

Profiles of the Judges

Gregory A. Smith | March, 2019

Othniel (3:7-11)

Description of Spiritual Failure	“And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth” (3:7).
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Mesopotomia (3:8)
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Service to king Cushan-rishathaim (3:8)
Length of Foreign Oppression	8 years (3:8)
Cry for Deliverance	“the people of Israel cried out to the Lord” (3:9)
Provenance of Judge	Of the tribe of Judah (3:9)
Special Notes	Othniel’s work was explicitly Spirit-empowered (3:10).
Length of Judge’s Service	Not recorded
Duration of Peace	40 years (3:11)

Ehud (3:12-30)

Description of Spiritual Failure	“And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord ...” (3:12).
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Moab (3:12), Ammon (3:13), and Amalek (3:13)
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Invasion by a coalition of nations led by Eglon king of Moab (3:12-13) Possession of Israelite territory—likely Jericho (3:13) Exactng of tribute (3:15; 3:18)
Length of Foreign Oppression	18 years (3:14)
Cry for Deliverance	“the people of Israel cried out to the Lord” (3:15)
Provenance of Judge	Of the tribe of Benjamin (3:15)
Special Notes	Ehud was left-handed (3:15-16)—a trait that likely factored into his ability to enter the presence of king Eglon armed with a deadly weapon (3:21).

Length of Judge's Service	Not recorded
Duration of Peace	80 years (3:30)

Shamgar (3:31)

Description of Spiritual Failure	Not recorded
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Philistia (3:31)
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Not recorded
Length of Foreign Oppression	Not recorded
Cry for Deliverance	Not recorded
Provenance of Judge	Not stated; Shamgar's name and title have led to speculation that he was of foreign derivation, or at the least that non-Israelite influence prevailed in his naming (Lindsey 387; Bowling 162; Huddleston 448-49)

Special Notes Only two verses mention Shamgar, providing scant information about him (3:31; 5:6). Two facts seem to suggest that he served concurrently with Ehud or, perhaps more likely, during the 80 years of relative peace that followed Ehud's service. First, Deborah is said to have arisen after Ehud's death (4:1ff.), with no reference to Shamgar. Second, the song of Deborah and Barak acknowledges Shamgar along with Jael, who was contemporaneous with Deborah (5:6).

Length of Judge's Service	Not recorded
Duration of Peace	Not recorded

Deborah (4:1-5:31)

Description of Spiritual Failure	"And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD ..." (4:1).
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Canaan (4:2)
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Cruel oppression under Jabin king of Canaan (4:2-3)
Length of Foreign Oppression	20 years (4:3)
Cry for Deliverance	"the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help" (4:3)
Provenance of Judge	Of the tribe of Ephraim (4:5)

Special Notes

Deborah is unique as the only woman among the Israelite judges. She was a prophetess (4:4) who gave Barak godly advice (4:6-7; 4:14) and praised Yahweh as the ultimate victor over Sisera's army (chap. 5, esp. vv. 2-3, 11).

The song of Deborah and Barak (chap. 5) is the only substantial occurrence of poetry found in the book of Judges.

Length of Judge's Service

Not recorded

Duration of Peace

40 years (5:31)

Gideon (6:1-8:32)

Description of Spiritual Failure

"The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord ..." (6:1).

Nation(s) Oppressing Israel

Midian, Amalek, and the people of the East (6:3; 6:33; 7:12); the coalition is simply referred to as Midian throughout the narrative

Nature of Foreign Oppression

Attacks in massive numbers with an emphasis on plundering Israel's food sources, both animal and vegetable (6:2-5; 6:11)

Length of Foreign Oppression

7 years (6:1)

Cry for Deliverance

"the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord" (6:6; cf. 6:7)

Provenance of Judge

Of the tribe of Manasseh (6:15)

Special Notes

Gideon was also known as Jerubbaal (e.g., 6:32; 7:1).

Liberation from Midian's oppression was not achieved merely by desperate calls to the Lord. Rather, it necessitated spiritual renewal, thus an unnamed prophet arrived on the scene before Gideon's emergence as a deliverer (6:7-10).

The narrative of Gideon's ministry repeatedly shows that he was reluctant to exert himself as a spiritual or military leader. The Lord patiently provided the assurances needed to bolster his faith and spur him to action.

Although Gideon was used to defeat Midian in a mighty way, he neglected to lead Israel faithfully. He exacted cruel revenge on towns that had refused to aid his military actions (8:4-9, 15-17), made a golden object that elicited idolatry in Israel (8:24-27), and accumulated numerous wives and at least one concubine (8:30-31). After he died, the nation fell back into the worship of Baal (8:33-34) and violence and ambition erupted in his family (9:1-5).

Length of Judge's Service	40 years (8:28ff.)
Duration of Peace	40 years (8:28)

Tola (8:33-10:2)

Description of Spiritual Failure	“As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal ...” (8:33-35).
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Not recorded; see Special Notes
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Not recorded; see Special Notes
Length of Foreign Oppression	Not recorded; see Special Notes
Cry for Deliverance	Not recorded
Provenance of Judge	Of the tribe of Issachar, but residing in Ephraim (10:1)
Special Notes	The account of the period leading up to Tola's service as judge contains no reference to foreign oppression. However, even if Israel may have been free from foreign attacks, it was the scene of significant bloodshed due to the arrogant ambition of Gideon's son Abimelech, whom the town of Shechem recognized as king (9:1-49). Abimelech's illegitimate reign lasted at least three years (9:22) before he met an untimely demise (9:53-54). Ironically, Gideon laid the foundation for Abimelech's sins by conducting himself presumptuously, not least in the naming of his son (Abimelech means “my father is king”).
Length of Judge's Service	23 years (10:2)
Duration of Peace	Not recorded

Jair (10:3-5)

Description of Spiritual Failure	Not recorded
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Not recorded
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Not recorded
Length of Foreign Oppression	Not recorded

Cry for Deliverance	Not recorded
Provenance of Judge	Of the region east of the Jordan River known as Gilead, not associated with a single tribe (10:3-4); on the geography of Gilead, see Rasmussen 52; LaSor
Special Notes	None
Length of Judge's Service	22 years (10:3)
Duration of Peace	Not recorded

Jephthah (10:6-12:7)

Description of Spiritual Failure	"The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him" (10:6).
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Ammon and Philistia (10:7; 10:17-18; 11:4)
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Persistent subjugation of the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan followed by aggressions against the tribes on the west side (10:7-9)
Length of Foreign Oppression	18 years (10:8)
Cry for Deliverance	"And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, 'We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals.' ... And the people of Israel said to the LORD, 'We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day'" (10:10, 15).
Provenance of Judge	From the land of Gilead (11:1ff.); see note on the provenance of Jair
Special Notes	Jephthah's life and service abounded in contradictions. Initially rejected by his community because of his birth to a prostitute, his people eventually sought him out because of his skill as a warrior (11:1-11). On the surface, his appointment as a judge seems to have been the result of human agency (11:5-8); nevertheless, Yahweh used him to accomplish his purposes for Israel. Although his life exhibited a tendency to rash speech and behavior (11:30-31; 12:1-6), he was zealous and Spirit-empowered (11:29, 32-33). Additionally, he had a strong appreciation for the history of the Lord's intervention in Israel's history (11:21, 23-24; 11:27).
Length of Judge's Service	6 years (12:7)

Duration of Peace Not recorded

Ibzan (12:8-10)

Description of Spiritual Failure Not recorded
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel Not recorded
Nature of Foreign Oppression Not recorded
Length of Foreign Oppression Not recorded
Cry for Deliverance Not recorded
Provenance of Judge Of the tribe of Judah (12:8)
Special Notes None
Length of Judge's Service 7 years (12:9)
Duration of Peace Not recorded

Elon (12:11-12)

Description of Spiritual Failure Not recorded
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel Not recorded
Nature of Foreign Oppression Not recorded
Length of Foreign Oppression Not recorded
Cry for Deliverance Not recorded
Provenance of Judge Of the tribe of Zebulun (12:11-12)
Special Notes None
Length of Judge's Service 10 years (12:11)
Duration of Peace Not recorded

Abdon (12:13-15)

Description of Spiritual Failure Not recorded
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel Not recorded
Nature of Foreign Oppression Not recorded

Length of Foreign Oppression	Not recorded
Cry for Deliverance	Not recorded
Provenance of Judge	Of the tribe of Ephraim (12:13, 15)
Special Notes	None
Length of Judge's Service	8 years (12:14)
Duration of Peace	Not recorded

Samson (13:1-16:31)

Description of Spiritual Failure	“And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD ...” (13:1).
Nation(s) Oppressing Israel	Philistia (13:1)
Nature of Foreign Oppression	Domination by the Philistines (14:4; 15:11)
Length of Foreign Oppression	40 years (13:1)
Cry for Deliverance	Not recorded
Provenance of Judge	Of the tribe of Dan (13:2ff.)
Special Notes	<p>The account of Samson's life and service is one of the two longest profiles in the book of Judges, being roughly equal in length to that of Gideon's judgeship. Samson's entry onto the scene of Israel's history was extraordinary. Born to devout parents following a visit from the angel of Yahweh, he was commissioned to adhere to a Nazirite lifestyle from conception to death (13:2-24).</p> <p>Notwithstanding his strong spiritual heritage, Samson was morally impoverished, a man who repeatedly made unwise choices rooted in sensuous desires and angry, vengeful emotions. In his sovereignty and grace, God displayed the Spirit's power in the life of a disobedient judge (13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14), thus beginning to loosen the Philistines' grip on his people.</p>
Length of Judge's Service	20 years (15:20; 16:31)
Duration of Peace	Consistent with the word from the angel of the Lord, peace was not fully achieved under Samson: “he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (13:5).

References

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