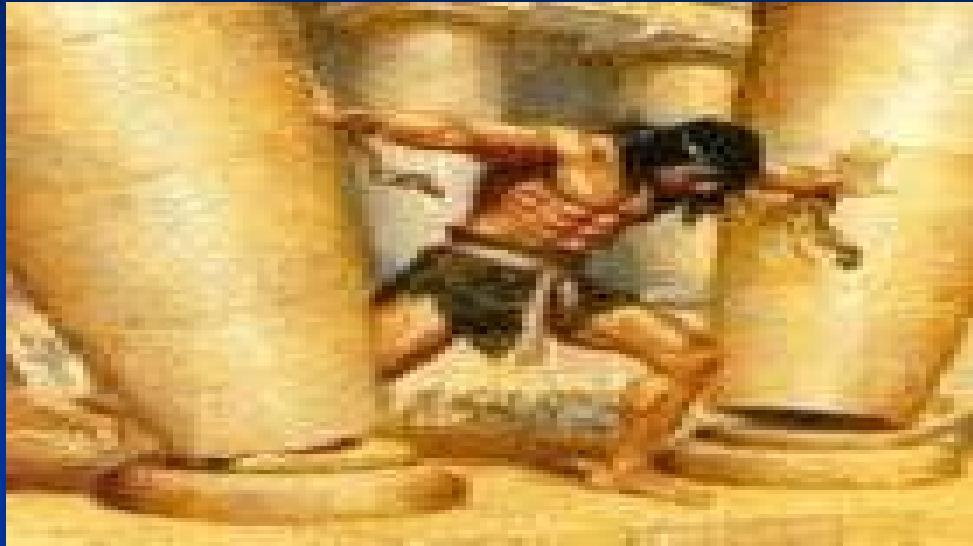


The Old Testament Judges



Dennis Raymond P. Maturan
De La Salle-College of St. Benilde
2010

What is a Biblical Judge?

- The word, means more than this; it refers to leaders who took charge of the affairs of the tribes in case of war (similar to a 'war king for example), and who assumed leadership of their respective tribes in the succeeding times of peace.
- They are benevolent dictators who ruled among the different tribes of Israel after Joshua divided the Promised land among the tribes. In accordance with the needs of the time, their functions were primarily **martial** and **judicial**.

List of Biblical Judges

- **Othniel**, the son of Kenaz from the tribe of Judah
- **Ehud**, the son of Gerah from the tribe of Benjamin
- **Shamgar**, the son of Anath from the tribe of Levi
- **Deborah**, from the tribe of Ephraim (with **Barak**, her general)
- **Gideon** (also named *Jerubbaal*), the son of Joash from the tribe of Manasseh
- **Tola**, the son of Puah from the tribe of Issachar
- **Jair**, from **Gilead**
- **Jephthah**, from Gilead
- **Ibzan**, from the tribe of Judah
- **Elon**, from the tribe of Zebulun
- **Abdon**, the son of Hillel, the *Piratoni*, from the tribe of Ephraim
- **Samson**, the son of Manoah, from the tribe of Dan
- The **First Book of Samuel** describes two further individuals as being judges: **Eli** and **Samuel**

Samson

Samson or Shimshon (שִׁמְשׁוֹן) "Of the sun" (perhaps proclaiming he was radiant and mighty) or "[One who] Serves [God]", Standard Hebrew Simšon, Tiberian Hebrew Šimšôn) is the third to last of the Judges of the ancient Children of Israel mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. He is described in the Book of Judges chapters 13 to 16.

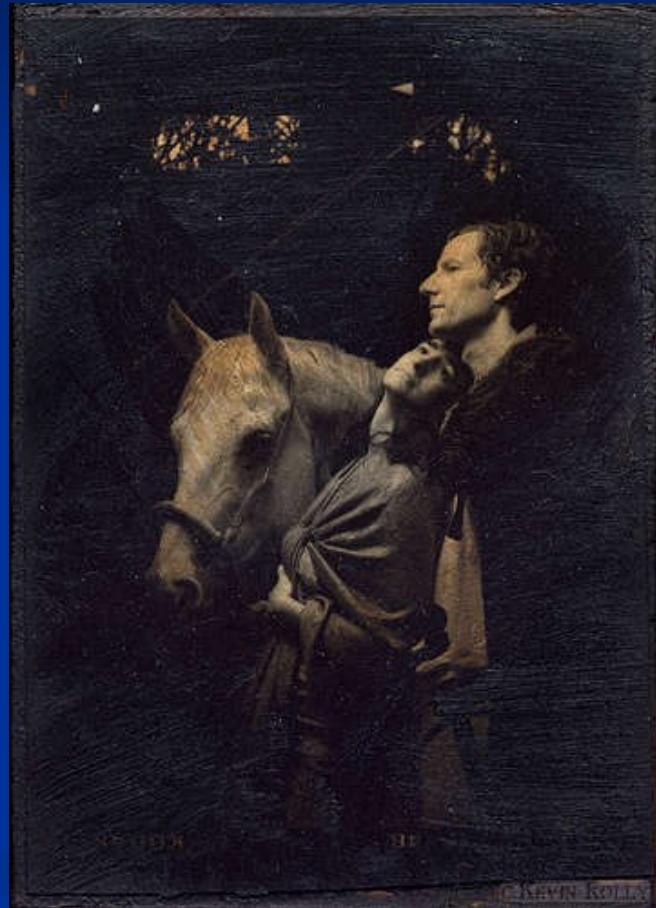
Samson is something of a Herculean figure, utilizing massive strength to combat his enemies and perform heroic feats unachievable by ordinary men: wrestling a lion, slaying an entire army with nothing more than a donkey's jawbone, and tearing down an entire building.



Othniel

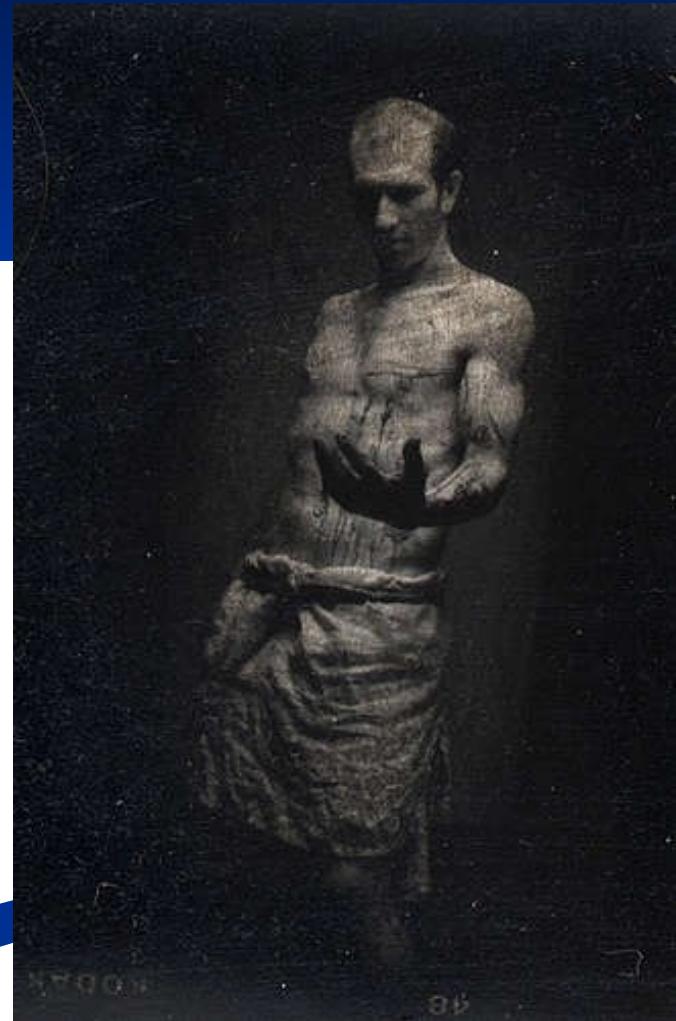
■ Othniel Ben Kenaz

(Hebrew: עֲתָנֵל בֶּן קְנָז "lion of God", Standard Hebrew 'Otni'el Ben Qənəz, Tiberian Hebrew 'Oṭnî' ēl Ben Qənəz) is the first of the Judges. His wife Achsah was the daughter of Caleb (Josh. 15:16, 17; Judg. 1:13). He gained her hand as a reward for his bravery in leading a successful expedition against Debir. Some thirty years after the death of Joshua, the Israelites fell under the subjection of Chushan-rishathaim, the king of Mesopotamia. He oppressed them for a full eight years, when they "cried" unto God, Othniel was raised up to be their deliverer. He was the son of Kenaz, younger brother of Caleb (Judg. 3:8, 9-11). He is the only Judge mentioned connected with the Tribe of Judah. Under him peace lasted for forty years.



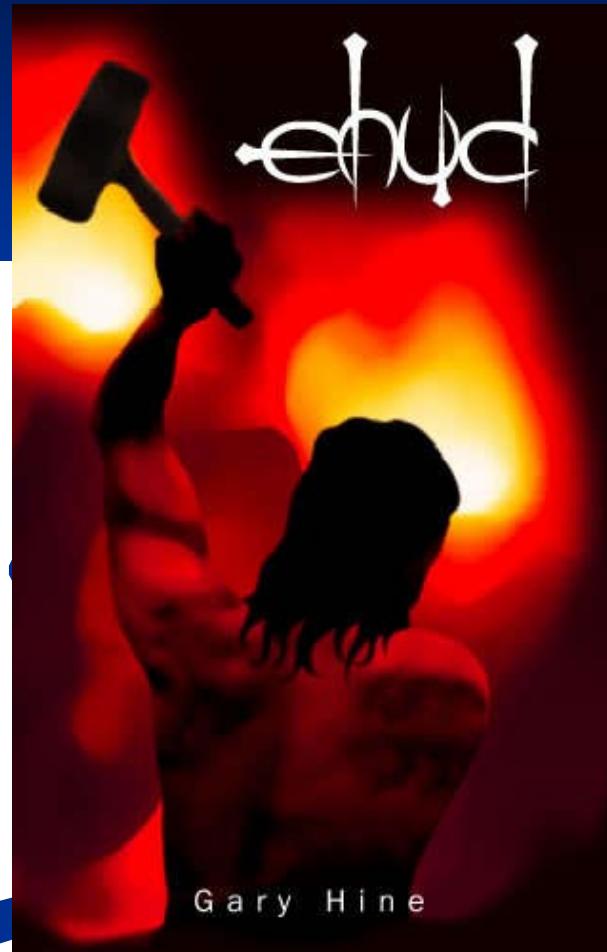
Ehud

- Ehud Ben Gera (אֵהוּד) originating from the Hebrew root אֶחָד (liking, sympathy, support), Standard Hebrew Ehud, Tiberian Hebrew 'Ēhûd), in the Biblical Book of Judges (3:12-4:1) was the Judge who fought against the Moabites, which Eglon



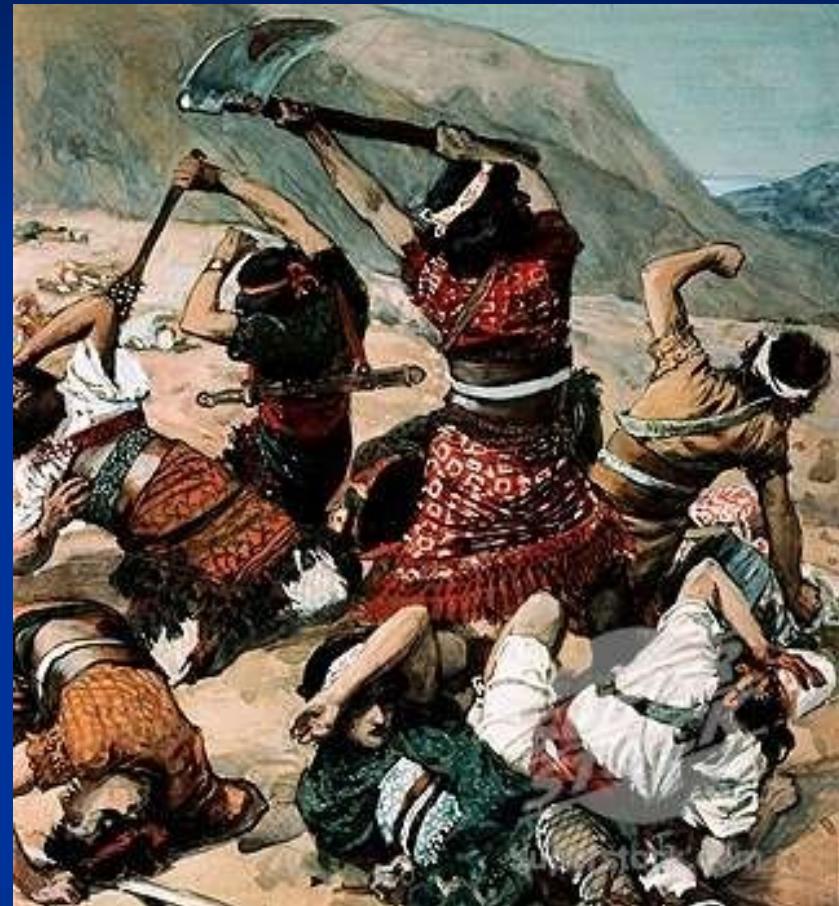
Ehud

- After killing Eglon, Ehud locked the doors to the king's chamber and left, leading to a very humorous scene. Eglon's assistants came back to check on the king but when they found the doors locked they assumed the king was relieving himself. They "waited to the point of embarrassment" until they finally unlocked the door and went in, where they found their king dead. Ehud escaped during this time and made it to the town of Seriah. He then led the tribe of Ephraim to seize the fords of the Jordan, where they killed about 10,000 Moabite soldiers.
- Ehud can be looked at as the opposite of the later judge Samson. He was just a normal man who purely by his own wits killed the king of Moab, and there was peace in the land for eighty years.



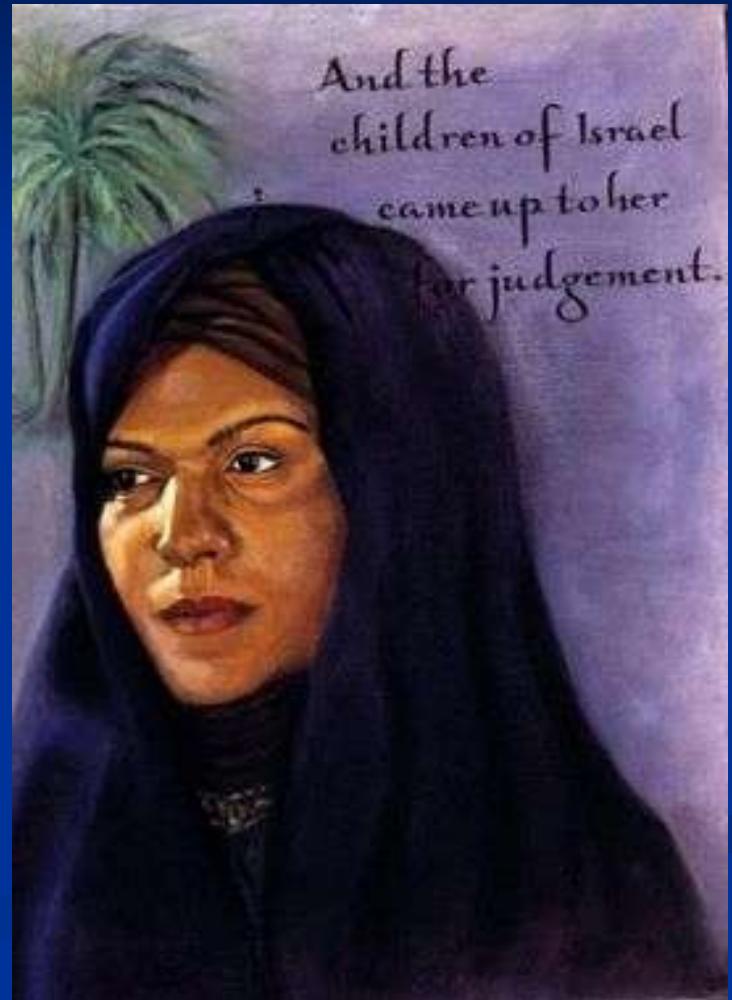
Shamgar

- The Philistines from the maritime plain had made incursions into the Hebrew upland for the purposes of plunder, when **Shamgar**, the son of Anath (Hebrew **שָׁמָגֵר בֶּן־עֲנָת** otherwise unknown, headed ,(an uprising for the purpose of freeing the land from this oppression. Shamgar repelled the invasion by slaying 600 men with an ox god, a formidable weapon sometimes ten feet long. He was probably contemporary for a time with Deborah and Barak (Judg. 3:31; 5:6).



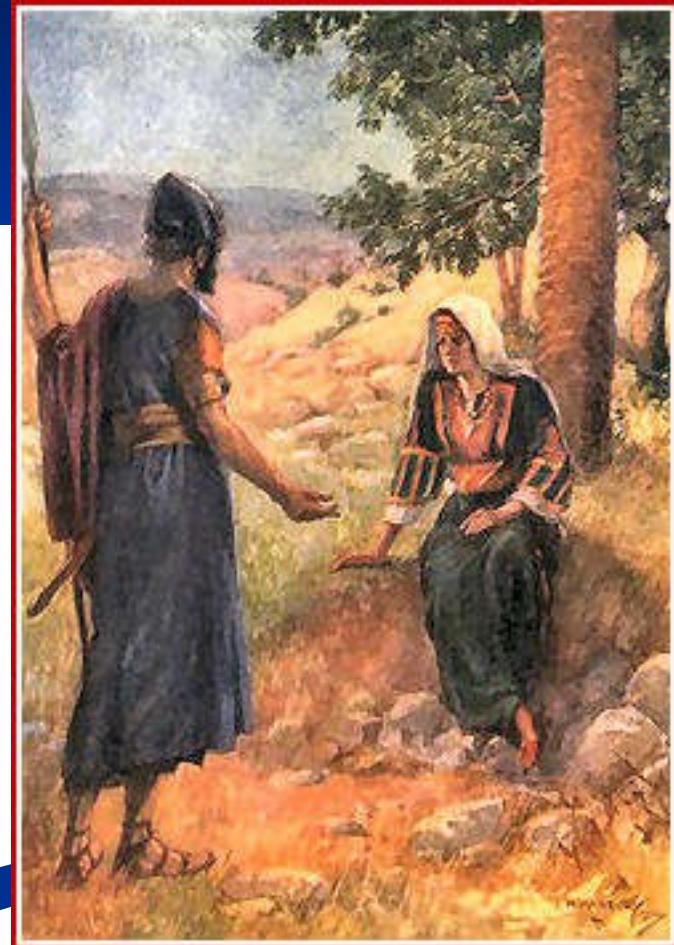
Deborah

- Deborah or Dvora (דָבָרָה "Bee", Standard Hebrew **Dəvrāh**, Tiberian Hebrew **DəbUrāh**) was a prophetess and the fourth Judge and only female Judge of pre-monarchic Israel in the Old Testament (Tanakh). Her story is told twice in chapters 4 and 5 of Judges. The first account is prose, relating the victory of Israelite forces led by General Barak, whom Deborah called forth but prophesied would not achieve the final victory over the Canaanite general Sisera himself. That honor went to Jael, the wife of Heber, a Kenite tentmaker. Jael killed Sisera by driving a tent peg through his head as he slept.



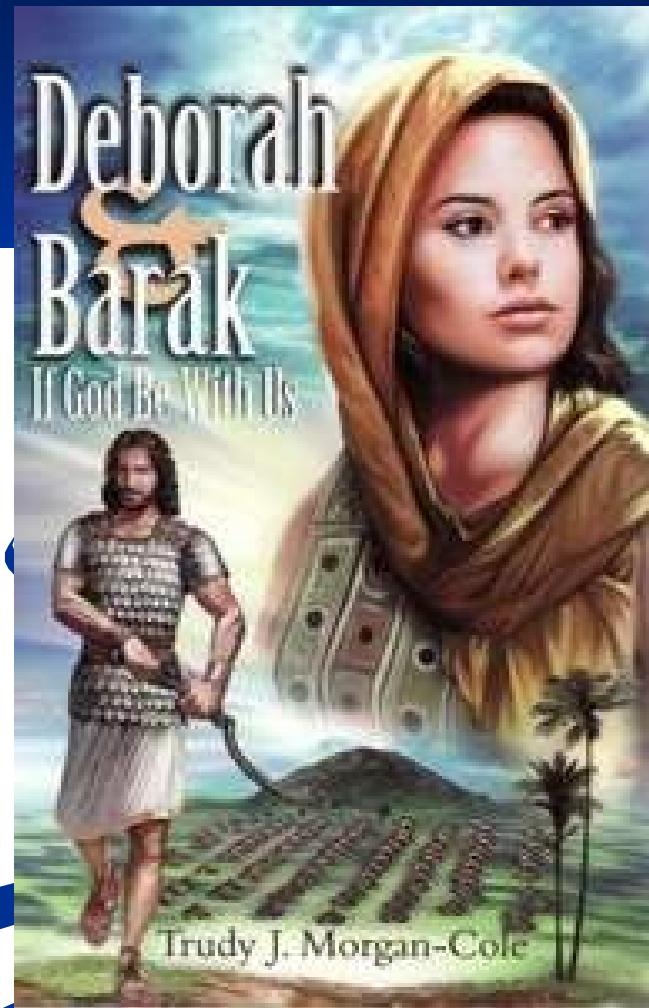
Barak

- Barak (בָּרָק "Lightning", Standard Hebrew Barak, Tiberian Hebrew Bārāq) is one of the Judges from the Book of Judges in the Bible.
- Barak was the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali. For twenty years Israel was oppressed by the Canaanites, whose army had chariots with iron scythes.
- The story of the victory of the Israelites under the prophetic leadership of Deborah and the military leadership of Barak, her commander, is related in prose (chapter 4) and repeated in poetry (chapter 5, which is known as the *Song of Deborah*). Chapter 4 makes the chief enemy Jabin, king of Hazor (present Tell el-Qedah, about three miles southwest of Hula Basin), though a prominent part is played by his commander in chief, Sisera of Harosheth-ha-goiim (possibly Tell el-'Amr, approximately 12 miles (19 km) northwest of Megiddo



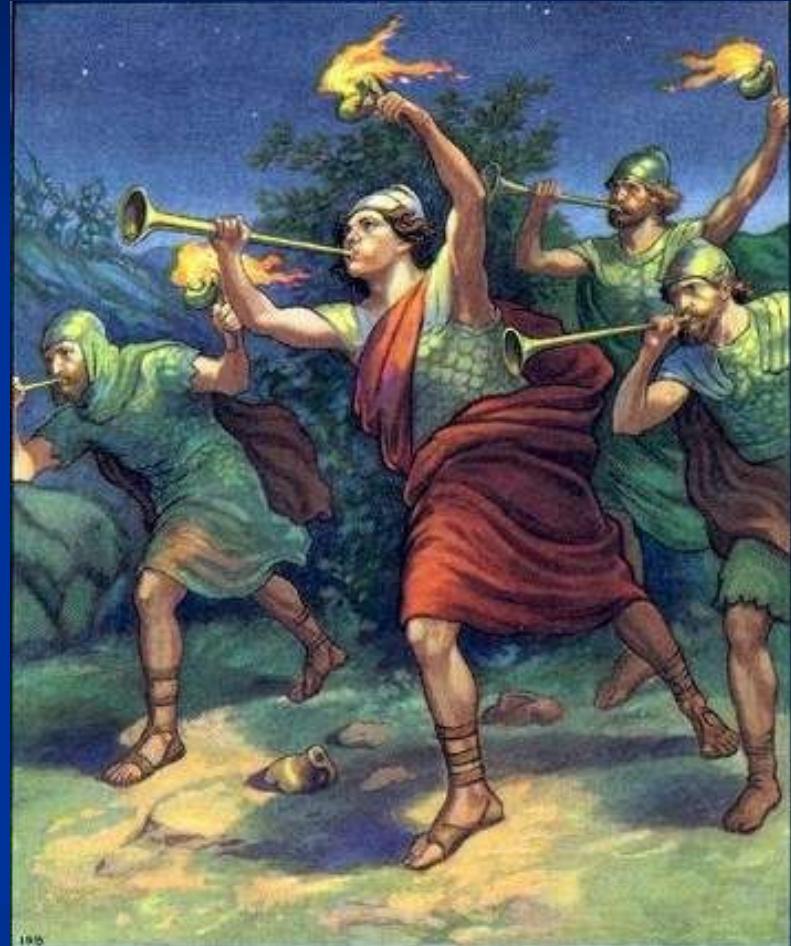
Barak

- Deborah said that Barak would win, but Sisera would be killed by a woman. In the battle at Mount Tabor, a cloudburst occurred, causing the river to flood, thus limiting the manoeuvrability of the Canaanite chariots. Sisera fled, seeking refuge in the tent of a Kenite woman, Jael. Jael gave Sisera a drink of milk and he fell asleep from weariness. Then she pounded a tent peg through his head. When Barak came along, she let him see Sisera dead in her tent. Later Israel slew King Jabin.
- Barak is remembered in the New Testament as one who "through faith defeated kingdoms in conflict"



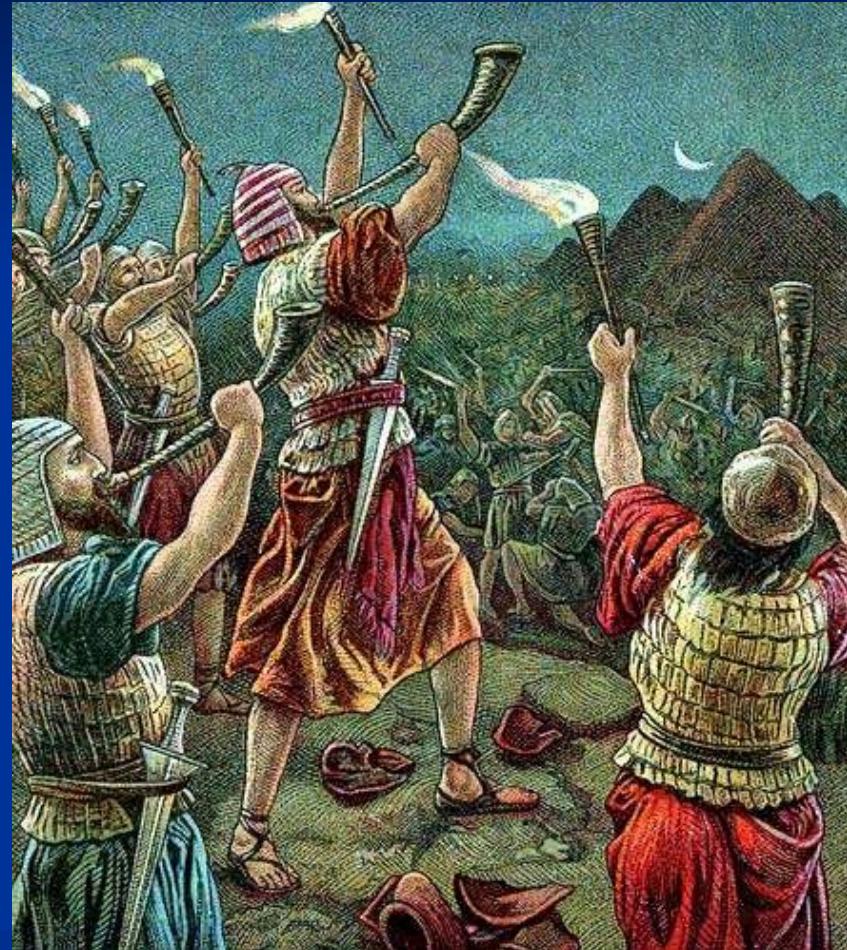
Gideon

- **Gideon** (גִּיאוֹן, Standard Hebrew, גִּידְׁעוֹן, Tiberian Hebrew **Gid'Ûn**), also known as **Jerubbaal**, is a character that appears in the Book of Judges, in the Bible. His story is told in chapters 6 to 8. He is also named in the Epistle to the Hebrews as an example of a man of faith. He is the son of Joash, from the clan of Abiezer in the tribe of Manasseh. The name Gideon means "Destroyer", "Mighty warrior" or "Feller (of trees)".
- As is the pattern throughout the book of Judges, the Israelites again turned away from God after forty years of peace brought by Deborah's victory over Canaan and were allowed to be attacked by the neighbouring Midianites and Amalekites. God chose Gideon, a young man from an otherwise unremarkable clan from the tribe of Manasseh, to free the people of Israel and to condemn their worship of idols.



Gideon

- Very unsure of both himself and God's command, he requested proof of God's will by a miracle:
 - 36Then Gideon said to God, "You say that you have decided to use me to rescue Israel. 37Well, I am putting some wool on the ground where we thresh the wheat. If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground, then I will know that you are going to use me to rescue Israel." 38That is exactly what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the wool and wrung enough dew out of it to fill a bowl with water. 39Then Gideon said to God, "Don't be angry with me; let me speak just once more. Please let me make one more test with the wool. This time let the wool be dry, and the ground be wet." 40That night God did that very thing. The next morning the wool was dry, but the ground was wet with dew. (*Judges 6:36-40, Good News Bible*)



Abimelech

In the Tanakh or Old Testament, Abimelech was a son of the great judge Gideon (Judges 9:1); thus his name / **אַבִימֶלֶךְ** אָבִימֶלֶךְ can best be "the king".

"Abimelech", a name claiming the inherited right to rule, was also a common name of the Philistine kings. He was, however, merely the son of Gideon's concubine; and to make good his claim to rule over Ephraim, he resorted to force.

Aided by his mother's relatives, he put to death all of his half-brothers, seventy in number, "on one stone," at Ophrah, only the youngest, Jotham, escaping. Abimelech ruled but three years in Shechem after the death of his father (*Judges 8:33-9:6*).



Abimelech

- He was an unprincipled, ambitious ruler, often engaged in war with his own subjects. When engaged in reducing the town of Thebez, which had revolted, he was struck mortally on his head by a mill-stone, thrown by the hand of a woman from the wall above. Perceiving that the wound was mortal, he desired his armor-bearer to thrust him through with his sword, that it might not be said he had perished by the hand of a woman (Judges 9:50-57).
- Some scholars have pointed with interest to the similarities between Abimelech's story and that of Labaya in the Amarna letters.



Tola

Tola (**תּוֹלָה** "Worm; grub", Standard Hebrew **Tola'**, Tiberian Hebrew **TÙlā'**) was one of the Judges of Israel whose career is documented in Judges 10:1-2. Tola, the son of Puah and the grandson of Dodo from the tribe of Issachar, judged Israel for twenty-three years after Abimelech died and lived at Shamir in Mount Ephraim, where he was also buried.



Jair

Jair (Hebrew יָיִר Ya'ir) was a man from Gilead (see also Manasseh), east of the River Jordan, who judged Israel for twenty-two years after the death of Tola. His inheritance was in Gilead through the line of Makir, the son of Menasseh. Jair was the son of Segub, the son of Hezron the Jew through the daughter of Makir (1 Chronicles 2). According to Judges 10:3-5, Jair had thirty sons, who rode thirty ass colts, and thirty 'cities' in Gilead which came to be known as Havoth-Jair. The word *chawwoth* ('tent encampments') occurs only in this context (*Numbers* 32:41; *Deuteronomy* 3:14; *Judges* 10:4), and is a legacy word remaining from the early nomadic stage of Hebrew culture. W. Ewing suggests that Kamon probably corresponds to Kamun taken by the Seleucid king Antiochus III, on his march from Pella to Gephrun (Polybius Book V.70:12).

Jair died and was buried in Kamo.

Jephtha

Jephtha (Heb. יפתח Yiftach) is a character in the Old Testament who served as one of the Judges in Israel for a period of six years (*Judges* 12:7) between the conquest of Canaan and the first king. Jephtha lived in Gilead and was a member of the Tribe of Manasseh. He is also called Jephthah in other bible references. His father's name was also Gilead.

Being driven out by his half-brothers, he took up dwelling in Tob, east of Gilead. Here some men opposing the Ammonites put themselves under his command.

(*Judges* 11:3) When Israel was gathering to go to war against Ammon, they looked for a God-appointed man and decided to go to Jephtha.

He is best known for a rather unfortunate episode, and is recalled in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:32) as an example of a man of faith for the same. Before leaving for the war, he made a vow to God that if he was to return home victorious, "whoever is the first to come through the doors of my house" to meet him would be given to God. He was victorious, and return he did, but he was met by his daughter and only child. It is written that after much mourning she died as a childless, unmarried virgin.

Jephtha

The event has been the subject of many debates among readers. Some have argued that this was a practice of dedicating women to virginity, but it is likely that he really sacrificed her as an offering. Ancient Jewish writers interpreted it as a human sacrifice, as seen explicitly, for example, in the classical Pseudo-Philo, where the daughter sings a lament about her impending death and its necessity to fulfil Jephtha's vow. *Leviticus 27:16-29* is used in support of both positions. On one hand it can be argued that these items are destroyed, but the cited text also allows for ransoming and also mentions land which can not be destroyed and was traditionally turned over for temple use. Some Jewish sources claim that Jephtha may have expected an "unclean" animal such as a dog to greet him upon returning home. Alternatively, the main point of this story may be to instruct young girls as to how to behave should they ever be selected for service (verses 37-38). That is, it could be a normative tale.

Jephtha

Later, Jephtha went to war against the Ephraimites, who refused to acknowledge him. The story is remembered for the killing of the fugitive Ephraimites who were identified by their accent; they said the Hebrew word *shibboleth* as *sibboleth*. In this rebellious action, 42,000 people lost their lives. (*Judges 12:5,6*) It should be noted that the method, while innovative, is by no means unique and has seen use throughout the centuries - for example, during the Finnish Civil War in 1918.

Ibz an

Ibzan (Hebrew אַבְצָן) appears in the Bible as one of the Judges of Israel. Very little is said about him, except the following:

⁸And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

⁹ And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

¹⁰ Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

from *Judges 12:8-10 (King James Version)*

*Ibz*an

Many scholars believe that the Bethlehem referred to in the story is the Bethlehem in the territory of the Tribe of Zebulun, rather than the more famous Bethlehem in the Tribe of Judah. However the Talmud (*Bava Batra* 91a) asserts that Ibzan is to be identified with Boaz from the story of Ruth, who lived in the Bethlehem of Judah, and that he consummated his marriage with Ruth on the last night of his life. This identification is probably made on the strength of the similarity of the Hebrew spellings of their names and the fact of their both residing in "Bethlehem."

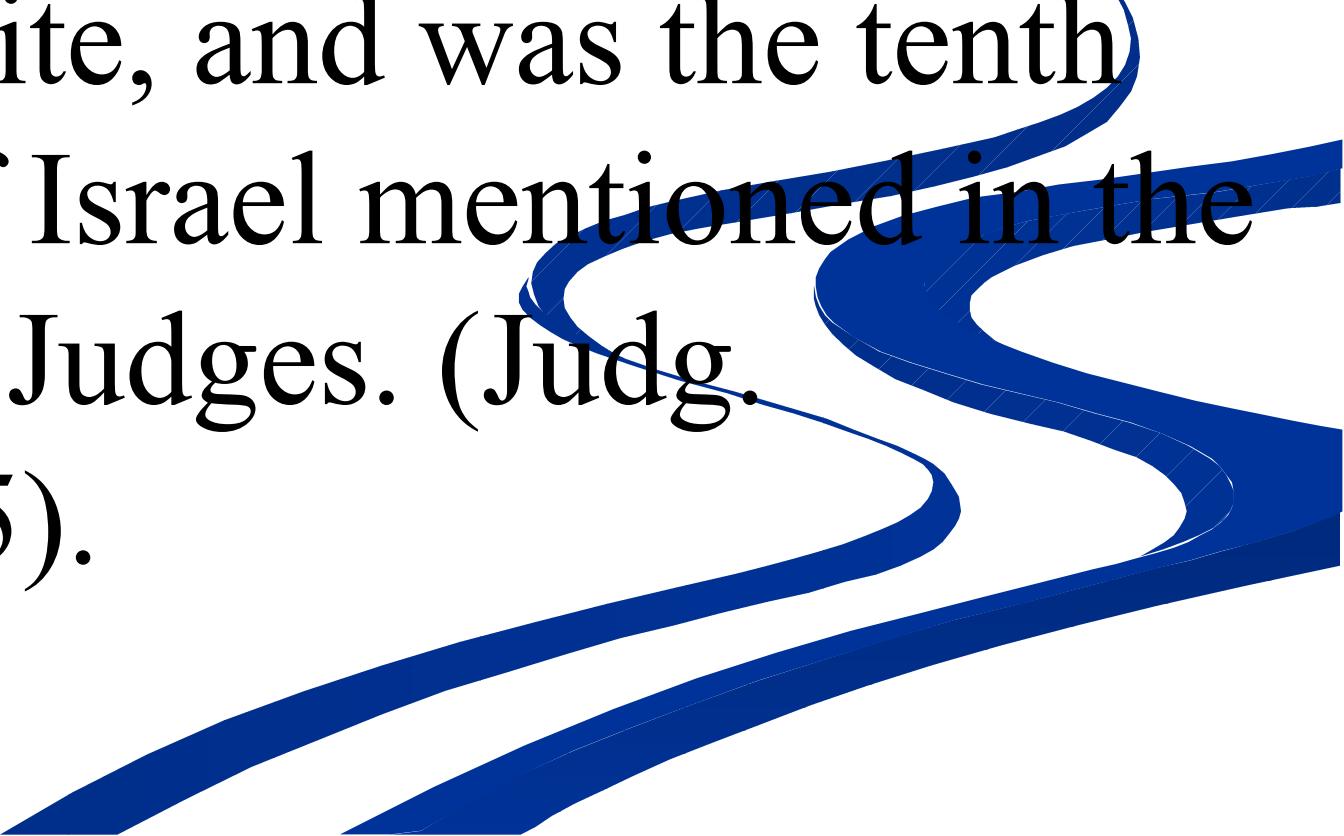


In the Bible, **Elon** (Hebrew אֵלֹן "Oak", Standard Hebrew **Elon**, Tiberian Hebrew ’lōn) was a Judge of Israel.

He followed Ibzan and was succeeded by Abdon. It is said that he was from the Tribe of Zebulun, led Israel for ten years, and was buried in Ajalon in Zebulon. (Judges 12:11)

Abdon

Abdon was the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, and was the tenth Judge of Israel mentioned in the Book of Judges. (Judg. 12:13-15).





Eli (אֵלִי "Ascent", Standard Hebrew 'Eli, Tiberian Hebrew 'Ēlî) is the name of one of the last Israelite Judges before the rule of kings in ancient Israel. He was also the main priest and trained the young prophet Samuel.

His sons (Hophni and Phinehas) were considered to be very wicked and were eventually struck down by God for the irreverence they showed in doing their priestly duties. God's judgment fell on Eli himself when hearing that Israel lost the Ark of the Covenant to their enemies. After he was told this he fell over in his chair and died.

Samuel

Samuel or **Shmu'el** (שְׁמֻאֵל) Standard Hebrew ,Šəmu'el, Tiberian Hebrew Šəmū'ēl) is an important leader of ancient Israel. His story is told in the Hebrew Bible in the Books of Samuel.

His status, as viewed by rabbinical literature, is that he was the last of the Hebrew Judges and the first of the major prophets who began to prophesy inside the Land of Israel. He was at the cusp between two eras (as one notes that the Books of Samuel follow directly after the Book of Judges) and selected/anointed the first two kings of the Kingdom of Israel: King Saul and King David.

Name

The literal translation of *Samuel* is *God Heard* ('Shama', heard; 'El', god), owing to Samuel 1:20, where Hannah names her son in memory of her requesting a child from God and God listening.

Samuel

Birth and early years

The peculiar circumstances connected with his birth are recorded in 1 Samuel 1:20. Hannah, one of the two wives of Elkanah, who came up to Shiloh to worship before the Lord, earnestly prayed to God that she might become the mother of a son. Her prayer was graciously granted; and after the child was weaned she brought him to Shiloh and consecrated him to the Lord as a perpetual Nazarite (1:23-2:11).

Here his bodily wants and training were attended to by the women who served in the Tabernacle, while Eli cared for his religious education. Thus, probably, twelve years of his life passed away. "The child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men" (2:26; comp. *Luke* 2:52). It was a time of great and growing degeneracy in Israel (Judg. 21:19-21; 1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22). .