



# Judges (Readings, a New Biblical Commentary)

*Roger Ryan*

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## **Judges (Readings, a New Biblical Commentary)** Roger Ryan

In this new contribution to the Readings series of commentaries, Roger Ryan offers a challenge to the fashionable disdain for the heroes of the Book of Judges. As against the current consensus majoring on the supposed flaws in the characters of the judges, and denigrating them as participants in Israel's moral and religious decline, he paints a positive portrait of each of the book's judge-deliverers. The key element in all the stories of the judges is that each of them wins independence for oppressed Israelites against great odds—an element that should predispose readers to a favourable evaluation of the heroes. Ehud slaughters an enemy king when the only weapon he has is a homemade dagger. Barak resolutely charges downhill against enemy chariots reinforced with iron. Jael slaughters an enemy commander by improvising with a hammer and a tent peg. Gideon defeats hordes of nomadic invaders with a small token army. The lone hero Samson slaughters the Philistine foe in great numbers. The Book of Judges presents in this reading a dark story-world in which its characters take heroic risks as they resolve conflicts by violent means. Their stories are jubilantly told and readers are expected to be neither squeamish nor censorious.

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