JUDGES 1-12

Man's nature
God's Character.
Our need to trust
in God's wisdom
not our instinct.

“What” Statement for Book of Judges

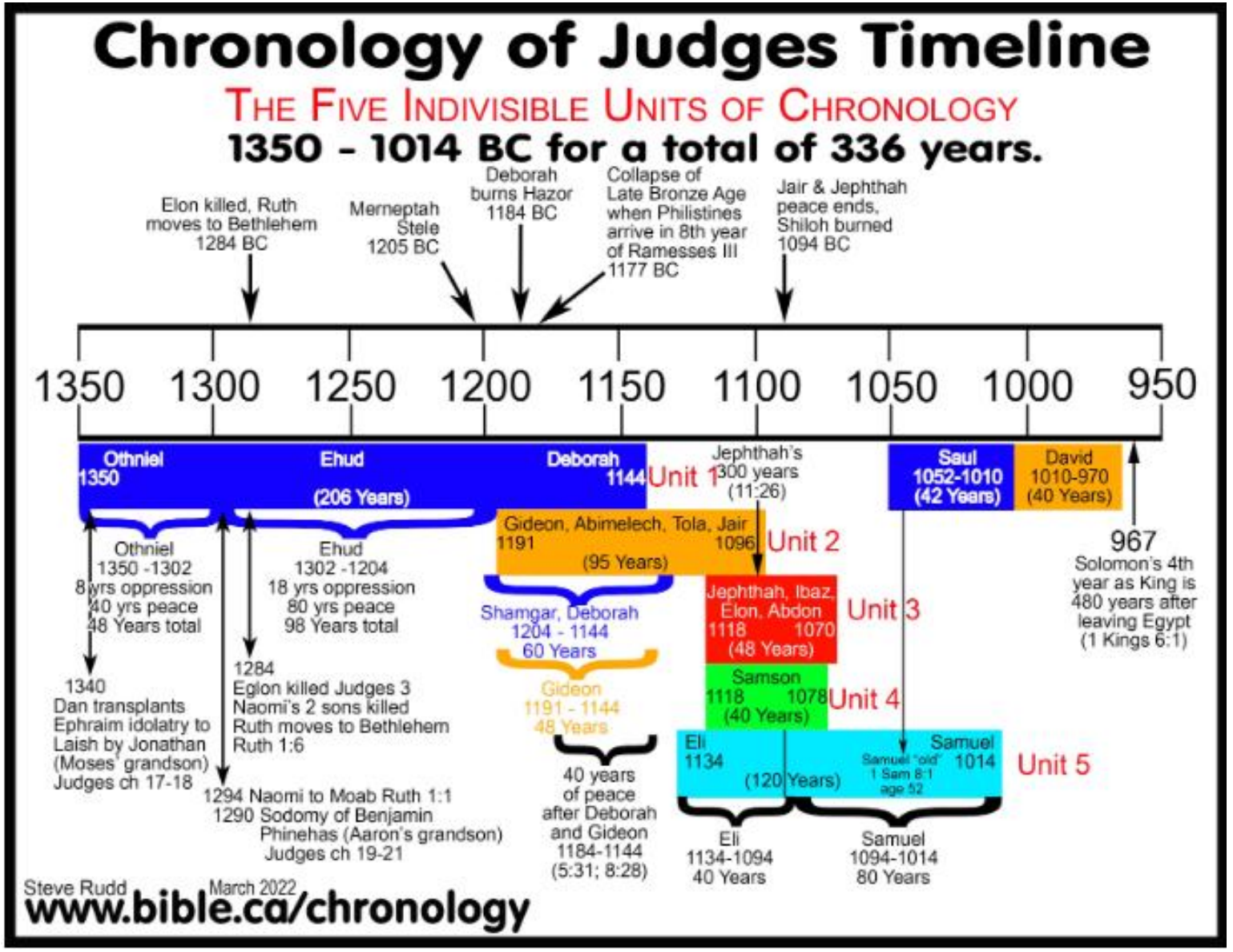
- **What is theme of Book of Judges?** Mankind's self-reliance and moral corruption leads to chaos, yet God remains faithful to rescue His people to show He is a merciful and faithful God. "Everyone Did What Was Right in Their Own Eyes": A recurring refrain in the book (Judges 17:6, 21:25) highlights a society completely broken by moral relativism, spiritual compromise, and tribal violence.
- **What was purpose of individuals who were Judges?** The primary purpose of the judges was to act as a deliverer and spiritual rescuers raised up by God to save Israel during times of crisis and oppression.
- **What is revealed about mankind?** The Book of Judges reveals humanity's deep-seated tendency toward moral corruption, self-reliance, and spiritual decay when left to its own devices.
- **What is revealed about God?** The Book of Judges reveals God’s unfailing grace & patience, faithful to His covenant, sovereign over all nations, willingness to use flawed individual for His purpose and merciful in response to human failure. **(God does not use the qualified, since none are, but qualify the called!)**

Judges Map


The Setting of Judges
Land occupied by the Israelites during the settlement period
City still dominated by Canaanites after the Israelites settled the Promised Land (according to Judges 1)
Ahlab
Dan
Rehob?
Achzib
Hazor
Acco
Beth-anath?
Aphek?
Mount Tabor
Nahalal?
Beth-shemesh?
Dor
Megiddo
Kamon?
Taanach
Beth-shean
Ibleam
Jabesh-gilead?
Thebez
Zaphon?
Shechem
Pirathon
Mizpah?
Shiloh
Bethel
Gezer
Shaalbim
Mizpah
Aijalon
Jerusalem
Heshbon
Ekron
Ashkelon
Hebron
Gaza
Debir?
Beersheba
Hormah?
Mediterranean Sea
Dead Sea
0 10 20 30 mi
0 10 20 30 40 km

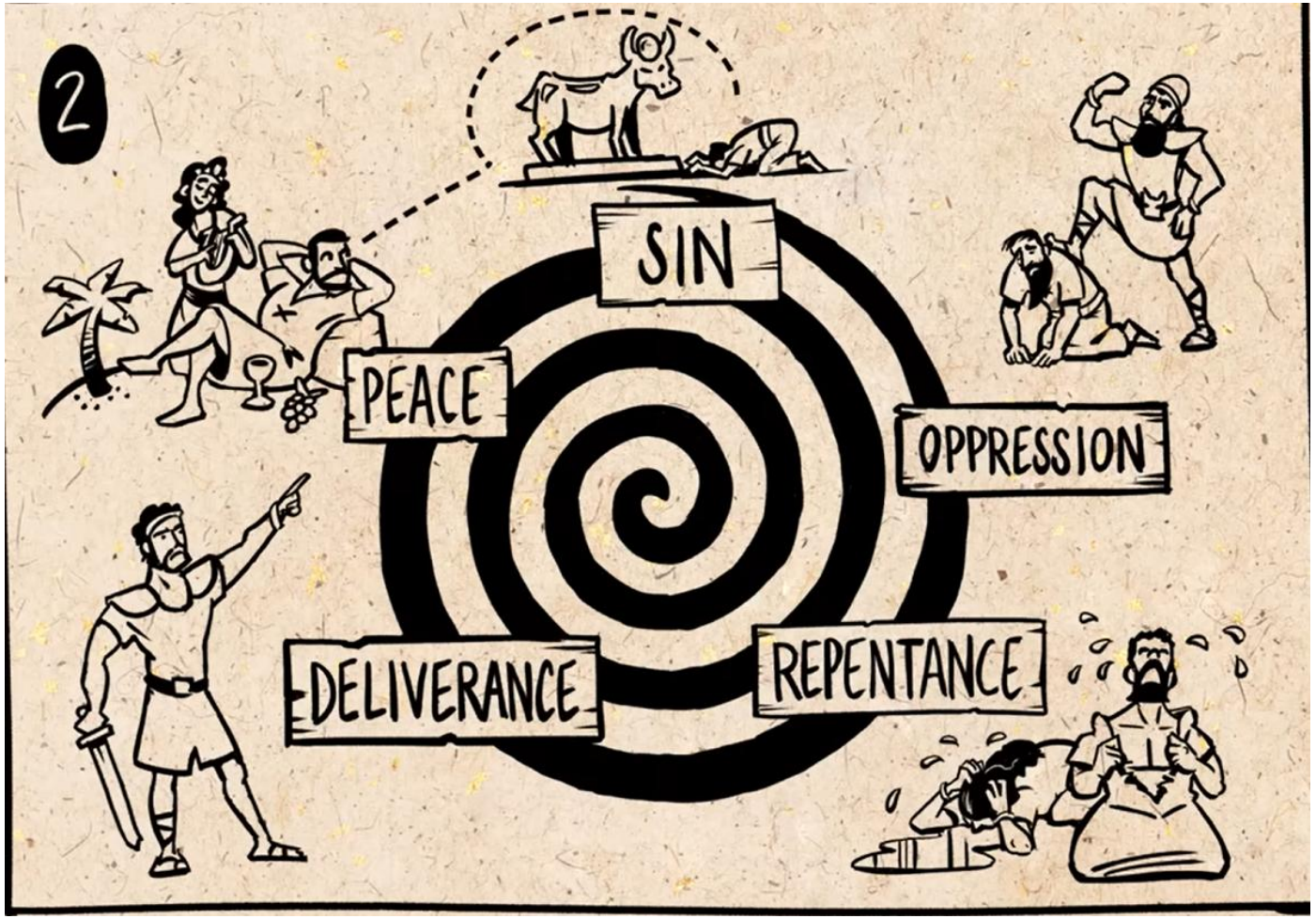
Timeline for Book of Judges

Estimate timeline was from 1350 BC to 1050 BC



Judges shows Israelites repeating pattern

- **Sin:** Israel abandons God and worships Canaanite idols.
- **Oppression:** God allows neighboring nations to conquer or oppress Israel.
Repentance: Israel groans and cries out to God for help.
- **Deliverance:** God raises up a judge to defeat the enemy and bring a period of peace.
- **Peace:** then forget what God has done and call to live like.



Judges 1-2
Incomplete Conquest and the Cycle Begins

- **Incomplete Obedience (Chapter 1):** After Joshua dies, the tribes of Israel ask who should fight the Canaanites first. Judah leads with Simeon's help and captures parts of the land, including Jerusalem, Hebron, and Debir, but most tribes fail to drive out the local inhabitants, choosing forced labor or coexistence instead.
- **The Repeating Cycle (Chapter 2):** An angel of the Lord rebukes Israel for making covenants with local pagans and worshiping false gods like Baal and Ashtaroth. A cyclical pattern emerges: Israel sins, God hands them over to foreign oppressors, the people cry out in distress, and God raises up a judge to deliver them, only for the cycle to restart upon the judge's death.

Judges 3-5
The First Major Judges

Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar (Chapter 3)

- Othniel (Caleb's younger brother) defeats King Cushan-Rishathaim of Mesopotamia, bringing 40 years of rest.
- Ehud, a left-handed Benjamite, uses a hidden double-edged dagger to assassinate the overweight Moabite King Eglon. He then rallies Israel to defeat Moab, securing 80 years of peace.
- Shamgar slaughters 600 Philistines with an oxgoad (a cattle-driving farm tool).

Judges 3-5
The First Major Judges

Deborah and Barak (Chapters 4–5)

- Israel is oppressed for 20 years by Canaanite King Jabin and his general, Sisera, who commands 900 iron chariots.
- The prophetess and judge Deborah directs General Barak to muster 10,000 men. Barak hesitates unless she comes with him, so Deborah prophecies that the honor of defeating Sisera will go to a woman.
- God floods the River Kishon to bog down the iron chariots. Sisera flees on foot to the tent of a Kenite woman named Jael, who drives a tent peg through his temple.
- Chapter 5 records the celebratory Song of Deborah and Barak, followed by 40 years of rest.

Judges 6-8
Gideon and His Son Abimelech's Shadow

Call of Gideon (Chapter 6): Midianites devastate Israel for seven years, forcing the people into mountain caves. The Angel of the Lord finds Gideon threshing wheat secretly inside a winepress and calls him a "mighty man of valor". Gideon tears down his father's altar to Baal and asks God for signs involving a fleece.

Defeat of Midian (Chapter 7): God trims Gideon's army down from 32,000 men to just 300 to prove the victory belongs to God. Armed only with trumpets, clay jars, and hidden torches, the 300 surprise the Midianite camp at night, causing the enemy forces to panic and turn on each other.

Gideon's Decline (Chapter 8): Gideon pursues and executes fleeing Midianite kings, punishes Israelite towns that refused to feed his exhausted troops, and refuses an offer to become king. However, he melts down gold plunder to create a sacred object (ephod) that becomes an idol for Israel, and his death triggers renewed idolatry.

Judges 9
The Tyranny of Abimelech

Conspiracy and Murders: Gideon's concubine-born son, Abimelech, persuades the leaders of Shechem to back him and brutally murders 70 of his half-brothers upon a single stone. Only the youngest son, Jotham, escapes.

Jotham's Parable: Jotham climbs Mount Gerizim and delivers a sharp fable comparing the people's choice of Abimelech to trees choosing a worthless, destructive thornbush to rule over them.

Downfall: After a three-year reign marked by civil bloodshed, God sends a spirit of discord between Abimelech and Shechem. Abimelech destroys Shechem, but while attacking the tower of Thebez, a woman drops a heavy millstone onto his head, and he orders his armor-bearer to run him through with a sword.

Judges 10-12
Jephthah and the Minor Judges

Tola, Jair, and New Oppression (Chapter 10): Following Abimelech, two minor judges named Tola and Jair lead Israel. When Israel drifts back into idol worship, God hands them over to the Ammonites and Philistines.

Jephthah the Gileadite (Chapter 11)

- Rejected by his family as the son of a harlot, Jephthah is summoned back by Gilead's elders to lead the war against Ammon.
- Jephthah sends a diplomatic challenge to the Ammonite king, then makes a rash vow to God: if granted victory, he will sacrifice whatever first comes out of his house to greet him.
- He defeats the Ammonites, and his only daughter is the first to run out to meet him with tambourines and dancing. He fulfills the tragic vow.

Judges 10-12
Jephthah and the Minor Judges

Civil War and the Shibboleth Test (Chapter 12)

- The tribe of Ephraim grows jealous because Jephthah didn't call them to the Ammonite war and threatens to burn his house.
- Jephthah and the men of Gilead fight Ephraim and capture the Jordan River crossings. To identify fleeing Ephraimites, they make them pronounce the word "Shibboleth" (which Ephraimites pronounce as "Sibboleth"), slaughtering 42,000 men who fail the test.

The Final Minor Judges: Jephthah judges for six years, followed by Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

Key Learning in Judges 1-12

Partial obedience is disobedience. After Joshua's death, the tribes of Israel fail to fully drive out the remaining Canaanites. Instead of removing corrupting influences as commanded, they settle alongside them and adopt their idolatrous practices.

Judges 2:10-12 All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.

After deliverance from sin or oppression and peace come remember who delivered you from sin or oppression and provided peace. Don’t forget and turn back to sin!

Judges 2:18-19 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. 19 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.

Key Learning in Judges 1-12

God uses unexpected people. God does not use the qualified, since none are, but qualify the called

Victory belongs to God, not human strength. Othneil, Ehud & Deborah. God delights in using weak or overlooked vessels to accomplish His mission.

Good beginnings can end in pride. Gideon starts as a fearful farmer whom God uses to defeat a massive Midianite army with just 300 men so that Israel cannot boast in its own power. However, Gideon ends poorly by retaliating violently against fellow Israelites and crafting a golden ephod that becomes an idol.

Ignoring God's character leads to foolish vows, tragedy, and internal division. Jephthan is an example.

The Need for a True King: The chaotic era highlights humanity's inability to save itself and points forward to the need for a righteous, permanent king—Jesus Christ.