

## **“Avoid Generation Degeneration” (The Book of Judges) An Overview**

**THE TITLE:** The Hebrew title *Shophetim* means “judges, rulers, deliverers, or saviors.” The bulk of the Book of Judges (chapters 3–16) records the ministries of these men and women. The great Old Testament scholar, Bruce Waltke, prefers to call these leaders “warlords,” which more accurately reflects their roles in the Book of Judges. In the Hebrew Bible, Judges is included among the “Former Prophets” (Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings) not among the historical books as in Christian Bibles (Joshua through Esther), stressing the view of the judges as God’s appointed agents of change.

**THE PURPOSE:** To show that God remains faithful to His people despite their unfaithfulness to Him. As a result, He periodically raises up judges to deliverer them.

**THE THEME:** Obedience brings God’s blessing; disobedience brings God’s discipline.

**THE AUTHOR:** The author is unknown. Jewish tradition attributed the authorship to Samuel for two primary reasons. First, he was a writer and an educator (1 Sam 10:25). Second, the emphasis on the tribe of Benjamin suggests the time of King Saul when Samuel still judged.

**THE OCCASION:** The Book of Judges tells the story of Israel between Joshua and the beginning of the kingship (approx. 1050–950 B.C.). It’s clear the stories were written after Israel had a king, because the writer repeatedly says the stories took place “before kings ruled Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The book also says that the Jebusites were still in control of Jerusalem (1:21), a situation that changed when David became king and removed them (2 Sam 5:6). Interestingly, the Book of Judges covers about one-fourth of the historical period described in the Old Testament (approx 300–350 years).

**KEY WORDS:** “Judgment” (22 times), “judge,” “judged,” “evil” (14 times), “cycles,” “defeat,” “test,” and “covenant.”

**KEY PHRASE:** “The sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2:11; 3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1).

**KEY VERSES:** Judges 2:18–21: “When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, ‘Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died.’”

Judges 21:25: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

### **SUMMARY STRUCTURE:**

The structure of the Book of Judges is very simple:

Judges 1–3:6	Introduction to the period of the judges
Judges 3:7–16:31	Description of the reign of the judges
Judges 17–21	Prologue: Two stories that characterize the period of the judges