

# JUDGES

(±1200 – 1020 BC)

**(Judges and Ruth)**

The previous period began with Moses and the exodus from Egypt and ended with Joshua and the Israelites entry into Canaan, the Promised Land. This period ended with the death of Joshua (the political leader) and Aaron's son (the religious leader). After the death of these leaders, the people had to venture into the future alone with God. This brings us to the time of the judges.

The period of the judges covers the events between the entry into the Promised Land and the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. During this phase, the tribes were not as closely united as they would later become. The tribes also moved to different areas, and God's people were still at the mercy of the hostile nations who lived in and around Canaan (for example, the Syrians, Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites and the Amalekites).

The continuous raids and battles were a struggle for possession of the land. Other groupings also wanted to expand their territory. The judges (leaders sent by God) acted timely to restore order in these hostile times. Only one or two Israelite tribes were normally involved in these clashes. The most well-known judges were Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and, of course, Samson. The story of Ruth also takes place during the time of the Judges.

This was a dark period in the history of Israel. Whereas the people still worshiped God in the time of Joshua, their faith in Him started to dwindle during this phase. The people began to lead an immoral life and wander off after other gods, and the judges were unable to follow in Joshua's footsteps and turn Israel back to the Lord. The book of Judges shows a clear pattern whereby the people would sin, show remorse and then again be pardoned by God. However, the time of the judges ends on a note of despair, when even the system of the judges stopped working in Israel and people were left to their own devices to determine what was right or wrong.

The book of Judges sketches specific human inclinations that still hold true today. It is about the rejection of God and the consequences that follow, and it concerns people who manipulate and exploit others. However, this book gives us a different perspective on

God. He is not depicted as a stern and heartless judge but rather as a patient and loving God. He is willing to go the extra mile with His children despite their stubbornness and is quick to forgive them if they show remorse. He uses people, despite their shortcomings: the judges Ehud and Jair were assassins, Jephthah was a mercenary, and Samson had a weakness for women. Yet despite all this, God sent His Spirit to them to lead His people. Likewise, God wants to—and is able to—use us despite our shortcomings.