

The Judges Era

(Judges – Ruth)

Woman in Rags, Garbage, Revealed as Heiress So read the headlines in the San Francisco Chronicle concerning the lady known as “Garbage Mary” who was picked up in the shopping mall in Delray Beach, Florida. She appeared to be just another derelict whose mind had faded. Neighbors told stories of her scrounging through garbage cans for food, which she hoarded in her car and her two-room apartment. There were mounds of garbage in the small apartment, stuffed in the refrigerator, the stove, the sink, the cabinets, and the bathtub. There were paths through the garbage. Other than in the kitchen, there were no chairs to sit in because they were piled with trash. Police finally identified her as the daughter of a well-to-do lawyer and bank director from Illinois who had died several earlier. In addition to the garbage, police found Mobil Oil stock worth more than four hundred thousand dollars, documents indicating ownership of oil fields in Kansas, stock certificates from firms such as U.S. Steele, Uniroyal, and Squibb, and passbooks for eight large bank accounts. Garbage Mary was a millionaire who was living like a derelict. Untold wealth was at her disposal, and yet she scrounged through garbage rather than claim the resources that were rightly hers. The parallel between Garbage Mary and Israel during the time of the judges is striking. This was a dark period indeed in the history of the Jewish people. They had lost their spiritual moorings, and, as is recorded in the final verse of the Book of Judges, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” The rest was a morally degraded, socially perverted, and spiritually bankrupt time of almost four hundred years. Israel had all the wealth of the promises of God at their disposal. Yet they scavenged through the garbage of life, eking out a pitiful existence. They could have been kings but lived like paupers.

Story Line Summary: *Samson* and others were chosen as *judges* to govern the people for *four hundred* rebellious years.

Expansion: There are four main subjects in the Judges Era:

- Judges
- Cycles
- Rebellion
- Ruth

Judges: The leaders of Israel (Judges)

As seen in the Book of Judges, these judges are not men who wear long, flowing black robes, sit on high benches, and make legal decisions. Rather, they are political-military *leaders of Israel* who exercise nearly absolute power because of their office and abilities. The four major judges are:

- Deborah, a female judge early in the Judges Era
- Gideon, who defeats an army of thousands with only three hundred men
- Samson, the most famous judge, whose fabulous strength has captured our imagination for thousands of years.
- Samuel, a transitional character held in very high regard in Scripture, who is both the last judge and the first prophet.

Rebellion: The breaking of God’s Law (Judges)

The Book of Judges records the darkest period in Israel’s history, following one of the brightest eras: the Conquest Era under Joshua. Just before Moses dies, he instructs Israel (in Deuteronomy 7:1-5) to do three things:

- Destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan.
- Avoid intermarriage with the Canaanites.
- Shun worship of the Canaanite gods.

Israel fails on all three accounts. *The breaking of God’s law* and the record of Israel’s subsequent moral degradation are sad indeed.



Cycles: Repetition of Israel's Misfortunes (Judges)

Much of the Era of Judges involves a series of seven cycles that are recorded in the Book of Judges. Each cycle has five component parts: (1) Israel "sins", (2) God disciplines them through military "conquest" by a neighboring country, (3) Israel "repents" and cries out to God for deliverance, (4) God raises up a judge who "delivers" them from bondage, and (5) God "frees" the land from military oppression for the remainder of that judge's life. That is one cycle: sin, conquest, repentance, deliverance, and freedom. Then, when a judge dies, the *repetition of Israel's misfortunes* begins again. The Israelites fall into sin again, followed by conquest, followed by repentance, etc. Seven such cycles are recorded in the Book of Judges.

Ruth: A Model Woman (Ruth)

Standing out in refreshing contrast to the general background of the Judges Era is Ruth, described in the book that bears her name. This *model woman* who lives during the Era of Judges is an example of moral and spiritual strength. Her story is one of love, purity, and commitment. She is a living illustration of the blessings that God showers on those who live in faithful obedience to Him. One example of God's blessings toward Ruth is that she, a non-Hebrew, is listed in the lineage from Abraham to Jesus. She is a picture of the Gentile church.

The Judges

Judge	Reference	Tribe	Oppressor	Period of Oppression	Period of Rest	Total Length of Time w/ each Judge
Othniel	3:7–11	Judah	Mesopotamians	8 years (3:8)	40 years	48 years
Ehud	3:12–30	Benjamin	Moabites	18 years (3:14)	80 years	98 years
Shamgar	3:31		Philistines			
Deborah	chs. 4–5	Ephraim	Canaanites	20 years (4:3)	40 years	60 years
Gideon	chs. 6–8	Manasseh	Midianites	7 years (6:1)	40 years	47 years
Tola	10:1–2	Issachar			23 years	23 years
Jair	10:3–5	Gilead-Manasseh			22 years (10:3)	22 years
Jephthah	10:6–12:7	Gilead-Manasseh	Ammonites		24 years (10:8 ; 12:7)	24 years
Ibzan	12:8–10	Judah or			7 years (12:9)	7 years
Elon	12:11–12	Zebulun			10 years	10 years
Abdon	12:13–15	Ephraim			8 years	8 years
Samson	chs. 13–16	Dan	Philistines	40 years (13:1)	20 years	60 years

Samuel served as a Judge and prophet after Samson; his story is recorded in 1 Samuel.

Name _____ Date _____ (2 points each) Score _____

Judges Era Homework

Besides the first part of 1 Samuel, what other books of the OT provide information about the era of the Judges?

Story Line Summary: _____ and others were chosen as judges to _____ the people for 400 _____ years.

List the four major judges of this era in the order presented in the book of Judges:

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_____ defeats an Army with only 300 men and is known for fleeces.

_____ was a man of great strength and had a problem with women.

_____ was a prophetess and judge.

_____ was a transitional character as a prophet and judge; his mother was Hannah.

The judges in this era are not black robed men presiding over court cases. Instead, they are _____ - _____ leaders of Israel who exercise nearly absolute power because of their office and abilities.

In Judges 6:22, Gideon has an encounter with the Angel of the Lord this could be an angel sent from God or it could be a pre-incarnate (taking on of flesh) appearance of _____.

There are a total of 13 judges who rule in the book of _____ some at the same time in different regions of the land.

In Deuteronomy 7:1-5, Moses instructs Israel to do 3 things when they enter the Promised Land.

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Much of Judges involves a series of _____ cycles which 5 components. List the 5 components below:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Prior to the period of the judges J _____ served as Israel's primary leader.

According to Judges 13:1 the _____ were one of Israel's primary enemies.

In Judges 13 we learn that the birth of _____ was somewhat miraculous in that his mother had been barren but the Angel of the Lord promised she would conceive.

Later in the chapter it becomes apparent that the couple believed that they have seen _____.

From birth Samson's lot was to live under the limitation of a Nazirite vow. Numbers 6:1-6 presents three prohibitions required under this vow. List them in the order they are presented in the chapter.

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True or False Samson is known for keeping this Nazirite vow from birth to death. _____

Where did Samuel, a judge, prophet and priest, grow up? _____ (1 Sam 3)

And under whose tutelage _____ did he grow up.

The textbook refers to Samuel as Israel's first prophet but this is not correct in Genesis 20 _____ is referred to as a prophet—making him Israel's first prophet.

Who was Samuel's mother? _____ (1 Samuel 2:21)

In 1 Samuel 8, Samuel appointed his sons _____ and _____ as judges over Israel, but their love for _____ got in the way of them serving the Lord like their father.

According to Judges 21:25 why was there a need for a king?

When Israel insisted they had to have a king like all the other countries around them Samuel discouraged them with several reasons why God needed to remain their king. List three of them below in your own words (see 1 Samuel 8:6ff)

In 1 Samuel 9:15ff we see that _____ anointed _____ to be Israel's first king.

Before he died Samuel also anointed _____ to be Israel next king (1 Samuel 16:13).

_____ lived during this same period and has an entire book of the OT dedicated to her story.

She was a widow and not a Jew until _____ married her after she became a follower of the LORD of Israel (Ruth 4:13).

Think: Ruth as a Gentile (non-Hebrew) bride is a picture of the _____. Christ (like Boaz) loves and will receive as a bride and gave his life for (Ephesians 5).

Ruth is listed in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1—who are the other women listed in the genealogy?

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