

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is considered by most people to be the book of scripture most difficult to understand and appreciate. Yet it was essentially the Old Testament that was available when Jesus Christ counseled that the scriptures should be searched diligently because they testified of him. It was also of this scripture and its companion, the New Testament, that Brigham Young stated:

"In all my teachings, I have taught the Gospel from the Old and New Testaments. I found there in every doctrine, and the proof of every doctrine, the Latter-day Saints believe in.... There may be some doctrines about which little is said in the Bible, but they are all couched therein." (JD 16:73.)

Of the Bible and its companion scripture, the Book of Mormon, the Lord said to a latter-day prophet: "And again, the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel ... in the Bible and the Book of Mormon." (D&C 42:12.)

Many reasons have been given by people as to why they do not study the Old Testament more diligently-it is too long, it was written too many years ago and does not apply today, there are too many voids in the record and some overlapping and duplication, it is not always presented chronologically, it contains too much history and too many "endless genealogies," and so on.

x The Old Testament is primarily a record of a series of families. In order to understand and appreciate the Old Testament, you will need to understand the major events, beliefs, customs, and traditions of the families discussed. The family of Adam is introduced first, but by chapter six of the first book (Genesis), the family of Noah appears. In only six more chapters (Genesis 12), the family of Abraham is featured, next Isaac (whose birth is recorded in chapter 21), and then Jacob (Israel), whose story begins in chapter 25 and whose descendants dominate the remainder of the Old Testament. Thus, of the 929 chapters in the thirty-nine books in the Old Testament, only 24 chapters do not deal directly with Jacob and his descendants, and these first 24 chapters provide the background for the coming forth of the family of Israel.

The last part of the Old Testament is primarily concerned with a specific segment of Jacob's family—the Jews, descendants of Jacob's fourth son (Judah), and also citizens of the kingdom of Judah. Thus, sometimes the entire Old Testament is referred to as the "record of the Jews."

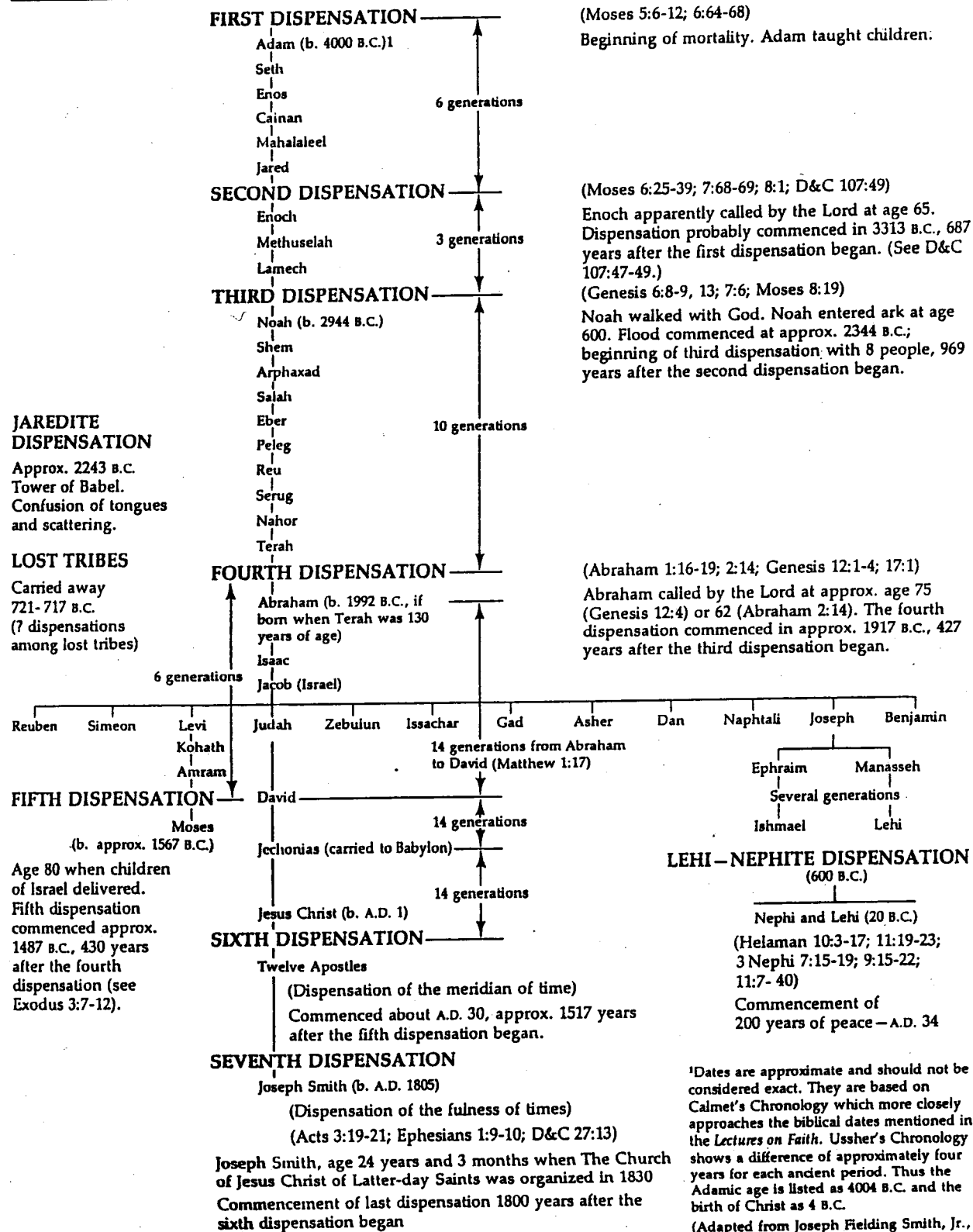
Other titles associated with the heads of major families might be used to indicate that the Old Testament is also the record of—

1. The Semites (descendants of Shem, the son of Noah).
2. The Hebrews (descendants of Abraham).
3. The Israelites (descendants of Jacob/Israel)

The problem of using these terms to refer to the major peoples of the Bible is that the terms are not synonymous, the speaker must be certain he is using each term correctly. All Jews (descendants of Judah) are Israelites (descendants of Jacob/Israel), but not all Israelites are Jews. (There are many descendants of the other sons of Jacob who are not descendants of Judah.)

All Israelites (descendants of Jacob/Israel) are Hebrews (descendants of Abraham), but not all Hebrews are Israelites.

Gospel Dispensations



¹Dates are approximate and should not be considered exact. They are based on Calmet's Chronology which more closely approaches the biblical dates mentioned in the *Lectures on Faith*. Ussher's Chronology shows a difference of approximately four years for each ancient period. Thus the Adamic age is listed as 4004 B.C. and the birth of Christ as 4 B.C.
(Adapted from Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., comp., "Our Gospel Dispensations," Instructor, Nov. 1959, inside back cover.)

THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL

NAME OF JUDGE	TRIBAL IDENTITY	APPROXIMATE YEAR	LENGTH OF SERVICE	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
Othniel	Judah	1200 B.C.	40 years	Judges 3:9-11
Ehud	Benjamin	1170	80 years	Judges 3:15-30
Shamgar	(not known)	1150	(not known)	Judges 3:31
Deborah and Barak	Ephraim	1125	40 years	Judges 4-5
Gideon	Naphtali			
	Manasseh	1100	40 years	Judges 6-8
Tola	Issachar		23 years	Judges 10:1-2
Jair	From city of Gilead		22 years	Judges 10:3-5
Jephthah	From city of Gilead	1070	6 years	Judges 11; 12:1-7 and
Ibzan	From Bethlehem		7 years	Judges 12:8-10
Elon	Zebulon		10 years	Judges 12:11-12
Abdon	Ephraim		8 years	Judges 12:13-15
Samson	Dan	1070	20 years	Judges 13-16
		<hr style="width: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"/> * 130 years	<hr style="width: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"/> * 293 years	

* The discrepancy between the calendar years of 130 and the total length of service of 293 years is usually explained as follows:

1. Overlapping judgeships – more than one judge might have ruled at the same time in different sections of Israel.
2. The term “forty years” may have been regarded as a generation (sacred number).

The Reign of the Judges

Judges 2:4; 6-7; 13-16

Lesson 19

Study the following scripture

- a. **Judges 2:6-23.** The rising generation of the children of Israel forsake the Lord to serve false gods.
- b. **Judges 4:1-16.** Barak is commanded to free Israel from Jabin, king of Canaan (4:1-7). He agrees to go if Deborah will go with him (4:8-9). Deborah and Barak deliver Israel from the Canaanites (4:10-16).
- c. **Judges 6-7.** Gideon is commanded to deliver Israel from the Midianites (6:1-24). He and 10 other men destroy Baal's altar (6:25-35). The Lord assures Gideon of help by granting him two signs (6:36-40). Gideon and 300 other men deliver Israel (7:1-25).
- d. **Judges 13-16.** An angel instructs Samson's parents to raise him as a Nazarite (13:1-25). Samson performs great feats of strength but breaks many of his Nazarite vows (14-15). Samson gives in to Delilah's enticing; his hair is cut, and he becomes weak, is captured by the Philistines, and dies while pulling down their temple (16:1-31).

After Joshua died, judges served as Israel's rulers and military leaders. Most of their reign was tragic as Israel went through the cycle of apostasy, captivity, repentance, and delivery many times. Offsetting the tragic parts of this history are stories of righteous judges such as Deborah and Gideon, who remained true and exercised faith and courage in helping deliver their people.

- What can we learn from Deborah about being a true friend? How have your friends helped you face difficult challenges or the Lord's commandments? How can we be better friends to others?
- As a Nazarite and a member of the house of Israel, Samson made covenants with the Lord. What covenants do we make with the Lord? How have these covenants strengthened you?
- What were the consequences of Samson's violation of his covenants? (Judges 16:17-21.) What are the consequences when we violate our covenants?

Additional reading: "Judges, The" and "Judges, Book of," Bible Dictionary, pages 719-20.

The Reign of the Judges

When Joshua and the leaders of Israel who served under him died, the national spirit of Israel also died. Tribal loyalty replaced national unity. Each tribe began to look to its own resources without giving help or asking aid from their fellow Israelites. Joshua's generation remained faithful to the Lord (Joshua 24:31), but spiritual apostasy soon occurred in the following generation. "And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel."

"And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger." (Judges 2:10, 12,)

None of this apostasy needed to happen. The Lord had directed Israel into the promised land and had provided them with a political covenant. He was to be their divine sovereign. Their temporal leaders were to be ruling judges, under whom the people retained religious and political liberties. (Such a form of government was advocated in the Book of Mormon by King Mosiah [see Mosiah 29].)

Israel's political covenant showed the mercy and long-suffering of the Lord and would have been the best possible government in Israel. As can be seen in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, however, under the rule of the judges the people must demonstrate loyalty to the Lord and his commandments for this ideal form of government to function properly. Since Israel usually broke their covenant during the reign of the judges, the governmental system did not function properly, and Israel fell out of favor with the Lord.

The reign of the judges is similar in many ways to the history of the Nephites prior to the coming of Christ. It is a story of one continuous cycle of apostasy and repentance. When the Israelites turned from the Lord, their enemies began to prevail (Judges 2:14-15). Suffering under oppression and war, the people would cry unto God and he would raise up a Deborah or a Gideon to deliver them. But once peace and security were reestablished, the people turned again to their former ways (Judges 2:16-19).

The story of the time of the judges is thus primarily a sad and tragic one, although in this period lived some of the, most remarkable men and women of the Old Testament. In their lives of courage, faith, and personal greatness, as well as in the lives of those who forsook the Lord and pursued selfish ends, are many lessons of importance for Saints today.

Deborah

Judges 4:1-16

The account of Deborah's time as a judge ties back to Ehud's time ignoring Shamgar. Rather than a few verses, as with some of the judges, two chapters were written about Deborah, the only female judge of Israel and a prophetess. She was a wife and mother (Judges 4:4; 5:7) who provided advice and judgement for people who came to her home between Ramah and Bethel in Ephraim.

Israel was sorely lacking in leadership at this time. The regular priesthood leadership was not in effect because the covenant had been broken. Deborah did not direct Israel in any official sense; she was a prophetess who possessed the spirit of prophecy, one of the gifts of the Spirit (see Revelation 19:10; Moroni 10:13; D&C 47:22). She was blessed with spiritual insight and leadership qualities that were not being put to use by any man. Barak would not lead an army against Jabin until Deborah promised to be present (Judges 4:8-9).

“No special ordination in the Priesthood is essential to man's receiving the gift of prophecy; bearers of the Melchizedek Priesthood, Adam, Noah, Moses, and a multitude of others were prophets, but not more truly so than others who were specifically called to the Aaronic order, as exemplified in the instance of John the Baptist. The ministrations of Miriam and Deborah show that this gift may be possessed by women also.” (Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, pp. 228-29; see also Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 3:66.)

Gideon

Judges 6 & 7

Again instead of a single verse or only a few to characterize the career of a judge, three chapters deal with one great leader Gideon.

When Gideon was called, he was first greeted by an angel with complimentary words. Gideon responded with irony: “If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of? (Judges 6:13)

“When Gideon asked for a ‘sign’ he seemed only to want a sign that the messenger was a bona fide emissary of the *Lord* (vs. 17). On this point, note that messengers may sometimes be from the wrong source and discernment is important. (D&C 129; see another consideration of the problem in 11 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Corinthians 12:10; and I John 4:1-2.) (Signs may be given, based upon man's faith and the will of God. D&C 63:10.)

“When Gideon made a meal of meat, cakes and broth, and the angel turned it into a miraculous burnt offering, this ‘sign’ quite overwhelmed Gideon. But the *Lord* kindly gave him comfort and peace, and Gideon gratefully named the monument he built there ‘*Lord of Peace*.’” (Rasmussen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1:150.)

Gideon was to start the reform by destroying idolatry at home and restoring there the worship of the true God. He did so, and after his father's timely repentance. They demonstrated the impotence of idols.

Gideon's father, Joash, owned a grove and an altar dedicated to the false god Baal. Groves of trees played a prominent part in ancient heathen worship. Since it was thought wrong to shut up the gods with walls, groves of trees were often used as natural temples. Within the groves the immoral rites of the heathen religions were performed.

Gideon and ten other men followed the Lord's commandments to tear down the grove and the altar and in their place erect an altar to Jehovah. The men of the city cried for Gideon's death, but Joash defended his son's actions. Joash named Gideon *Jerubbaal*, "let Baal plead," meaning that if Baal was upset by Gideon's actions Baal could defend his own cause. The name Jerubbaal remained with Gideon on some occasions thereafter.

The reformation and restoration were launched immediately. The people of his community gathered to Gideon, and then those of his own large tribe and of the neighboring tribes to the north, for the enemy was gathered in the important north-central valley of Jezreel.

The enemy was numerous and their camels without number, but the sizable Israelite army of 32,000 assembled from the tribes from the north-Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali-joined his campaign, these were more than enough for the purposes of the Lord at the time. Eventually the 32,000 was reduced by command of the Lord to a mere 300, so that the 'help of the Lord' might be apparent to Israel...

"Against the formidable might of camel-mounted marauders, strategy and the help of the Lord gave the Israelites success where hand to hand combat would have been disastrous. It is now known that the use of camels for military purposes by the nomadic desert riders was only beginning to be common in those times 12th to 10th centuries B.C., and of course, the first tribes to use them had the advantage." (Rasmussen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1:151.)

Samson

Judges 13-16

Samson could have been one of the greatest leaders in Israel since Joshua if he had been true to his Nazarite vows and to his Lord. If Samson, foreordained and chosen by the Lord, had been able to master himself, he could have set an example of spiritual and physical courage that would rank with the finest in history. But we can learn from Samson's failure to avoid self-justification and uncontrolled passion so that we might join modern Israel in becoming a mighty and pure people before the second coming of the Lord.

Certainly the experience of Manoah and his wife Samson's parents is one of the most remarkable instances of angelic visitation recorded in all of scripture. And that fact heightens all the more the tragedy of Samson's life. Heralded by an angel, born of a barren woman, blessed with tremendous gifts from the Lord, Samson should have lived one of the greatest lives in scriptural record. Instead, his life was one of self-indulgence, immorality, selfish seeking fore revenge, and violation of the covenant. Samson's life is truly one of the great tragedies of history.

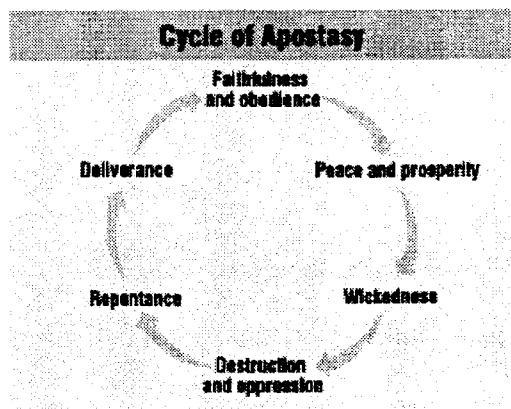
In the Church today when one speaks of a person having the Spirit of the Lord with him, he means that he is a spiritual person, that is, he is close to God, has a testimony, demonstrates spiritual power, and so on. And such spiritual power comes only through obedience and righteousness. So, could Samson have had "the Spirit of the Lord come mightily upon him"? (vs. 6). That or a similar phrase is used three times in the account of Samson (see **Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14**), but in every case it has reference to Samson's demonstration of great courage and physical strength. Samson's remarkable strength was a gift of God derived from and sustained by the Nazarite vow he was under. Perhaps when the author of judges used the phrase "the Spirit of God" he did not use it as one does today, but used it more in the way that one would now use the phrase "spiritual gifts." One may say of another, "The way he taught the lesson demonstrated that he has a spiritual gift." Samson's gift was strength, and each time he used that gift in a remarkable manner, the writer of the scripture gave credit to the Lord, the true source of the gift, by saying "the Spirit of the Lord" came mightily upon him.

Was Samson's Hair Really the Source of His Strength?

Judges 16:17-22.

The biblical account of Samson reveals him as a man of extreme confidence and tremendous courage, qualities based on his recognition that his power was from God and that God would sustain him in the mission to which he had been called. But Samson did not realize that there is a rule that governs power in the Lord, which is, "let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God" (**D&C 121:45**). Samson's misfortunes began when his confidence in God turned into conceit and pride. Over a period of time he broke the vows of a Nazarite and violated other commandments, including the law of chastity (see **Judges 16:1**). Samson's superhuman strength did not reside in his hair but in his confidence in God and in the Nazarite oath, of which the hair was the outward symbol. Delilah's treachery and the shaving of Samson's hair signified the final betrayal of his vows. Thus, he became a miserable, broken man with no power left.

Judges 2-16



Why would the Israelites let themselves go through this cycle over and over again—twelve times in the book of Judges alone?

Individuals and groups of people in our day get caught in this cycle as well. President Spencer W. Kimball said: "Few men have ever knowingly and deliberately chosen to reject God and his blessings. Rather, we learn from the scriptures that because the exercise of faith has always appeared to be more difficult than relying on things more immediately at hand, carnal man has tended to transfer his trust in God to material things. Therefore, in all ages when men have fallen under the power of Satan and lost the faith, they have put in its place a hope in the 'arm of flesh' and in 'gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear,

nor know' (Dan. 5:23)—that is, in idols" (*Ensign*, June 1976, 4). (*Old Testament Student Study Guide*, 84)

The reign of the judges is similar in many ways to the history of the Nephites prior to the coming of Christ. It is a story of one continuous cycle of apostasy and repentance. When the Israelites turned from the Lord, their enemies began to prevail (see Judges 2:14–15). Suffering under oppression and war, the people would cry unto God and he would raise up a Deborah or a Gideon to deliver them. But once peace and security were reestablished, the people turned again to their former ways (see Judges 2:16–19). The story of the time of the judges is thus primarily a sad and tragic one, although in this period lived some of the most remarkable men and women of the Old Testament. In their lives of courage, faith, and personal greatness, as well as in the lives of those who forsook the Lord and pursued selfish ends, are many lessons of importance for Saints today. Look for those lessons as you read this period of Israel's history. (*Old Testament Student Manual*, 251)

1:1-2:5 Failure to conquer Canaan

a Optimistic opening assembly (at Gilgal?) (1:1-2)

- Tribal conquests begin
- Obedient Israelites initiate positive communication with Jehovah
- Tribes set out to take land, with Jehovah's blessing and direction

b failure of the tribes to take their lands (1:3-36)

- (1) Judah: more positive
- (2) Benjamin: negative
- (3) Joseph: negative
- (4) Zebulun: negative
- (5) Asher: negative
- (6) Naphtali: negative
- (7) Dan: very negative

a' disheartening closing assembly at Bokim (2:1-5)

- Conquest ends in failure and divine condemnation
- Jehovah initiates negative communication with disobedient Israelites
- Jehovah will no longer help tribes take their land

Israel's pattern of decline (Judges 2:6-3:6)

a Positive beginning: during lifetime of Joshua and elders, Israelites set out to take their inheritances and they serve Jehovah (2:6-9)

b Sin of next generation (2:10-13)

- Contrasted with their fathers
- Served the Baals; worshiped other gods
- Went after other gods
- Occurred once; and they had an excuse ("they did not know")

c Judgment: military defeat from surrounding nations (2:14-15)

- Begins: Jehovah was angry at Israel

d CENTER: Jehovah's merciful intervention (2:16)

b' worse sins of each successive generation (2:17-19)

- Contrasted with their fathers
- Served the Baals; worshiped other gods
- Went after other gods
- Not just once, but repeatedly; and no excuse given

c' worse judgment: Jehovah will no longer enable Israel to take their land (2:20-3:4)

- Begins: Jehovah was angry with Israel

a' disheartening conclusion: Israelites, having failed to take their land, settle among the Canaanites, intermarry, and serve their gods (3:5-6)

Seven judges (Judges 3:7-16:31)

a Othniel (3:7-11; 1:11-15)

- evaluation: positive
- procures a good Israelite wife by obeying Jehovah
- drives Canaanites from the land and settles there
- wife presses him for a good thing: to extend their territory
- good judge, leading a united Israel
- blessed by his brave Israelite father-in-law

b Ehud (3:12-30)

- evaluation: positive
- Transjordanian king oppresses Israel eighteen years: occurs in Benjamin
- Ehud has a secret message and message from God for enemy king
- captures Jordan's fords & w/ Ephraim's help kills thousands of enemies attempting to cross
- Israelites united

c Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:31)

- evaluation: positive
- woman crushes Sisera's skull in a careless moment
- Israelites united

d TURNING POINT: Gideon (6:1-8:32)

- evaluation: positive/negative

(1) Gideon's stand against idolatry at Ophrah (6:1-32)

(2) Gideon's battle against Midianites (6:33-7:25)

(2') Gideon's battle against Israelites (8:1-21)

(1') Gideon's lapse into idolatry at Ophrah (8:22-32)

c' Abimelech (8:33-9:57)

- evaluation: negative
- woman crushes Abimelech's skull in careless moment
- Israelites fragmented; civil war

b' Jephthah (10:6-12:7)

- evaluation: negative
- Transjordanian king oppresses Israel eighteen years: occurs in Benjamin
- Jephthah sends messages twice to enemy king
- captures fords of Jordan and kills thousands of Ephraimites who cross
- Israelites fragmented; civil war

a' Samson (13:1-16:31)

- evaluation: negative

- procures bad wives from Canaan's native population, disobeying Jehovah
- settles among the pagan inhabitants of Canaan
- wives press him for bad things: to betray his secrets
- bad judge, fragmenting Israel
- betrayed by his cowardly pagan father-in-law

Othniel (Judges 3:7-11)

a beginning of oppression (3:7-8)

- Israel sins and Jehovah sells them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim
- subjugation for eight years

*Jehovah
intervening*

b TURNING POINT: Jehovah intervenes and raises up Othniel, who rescues Israel (3:9)

a' end of oppression (3:10-11)

- Jehovah delivers Cushan-rishathaim into the hand of Othniel
- the land has rest for forty years

Ehud (Judges 3:12-30)

a beginning of oppression (3:12-14)

- Moab (crosses the Jordan and) smites Israel
- negative chronological note
- result: humiliation

b Ehud's first trip down to Jericho (3:15-17)

- appeal to Jehovah
- Ehud sent to Moabite king with a gift in his hand
- result: humiliation

c Ehud leaves palace after giving Eglon tribute (3:18-19)

- passes place called The Idols
- palace servants asked to give king privacy
- result: humiliation

d TURNING POINT: Jehovah gives victory (cf. 3:28); Ehud's "message from God": he kills the enemy king (3:20-22)

c' Ehud leaves palace after killing Eglon (3:23-26)

- passes place called The Idols again
- palace servants give king privacy
- result: triumph

b' Ehud's second trip down to Jericho (3:27-28a)

- Ehud goes down to Jericho again, this time leading Israel's army in attack
- "Jehovah has given them into your hand"
- result: triumph

a' end of oppression (3:28b-30)

- Israel smites Moab, driving Moabites back across Jordan
- happy chronological note
- result: triumph

Deborah (Judges 4-5)

a beginning of oppression (4:1-3)

- Israel sins and is oppressed by King Jabin of Canaan
- negative chronological note: oppression lasts twenty years

b Deborah's prediction about a woman killing Sisera (4:4-9a)

- interaction between a brave woman (Deborah) and a weak military man (Barak)

c troops gather (4:9b-13)

- Barak goes up, with his troops at his feet
- Sisera gathers his troops for battle
 - d TURNING POINT: Jehovah gives victory (4:14-15a)

c' troops disperse (4:15b-16)

- Sisera goes down from his chariot and flees on foot
- Barak pursues fleeing enemy troops

b' Deborah's prediction comes true: Jael kills Sisera (4:17-22)

- interaction between a brave woman (Jael) and a weak man (Sisera)

a' end of oppression (4:23-24)

- God ends the oppression of King Jabin of Canaan, and Israel oppresses and finally destroys Jabin
- positive chronological note: land rests forty years

interlude: Song of Deborah (5:1-31)

4:4 The reference to Deborah [Heb. "bee"] as a prophetess does not mean she held the priesthood office or calling of a prophet. Her gift of prophecy would have been essentially the same that is available to every worthy person who has received the gift of the Holy Ghost. The fact that a good woman was recognized as the spokesperson for the Lord is probably a good indication of the failure of priesthood members to honor their responsibilities. (Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Old Testament*, 210.)

Gideon (Judges 6:1-8:32)

a beginning of oppression by Midianites (6:1-10)

- negative chronological note

b Gideon's divine call; his destruction of idolatry at Ophrah (6:11-40)

- Gideon's family's good involvement
- Gideon's fleece laid on the ground to collect dew (which encourages Gideon to lead Israel to victory)
- Gideon pleases Jehovah, opposes the people
- good results: Jehovah in control

c troops gather for the battle (7:1-14)

- army is made smaller, "that Israel may not boast"
- intertribal cooperation assumed
- good results: Jehovah in control

d TURNING POINT: Jehovah gives victory (7:15-22)*

c' troops disperse after the battle (7:23-8:21)

- the pursuit; attempt to enlarge the army; boasting
- intertribal bickering
- tragic results: Jehovah not in control

b' Gideon's call by Israelites and his lapse into idolatry at Ophrah (8:22-27)

- Gideon's family's bad involvement
- Gideon's garment spread out (on the ground) to collect spoils (which leads to idolatry)
- Gideon cooperates with the people, displeases Jehovah
- tragic results: Jehovah not in control

a' end of oppression by Midianites (8:28-32)

- positive chronological note

Abimelech (Judges 8:33-9:57)

a introduction: Israel's sin (8:33-35)

- anticipates Israel's sin against Gideon's family

b Gideon's seventy sons killed by Abimelech (9:1-6)

- setting: town north of Shechem

- killing involves a stone (and presumably a sword)
- sons of Gideon killed by fellow Israelites
 - c Jotham's curse upon Shechem and Abimelech (9:7-21)
 - calls for strife between Abimelech and Shechem
 - prominence of trees
 - speaks from top of the mount (Gerizim)
 - calls for fire to come out from Abimelech, consumes lords of Shechem
 - d TURNING POINT: God intervenes to help; summary of Abimelech's rule (9:22-25)
 - c' Jotham's curse upon Shechem fulfilled: Shechem destroyed by Abimelech (9:26-49)
 - strife breaks out between Abimelech and Shechemites
 - trees or wood (cesim) used against Shechem
 - tops of mountains (ro'Se hehsrim)
 - fire used by Abimelech to destroy Shechemites
 - b' Gideon's son, Abimelech, is killed (9:50-55)
 - setting: town north of Shechem
 - killing involves a stone and a sword
 - son of Gideon killed by fellow Israelite

a' conclusion (9:56-57)

- looks back on how God punished Shechem and Abimelech for their sin against Gideon's family

Jephthah (Judges 10:6-12:7)

a introduction: Israel's oppression and cry for help (10:6-16)

- chronological note
 - b diplomacy in response to Ammonite threat (10:17-11:28)
 - begins: Ammonites called to arms
 - Ammonites cross over to Gilead to fight (11:12)
 - why have you come against me to fight against my land? (11:12)
 - Jephthah first resorts to diplomacy, which fails
 - c Jephthah's vow (11:29-31)
 - d TURNING POINT: Jehovah gives victory (11:32-33)
 - c' Jephthah's vow sadly fulfilled (11:34-40)

b' diplomacy in response to Israelite threat; tragic civil war (12:1-6)

- begins: Ephraimites called to arms (12:1)
- Ephraimites cross over to Gilead to fight
- why have you come up against me today to fight against me? (12:3)
- Jephthah first resorts to diplomacy, which fails

a' conclusion: summary of Jephthah's rule; his death and burial (12:7)

- chronological note

Samson (Judges 13-16)

a Samson's birth (13:1-25)

- chronological note
- his parents see God and do not die; reference to "day of his [Samson's] death"
- Samson grows up between Zorah and Eshtaol: mention of Manoah

b Samson betrays his secret to his Philistine wife (14:1-20)

- begins: Samson falls in love with woman in Sorek Valley
- Philistines will burn woman's house down if she will not entice Samson to betray secret
- woman initially fails: he finally reveals his secret to her; and she tells the Philistines
- keyword: tell

- setting: Sorek Valley (Timnah)
 - c Samson visits wife at Timnah (15:1 -8)
 - angered by Philistines and destroys town's fields
 - begins: Samson goes to visit his wife
 - ends: Samson goes down to Etam
 - d TURNING POINT: Samson kills one thousand Philistines with jawbone of ass; fellow Israelites reject Samson's leadership and Philistines begin to take the initiative against him (15:9-20)
 - summary of years of Samson's judgeship
 - c' Samson visits prostitute at Gaza (16:1-3)
 - opposed by Philistines and destroys town's gates
 - begins: Samson goes to the Gaza harlot
 - ends: Samson takes the Gaza gates up to Hebron
 - b' Samson betrays his secret to Delilah (16:4-22)
 - begins: Samson falls in love with Delilah in Sorek Valley
 - Philistines offer Delilah gifts to entice Samson to betray secret
 - Delilah initially fails: he finally reveals his secret to her; and she tells the Philistines
 - keyword: tell
 - setting: Sorek Valley (Delilah's home)

a' Samson's death (16:23-31)

- chronological note
- Samson cannot see, and he dies
- he is buried between Zorah and Eshtaol: mention of Manoah

14:6 In the Church today when one speaks of a person having the Spirit of the Lord with him, he means that he is a spiritual person, that is, he is close to God, has a testimony, demonstrates spiritual power, and so on. And such spiritual power comes only through obedience and righteousness. So, could Samson have had "the Spirit of the Lord come mightily upon him"? (vs. 6). That or a similar phrase is used three times in the account of Samson (see Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14), but in every case it has reference to Samson's demonstration of great courage and physical strength. Samson's remarkable strength was a gift of God derived from and sustained by the Nazarite vow he was under. Perhaps when the author of Judges used the phrase "the Spirit of God" he did not use it as one does today, but used it more in the way that one would now use the phrase "spiritual gifts." One may say of another, "The way he taught the lesson demonstrated that he has a spiritual gift." Samson's gift was strength, and each time he used that gift in a remarkable manner, the writer of the scripture gave credit to the Lord, the true source of the gift, by saying "the Spirit of the Lord" came mightily upon him. (*Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel, 260*)

14:15 *fire* (Heb. 'esh) Samson, for example, is quietly but effectively associated with a verbal and imagistic motif of fire. The various cords that fail to bind him are likened unto flax dissolving in fire when he snaps them with his strength (15:14). The thirty Philistine men threaten his first wife with death by fire if she does not obtain for them the answer to Samson's riddle (14:15). When Samson is discarded as a husband by the action of his first father-in-law, he responds by tying torches to the tails of foxes and setting the Philistines fields on fire (15:4-5). The immediate reaction of the Philistines is to make a roaring bonfire out of the household of Samson's recent wife, with her and her father in the midst of the flames (15:6). By the time we get to the captive Samson bringing down the temple of Dagon on himself and several thousand of his enemies, though there is no actual fire in this climactic scene, fire has become the metonymic image of Samson: a blind, uncontrolled force, leaving a terrible swath of destruction behind it, finally consuming itself together with whatever stands in its way. (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative, 94-95*)

* the outlines are adapted from David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*