

Come Follow Me May 30-June 5

Judges 2–4; 6–8; 13–16

“The Lord Raised Up a Deliverer”

The scriptures testify of Jesus Christ. Ponder how the stories you read in Judges help you come closer to Him.

Record Your Impressions

We all know what it’s like to make a mistake, feel bad about it, and then repent and resolve to change our ways. But in some cases we forget our earlier resolve, and, when we face temptation, we may find ourselves making the mistake again. This tragic pattern is typical of the Israelites’ experiences described in the book of Judges. Influenced by the beliefs and worship practices of the Canaanites – whom they were supposed to drive out of the land – the Israelites broke their covenants with the Lord and turned away from worshipping Him. As a result, they lost His protection and fell into captivity. And yet each time this happened, the Lord gave them the chance to repent and raised up a deliverer, a military leader called a “judge.” Not all of the judges in the book of Judges were righteous, but some of them exercised great faith in delivering the children of Israel and restoring them to their covenant relationship with the Lord. These stories remind us that no matter what has led us away from Jesus Christ, He is the Redeemer of Israel and is always willing to deliver us and welcome us back to Him.

For an overview of the book of Judges, see “[Judges, book of](#)” in the Bible Dictionary.

(22-1) Introduction

When Joshua and the leaders of Israel who served under him died, the national spirit of Israel also died. Tribal loyalty replaced national unity. Each tribe began to look to its own resources without giving help or asking aid from their fellow Israelites. Joshua's generation remained faithful to the Lord (see [Joshua 24:31](#)), but spiritual apostasy soon occurred in the following generation. "And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

"And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger." ([Judges 2:10, 12.](#))

None of this apostasy needed to happen. The Lord had directed Israel into the promised land and had provided them with a political covenant. He was to be their divine sovereign. Their temporal leaders were to be ruling judges, under whom the people retained religious and political liberties. (Such a form of government was advocated in the Book of Mormon by King Mosiah [see [Mosiah 29](#)].)

Israel's political covenant showed the mercy and long-suffering of the Lord and would have been the best possible government in Israel. As can be seen in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, however, under the rule of the judges the people must demonstrate loyalty to the Lord and His commandments for this ideal form of government to function properly. Since Israel usually broke their covenant during the reign of the judges, the governmental system did not function properly, and Israel fell out of favor with the Lord.

The reign of the judges is similar in many ways to the history of the Nephites prior to the coming of Christ. It is a story of one continuous cycle of apostasy and repentance. When the Israelites turned from the Lord, their enemies began to prevail (see [Judges 2:14–15](#)). Suffering under oppression and war, the people would cry unto God and He would raise up a Deborah or a Gideon to deliver them. But once peace and security were reestablished, the people turned again to their former ways (see [Judges 2:16–19](#)).

The story of the time of the judges is thus primarily a sad and tragic one, although in this period lived some of the most remarkable men and women of the Old Testament. In their lives of courage, faith, and personal greatness, as

well as in the lives of those who forsook the Lord and pursued selfish ends, are many lessons of importance for Saints today. Look for those lessons as you read this period of Israel's history.

JUDGES CHAPTER 2

An angel rebukes Israel for not serving the Lord — As a pattern of future events, a new generation arises that forsakes the Lord and serves Baal and Ashtaroth — The Lord is angry with the children of Israel and ceases to preserve them — He raises up judges to guide and lead them — The Canaanites are left in the land to test Israel.

(22-4) Judges 2. What Was the Political and Religious Condition of the Populace of the Promised Land When the Israelites Conquered It?

“When discussing the political and religious conditions in Palestine at the time of the Israelite conquest (between 1250 and 1200 B.C.), we should note that the whole Near East had boiled with turmoil during the preceding century. The power of Egypt's ally in Mesopotamia, Mitanni, had collapsed. Egypt herself first lost and then regained power over much of the eastern Mediterranean area. The Hurrian and Aryan peoples had pressed down from the north almost as far as Palestine, Assyria had begun to rise as a world power, and the old Hittite Empire of Asia Minor and Egypt had reached a standoff for control of the Near East.

“In Palestine, Egypt was nominally in control. The land of Canaan was made up of numerous city-states, each independently governed, which paid tribute to Egypt whenever they were forced to do so. Other Hebrew tribes, distant relatives of the Israelites, comprised a modest part of the population in Canaan. It is also worth noting that prior to Israel's settlement, the Canaanites had developed a linear alphabet, which later passed from Phoenicia to Greece, thus becoming the ancestor to our own.

“The material culture and international trade of the Canaanites was highly advanced, but their religious ways stood diametrically opposed to Israel's. Based on the fertility cults led by the god Baal, the Canaanite religion was an extraordinarily immoral form of paganism, including ... prostitution, homosexuality, and other orgiastic rites.

“The population of Canaan was mixed. In addition to the Canaanites near the sea and a few Hebrew clans, the Amorites are mentioned often in the Old Testament. Abraham descended from this Semitic people. Many of the other peoples listed in the Bible as inhabitants of the land (Hittites, Hivites, Horites, Jebusites, etc.) represent Canaan's non-Semitic elements, although their tribal names preserve their distant origins. These people fully adopted the Canaanite religion and way of life by the time of the Israelite invasion.” (S. Kent Brown, “I Have a Question,” Ensign, Oct. 1973, p. 58.)

(22-5) Judges 2. How Did the Canaanite Culture Affect the Lifestyle of the Israelites?

“Perhaps inevitably, the Israelites, who had no distinct culture or knowledge of settled life, gradually absorbed many aspects of Canaan’s sophisticated culture. The architectural style, pottery, furniture and literature of later Israel were all borrowed from those of Canaan. In many ways this borrowing was beneficial. The Israelites were able to profit from the techniques of construction, farming and craftsmanship which had taken the Canaanites centuries to develop.

“But in the eyes of Israel’s religious leaders, the pagan ways of the Canaanites posed a continual threat to the integrity of the nation. The Israelites’ only strength lay in their common covenant. Any weakening of this basic loyalty left the individual tribes without the strength that comes from unity. When misfortune came, it was [because of] the faithlessness of the people, who again and again turned away from the Lord.” (Great People of the Bible and How They Lived, p. 114.)

1 And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be *as thorns* in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

4 And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.

5 And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

(22-6) Judges 2:1–5

Why, according to the angel of the Lord, did God no longer assist Israel in driving out the Canaanites?

6 ¶ And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

7 And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old.

9 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which “knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 ¶ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to “anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served “Baal and Ashtaroth.

(22-7) Judges 2:11–13. What Resulted from Israel’s Not Driving the Canaanites Out of the Promised Land?

“The Book of Judges makes clear that Israel did not conquer all of Canaan when first she entered it. ... For a long time during the days of the Judges many of the Israelites were essentially ‘hillbillies’ [see Judges 6:2], hemmed in by their enemies on every side. After the generations of Israelites who had been acquainted with Joshua passed away, the effects of Canaanite morals and religion began to be apparent upon the younger generation. For long periods of time the Canaanites conquered Israel and this fact alone would tend to disrupt her settled religious life and practice. Times were rough and banditry was rampant. As the record itself states: ‘In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes’ [Judges 17:6]. All of this seems to have taken place because Israel did not drive the Canaanites completely out. The Lord said to the Israelites: ‘Ye have not hearkened to My voice; what is this ye have done? Wherefore I also said: I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be unto you as snares, and their gods shall be a trap unto you.’ [Judges 2:2–3.] ... Israel’s conduct during this period had a lasting effect upon her religion and morals. For centuries Israel’s prophets and wise men referred to it and denounced her allegiance to old Canaanite practices. It is plain that Israel, during the period of the Judges, compromised her relatively high religious ideals with Canaanite practices and certain elements in her population must have apostatized completely.” (Sperry, Spirit of the Old Testament, pp. 51–52.)

(22-8) Judges 2:12–13. Who Are Baal and Ashtoreth?

“Numerous Old Testament references recite apostate Israel’s worship of *Baal* and *Baalim* (plural of Baal). It was the priest of Baal, for instance, with whom Elijah had his dramatic contest in the days of Ahab and Jezebel. (1 Kings 18.) Baal was the supreme male deity of the Phoenician and Canaanitish nation. It is likely that there were, in practice, many Baals or gods of particular places, the worship of whom was licentious in

nature, *Baalzebub* (the same name as *Beelzebub* or *Satan*) was the name of the god of one particular group. (2 Kings 1:3.)” (McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p. 68.)

“As Baal was the supreme male deity of the Phoenician and Canaanitish nations, so Ashtoreth (Ashtaroth) was their supreme female deity. She was the so-called goddess of love and fertility, whose licentious worship pleased Israel in her apostate periods. (Judges 2:13; 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:3–4; 12:10.)” (McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p. 55.)

For more information on the false gods of Old Testament times, see Enrichment Section F, “Idolatry: Ancient and Modern.”

Judges 2:13

Who were Baal and Ashtaroth?

Baal was the Canaanite storm god, and Ashtaroth was the Canaanite fertility goddess. The worship of these two gods indicates how important the fertility of the land and of the people was to the Canaanites. The ways the people worshipped these and other false gods—including, at times, sexual immorality and the sacrifice of children—were especially offensive to the Lord.

14 ¶ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

16 ¶ Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

(22-9) Judges 2:16. Who Are the Judges?

The so-called judges, according to the record, appear to be more military heroes rather than officers of the judiciary.

“The English word ‘judge’ doesn’t well describe these leaders. Though the root of the Hebrew word used means primarily ‘to judge,’ it is used secondarily also in the extended meaning ‘to govern.’ Most of the ‘judging’ done in this period was a matter of giving advice and rendering decisions. Regular court procedures are nowhere described for the times of the Judges in

Israel. In fact, the most common function they are seen to perform is that of military leadership.” (Rasmussen, Introduction to the Old Testament, 1:149.)

The judges did not reign over all of unified Israel during their period of leadership. The chronicler of these stories likely took the choicest of the heroes from each of the tribes during this generally apostate period and combined into one book their righteous achievements and their moral lessons for Israel.

17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so.

18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, *that* they returned, and corrupted *themselves* more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

20 ¶ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;

21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:

22 That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep *it*, or not.

23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

(22-10) Judges 2:14–23. What Was the Cyclical Pattern of Israel’s Relationship with the Lord during the Period of Judges?

These verses explain what this historical record, the book of Judges, reveals. First, the people chose evil by worshiping heathen gods, and the Lord allowed them to fall into the hands of their enemies. Judges were then raised up by the Lord to deliver them. At such times, as it is more clearly stated in the Joseph

Smith Translation, “the Lord *hearkened* because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them” (JST, Judges 2:18; emphasis added). But as soon as the judge was dead, Israel turned to the other gods, and the cycle began again. A strikingly similar cycle of righteousness and apostasy occurred among the people of the Book of Mormon and is graphically described in Helaman 12.

JUDGES CHAPTER 3

The children of Israel intermarry with the Canaanites, worship false gods, and are cursed — Othniel judges the Israelites — They serve Moab and are delivered by Ehud, who slays Eglon.

(22-12) Judges 3–15. Who Were the Twelve Judges of Israel and What Were Their Areas of Leadership?

The twelve judges and their victories spoken of in the book of Judges were as follows:

1. Othniel of Judah (3:9): victory against Chushan-rishathaim.
2. Ehud of Benjamin (3:15): victory against Eglon of Moab.
3. Shamgar (3:31): victory against the Philistines (location unknown).
4. Deborah (Ephraim) and Barak (Naphtali) (4:4–6): victory over Jabin and Sisera.
5. Gideon of Manasseh (6:11): victory over the Midianites and Amalekites.
6. Tola of Issachar (10:1).
7. Jair of Gilead (10:3).
8. Jephthah of Gilead (11:11): victory over the Ammonites.
9. Ibzan of Bethlehem (12:8).
10. Elon of Zebulun (12:11).
11. Abdon of Ephraim (12:13).
12. Samson of Dan (15:20): victory against the Philistines.

1 Now these *are* the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, *even* as many of *Israel* as had not known all the wars of Canaan;
2 Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;
3 *Namely*, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath.
4 And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.
5 ¶ And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:
6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.
7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

(22-11) Judges 3:1–7

Intermarriage with the heathen nations was a natural result of serving “Baalim and the groves” (v. 7). The groves were local worship centers for heathen gods and included a tree or pole and altars, often among groves of trees. The practice of idolatry which broke the covenant and which was sustained from generation to generation corrupted the house of Israel. One of the most important reminders to Israel that the Lord gave through Moses before they entered the promised land went unheeded (see Deuteronomy 7:3–5).

8 ¶ Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years.
9 And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, *even* Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.

10 And the “Spirit” of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against “Chushan-rishathaim”.

11 And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

12 ¶ And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

13 And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.

(22-13) Judges 3:13. Where Was the “City of Palm Trees”?

The “city of palm trees” is another name for Jericho (Judges 3:13; see also Deuteronomy 34:3; Judges 1:16; 2 Chronicles 28:15). Evidently this city had been rebuilt near the original site after its destruction by Joshua. Through the centuries, Jericho has had minor shifts in location. The New Testament location was different from both Old Testament locations.

14 So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

16 But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

17 And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon *was* a very fat man.

18 And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

19 But he himself turned again from the quarries that *were* by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret “errand” unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

20 And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of *his* seat.

21 And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

22 And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

23 Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.

24 When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour *were* locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

25 And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened *them*: and, behold, their lord *was* fallen down dead on the earth.

26 And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.

27 And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.

28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

29 And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

31 ¶ And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

JUDGES CHAPTER 4

Deborah, a prophetess, judges Israel — She and Barak deliver Israel from the Canaanites — Jael, a woman, slays Sisera, the Canaanite.

1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host *was* Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

4 ¶ And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, *saying*, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, *then* I will not go.

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 ¶ And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

(22-14) Judges 4:1–10. How Was It That a Woman, Deborah, Led Israel?

Israel was sorely lacking in leadership at this time. The regular priesthood leadership was not in effect because the covenant had been broken. Deborah did not direct Israel in any official sense; she was a prophetess who possessed the spirit of prophecy, one of the gifts of the Spirit (see Revelation 19:10; Moroni 10:13; D&C 46:22). She was blessed with spiritual insight and leadership qualities that were not being put to use by any man. Barak would not lead an army against Jabin until Deborah promised to be present (see Judges 4:8–9).

“No special ordination in the Priesthood is essential to man's receiving the gift of prophecy; bearers of the Melchizedek Priesthood, Adam, Noah, Moses, and a multitude of others were prophets, but not more truly so than others who were specifically called to the Aaronic order, as exemplified in the instance of

John the Baptist. The ministrations of Miriam and Deborah show that this gift may be possessed by women also." (Talmage, Articles of Faith, pp. 228–29; see also Smith, Answers to Gospel Questions, 3:66.)

11 Now Heber the Kenite, *which was* of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, *which is* by Kedesh.

12 And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

13 And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, *even* nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that *were* with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this *is* the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

15 And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all *his* chariots, and all *his* host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off *his* chariot, and fled away on his feet.

16 But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; *and* there was not a man left.

Judges 2:1–19; 4:1–16

The Lord offers deliverance when I stray.

The book of Judges can serve as a warning to us: even after we experience the Lord's power in our lives, it is always possible to fall away. The book can also provide encouragement to those who do fall away, for the Lord offers a way back. For instance, as you read [Judges 2:1–19](#), look for actions that led the Israelites away from the Lord and how the Lord delivered them. What do these verses teach you about the Lord? What can you do to remain more consistently faithful to Him?

You will find the pattern of rebelliousness, sorrow, and deliverance repeated throughout Judges (see specifically [chapters 3, 4, 6, and 13](#)). As you read the

book of Judges, ponder what the judges did to deliver Israel and how the Savior helps you when you need deliverance.

One noteworthy example of someone who helped deliver Israel is Deborah. Read about her in [Judges 4:1–16](#), and note the influence she had on people around her. What words or actions of Deborah show you that she had faith in the Lord? What do you feel Deborah meant by her question in [verse 14](#): “Is not the Lord gone out before thee?”

See also [Alma 7:13](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 84:87–88](#).

17 Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for *there was* peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

18 ¶ And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

19 And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

21 Then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her *tent*, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail *was* in his temples.

23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

(22-15) [Judges 4:10–24](#)

The Kenites were descendants of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses (see [Judges 1:16](#)). The courageous Jael, who was the wife of Heber the Kenite,

slew the chieftain Sisera, thus fulfilling Deborah's prophecy (see [Judges 4:9](#)). Sisera's death opened the way for Barak's victory.

JUDGES CHAPTER 6

Israel is in bondage to the Midianites — An angel appears to Gideon and calls him to deliver Israel — He overthrows the altar of Baal, the Spirit of the Lord rests upon him, and the Lord gives him a sign to show he is called to deliver Israel.

1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: *and* because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which *are* in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

3 And *so* it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; *for* both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

7 ¶ And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

10 And I said unto you, I *am* the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

(22-17) Judges 6:1–10. Why Was the Presence of the Midianites and the Amalekites such a Terrible Scourge to Israel?

“The Midianites and the Amalekites were the children of the desert who, through their roving habits which begot naturally a desire for plunder, led them into a systematic practice of robbing the Israelites. During the seasons of harvest they came from the deserts on the south and the east like great swarms of locusts and carried away the corn [grain] and the live-stock upon which the Israelites subsisted.

“For seven years Israel was thus impoverished, and adopted every means at their command to conceal their property and to hide themselves from the dangers of slaughter by the Midianites. In that period, through southern Palestine, they made caverns in the earth that may still be seen. In time, however, they came to feel so deeply their suffering and humiliation that they appealed to Jehovah, the God they had forsaken in their worship. He was their last refuge, their last means of escape from the awful bondage of those times.” (Tanner, *Old Testament Studies*, 1:288–89.)

11 ¶ And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which *was* in Ophrah, that “pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat “by the winepress, to hide *it* from the Midianites.

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD *is* with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where *be* all his “miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy “might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family *is* poor in Manasseh, and I *am* the “least in my father’s house.

16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be “with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

17 And he said unto him, If now I have found “grace in thy sight, then shew me a “sign that thou talkest with me.

18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set *it* before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

19 ¶ And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought *it* out unto him under the oak, and presented *it*.

20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay *them* upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

21 ¶ Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that *was* in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

22 And when Gideon perceived that he *was* an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

23 And the LORD said unto him, Peace *be* unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

24 Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it *is* yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

(22-18) Judges 6:11–24. Since the Lord Condemns Sign-Seeking, How Do We Explain Gideon’s Request?

“When Gideon asked for a ‘sign’ he seemed only to want a sign that the messenger was a bona fide emissary of the *Lord* (v. 17). On this point, note that messengers may sometimes be from the wrong source and discernment is important. (See, e.g., D&C 129; see another consideration of the problem in II Corinthians 11:13–15; I Corinthians 12:10; and I John 4:1–2.) (Signs *may be* given, based upon man’s faith and the will of God. D&C 63:10.)

“When Gideon made a meal of meat, cakes and broth, and the angel turned it into a miraculous burnt offering, this ‘sign’ quite overwhelmed Gideon. But the *Lord* kindly gave him comfort and peace, and Gideon gratefully named the monument he built there ‘*Lord of Peace*.’” (Rasmussen, Introduction to the Old Testament, 1:150.)

25 ¶ And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father’s young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that *is* by it:

26 And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do *it* by day, that he did *it* by night.

28 ¶ And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that *was* by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar *that was* built.

29 And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

30 Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that *was* by it.

31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he *be* a god, let him plead for himself, because *one* hath cast down his altar.

32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

33 ¶ Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abi-ezer was gathered after him.

35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

36 ¶ And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; *and* if the dew be on the fleece only, and *it be* dry upon all the earth *beside*, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

JUDGES CHAPTER 7

Gideon's army is reduced to 300—They frighten the Midianite armies with trumpets and lights—The Midianites fight among themselves, flee, and are defeated by Israel.

1 Then Jerubbaal, who *is* Gideon, and all the people that *were* with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

(22-19) Judges 6:25–7:1. How Did Gideon Receive the Name Jerubbaal and What Does It Mean?

Gideon's father, Joash, owned a grove and an altar dedicated to the false god Baal. Groves of trees played a prominent part in ancient heathen worship. Since it was thought wrong to shut up the gods with walls, groves of trees were often used as natural temples. Within the groves the immoral rites of the heathen religions were performed.

Gideon and ten other men followed the Lord's commandments to tear down the grove and the altar and in their place erect an altar to Jehovah. The men of the city cried for Gideon's death, but Joash defended his son's actions. Joash named Gideon *Jerubbaal*, "let Baal plead," meaning that if Baal was upset by Gideon's actions Baal could defend his own cause. The name Jerubbaal remained with Gideon on some occasions thereafter.

2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that *are* with thee *are* too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever *is* fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount

Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

4 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people *are* yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, *that* of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.

5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.

6 And the number of them that lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

7 And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the *other* people go every man unto his place.

8 So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all *the rest of* Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

9 ¶ And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

10 But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host:

11 And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that *were* in the host.

12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.

13 And when Gideon was come, behold, *there was* a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

14 And his fellow answered and said, This *is* nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: *for* into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

15 ¶ And it was *so*, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

16 And he divided the three hundred men *into* three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

17 And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be *that*, as I do, so shall ye do.

18 When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that *are* with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, *The sword* of the LORD, and of Gideon.

19 ¶ So Gideon, and the hundred men that *were* with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that *were* in their hands.

(22-21) Judges 7:19

Ancient Israel divided the twelve hours of the night into three watches. The middle watch would have been from 10:00 P.M. until 2:00 A.M. After the dispersion of Israel, the Jews continued the practice (see [Exodus 14:24](#); [1 Samuel 11:11](#); [Psalms 63:6](#); [90:4](#); [119:48](#); [Lamentations 2:19](#)). In New Testament times the Romans divided the night into four watches (see [Matthew 24:43](#)).

20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow *withal*: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

21 And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, *and* to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath.

23 And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.

24 ¶ And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan.

25 And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

JUDGES CHAPTER 8

Gideon pursues and destroys the Midianites—He frees the children of Israel but refuses their invitation to reign as king over them—Gideon dies, and Israel returns to idolatry.

1 And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

2 And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? *Is not* the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?

3 God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

4 ¶ And Gideon came to Jordan, *and* passed over, he, and the three hundred men that *were* with him, faint, yet pursuing *them*.

5 And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they *be* faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

6 ¶ And the princes of Succoth said, *Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

7 And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

8 ¶ And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered *him*.

9 And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

10 ¶ Now Zebah and Zalmunna *were* in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand *men*, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.

11 ¶ And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure.

12 And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

13 ¶ And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun *was up*,

14 And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, *even* threescore and seventeen men.

15 And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, *Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men *that are weary*?

16 And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth.

(22-22) Judges 8:16. What Did Gideon Do to the Men of Succoth When He “Taught” Them with Thorns and Briars?

As they pursued the remnants of the Midianite army, Gideon’s valiant little band of three hundred grew faint from hunger and sought food from the people of Succoth, a town of Gad (Gilead), which lay on the east side of the Jordan not far from Jericho. The Succothites refused to give Gideon’s men the food they needed because they had not yet actually conquered the Midianite kings. The people of Penuel (the place where Jacob had stopped many years before and wrestled with God’s messenger [see Genesis 32:31]), also refused aid. Perhaps they were afraid that Gideon would fail to capture and subdue

the fleeing kings and that later the Midianites would return and punish them for aiding Gideon. Whatever the reason, these events illustrate the tragic fragmentation of apostate Israel. Since the Midianites lived in the deserts of Arabia, Gad and the other tribes east of the Jordan were most vulnerable to their marauding raids. Yet instead of joining Gideon in his attempt to eliminate the threat once and for all, these Gadites flatly refused to get involved.

Gideon was furious and promised that once he finished with the Midianites he would return to deal with these traitors. In the case of Succoth, Gideon promised to return and “tear” — the Hebrew literally means “thresh” — their flesh with briars and thorns (v. 7) (see Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, s.v. “tear,” p. 440). Yet when Gideon did return, the record says, he “taught” them with briars and thorns (v. 16). Many of the ancient manuscripts show this change to be a scribal error: “Instead of ... *he taught*, Houbigant reads ... *he tore*; and this is not only agreeable to what Gideon had threatened, ver. 7, but is supported by the *Vulgate, Septuagint, Chaldec, Syriac, and Arabic*. The Hebrew text might have been easily corrupted in this place by the change of ... *shin* into ... *ain*, letters very similar to each other.” (Clarke, *Bible Commentary*, 2:137.)

This punishment was probably a figurative term and not necessarily an actual whipping with thorn branches. “What this punishment consisted in I cannot say; it must mean a severe punishment: as if he had said, I will thresh your flesh with briars and thorns, as corn is threshed out with threshing instruments; or, Ye shall be trodden down under the feet of my victorious army, as the corn is trodden out with the feet of the ox.” (Clarke, *Bible Commentary*, 2:136.) Such harsh punishment was justified because in their refusal to help Gideon’s army, Succoth and Penuel threatened the whole nation of Israel. Their act was thus equivalent to high treason.

17 And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

18 ¶ Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men *were they* whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou *art*, so *were they*; each one resembled the children of a king.

19 And he said, They *were* my brethren, *even* the sons of my mother: *as* the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.

20 And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, *and* slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he *was* yet a youth.

21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man *is*, *so is* his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that *were* on their camels' necks.

(22-23) Judges 8:21

Zebah and Zalmunna did not want Jether to slay them. To have a boy slay them would be a great dishonor, but to die quickly under the hand of such a great warrior as Gideon would preserve their honor. Compare this request with Abimelech's request of his armor-bearer to slay him lest men say a woman had killed him (see Judges 9:53–54).

(22-20) Judges 7; 8:21. How Did Gideon's Forces Deal with the Numerous Camel-Riding Midianites?

"Though only the tribes from the north—Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali—joined his campaign, these were more than enough for the purposes of the Lord at the time. Eventually the 32,000 were reduced to 300, that the 'help of the Lord' might be apparent to Israel. ...

"Against the formidable might of camel-mounted marauders, strategy and the help of the Lord gave the Israelites success where hand to hand combat would have been disastrous. It is now known that the use of camels for military purposes by the nomadic desert riders was only beginning to be common in those times—12th to 10th centuries B.C., and of course, the first tribes to use them had the advantage." (Rasmussen, Introduction to the Old Testament, 1:151.)

22 ¶ 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 delivered us from the hand of Midian.

23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

(22-24) Judges 8:22–23. "The Lord Shall Rule over You"

These verses give proof of Gideon's great faith and righteousness. The people sought to make him king because of his greatness in victory. Had he consented, Gideon would have been lending support to the idea that through his own power he had won the battle. By refusing their request, Gideon reminded them where the real source of their victory lay and whom they should view as their king.

24 ¶ And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they *were* Ishmaelites.)

25 And they answered, We will willingly give *them*. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.

26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that *was* on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that *were* about their camels' necks.

27 And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, *even* in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

28 ¶ Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

(22-25) Judges 8:24–28. How Did the Ephod Become a Snare to Gideon?

“An unfortunate anticlimatic development arose due to Gideon's mistaken zeal in making a new ephod (part of the garment of the chief Priest in Israel) out of some of the precious things gathered from the smitten soldiers of the enemy. When the text says Israelites 'went a whoring after it' the idiom means they looked upon it as if it were an idol, and idol worship is often condemned in these terms as infidelity to God.” (Rasmussen, Introduction to the Old Testament, 1:151.)

Gideon's intention was to use the spoils of war to make a fitting memorial honoring God's part in the victory, but the Israelites were quick to turn to false gods and viewed the ephod as though it were an idol.

29 ¶ And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.
30 And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.
31 And his concubine that *was* in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.
32 ¶ And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.
33 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.
34 And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:
35 Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, *namely*, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

Judges 6–8

The Lord can work miracles when I trust in His ways.

To receive the Lord's miracles in our lives, we must trust in His ways, even when His ways seem unusual. The story of Gideon, found in [Judges 6–8](#), is a good example of this. How did the Lord work an unlikely miracle when Gideon's army defeated the Midianites? What do you feel the Lord is trying to teach you? How have you seen the Lord do His work in ways that seem unlikely?

See also Russell M. Nelson, "[With God Nothing Shall Be Impossible](#)," *Ensign*, May 1988, 33–35.

JUDGES CHAPTER 13

Israel is in Philistine bondage for forty years — An angel comes to Manoah's wife and promises a son who will begin to deliver Israel — The angel comes again; he ascends in a flame from the altar — Samson is born, and the Spirit of the Lord moves upon him.

1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.
2 ¶ And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name *was* Manoah; and his wife *was* barren, and bare not.

(23-2) Judges 13:1-2

Zorah, the home of Samson, had been assigned originally to the tribe of Judah (see [Joshua 15:33](#)), but was later inhabited by the tribe of Dan, which had been unable to take over the land assigned to it as its inheritance. See Maps and Charts for the location.

3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

(23-3) Judges 13:5. What Is a Nazarite?

“The primary meaning of the Heb. verb *nazar* is to separate. Hence the *nazir* [Nazarite] is ‘the separated,’ ‘consecrated,’ ‘devoted.’” (Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. “Nazarite,” pp. 647–48). A Nazarite, therefore, was one who was separated from others by a special vow of self-dedication to Jehovah. The term “set apart” is used to mean that one has been given a special calling or position and is thus separated from others. (See [Reading 17-11](#).) Jesus’ title, the Nazarene, meant that He was from the city of Nazareth, not that He was a Nazarite.

6 ¶ Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance *was* like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he *was*, neither told he me his name:

7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean *thing*: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

8 ¶ Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

9 And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband *was* not with her.

10 And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the *other* day.

11 And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, *Art* thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I *am*.

12 And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and *how* shall we do unto him?

13 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

14 She may not eat of any *thing* that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean *thing*: all that I commanded her let her observe.

15 ¶ And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he *was* an angel of the LORD.

17 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What *is* thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?

18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it *is* secret?

19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered *it* upon a rock unto the LORD: and *the angel* did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on *it*, and fell on their faces to the ground.

21 But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he *was* an angel of the LORD.

22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

23 But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these *things*, nor would as at this time have told us *such things* as these.

24 ¶ And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

(23-4) Judges 13:16–25

“The angel does not say that it [his name] was *secret*, but ... *hu peli*, it is WONDERFUL; the very character that is given to Jesus Christ [see Isaiah 9].” (Clarke, Bible Commentary, 2:159.)

It is doubtful that the angel was the Lord Himself, but rather was one who spoke in the name of the Lord by divine authority, as in Revelation 22:1–9. Certainly the experience of Manoah and his wife is one of the most remarkable instances of angelic visitation recorded in all of scripture. And that fact heightens all the more the tragedy of Samson’s life. Heralded by an angel, born of a barren woman, blessed with tremendous gifts from the Lord, Samson should have lived one of the greatest lives in scriptural record. Instead, his life was one of self-indulgence, immorality, selfish seeking for revenge, and violation of the covenant. Samson’s life is truly one of the great tragedies of history.

JUDGES CHAPTER 14

Samson slays a young lion with his bare hands — He marries a Philistine wife, propounds a riddle, is deceived by his wife, and slays thirty Philistines.

1 And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

2 And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.

3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, *Is there* never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the b^uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

4 But his father and his mother knew not that it *was* of the ^LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had b^udominion over Israel.

5 ¶ Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

(23-5) Judges 14:6. If Samson’s Life Was So out of Harmony with God’s Will, How Did He Have the “Spirit of the Lord”?

In the Church today when one speaks of a person having the Spirit of the Lord, he means that he is a spiritual person, that is, he is close to God, has a testimony, demonstrates spiritual power, and so on. And such spiritual power comes only through obedience and righteousness. So, could Samson have had “the Spirit of the Lord come mightily upon him”? (v. 6). That or a similar phrase is used three times in the account of Samson (see Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14), but in every case it has reference to Samson’s demonstration of great courage and physical strength. Samson’s remarkable strength was a gift of God derived from and sustained by the Nazarite vow he was under. Perhaps when the author of Judges used the phrase “the Spirit of God” he did not use it as one does today, but used it more in the way that one would now use the phrase “spiritual gifts.” One may say of another, “The way he taught the lesson demonstrated that he has a spiritual gift.” Samson’s gift was strength, and each time he used that gift in a remarkable manner, the writer of the scripture gave credit to the Lord, the true source of the gift, by saying “the Spirit of the Lord” came mightily upon him.

6 And the “Spirit” of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and *he had* nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

7 And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

8 ¶ And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, *there was* a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

9 And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

10 ¶ So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a “feast”; for so used the young men to do.

11 And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

12 ¶ And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find *it* out, then I will give you thirty “sheets” and thirty change of garments:

13 But if ye cannot declare *it* me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.

14 And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.

15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? *is it* not so?

16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told *it* me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told *it* my father nor my mother, and shall I tell *it* thee?

17 And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.

18 And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What *is* sweeter than honey? and what *is* stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

19 ¶ And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

20 But Samson's wife was *given* to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

(23-6) Judges 14:8–20

At Samson's seven-day wedding celebration he proposed a riddle. When his wife revealed the answer to the thirty Philistine guests to save her own life (see v. 15) and Samson lost the wager, he was furious and wreaked havoc on the Philistines at Ashkelon to get the spoils necessary to pay his debt.

Probably for spite, his father-in-law gave Samson's wife to the man "used as his friend" (v. 20), that is, his best man at the wedding.

Here is an excellent glimpse of the moral state of the Philistines and of Samson's own moral failure. The angel had told his mother that her son "shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" ([Judges 13:5](#)). Instead, Samson married a Philistine, interacted with them, and smote them only when it suited his personal desire.

JUDGES CHAPTER 15

Samson burns the grain of the Philistines — They burn his wife and father-in-law — Samson slays a thousand Philistines at Lehi with the jawbone of an ass.

1 But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

2 And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: *is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her.*

3 ¶ And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

4 And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

5 And when he had set the brands on fire, he let *them* go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards *and* olives.

6 ¶ Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

7 ¶ And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

8 And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

9 ¶ Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

10 And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us.

11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines *are* “rulers over us? what *is* this *that* thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

12 And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.

13 And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

14 ¶ *And* when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that *were* upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands “loosed from off his hands.

15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

16 And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

17 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

18 ¶ *And* he was “sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

19 “But God clave an hollow place that *was* in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof “En-hakkore, which *is* in Lehi unto this day.

(23-7) Judges 15:9–19. The Place of Lehi

The city of Lehi was located in the Shephelah, or foothill area, a few miles southwest of Jerusalem. (See Maps and Charts for the possible location.) *Lehi* means “jaw-bone,” and *Ramath-Lehi* means the “lifting up of the cheek or jaw-bone” (Fallows, Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Ramath-Lehi,” 3:1426). Therefore, Samson’s source of water was a spring miraculously provided by God near the place of Lehi (jaw), the spring known thereafter as En-hakkore,

“the spring of him who called” (Douglas, New Bible Dictionary, s.v. “En-hakkore,” p. 377).

Some Latter-day Saint scholars have speculated that the location of Samson’s battle with the Philistines may have been the site of Lehi’s home near Jerusalem before he led his family into the wilderness, but there is no evidence to support this idea. Lehi lived five or six hundred years after Samson. That he should live in the place that bore his name would certainly be unlikely.

20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

JUDGES CHAPTER 16

Samson carries away the doors of the gate of Gaza—He loves Delilah, who delivers him to the Philistines—He destroys a building, killing himself and 3,000 others.

1 Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

2 *And it was told* the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed *him* in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.

3 And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put *them* upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that *is* before Hebron.

4 ¶ And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name *was* Delilah.

5 And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength *lieth*, and by what *means* we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred *pieces* of silver.

6 ¶ And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength *lieth*, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

7 And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

9 Now *there were* men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.

10 And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

11 And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

12 Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And *there were* liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.

13 And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

14 And she fastened *it* with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

15 ¶ And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart *is* not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength *lieth*.

16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, *so* that his soul was vexed unto death;

(23-8) Judges 16:1–16

To offer Delilah a treasure of eleven hundred pieces of silver was a striking indication of the desperate state in which the five lords of the Philistines found themselves after the depredations wrought by Samson. These lords were the rulers of the five major cities of the Philistines. These cities—Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath—were significant in Old Testament history. Gaza was where Samson had visited a harlot (see v. 1) and was also the scene of his death (see Judges 16:21–30). Gath was the hometown of the later Philistine champion Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17:4).

17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I *have been* a Nazarite unto God from my

mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.

18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

20 And she said, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

21 ¶ But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

(23-9) Judges 16:17–22. Was Samson's Hair Really the Source of His Strength?

The biblical account of Samson reveals him as a man of extreme confidence and tremendous courage, qualities based on his recognition that his power was from God and that God would sustain him in the mission to which he had been called. But Samson did not realize that there is a rule that governs power in the Lord, which is, “let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God” (D&C 121:45).

Samson's misfortunes began when his confidence in God turned into conceit and pride. Over a period of time he broke the vows of a Nazarite and violated other commandments, including the law of chastity (see Judges 16:1).

Samson's superhuman strength did not reside in his hair but in his confidence in God and in the Nazarite oath, of which the hair was the outward symbol.

Delilah's treachery and the shaving of Samson's hair signified the final betrayal of his vows. Thus, he became a miserable, broken man with no power left.

23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines *were* there; and *there were* upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with *all his* might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that *were* therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than *they* which he slew in his life.

(23-11) Judges 16:29–30. Could Samson Have Really Pulled Down an Entire Temple?

“The character of [this] building is illustrated by discoveries at Gezer and Gaza. The roof was supported by wooden pillars set on stone bases. It was flat, consisting of logs of wood stretching from one wall to beams supported by the pillars and from these beams to other beams or to the opposite wall. The temple at Gezer had a forecourt leading into a paved inner chamber, separated from it by four circular stones, on which the wooden pillars stood. Samson probably stood between the two central pillars, if there were more

than two. The Philistine lords and ladies were in the inner chamber; the crowd watched from the roof. *Samson made sport*, in the forecourt, and then asked the boy to lead him to the central pillars to rest against them. Then, putting an arm round each, and bending forward so as to force them out of the perpendicular, he brought the roof down. The weight of people on the roof may have made the feat all the easier." (Guthrie, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 272.)

31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought *him up*, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

(23-10) Judges 16:23–31. Why Did God Once Again Strengthen Samson?

The claim of the Philistines that "our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy" (v. 24) referred to their belief that their success in capturing Samson proved the Philistine deity Dagon (see Reading F-7) was greater than Jehovah. Thus, the people did not fear to make sport of Samson, the champion of Jehovah, in the temple of their god. In this setting, Samson once again exercised that kind of courage through which God could have used him as a tool. But again the self-centeredness of Samson is evident. Even in his final opportunity, when Samson used his restored strength to destroy the temple of Dagon and the Philistines who were there, he thought only of getting revenge for what had been done to him (see v. 28). In the destruction of his very temple, what better proof could there be that the power of Dagon was nothing? And yet how much more powerfully could Samson have borne witness to the power of Jehovah if he had fulfilled his calling to overthrow the power of the Philistines.

Judges 13–16

Strength comes from faithfulness to my covenants with God.

Samson lost both his physical strength and his spiritual strength because he violated his covenants with God, including those that applied specifically to Nazarites (for information about the Nazarites, see Numbers 6:1–6; Judges 13:7). As you read Samson's story in Judges 13–16, ponder each covenant you have made. How have you been blessed with strength because you have kept

those covenants? What do you learn from Samson’s story that inspires you to stay true to your covenants with God?

Ideas for Family Scripture Study and Home Evening

[Judges 2:10.](#)

After Joshua died, the next generation of Israelites “knew not the Lord.” Talk with your family about how they know the Lord and “the works which he [has] done” for them. How will you ensure that this knowledge will be preserved for future generations?

[Judges 3:7–10.](#)

These verses summarize a pattern that occurs often throughout the book of Judges. As your family members read these verses, they could identify what Israel did to stray from the Lord and what the Lord did to deliver them. What might lead us to forget the Lord? How can He deliver us? How can we be more consistently faithful to Him?

[Judges 6:13–16, 25–30.](#)

Gideon showed great courage in obeying the Lord, even though his actions were not popular. What has the Lord asked us to do that others might not agree with? How can the Lord’s words to Gideon in [verses 13–16](#) inspire us to do the right thing?

[Judges 7.](#)

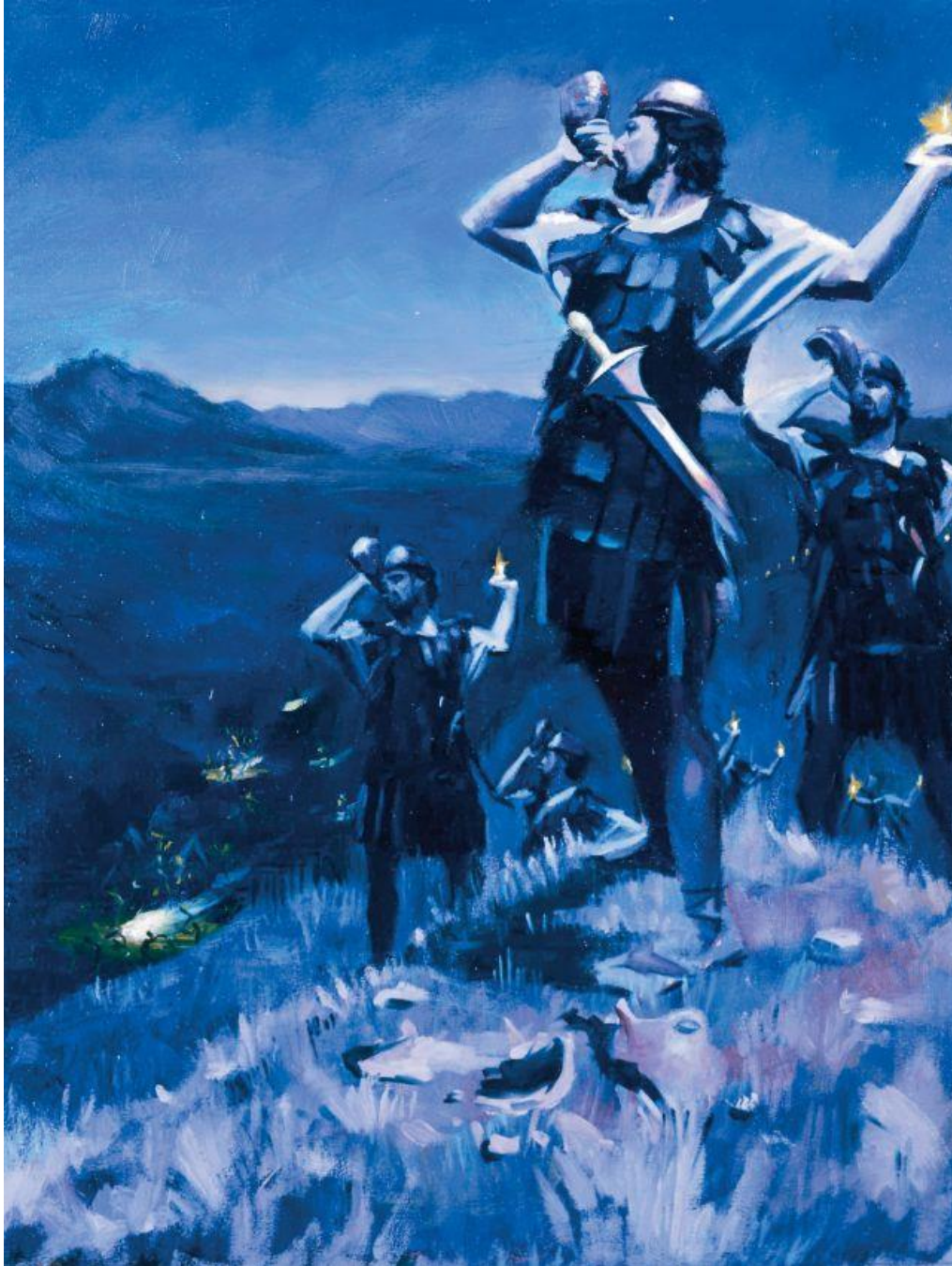
Could you use a role play or other creative activity to help your family learn from the experience of Gideon’s army described in this chapter? How can the Lord’s words in this chapter (see, for example, [verses 2 and 15](#)) apply to our lives?

[Judges 13:5.](#)

Samson’s covenants with the Lord gave him strength, just as our covenants give us strength. Your family might enjoy doing some physical exercises and discussing how those exercises can help make us strong. What can we do to help us become spiritually stronger? For some ideas, family members could read [Mosiah 18:8–10](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79](#). How does keeping our covenants give us spiritual strength?

For more ideas for teaching children, see [this week’s outline](#) in *Come, Follow Me—For Primary*.

Suggested song: “[Redeemer of Israel](#),” *Hymns*, no. 6.



Gideon's Army, by Daniel A. Lewis

Enrichment Section F

Idolatry: Ancient and Modern

(F-1) The Seriousness of Idolatry

What was so evil about idolatry that would cause the Lord to be so severe in His punishment of those who practiced it? Why did the Lord tell the Israelites of Joshua's day to destroy all of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites? Why did the Lord command them, "Thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth"? ([Deuteronomy 20:16](#).) They were also commanded to make a heap of all the images and all but certain designated possessions and burn them (see [Deuteronomy 7:24–26](#); [12:2–3](#)). Why such severe treatment? Why was the Lord so severe with all Israel when Achan kept things that were forbidden? (see [Joshua 7](#)). Why, indeed, must mankind be strictly confined by commandment to the worship of only the one true God? Perhaps the real question is, Why would anyone want to worship any but the true God? After Saul fell from the favor of the Lord, David was anointed to sit on the throne of Israel and to establish the royal family that would produce the King of Kings. Probably no king of Israel was more free than David was of any idolatrous inclinations or practices. From his day on, the writers of the Old Testament used David as the standard of excellence in measuring the loyalty of their kings to Jehovah. This use of David as a standard almost makes it look as if a king could be forgiven any offense more easily than even the slightest dabbling in idolatry.

(F-2) Idolatry Is the Worship of False Gods Which May or May Not Involve the Manufacturing of Images

The first two commandments in the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) forbade the sin of idolatry (see [Exodus 20:25](#)). Thus, the Lord announced the error and sin of having false gods, tangible or intangible, as objects of worship. (This commandment does not refer to decorations on or in temples, tabernacles, or chapels. The same Lord who gave the Ten Commandments also instructed the Israelites in the decoration of the ark of the covenant with graven cherubim. Simply having these cherubim there as art objects was not idolatry. It is when the image becomes an object of or an integral part of worship or obeisance that its manufacture and use become idolatrous.)

It is very important to understand that the worship of a false god that is intangible is just as evil and just as disastrous to the idolater as the worship of a graven image. Some false god may be associated with nature or be the worship of nature itself, meaning the laws or powers seen in nature. Idolatry of nature-related gods has included the worship of various animals, plants, the weather, volcanoes, the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, and so on. For instance, the Baal of the Old Testament was a god of nature. He was associated with rain and fertility of the soil, and he was also worshiped as a sun god. The myths

surrounding him say that he was supposed to be a real entity who dwelt on a mountain somewhere north of Israel and was involved in all sorts of heroic but sinful pursuits. He even was supposed to have been killed by Mot, the god of death, and later resurrected. This episode was supposed to explain a great drought in the Middle East and its later alleviation (see Roth, Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Baal worship," 4:10–11).

Though in the Old Testament idolatry is associated with the worship of actual images, true idolatry goes far beyond the practice of bowing down to images and appeasing angry idols. The Lord has made it clear in all ages that whenever men place their full trust in such things as other men, nations, treaties, treasuries, precious minerals, armies, or armaments, their actions are a form of idolatry because such actions reveal a lack of trust in Jehovah. To be totally free of idolatry one must put complete trust in the true God.

(F-3) Idolatry in the Old Testament

The most pronounced and consistent of Israel's departures from the covenant relationship with Jehovah involved idolatry. Old Testament history is filled with accounts of Israel's turning to false gods, the Lord's warnings against doing so, and prophets' warnings about what would happen if Israel did not repent. The following excerpts briefly summarize idolatry in the Old Testament.

(F-4) The Sin of Idolatry

"Idolatry was the most heinous offense against the Mosaic law, which is most particular in defining the acts which constitute the crime, and severe in apportioning the punishment. Thus, it is forbidden to make any image of a strange God; to prostrate oneself before such an image, or before those natural objects which were also worshiped without images as the sun and moon [[Deuteronomy 4:19](#)]; to suffer the altars, images, or groves or idols to stand [[Exodus 34:13](#)]; or to keep the gold and silver of which their images were made and to suffer it to enter the house [[Deuteronomy 7:25–26](#)]; to sacrifice to idols, most especially to offer human sacrifices; to eat of the victims offered to idols by others; to prophesy in the name of a strange god; and to adopt any of the rites used in idolatrous worship, and to transfer them to the worship of the Lord [[Deuteronomy 12:30–31](#)]. As for punishment, the law orders that if an individual committed idolatry he should be stoned to death [[Deuteronomy 17:2–5](#)]; that if a town was guilty of this sin, its inhabitants and cattle should be slain, and its spoils burnt together with the town itself [[Deuteronomy 13:12–18](#)]." (Fallows, Bible Encyclopedia, s.v. "idolatry," 2:850.)

(F-5) Objects of Idolatry

“The sun and moon were early selected as outward symbols of all-pervading power, and the worship of the heavenly bodies was not only the most ancient but the most prevalent system of idolatry. Taking its rise in the plains of Chaldea, it spread through Egypt, Greece, Seythia, and even Mexico and Ceylon. Comp. [Deut. 4:19](#); [17:3](#); [Job 31:20–28](#). In the later times of the monarchy, the planets or the zodiacal signs received, next to the sun and moon, their share of popular adoration. [2 Kings 23:5](#). Beast-worship, as exemplified in the calves of Jeroboam, has already been alluded to. Of pure hero-worship among the Semitic races we find no trace. The singular reverence with which trees have been honored is not without example in the history of the Hebrews. The terebinth (oak) at Mamre, beneath which Abraham built an altar, [Gen. 12:7](#); [13–18](#), and the memorial grove planted by him at Beersheba, [Gen. 21:33](#), were intimately connected with patriarchal worship. Mountains and high places were chosen spots for offering sacrifice and incense to idols, [1 Kings 11:7](#); [14:23](#); and the retirement of gardens and the thick shade of woods offered great attractions to their worshippers. [2 Kings 16:4](#); [Isa. 1:29](#); [Hos. 4:13](#). The host of heaven was worshipped on the house-top. [2 Kings 23:12](#); [[Jeremiah 19:13](#); [32:29](#)]; [Zeph. 1:5](#). (The modern objects of idolatry are less gross than the ancient, but are none the less idols. Whatever of wealth or honor or pleasure is loved and sought before God and righteousness becomes an object of idolatry.)” (Smith, Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. “idolatry,” pp. 263–64.)

(F-6) Rites Used in Idol Worship

“The general rites of idolatrous worship consist in burning incense; in offering bloodless sacrifices, as the dough-cakes and libations in [[Jeremiah 7:18](#)], and the raisin-cake in [[Hosea 3:1](#)]; in sacrificing victims [[1 Kings 18:26](#)]; and especially in human sacrifices. ... These offerings were made on high places, hills, and roofs of houses, or in shady groves and valleys. Some forms of idolatrous worship had libidinous orgies. ... Divinations, oracles [[2 Kings 1:2](#)], and rhabdomancy [[Hosea 4:12](#)] form a part of many of these false religions. The priesthood was generally a numerous body; and where persons of both sexes were attached to the service of any god (like that of Ashtoreth), that service was infamously immoral.” (Fallows, Bible Encyclopedia, s.v. “idolatry,” 2:850.)

(F-7) The More Well-known False Gods of the Old Testament

Ashtoreth. “This is the name of *Astarte*, goddess of the Zidonians [[1 Kings 11:5, 33](#)], and also of the Philistines [[1 Samuel 31:10](#)], whose worship was introduced among the Israelites during the period of the judges [[Judges 2:13](#); [1 Samuel 7:4](#)], and was celebrated by Solomon himself [[1 Kings 11:5](#)], and was finally put down by Josiah [[2 Kings 23:13](#)]. She is frequently mentioned in connection with Baal, as the corresponding female divinity [[Judges 2:13](#)]; and from the addition of the words ‘and all the hosts of heaven,’ in [[2 Kings 23:4](#)] ... it is probable that she represented one of the celestial bodies. ...

“... The most prominent part of her worship, consisted of those libidinous orgies which Augustine, who was an eye witness of their horrors in Carthage, describes with such indignation. ... Her priests were eunuchs in women’s attire and women ... *prostitutes* [[Hosea 4:14](#)], ... who, like the Bayaderes of India, prostituted themselves to enrich the temple of this goddess.” (Fallows, Bible Encyclopedia, s.v. “Ashtoreth,” 1:168.)

Baal. “The supreme male divinity of the Phoenician and Canaanitish nations, as Ashtoreth was their supreme female divinity. Some suppose Baal to correspond to the sun and Ashtoreth to the moon; others that Baal was Jupiter and Ashtoreth Venus. There can be no doubt of the very high antiquity of the worship of Baal. It prevailed in the time of Moses among the Moabites and Midianites, [Num. 22:41](#), and through them spread to the Israelites. [Num. 25:3-18](#); [Deut. 4:3](#). In the times of the kings it became the religion of the court and people of the ten tribes, [1 Kings 16:31-33](#); [18:19, 22](#), and appears never to have been permanently abolished among them. [2 Kings 17:16](#). Temples were erected to Baal in Judah, [1 Kings 16:32](#), and he was worshipped with much ceremony. [1 Kings 18:19, 26-28](#); [2 Kings 10:22](#). The attractiveness of this worship to the Jews undoubtedly grew out of its licentious character. We find this worship also in Phoenician colonies. The religion of the ancient British islands much resembled this ancient worship of Baal, and may have been derived from it. Nor need we hesitate to regard the Babylonian Bel, [Isa. 46:1](#), or Belus, as essentially identical with Baal, though perhaps under some modified form. The plural, Baalim, is found frequently, showing that he was probably worshipped under different compounds, among which appear—

1. Baal-berith (*the covenant Baal*), [Judges 8:33](#); [9:4](#); the god who comes into covenant with the worshippers.
2. Baal-zebub (*lord of the fly*), and worshipped at Ekron. [2 Kings 1:2, 3, 16](#).
3. Baal-hanan. *a.* The name of one of the early kings of Edom. [Gen. 36:38, 39](#); [1 Chron. 1:49, 50](#). *b.* The name of one of David’s officers, who had the superintendence of his olive and sycamore plantations. [1 Chron. 27:28](#).

4. Baal-peor (*lord of the opening, i.e. for others to join in the worship*). We have already referred to the worship of this god. The narrative ([Num. 25](#)) seems clearly to show that this form of Baal-worship was connected with licentious rites." (Smith, Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Baal," p. 70.)

Chemosh. "The god of Moab ([1 Kgs. 11:7](#)); also of Ammon ([Judg. 11:24](#)). ... Chemosh was worshipped with human sacrifices ([2 Kgs. 3:27](#))" (Bible Dictionary, s.v. "[Chemosh](#).")

Dagon. "The God of the Philistines ([Judg. 16:23](#); [1 Sam. 5:2](#); [1 Macc. 10:84](#); [12:2](#)). There were temples of Dagon at Gaza and Ashdod. ... His image was in the form partly of a man and partly of a fish. Some recent writers, however, question whether Dagon was really a fish-god, and connect the name with *dagan*, 'grain.'" (Bible Dictionary, s.v. "[Dagon](#)".)

Molech. "The worship of Moloch is generally cited as an example of the cruelest and most abhorrent idolatry known to man. Moloch, called also Molech, Malcham, Milcom, Baal-melech, etc., was an Ammonite idol: it is mentioned in scripture in connection with its cruel rites ([Lev. 18:21](#); [20:2-5](#); see also [1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33](#); [2 Kings 23:10, 13](#); [Amos 5:26](#); [Zeph. 1:5](#); [Jer. 32:35](#)). Keil and Delitzsch describe the idol as being 'represented by a brazen statue which was hollow, and capable of being heated, and formed with a bull's head, and with arms stretched out to receive the children to be sacrificed.' While the worship of this idol did not invariably include human sacrifice, it is certain that such hideous rites were characteristic of this abominable shrine. The authors last quoted say: 'From the time of Ahaz, children were slain at Jerusalem in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and then sacrificed by being laid in the heated arms and burned' ([2 Kings 23:10](#); [16:3](#); [17:17](#); [21:6](#); [Jer. 32:35](#); [Ezek. 16:20, 21](#); [20:31](#); compare [Ps. 106:37, 38](#)). Many authorities state that the sacrifice of children to this hideous monster long antedated the time of Ahaz. 'The offering of living victims was probably the climax of enormity in connection with this system, and it is said that Tophet, where it was to be witnessed, was so named from the beating of drums to drown the shrieks and groans of those who were burned to death. The same place was called the Valley of Hinnom, and the horrible associations connected with it led to both Tophet and Gehenna ('valley of Hinnom') being adopted as names and symbols of future torment.'" (Talmage, Articles of Faith, p. 464.)

(F-8) Why Was Idolatry So Attractive to the Israelites?

"Many have wondered why the Israelites were so easily led away from the true God, into the worship of idols. (1) Visible, outward signs, with shows, pageants,

parades, have an attraction to the natural heart, which often fails to perceive the unseen spiritual realities. (2) But the greatest attraction seems to have been in licentious revelries and obscene orgies with which the worship of the Oriental idols was observed. This worship, appealing to every sensual passion, joined with the attractions of wealth and fashion and luxury, naturally was a great temptation to a simple, restrained, agricultural people, whose worship and laws demanded the greatest purity of heart and of life." (Smith, Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "idolatry," p. 264.)

(F-9) Worship of the True God Must Be Complete and Wholehearted

A person's god is the thing or being in which he trusts and which he believes has the greatest power. It is the thing to which he looks for whatever salvation he believes is available. All other beliefs and actions are affected by that belief or object of his worship. When this idea is fully grasped one can understand why the Lord would issue an edict to destroy all the people and their possessions in an idolatrous city. Not to destroy their goods would be to demonstrate a lack of faith that the Lord would provide. Similarly, if a Latter-day Saint will not tithe, is it not because he centers his trust in worldly things and the system that produces them instead of in the providence of the Lord? In that sense, then, the things of the world become a god to him, for he trusts more in them than in God's power. Paul said, "Covetousness ... is idolatry" ([Colossians 3:5](#)) and a "covetous man ... is an idolater" ([Ephesians 5:5](#)). Is not the failure to pay tithing a form of covetousness? Those who do not pay tithing would likely be shocked to think they were guilty of idolatry just as the ancient Israelites were guilty of idolatry. The form differs, but the sin is the same.

Often modern prophets have warned against making idols of money, automobiles, houses, and other material objects (see [Reading 11-4](#) for President Spencer W. Kimball's statement on modern idolatry). The worship of these things, of course, is symptomatic of the trust some have in natural law instead of God and His laws. They see the world as a place where the creature fares according to his genius (see [Alma 30:17](#)). Hence, they look upon all they gain as their own, not as the Lord's. They forget that they are only stewards of the Lord's goods.

A Zion people can come into being only through obedience to the gospel, commencing with a true knowledge of the true God. There cannot be any compromise. You cannot serve God and mammon (see [Luke 16:13](#)). True worship, like liberty, is not divisible. You cannot get away with a little idolatry; once started, the destruction follows unless sincere repentance occurs

(see [Exodus 34:10–17](#); [Deuteronomy 7](#); [Joshua 23:6–16](#); [1 Kings 9:9](#); [2 Kings 17:7–23](#); [Psalm 106:34–43](#); [Jeremiah 16:11–21](#); [John 2:11–23](#)).

When the Lord put a blessing and a cursing upon the children of Israel and their land, the conditions were very strict (see [Deuteronomy 28](#); [Leviticus 26](#)). The Israelites failed because they would not put their complete trust in their one true God. So they were delivered up to the consequences of trying to love both the world and the Lord at the same time.

Brigham Young called upon modern Saints to examine their own hearts in this regard:

“Again, I can charge you with what you will all plead guilty of, if you would confess the truth, viz., you dare not quite give up all your hearts to God, and become sanctified throughout, and be led by the Holy Ghost from morning until evening, and from one year’s end to another. I know this is so, and yet few will acknowledge it. I know this feeling is in your hearts, as well as I know the sun shines.

“We will examine it a little closer. Many of you have fearful forebodings that all is not right in the organization of this kingdom. You shiver and shake in your feelings, and tremble in your spirit; you cannot put your trust in God, in men, nor in yourself. This arises from the power of evil that is so prevalent upon the face of the whole earth. It was given to you by your father and mother; it was mingled with your conception in the womb, and it has ripened in your flesh, in your blood, and in your bones, so that it has become riveted in your very nature. If I were to ask you individually, if you wished to be sanctified throughout, and become as pure and holy as you possibly could live, every person would say yes; yet if the Lord Almighty should give a revelation instructing you to be given wholly up to Him, and to His cause, you would shrink, saying, ‘I am afraid he will take away some of my darlings.’ That is the difficulty with the majority of this people.

“It is for you and I to wage war with that principle until it is overcome in us, then we shall not entail it upon our children. It is for us to lay a foundation so that everything our children have to do with, will bring them to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. If we lay such a foundation with all good conscience, and labor as faithfully as we can, it will be well with us and our children in time and in eternity.” (In Journal of Discourses, 2:134.)