

Meet the players

1. Chronology 2516 - c.2900 Per Seder Olam: mid-13<sup>th</sup> century BCE to mid-9<sup>th</sup> century BCE
2. The enemies Canaanites and easterners (Moav, Midian, Amalek, etc.) / Philistines and Ammon
3. Mesha Stele (c. 850 BCE), Lines 10-11 ([http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mesha\\_Stele](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mesha_Stele))  
And the men of Gad lived in the land of Atarot from ancient times; and the king of Israel built Atarot for himself, and I fought against the city and captured it.
4. Divrei haYamim I 5:8-10  
 וּבֶלַע בֶּן-עֲזָז בֶּן-שִׁמְעֵן בְּיָדוֹ אֵל הוּא יוֹשֵׁב בְּעָרֵי עַד-נָבו וְעַל מְעֹן: וְלִמְזָרָה יָשַׁב עַד-לְבוֹא מִדְּפָרָה לְמוֹתְהֵנָּה פָּרַת כִּי מִקְנֵיהֶם רָבו בְּאֶרֶץ גִּלְעָד: וּבִימֵי שָׁאוּל עָשָׂה מִלְחָמָה עִם-הַחֲגִרָאִים וַיִּפְּלוּ בְיָדָם וַיָּשֻׁבוּ בְּאֶהְלֵיהֶם עַל-כָּל-פְּנֵי מִזְרָח לְגִלְעָד:  
 And Bela son of Azaz son of Shema son of Yoel dwelled in Aroer, and to Nevo and Baal Me'on. And to the east, he dwelled up to the entrance to the wilderness, from the Euphrates River, because their cattle multiplied in the land of Gilad. And in Shaul's days they warred with the Hagrites, who they fell into their hands, and they dwelled in their tents across the land east of Gilad.
5. Changes Dan: Shoftim 1:34/5:17 Asher: Shoftim 1:31-32/5:17

The Book

6. Talmud, Bava Batra 14b

שמואל כתב ספרו ושופטים ורות

Shemuel wrote his book, Shoftim and Ruth.

7. Three sections (Daat Mikra)
  - 1:1 – 2:5 Settlement
  - 2:16 – 16:31 History of the Shoftim
  - 17:1 – 21:25 Two calamities
8. Bereishit 17:7-8  
 וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרָיִךָ לְדֹרֹתָם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹקִים וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרָיִךָ: וְנִתַּמְתִּי לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרָיִךָ אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרִיֶּךָ אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְאֶחְזַת עוֹלָם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לְאֱלֹקִים:  
 And I have established My covenant between Myself and you, and your children after you, across the generations, an eternal covenant, to be G-d for you and for your children after you. And I have given to you and to your children after you the land of your residence, the entire Land of Canaan, as an eternal portion, and I will be their G-d.

9. Ralbag to Shoftim 3:30 (1)  
 הראשון הוא כולל כל ספור זה הספר והוא שמי שיעבוד הש"י הוא מושגח ונעזר בו ואשר יסור ממנו תסור ההשגחה האלקיות ויהיה נכון אל שיגיע כל רע ולזה תמצא שתכף שסרו ישראל מאחרי ד' היו נופלין ביד אויביהם ובשובם אליו היו ניצולים.  
 The first lesson includes this entire book's narrative. It is that one who serves Gd will be watched over and aided by Him, and one who strays from Him will also have Gd's supervision stray from him. He will be prepared for all ill. Therefore you will find that as soon as Israel strayed from after Gd, they fell into the hand of their enemies, and when they returned to Him they were rescued.

What is a Shofet?

10. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Introduction to Shoftim, pg. 95  
 וזכור תזכור גם כן שלא היה בכל השופטים האלה איש ריב ואיש מדון לאלקים ולא עובד ע"ז, וכלם היו אנשים צדיקים וטובים, זולתי אבימלך שהרג אחיו להשתרר על ישראל, וגם זה עשה קודם היותו שופט.  
 And remember well, too, that none of these judges were men of quarrels and disputes with G-d, or idolaters. All of them were righteous and good men, other than Avimelech, who killed his brothers in order to rule over Israel – but he did that before becoming a judge.

11. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Introduction to Shoftim, pp. 93-95

- Five similarities to Kings
  - Called by G-d, appointed by a court on behalf of the nation
  - Lead in war as needed
  - Has the power to punish (as judges and) extra-judicially
  - Those who rebel against a judge would be punished with death
  - There is continuity; there were no periods without judges
- Five differences from Kings
  - Not anointed
  - They preside over courts, which kings cannot do
  - The mitzvot of kings (limits on marriage, money and horses; mitzvah of writing a Torah) do not apply
  - The nation's obligations of reverence do not apply
  - The position is not hereditary

12. Targum Yonatan to Shoftim 2:16

ואקים ד' נגידין ופרקינן מיד בזויהון

And Gd established leaders, and redeemed them from those who raided them.

13. Rabbi Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer, Bigdei Shesh, Introduction to Shoftim

אין לך ספר בתנ"ך המבטא חוסר הצלחה כספר שופטים

No book in Tanach expresses failure like the book of Shoftim.

14. Talmud, Bava Batra 15b

א"ר יוחנן מאי דכתיב "ויהי בימי שפוט השופטים"? דור ששופט את שופטיו.

Rabbi Yochanan said: What is the meaning of Ruth 1:1, "And it was in the days of the judging of the judges"? A generation that judged its judges.

15. Talmud, Erchin 17a

פליגי בה רבי יהודה נשיאה ורבנן חד אמר דור לפי פרנס וחד אמר פרנס לפי דורו למאי הלכתא אילימא למעליותא דמר סבר אי מעלי דרא מעלי פרנס ומר סבר אי מעלי פרנס מעלי דרא הא איכא צדקיה דהוה מעלי ודריה לא הוה מעלי והא יהויקים דלא הוה מעלי ודריה הוה מעלי... אלא לענין תוקפא וניחותא קאמרינן

Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah and the Sages debated whether the generation matches the leader or the leader matches the generation. As far as what? If you are discussing their spiritual level, meaning that one says that if the generation is good then the leader will be good, and the other says that if the leader is good then the generation will be good, then what about Tzidkiyah, who was good in a bad generation? And what about Yehoyakim, who was bad in a good generation?... Rather, it's about harsh and gentle styles.

16. The fifteen judges, per Abarbanel

1. Otniel ben Kenaz of Yehudah	Chapter 3	40 years
2. Ehud ben Gera of Binyamin	Chapter 3	80 years
3. Shamgar ben Anat, a Kohen	Chapter 3	1 year, during Ehud's 80 <sup>th</sup> year
4. Devorah and Barak of Naftali	Chapters 4-5	40 years
5. Gideon of Menasheh	Chapters 6-8	40 years
6. Avimelech of Menasheh	Chapter 9	3 years
7. Tola ben Puah of Yissachar	Chapter 10	23 years
8. Yair haGiladi of Menasheh	Chapter 10	22 years
9. Yiftach of Menasheh	Chapters 10-12	6 years
10. Ivtzan (Boaz of Yehudah)	Chapter 12	7 years
11. Eilon of Zevulun	Chapter 12	10 years
12. Avdon ben Hillel of Ephraim	Chapter 12	8 years
13. Shimshon of Dan	Chapter 13-16	20 years
14. Eli the Kohen	Shemuel I	39 years (40 <sup>th</sup> incomplete)
15. Shemuel the Levi	Shemuel I	11 years