

## Chapter 12: Judges

### Key Terms

- theocracy: a state or nation ruled directly by God
- Canaan: area of land in Palestine conquered by the Israelites
- Deuteronomistic school: (Hypothetical) Hebrew scribal guild of the seventh century BC responsible for shaping the historical literature of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy–Kings)
- Deuteronomistic History: Martin Noth proposed that Deuteronomy–2 Kings is a unified work written primarily during the exilic period. This term describes Deuteronomy–2 Kings in Noth's theory, which remains a dominant theory today.
- judge: charismatic leader appointed by God to lead Israel for a specific time and purpose
- Sea Peoples: group of people from the Mediterranean who migrated to the ancient Near East at the end of the thirteenth century BC.

### Key Ideas

- The cycles of the judges period.
- God's justice and grace.
- God's sovereign provision of deliverers.
- Covenant failure by the people, the priests, and the tribal leadership.
- The role of the Spirit of the Lord.

### Chapter Summary

Modern scholarship generally groups this book with the Deuteronomistic history; the dating of the book depends largely on an early or late date for the exodus. Very few internal indicators for dating the book exist. However, the events of the book most likely took place in the Late Bronze Age II, during which time the land of Canaan comprised multiple independent city states. The author of Judges largely ignores major historical events, focusing rather on the theological implications of Israel's history. In contrast to its neighbors, which were organized as city-states, Israel was organized with a tribal structure.

The purpose of Judges is to explain the theological significance of the events between Joshua and David. The recurring disobedience and apostasy of the Israelites under the tribal leadership brings them under God's punishment (in enslavement) and subsequent mercy (in deliverance). The book demonstrates that the people need a king, not merely to lead them in battle, but to lead them in covenant faithfulness. Judges records Israel's repetitive cycle of sin, punishment, cry for deliverance, the Lord's deliverance.

The judges were raised up by God to deliver the Israelites, but the book specifies very little of their role apart from military leadership. The Spirit of the Lord plays a prominent role in the book, at times granting authority to the judges and empowering them for their tasks.

To understand the apostasy of Israel evident throughout this book, we must consider the contrast between the monotheism taught in the covenant and the polytheism which pervaded Canaanite culture. The failure of the initial generations to perpetuate the covenant teaching ensured that the Israelites simply adopted the prevailing worldview of their neighbors.