

**THE MODERN READER'S
BIBLE, HISTORY SERIES;
THE JUDGES, BOOKS V-VII**

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The Modern Reader's Bible, history series; The Judges, Books V-VII by Richard G. Moulton

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RICHARD G. MOULTON

**THE MODERN READER'S
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The Modern Reader's Bible

History Series

The Judges

THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE

A SERIES OF WORKS FROM THE SACRED SCRIPTURES PRESENTED
IN MODERN LITERARY FORM

THE JUDGES

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

THIS third volume of Bible history is devoted to the Great Transition in the history of the People of Israel. Hitherto this people of the invisible Jehovah have stood out from the other nations of the world as a nation with an invisible king. Henceforward they will be found assimilated in the form of their government to other peoples; in theory God is still their ruler, but the visible representatives of Jehovah are no longer men raised up by a spiritual call, but 'kings' succeeding by natural descent. The intervening period then presents the Chosen Nation in its efforts towards Secular Government. I have called this volume 'The Judges': in the title of this office we have the history in embryo. It is the most general of biblical terms for a ruler, and may be applied to government of different types. As the judges are raised up from time to time by the Divine authority, the name reflects the office of the prophets. On the other hand, the function for which the judges are required is the more or less complete union of the nation for purposes of national defence; and this was the basis of the popular demand for kings: "We will have a king over us; that we also

may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.”

This third part of the history covers three books. Book five is concerned with the Conquest of Canaan. In spirit it is a continuation of what has preceded; Joshua is a second Moses. He wields an authority not inferior to that of his predecessor:

All that thou hast commanded us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses,

The passage of the Jordan is a counterpart to the passage of the Red Sea. The ‘*Doomsday Book*,’ as it has well been called, occupying ten chapters of *Joshua*, carries on the documentary legislation of the Exodus. And the Farewell of Joshua, and the covenant which he inaugurates, are an echo of the successive appeals of Moses, and the covenants in the land of Moab, which constitute the *Book of Deuteronomy*.

It is in the sixth book that the character of the period becomes apparent—a Succession of Judges. Isolated stories describe these officers raised up in times of national emergency, and wielding an undefined authority as long as they live. The intervals between are conveyed by the characteristic formula that there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own

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eyes. As we traverse the order of events, we seem to catch an approach to the coming unification of the people in the hegemony of various tribes in succession according to the quarter from which the national danger comes. At the opening of the book the tribe of Judah takes the leadership by the Divine appointment of the lot; Simeon uniting with Judah by invitation. In the achievements of Deborah and Barak, with the enemy in the north, the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali come to the front. When Gideon and Jephthah are waging war against such external foes as the Midianites and Ammonites, the men of Ephraim seem to claim an hegemony; the leaders indeed do not come from that tribe, but the Ephraimites make it a grievance that they have not been called upon as a matter of course; and in the case of Jephthah this leads to a civil war. Under Samson the 'Philistines' are the foe, and the tribe of Dan has the lead; the stories of Samson are followed by the interesting narrative of the Danish migration. And at the close of the sixth book the tribe of Benjamin has attained such power as to be able for a long time to carry on a successful war against the whole of the rest of Israel. Though it seems paradoxical to cite a civil war as evidence of unity, yet this cohesion of eleven tribes is the largest advance that has yet appeared in the transition from tribeship to nationality.

It is in this sixth book that we find the idea of kingship distinctly formulating itself. It comes upon us quite

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suddenly in the story of Gideon. After the great deliverance wrought by him the appeal is made in these terms :

Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also : for thou hast saved us out of the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you : the LORD shall rule over you.

After the death of Gideon, however, his illegitimate son, Abimelech, obtains the help of his mother's brethren, slaughters in oriental fashion the seventy sons of Gideon, and is crowned 'king' in Shechem. As Israel's first royal procession is marching in triumph, an escaped son of Gideon suddenly confronts them from the safe height of Gerizim, and pours upon them the biting satire of his fable in scorn of people and king, and of the whole idea of kingship.

The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them ; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? Then said