

Barak, her commander-in-chief, discomfited the vast army of Jabin, under the command of Sisera, one of the greatest generals of his age, and ruled over Israel for forty years. The Judges appear in history as gallant insurgents, border warriors or guerilla leaders, rather than as grave administrators of justice, or dignified rulers of a great kingdom. Usually their authority and achievements were local, rather than national, and confined mainly to the boundaries of their own tribe. Any general gathering of the people partook more of the character of a warlike confederacy than of a judicial or deliberative assembly.

The Judges arose out of different tribes, and were summoned to power by the exigencies of the time, as in the case of Jephthah, or directly called by a message from God, as was Gideon. The Hebrew people, soon after the death of Joshua, with whom their career of conquest ceased, instead of forming a strong, united, federal government, unhappily insisted on separate Tribal rights, and oft became mutually jealous, if not enviously hostile to each other. This want of union among the Tribes arose out of their disobedience and apostasy from God, on account of which they were frequently subjected to foreign invasion and oppression.

From the death of Joshua to the time of Deborah, a period of one hundred and fifty years, Othniel, Ehud and Shagar successively governed the people. The last mentioned, probably a farmer, interrupted in his rural labor, while ploughing in the field, by an inroad of the Philistines, indignantly arose in his might and slew six hundred of the foe with his oxgoad, and by such a valiant exploit delivered Israel for the time. After the glorious victories and wise rule of Deborah, a season of peace and prosperity was enjoyed. Then a wild horde of Midianites and other nomadic freebooters overran the land, and occupied it in vast numbers, so that the oppressed and impoverished people were driven to take refuge in the fastnesses of the mountains. Gideon, a scion of a noble race, and in person "as the son of a King," received a divine commission, and by divine aid expelled the invaders, and slew their kings and one hundred and twenty thousand of their army. Half a century later a fresh apostasy led to another invasion by the Ammonites on the east, who overcame the united forces of several tribes and imperilled the peace of the entire people.

Jephthah, who had been unjustly exiled by his brethren on account of his illegitimacy, had become a noted chieftain and captain of a band of lawless freebooters east of the Jordan. To him, as a mighty man of valor, the tribes now turned for aid, and he assumed the command of the forces and drove the enemy out of the country with great slaughter and the destruction of many cities, and ruled over Israel six years. Another half century passes, and again Israel is under the heel of the oppressor. For forty years the Philistines had harassed and oppressed the southern tribes, especially Simeon and Dan. The oppression and tyranny