

Lesson 17: Judges – Deborah, Gideon, Samson, and Ruth

Reading Preparation:

- Judges 1-8; 13-16
- Ruth

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Lesson Notes:

[1. Book of Judges](#)

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“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 for aid from their fellow Israelites. [While] Joshua’s generation remained faithful to the Lord (see Joshua 24:31),... spiritual apostasy soon occurred in the following generation.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 251).

Judges 2:10, 12

10 ...and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

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.

It is the responsibility of each generation to teach the rising generation the lessons they have learned. When the preceding generation fails in this responsibility to their youth, the risk is that they will then repeat the errors of the previous generation. It appears Israel failed to teach their children about the manifestations of the Lord to them during their journey in the wilderness as well as the intervention of the Lord as they crossed the Jordan River. The lessons of Moses and Joshua had been recorded and the people had been witnesses, however, they failed in their parental and civic responsibility to teach these lessons to their children. The Lord states, as recorded in modern revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, that He ultimately holds parents responsible to teach their children spiritual truths.

Doctrine and Covenants 68:25

25 And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach

them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

It is true children will make their own decisions, but they must be taught if their decisions are to be informed.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"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....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." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 251).

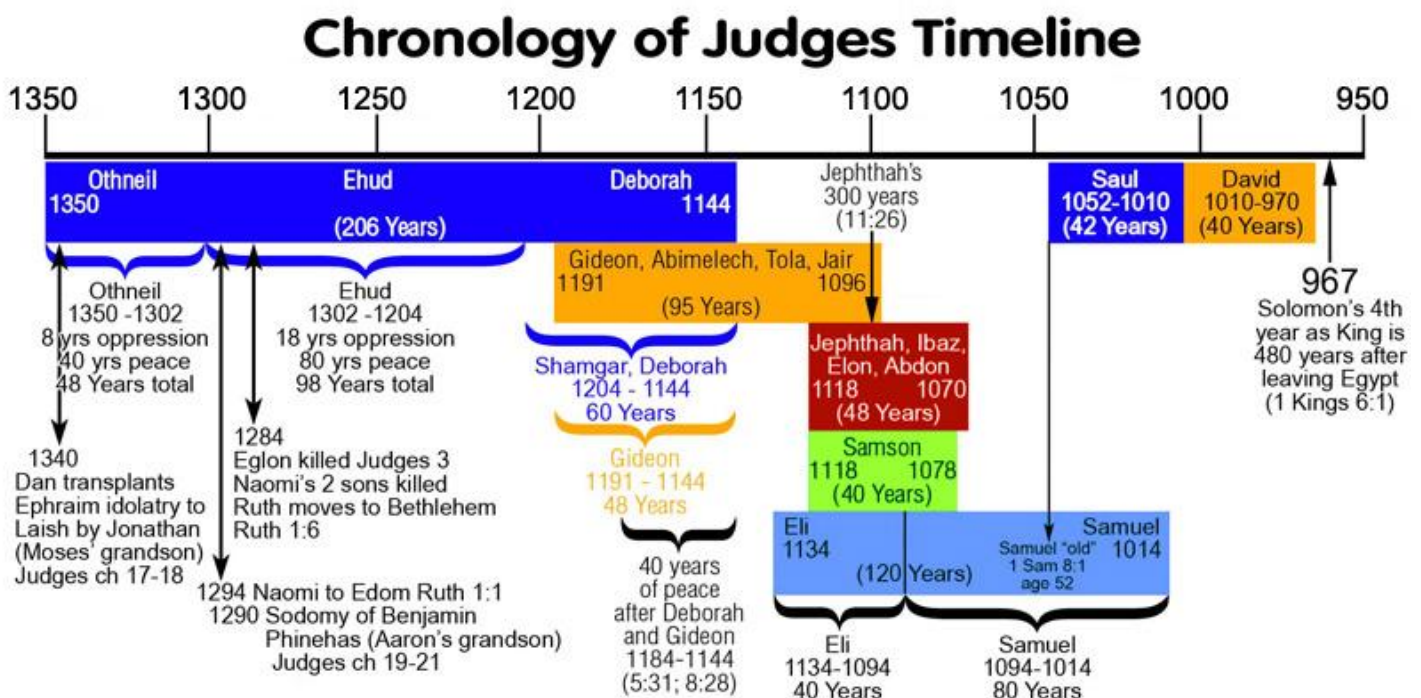
Under this political system, there was to be no division between Church and State. The Lord was to be their divine leader and judges were to function under his direction. When Israel's leaders were obedient to the Lord and to the words of his prophets, the people were righteous and they were prosperous. When her leaders were unrighteous and the people did not follow the counsel of the Lord, the people suffered.

During the book of Judges, twelve judges served as Israel's military leaders and rulers.

Victor L. Ludlow lists the twelve judges:

1. "Othniel of Judah (Judges 3:9): victory against Cushan-rishathaim.
2. "Ehud of Benjamin (3:15): victory against Eglon of Moab.
3. "Shamgar (3:31): victory against the Philistines.
4. "Deborah of Ephraim and Barak of 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 Ammonites.
9. "Ibzan of Behlehem (12:11).
10. "Elon of Zebulun (12:11).
11. "Abdon of Ephraim (12:13).
12. "Samson of Dan (15:10): victory against the Philistines."

(Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 64-65).



Reference: Chronology of Judges Timeline provided courtesy of Steve Rudd at www.Bible.ca.

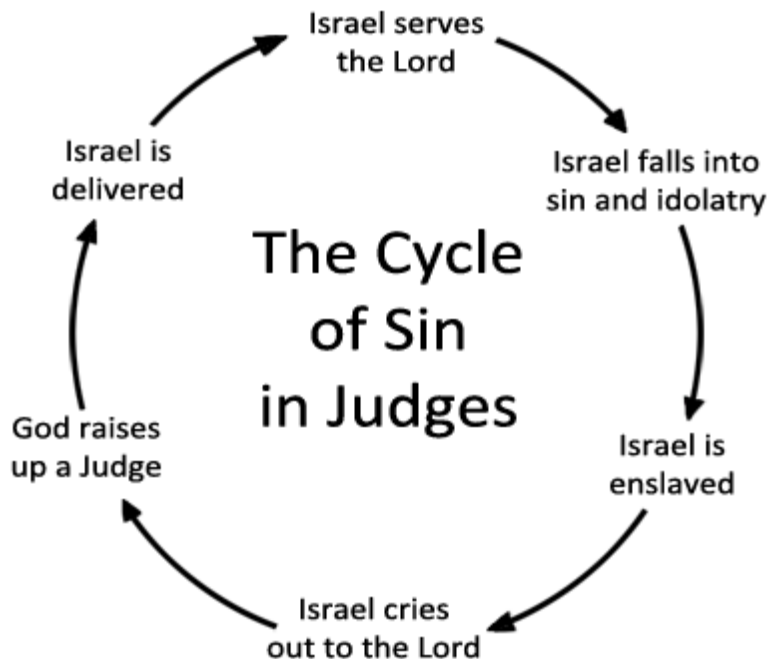
Allan K. Burgess notes,

"The judges became leaders by either self-appointment, the request of the Israelite people, or the Lord's designation. They were more like heroes, champions, or deliverers than what we think of as judges today...Many judges were chosen instead as military leaders to deliver Israel from her enemies." (New Insights into the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993, 125-126).

Allan K. Burgess continues,

"This period of Old Testament history was characterized by faithfulness and idolatry. During these four hundred years, a cycle of apostasy was repeated many times, generally according to the following pattern: (1) Peace and prosperity; (2) Pride; (3) Wickedness; (4) Destruction and bondage; (5) Humility and prayer; (6) Deliverance; and (7) Repetition of the cycle beginning with peace and prosperity." (New Insights into the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993, 125).

This process may be referred to as the ABCD principle. The people receive "A" "B"lessing, then are "C"ursed and finally are ripe for "D"estruction. Note the following chart:



(Reference: 2008 Online Bible Schools, Cycle of Sin in Judges, <http://www.generationword.com/>, http://www.generationword.com/_notes/9.html)

Remembering and not forsaking are lessons we must learn if we are to benefit from our study of the Old Testament. If we fail to remember, then we too will suffer the same consequences as the children of Israel.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"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 in 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 us today]." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 250).

We will now examine the lives and examples of four individuals. Three served as judges, (Deborah, Gideon, and Samson). The fourth, Ruth, is an example of righteous living taken from the lives of the ordinary people.

2. Deborah

Due to another of the unrighteous cycles of Israel, we learn that the Lord withdrew support from Israel and had allowed them to be oppressed.

Judges 4:2-3

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 [Jabin] had nine hundred chariots of iron; and [for]

twenty years he mightly oppressed the children of Israel.

Twenty years is a long time to be oppressed by a tyrannical ruler. Due to the number of his chariots, no one dared to rise in revolt against him. It appears the Lord in His mercy is going to give Israel another opportunity to demonstrate their obedience.

Roy A. Welker describes the duties of judges,

"Some of the duties of the judges seemed to be to preside over other officials. However, they could appoint no officers except perhaps those of the military....As a rule the "judges" were simple in manner, free from ambition and greed, moderate in their desires, unselfish, noble in their impulses, possessed of exalted and limitless patriotism and desirous of fighting for God and his cause. They had no fixed income but received many presents to honor them. They also received a goodly share of the spoils of war.... A noble thing about them was that they required the people to be loyal to God as they were themselves. Most of them held the idea that the way to happiness was to shun idolatry and obey the commandments of the Lord." (Spiritual Values of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: L.D.S. Department of Education, 1961, 85).

Who was Deborah?

Judges 4:4-5

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.

Deborah is a prophetess.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"[While] 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...She was blessed with spiritual insight and leadership qualities that were not being put to use by any man." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 254).

Roy A. Welker states,

"Deborah was the only woman judge,... yet she was one of the most important.... she became an inspiration to many of those who succeeded her. She was a courageous, fearless, bold warrior and a relentless enemy. The fires of patriotism and loyalty to God and country never burned more fiercely in woman's breast than in hers....it was [however] her spiritual power, her indomitable will and courage, her unshakable faith in Jehovah's help, that fired the forces of Israel with the will to fight and to win. As a military leader she deserves a place with those of highest rank." (Spiritual Values of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: L.D.S. Department of Education, 1961, 85-86).

Flavius Josephus states,

Her calling came as the Israelites, "...besought Deborah, a certain prophetess among them... to pray to God to take pity on them and not to overlook them, now they were ruined by the Canaanites." (The Complete Works of Josephus. Translated by Wm. Whiston. Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Kregel Publications, 1960, [Twenty-fifth printing 1991], Antiquities of the Jews, Book V, Chap. V, 2, 114).

It was to Deborah whom the Lord spoke. She called Barak, a military leader, and gave him the message she had received from the Lord.

Judges 4:6-7

6 ...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.

While the details are limited, the word of the Lord had come to Deborah and through her military leader, Barak, the Lord was willing to deliver Israel from her enemies.

What is the response of Barak, her military leader, to Deborah?

Judges 4:8

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.

Adam Clarke notes,

"The Septuagint [The Greek translation of the O.T... made in the first instance for the use of Greek-speaking Jews living in Alexandria in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (284-246 B.C.)]" LDS Bible Dictionary, 771] made a remarkable addition to the speech of Barak: "If thou wilt go with me I will go but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go; because I know not the day in which the Lord will send his angel to give me success." By which he appears to mean that, although he was certain of a divine call to this work, yet, as he knew not the time in which it would be proper for him to make the attack, he wished that Deborah, on whom the Divine Spirit constantly rested, would accompany him to let him know when to strike that blow, which he knew would be decisive." (Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth printing, 1991], 269).

In other words, his response to Deborah indicates his complete trust in Deborah's inspiration; however, he wants her presence in order to strengthen his own success.

Deborah's response to Barak.

Judges 4:9-10

**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 he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and
Deborah went up with him.**

Deborah is willing to go to the battle for she knew the Lord would deliver Sisera into their hands.

Judges 4:13

**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.**

It is of interest to note this was going to be no small battle and, according to the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, the Israelites were greatly outnumbered.

Flavius Josephus states,

"Jabin...had in pay three hundred thousand footmen and ten thousand horsemen, with no fewer than three thousand chariots. Sisera was the commander of all his army, and was the principal person in the king's favour....Deborah sent for Barak, and bade him choose out ten thousand young men to go against the enemy, because God had said that number was sufficient and promised them victory....[All was not well for when the Israelites and Barak saw the forces of Sisera they] were so affrighted at the multitude of those enemies, that they were resolved to march off, had not Deborah retained them, and commanded them to fight the enemy that very day, for that they should conquer them, and God would be their assistance." (The Complete Works of Josephus. Translated by Wm. Whiston. Antiquities, 5:5:1, 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Kregel Publications, 1960, Antiquities of the Jews, Chapter V, 2-3, 114-115).

As Sisera gathered his men and chariots unto the dry river bed of the Kishon, Deborah gave the following directive to Barak.

Judges 4:14-15

**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,...**

We learn from the song of Deborah, the Lord did intervene on behalf of the Israelites.

Judges 5:20-21

**20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses
fought against Sisera.
21 The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient
river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden
down strength.**

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"The Song of Deborah seems to suggest...an unexpected downpour, suddenly struck the area. The chariots of Sisera bogged down in the resulting overflow of the Kishon River, making it possible for the smaller forces of Deborah and Barak to achieve victory. Deborah rightly saw in this event the hand of the Lord and gave him credit for the victory (see Judges 5:2-5)." (The Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2nd Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 254).

Sisera seeing that the battle was lost ran to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, seeking assistance. After Sisera fell asleep, Jael killed him. (See Judges 5:24-27).

Judges 4:22

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.

Barak might well have recalled the words of Deborah made prior to the commencement of the battle, "the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judges 4:9). The woman had not been Deborah, but Jael.

In the following verse, Deborah gives credit in song and verse for the success of the battle unto the Lord.

Judges 5:2-3, 30-31

**2 Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.
3 Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.
30 Have they not sped. Have they not divided the prey;...
31 So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.**

Deborah is an example of a righteous woman who lived during a time of unrighteousness. She, however, lived her life so when the time came that the Lord needed a courageous woman; she was receptive to the prompting. Deborah was willing to act and be an instrument in the hands of the Lord.

Ann Spangler and Jean E. Syswerda note,

"...[A] mother in Israel had arisen, a woman whose strong faith gave birth to hope and freedom and a peace that lasted for forty years. Never again would the Canaanites join forces against Israel...Deborah arose and called the people to battle, leading them out of idolatry and restoring their dignity as God's chosen ones." (Women of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999, 109).

Israel was freed from her enemies. "And the land had rest [peace] for forty years" (Judges 5:31).

3. Gideon

Gideon, like Deborah, was serving as a judge in Israel. He is number four on our list of twelve judges. Israel's enemies at this time are the Midianites and the Amalekites.

Gideon is one of most unlikely heroes in the scriptures. He is full of doubts and is extremely reluctant to answer the call of the Lord. He wants proof, in the form of signs, before he is willing to fulfill the Lord's errand. Unfortunately, in many regards, he is a lot like us. Many of us want to see both signs and wonders before we are willing to act. Maybe, we too, can learn from Gideon's experience.

Ann Spangler and Robert Wolgemuth note,

"God wasn't looking for a born leader; a man would be great in the eyes of his own people. He wasn't searching for a self-reliant man who would take credit for every victory. He needed someone whose weakness he could use, a man whose apparent unsuitability would eventually convince his people that their God was still with them, still powerful, still loving." (Men of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002, 126).

The children of Israel approached the Lord for support and received an answer from an unnamed prophet.

Judges 6:7-10

**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...
9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you,...**

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

Once again, God sends a prophet to call Israel to repentance. She has once again gone after other gods, and not obeyed the voice of the Lord. Nevertheless, in his patience, the Lord is going to again intervene on behalf of Israel. Once again, He will fight against and deliver her from her enemies. His choice to lead Israel into battle will be one who is unknown to the army, but with the Lord's help, he will deliver her from her adversary. The Lord's choice will be one of her righteous, yet reluctant judges, rather than one of her distinguished Generals!

3.1. Gideon's Calling

Judges 6:11-12

11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak...and..Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

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

It is my impression when the angel of the Lord refers to Gideon as a "mighty man of valour," he is speaking to who Gideon can become, not who is now. In fact, he expresses his opinion that due to all their troubles, "the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites" (Judges 6:13). The angel is not deterred and reiterates the call of the Lord to Gideon, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites:..." (Judges 6:14). Gideon exclaims in wonder that the call to save Israel would come to him.

Judges 6:15

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.

In other words, Gideon is saying, I meet none of the qualifications of a military leader. Surely, you have made a mistake. There must be someone else, anyone else, more qualified for this assignment than I!

The discussion continues and again the angel is not deterred by Gideon's explanations. Gideon is the one the Lord, not man, has selected.

Judges 6:16

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

In an effort to make his message for emphatic, the angel now speaks "as if" he is the Lord, "I ...will be with thee," in the battle with the Midianites and together we will be as if we are one. The reluctant Gideon is still not convinced the Lord has chosen him for this military battle and wants further evidence!

Judges 6:17

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

It is "as if" Gideon is saying, show me your power and then I will believe that you are truly a representative of the Lord. The angel agrees to Gideon's request.

Gideon now prepares a young goat and some flour cakes and brings them to the angel. (See Judges 6:19). The angel tells him to put the items [the young goat and the cakes] upon a rock. (See Judges 6:20).

Judges 6:21

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 a fire out of the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

Gideon is very impressed with the actions of the messenger.

Judges 6:22

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.

Gideon has now, by his own test, confirmed that the messenger is a true representative of the Lord. He honors their meeting by building an altar unto the Lord (See Judges 6:24).

The first assignment the angel gives Gideon is to destroy the altar that his own father has built to Baal.

William Smith states,

"Baal. [is] the supreme male divinity of the Phoenician and Canaanitish nations, as Ashtoreth was their supreme female divinity.... 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, (see Numbers 22:41), and through them spread to the Israelites, (Numbers 25:3-18; Deuteronomy 4:3). In the times of the kings it became the religion of the court and people of the ten tribes (see 1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:19, 22), and appears never to have been permanently abolished among them, (see 2 Kings 18:19, 26-28)." (A Dictionary of the Bible. Revised and Edited by F.N. and M. A. Peloubet. Thomas Nelson Publishers, [Nelson Reference and Electronic], 1986, 70).

Gideon complies with the directive of the angel, however "because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day [as requested], he did it by night" (see Judges 6:27). When it was learned the altar and grove had been destroyed, and that Gideon had done the destruction, they were ready to kill him. (see Judges 6:30). Gideon's father speaks for his son against the townspeople, suggesting his love for his son, was greater than his belief in idol worship.

Judges 6:31

31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him?... if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

It appears that Joash, Gideon's father, chooses to mark this occasion by giving Gideon a new name.

Judges 6:32

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

The LDS Bible Dictionary states,

"The name, Jerubbaal, literally means, 'He that striveth with Baal.'" (Jerubbaal. LDS Bible Dictionary, in Holy Bible. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 712).

Adam Clarke states,

"Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon. This is improper; it should be 'Jerubbaal Gideon,' as we say 'Simon Peter,' or call any man by his Christian name and surname." (Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible. Abridges by Ralph Earl. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth Printing, 1991], 275).

Gideon answers the call to fight against the Midianites and the Amalekites, however, as they assemble, Gideon has another request of the Lord. Perhaps his faith began to falter in view of the enemy that was gathered to fight against Gideon and those who he will lead into battle.

Judges 6:36-37

**36 And Gideon said unto God, if thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,
37 Behold, I will put 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.**

The next morning, Gideon arises and the fleece is soaked with water, however, the ground is dry around it. Unfortunately, this event is not sufficient to bolster Gideon's faith and he makes yet another request.

Judges 6:39-40

**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**

Gideon had tested the angel of the Lord and he had complied, even reversing the last test that Gideon had designed. Repeatedly, the angel had confirmed the Lord would be with Gideon as he went into battle. It appears the

last test was sufficient to confirm his faith. Gideon accepts his calling and prepares himself for the battle.

3.2. Reduction in Troops

It appears from the scriptures that the messenger changes from an angel who speaks for the Lord to the Lord himself. The justification is that Judges, Chapter 7, verses 2, 4, and 7, state, "And the Lord said," and in verse 9, "... the Lord said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand." I acknowledge it is possible that the angel is now speaking to Gideon "as if" he is the Lord, however I am going to read the scriptures as the Lord speaking for himself in that Gideon has accepted the call from the Lord and is now ready to go into battle.

Gideon is ready; however, the Lord has an adjustment to make regarding the number of soldiers who will go into battle. In the eyes of the Lord there are too many soldiers and the number must be reduced, "least Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me" (Judges 7:2). The Lord presents a plan in order to reduce their number.

Judges 7:3

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.

Two-thirds of the volunteers were frightened due to the number of the opposing forces of the Mideianites and chose to go home. The ten thousand who remained are still too many!

The next test is to invite those who are remaining to go to the stream to obtain a drink of water. "Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped him shalt thou set by himself, likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink" (Judges 7:5).

Judges 7:6-7

**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.**

From the original 32,000 volunteers, there are now only 300 men who will go into battle with Gideon. What is the number that Gideon and his band will face?

Judges 7:12

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.

By all practical estimates, one could safely state the foe greatly out-numbered Gideon and his band of three hundred! The advantage, however, swings in favor of Gideon and his men, for the simple reason that the Lord is on their side and when that fact is true, the numbers of the enemy are insignificant.

3.3. Final Confirmation

Gideon is now directed by the Lord to go down in disguise to the enemy.

Judges 7:9-11

**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.**

Gideon and his servant hear a Midianite man sharing a dream he had with his companions. Their interpretation of the dream and conclusion was that "there 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" (Judges 7:14). This interpretation, just as the Lord had stated, had a profound effect upon Gideon.

Judges 7:15

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.

3.4. The Battle

Rather than waiting until daylight, Gideon and his force of 300 attack during the night. The plan is that he will divide his band into three groups of 100.

Judges 7:16-22

**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 [candles] within the pitchers.
17 And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise:...
18 When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of the camp, and say, the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.
19 ...and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.
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 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...**

The similarity with the battle of Jericho under Joshua and the battle of Gideon and his 300 men is that in both battles, the odds were overwhelming, trumpets were used and the battle was successful. It is doubtful anyone trained in military tactics would have designed either battle as recorded. The last and most important similarity between the two battles is that the Lord himself was the tactician and now with His power, as the foe was in disarray, "the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow," and the Midianites defeated themselves. The ironic truth is even before the battle began, they had defeated themselves from within through their idolatry and sexual perversion. They had reached the point where there was no desire for repentance and this day, Israel was victorious because they had turned to the Lord their God.

Now that the battle has been fought by Gideon and his band, men of other tribes join in.

Judges 7:23

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.

3.5. Rule Over Us

The children of Israel are so pleased with the victory that Gideon and his men have achieved they request he rule over them and his son and his son's son also.

Judges 8:23

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.

Winning a battle, while it is a triumphant experience, doesn't completely change who you are, but there is something different about Gideon that has changed forever. In spite of his initial reluctance and testing, he came to personally see "an angel of the Lord" (Judges 6:22), and even the Lord himself (Judges 7:2, 4, 7, 9). He was guided and directed to be victorious in a battle with only "three hundred men" (Judges 7:7), when the enemy was "like grasshoppers" (Judges 7:12), they were so numerous. Gideon was a witness the power of the Lord and his mercy when Israel became righteous. Having had this first-hand experience with the Lord changed Gideon. Fame and fortune paled in comparison.

Surely we too can relate to Gideon's experience. How many times has the Lord approached us to fulfill an assignment that appeared overwhelming to us? As we considered the task through the lens of our own inadequacies, we may have wanted some kind of reassurance that if we proceeded we would be successful. There may even have been times when we declined the assignment. It is important for each of us to remember the Lord can make up for any inadequacies we may have and if we will but exercise "a little faith" we will be strengthened by the Lord and through His power, we can do all things.

3.6. Remembered Not the LORD

Gideon gathered the golden ear rings of his enemies and made an "ephod" which he presented to the people of Ophrah.

William Smith states,

An ephod is "a sacred vestment originally appropriate to the high priest." (A Dictionary of the Bible. Revised and Edited by F.N. and M. A. Peloubet. Thomas Nelson Publishers, [Nelson Reference and Electronic], 1986, 175).

Judges 8:27

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

Adam Clarke states,

"Whether Gideon designed this ephod for an instrument of worship or merely as a trophy is not very clear. It is most likely that he had intended to establish a place of worship at Ophrah, and he took this occasion to provide the proper sacerdotal vestments." (Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth printing, 1991], vs. 24, 275).

The children of Israel had been commanded not to make any image like unto those who dwell in the land.

Exodus 23:33

33 They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

During the forty years of peace that followed, Gideon married several wives and had many children and died an old man. (see Judges 8:30-33). As the record reads, Gideon as a judge in his community must have continued to have had a positive effect upon the religious life of the Israelites during these years of peace. However, upon his death, things changed dramatically for Israel.

Judges 8:33-34

**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:**

The inference is that having lost their religious leader and the direction he provided enabled Israel to remember all the Lord had done for them and the protection he had provided from their enemies. Once, Gideon was dead, their testimonies being weak, they lost their religious bearings, and turned to idol worship and remembered no longer their Lord. Neither did they remember Gideon.

Judges 8:35

35 Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

What a tragic epitaph to the efforts of the Lord and Gideon by the children of Israel. As a nation, they were "as a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (Proverbs 26:11). They had rejected the source of their happiness and preservation. They had turned once again to idolatry and its perverted worship which offered them false security. They had traded obedience to the Lord for freedom to do as they pleased. Once again they will find themselves in bondage, both as a nation and as individuals. As Alma, a Book of Mormon prophet, so succinctly stated, "Wickedness never was happiness" (B/M, Alma 41:10).

4. Samson

Samson is one of the best known individuals in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, he is known not for his spirituality, but for his physical strength. Like many of us, he did not live up to his potential. The great blessings that could have come to Israel and to him, due to his focus upon himself were unfortunately never realized.

Samson will serve as the twelfth judge of Israel. Israel has been in bondage to the Philistines for forty years due to their disobedience to the Lord's commandments. (See Judges 13:1). His birth was proceeded by an angelic visitation.

Judges 13:3

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.

This son was not to be an ordinary boy. He was to be raised as a Nazarite and a special promise was given to him.

Judges 13:5

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 deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

Victor L. Ludlow notes,

"A Nazarite was not to have strong drink, nor could he eat any fruit of the vine (grape, raisin, etc.). He was not to have his hair cut, nor could he touch a dead person...As long as Samson remained faithful to his Nazarite vows, he had the strength of the Lord with him." (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 71).

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual adds,

"A Nazarite, ...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." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 259).

Following Samson's birth we read the following,

Judges 13:24

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

[4.1. Samson Married A Philistine](#)

As Samson grew, he completely forgot the purpose of his birth and desires marriage with a daughter of the Philistines. (See Judges 13:2). The Philistines represent everything that is evil to Israel. Israel has been in bondage to them for forty years, because they forgot their covenants with God and followed their alternative lifestyle to lead them away from the Lord. Samson, who was to free Israel from the Philistines, is ready to now join them! His parents have great concern.

Judges 14:3-4

**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 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...**

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

"In violating Nazarite standards in his proposed marriage and his behavior otherwise (see Numbers 6), he must have been moved by some spirit he assumed to be the Spirit of the Lord. His proposed marriage, the impossible riddle and betrayal, and the slaughter of thirty men to pay off a silly vow seem unlikely ways to free Israel or bring blessings from God." (A Latter-Day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 220).

To believe that one is guided by the spirit of the Lord, when, in fact, he is not, often results in the breaking of prior covenants and further loss of the Lord's direction. The key to this insight is found in Samson's words to his parents, "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well." (Judges 14:3). Samson is not doing that which pleaseth the Lord, he is only doing that which pleaseth himself! By choosing to marry someone who was not one of God's people, Samson was choosing to violate the laws of the Lord as given to Moses.

Samson's behavior ever further reflects, as Ellis Rasmussen has noted, that he is not guided by the spirit of the Lord. He pronounces a riddle with an accompanied penalty, the payment of "thirty sheets and thirty changes of

garments" (Judges 14:12); the threat to "burn thee and thy father's house," to Samson's wife if she does not disclose the answer to the riddle; the betrayal of her husband by telling the [answer] to "the riddle to the children of her people," and Samson's action of "slew thirty men of them" (Judges 14:12, 15, 17, 19) give evidence that Samson is acting on his own volition and is unable to control his own behavior.

The Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual states,

"As a Nazarite and a member of the house of Israel, Samson made covenants with the Lord. However, he soon broke his Nazarite vow and his covenants as a member of the house of Israel.

"What vows and covenants did he break?

"a. He married outside the covenant house of Israel (Judges 14:1-3).

"b. He was immoral with a harlot (Judges 16:1).

"c. He had his hair cut (Judges 16:4-20."

(Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996, [Second Edition, 2001], 90).

When we break the covenants we have made [at baptism, received the priesthood, partake of the sacrament], we, too, suffer consequences for our actions. When we are immoral, dishonest, seek power or control over others, are physically or emotionally abusive, "the Spirit of the Lord is grieved;" (D&C 121:37). When the Spirit withdraws, we are left on our own to face the temptations of the evil one. It is then when we no longer seek the will of the Lord, but instead our own will. This is the consequence of Samson's breaking his covenants.

Samson now learns his wife has been given to another by her father. (See Judges 15:2). He again acts out his rage and seeks revenge.

Judges 15:4-5

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 stocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.

The Philistines now direct their revenge upon the men of Judah. They come to Samson to discuss the matter with him.

Judges 15:11

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.

Unfortunately, it is not about freeing Israel from bondage, it is all about Samson settling a score, and getting even. With the thought of revenge in his mind, he now allows the men of Judah to bind him with cords and lead him to the Philistines. The Philistines seeing him bound with ropes, must have been pleased the men of Judah were surrendering him to them.

Judges 15:14-15

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.

This is certainly one time when we might agree it was truly the Spirit of the Lord that came upon Samson, for in this battle with the Philistines he was able to destroy a thousand men as part of freeing Israel from bondage. There is, however, no humility on Samson's part for his success in battle.

Judges 15:16

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.

Unlike others who have gone before him, Samson does not recognize the success of the battle is not due to his strength, but to the strength of the Lord. It is the spirit of the Lord that was with him and won the victory for Israel, not his brute strength. It has been said that we are at our weakest when we fail to recognize the Lord in our lives. At this moment in time, Samson had lost his strength.

The success of the battle must have brought some relief from the bondage of the Philistines.

Judges 15:20

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

We have no further record of Samson's actions during his service as a judge, but there is also no evidence to infer that his self-focused behavior changed. Samson's stubbornness, his revenge upon others and ingratitude to the Lord, reached a new low.

4.2. Samson Serves Samson

Judges 16:1

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

Gaza is a Philistine city. Samson is an Israelite on Philistine soil. He is not there to destroy the city. He is there to visit a harlot and to break his covenants with God.

Samson, who had so much potential at birth, succumbs to the temptation of immorality. Samson appears to only serve Samson. The townspeople are not pleased with Samson's presence in the city and make plans to kill their enemy.

Judges 16:2

2 And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in...In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.

Samson waits until midnight. Not to create havoc in the city, but to show the Philistines that he still has his strength. He gets up in the middle of the night and leaves the city, but not before he has demonstrated his power.

Judges 16:3

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.

The actions of Samson are not about fulfilling his errand from the Lord, but satisfying his own carnal lust and demonstrating his own strength. Samson's actions are only to do what pleases Samson.

4.3. Delilah

Samson now becomes attracted to another Philistine woman by the name of Delilah. Unbeknown to Samson, she enters into an agreement with the lords of the Philistines to learn the source of Samson's strength in exchange for eleven hundred pieces of silver. (See Judges 16:4-5). Three times Samson tells her that he would be helpless if he were: (1) Bound with green withs that have never been dried; (2) Bound fast with new ropes and (3) Had seven locks of his hair woven into a web. (See Judges 16:9, 11, 13). Each time he tells her how he would be made helpless if one of these three things were to occur, she proceeds to take action and then tell him that the Philistines are upon him. As he becomes free, she taunts him again to tell her his secret. (see Judges 16:10, 13).

Judges 16:15

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.

How tragic when each partner lies to the other! How can one possibly build a relationship of love and trust when honesty is not found in either individual? Delilah does not trust or love him, nor in fact, does Samson trust or love her in spite of words of professed love. How our words betray us when they are not matched by our actions.

Delilah continues to seek the source of his strength.

Judges 16:16

16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, and vexed him unto death;

How different are Joseph's actions than Samson for when Potipher's wife attempted to seduce him! He left. Samson remains. Samson must believe he has the strength to overcome all temptations and that he also has the power of discernment. Unfortunately Samson has neither power. Vulnerable to Satan's power, he does not leave. He stays.

After her constant demands, Samson finally tells her the source of his strength.

Judges 16:17

17 ...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.

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"Samson's superhuman strength did not reside in his hair but in his confidence in God and in the Nazarite oath, of which his hair was the outward symbol...Samson's misfortunes began when his confidence in God turned into conceit and pride...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." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis -2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 260).

Delilah's next step is to alert the Philistines.

Judges 16:18

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.

Samson was all alone. For Delilah, it was all about the money.

Judges 16:20

20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep..And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

Due to the breaking of his covenants, Samson no longer had the strength of the Lord to sustain him. His strength, both physical and spiritual are gone. His own words had come true, "my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man" (Judges 16:17). The lords of the Philistines arrive to take a weakened Samson as their prisoner.

Judges 16:21

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.

Now in the Philistine prison in Gaza, Samson passes his time grinding grain. As far as we know there is no time spent upon the misguided choices and regrets of his life. What does dominate his thoughts? Getting revenge upon his captors for taking his eyesight! Eventually he will be brought to their pagan temple.

Judges 16:23, 25

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.
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.

[4.4. His Death](#)

The Philistines believe that because Samson has been delivered into their hands the Philistine deity Dagon was greater than Jehovah. The Philistines have no fear of making sport of Samson. In this setting, Samson exhibited the potential courage the Lord had seen in Samson as a boy and that could have been used for the good of Israel... if he had been willing to be molded in the hands of the Lord. Sadly, Samson chose to do otherwise. Samson learns that his hair has grown out. Samson does not seek to perform the mission for which he was born. He does not ask for forgiveness for his transgressions! His desire for strength is only that he might now take revenge against those who had blinded him! Little does Samson realize that it was not the Philistines who made him blind, but his own actions as he put his will before the will of God. He, who could have done so much to free the Israelites from the Philistines, now chooses to die with them. He makes a final plea to the Lord.

Judges 16:28-30

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,...
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.

D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer state,

*"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...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...putting an arm round each [pillar] and bending forward so as to force them out of the perpendicular, he brought the roof down. The weight of the people on the roof may have made the feat all the easier." (D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, eds. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971, 272; see also *Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 261).*

Samson is dead. His last act of sacrifice does more to fulfill his calling by the Lord than any prior action he had taken. What lessons may we take from Samson's life? Two come to mind. First, we will learn our potential is meaningless unless we use it for good. If we use our God given talents to advance our own cause or to gratify our own pleasures, our potential will come to nothing. If, however, we seek to develop and to exercise the gifts we have been given for the good of others, we will find great joy and happiness. Secondly, no matter what choice we make, the Lord will never completely abandon us. Repeatedly, Samson did not choose to follow the Lord, but the Lord did not abandon him. Nor will the Lord ever abandon us!

Ann Spangler and Robert Wolgemuth observe,

"God heard the last words he [Samson] spoke and granted his prayer, making him even more effective in death than he had ever been in life." (Men of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002, 136).

Ann Spangler and Robert Wolgemuth share this prayer,

"Father, I thank you that the plans and purpose of your heart stand firm forever. Help me to be in complete alignment with your plans for my life. If I waver, then bring me back, no matter what it takes. Use the hard things in my life to shape me so that I can be used however and wherever you intend." (Men of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002, 136).

5. Book of Ruth

Following our study of the turmoil of the period of the Judges, the book of Ruth stands out for its simple message of loyalty, love and generosity. In fact, there are only two books in the entire scriptures that are named after women. One is about a woman who is to become a Queen to bless her people, Esther. The other book is about a ordinary woman who, because of her acts of kindness to another, becomes an example to people everywhere. Her name is Ruth.

The LDS Bible Dictionary states,

"The land of Moab lay southeast of the Dead Sea. The Moabites were akin to the Israelites, and spoke a language that closely resembled Hebrew, but there was constant warfare between the two nations." (Moab. LDS Bible Dictionary in Holy Bible. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 733).



(Reference: The Judges of Israel, David P. Barrett, <http://www.biblemapper.com/>, <http://www.biblemapper.com/gallery1.htm>)

The book of Ruth begins with Ruth living in the land of Moab. Due to a famine in the area where they were living, a man named Elimelech, his wife, Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, had left their home in Bethlehem and had travelled approximately 30 or 40 miles, to live in the the country of Moab (see Ruth 1:2). Tragedy strikes the family.

Ruth 1:3

**3 And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left,
and her two sons.**

The two sons determine to take wives of the Moabites and one marries Orpah, and the other, Ruth. After living in Moab for ten years, tragedy strikes again (see Ruth 1:4).

Ruth 1:5

**5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the
woman was left of her two sons and her husband.**

Naomi having lost her husband and two sons and upon learning there is again food in her homeland at Bethlehem determines to leave the land of Moab (see Ruth 1:6) and return to her home. It appears initially, both Orpah and Ruth had decided to leave with her.

Ruth 1:7

**7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she
was, and her two daughter in law with her; and they went
on the way to return unto the land of Judah.**

It is not known how far they had traveled when Naomi had second thoughts about taking her daughters-in-law out of their land and now tries to discourage them from continuing the journey with her to Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:8-9

**8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go,
return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly
with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.
9 The LORD grant you that you may find rest, each of you
in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and
they lifted up their voice, and wept.**

Naomi continues her insistence that both daughters-in-law return to their own land and families.

Why, we might ask?

Nelson Beecher Keyes reminds us,

Moab anciently has been an idolatrous nation however "...the Moabites, [where spared]...[when] God refused Moses the right to attack-[because] they were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew..." (Reader's Digest Story of the Bible World in Map, Word, and Picture. Pleasantville, New York: The Reader's Digest Association, 1962, 38).

It is possible that Naomi may have felt they would both be more comfortable among their own people of whom she had been a foreigner. She states,

Ruth 1:13-15

**13 ...it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of
the LORD is gone out against me.
14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and
Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.
15 And she [Naomi] said, Behold, thy sister in law
[Orpah] is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods:
return thou after thy sister in law.**

Orpah will return to Moab, but Ruth refuses to leave. She makes her final plea to her mother-in-law not to require her to leave. Her words are well known, even today, by many.

Ruth 1:16-17

**16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to
return from following after thee: for whither thou goest,
I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy
people shall be my people, and thy God my God:
17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be
buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but
death part thee and me.**

It is striking to me that of the promises Ruth makes to Naomi, are that “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Naomi recognizes Ruth’s allegiance.

Ruth 1:18-19

**18 When she [Naomi] saw that she [Ruth] was steadfastly minded [persevering] to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.
19 So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem...**

Apparently the townspeople did not recognize Naomi, possibly due to her saddened appearance for she tells them,

Ruth 1:20

20 And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi [Pleasant], call me Mara [bitter, very sad]: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

Tragedy often affects many with the feeling that the Lord has abandoned us. Were He with us, as He promises, we assume our life would be void of disappointment and unhappiness. Unfortunately, when this is not the case, we blame God and may even become bitter in our attitude towards life in general and specifically religion. Our Father in Heaven never did promise us a life of bliss. We are here upon this earth to learn through our experiences and to be tested regarding our obedience to Our Father in Heaven. Some of the hardships we experience come because of the calamities of the world in which we live and others through our own poor choices. God’s promise is that he will never leave us, no matter how difficult life’s events may be. He will be there to dry our tears and give us support for another day. When this life is over, He will then make up to us all our sorrows and disappointments. For now, He does not prevent personal sorrow or pain for these are part of the earthly experiences we need to have in order to grow and become like Him, and his Son, Jesus Christ. Without these events in our lives, we could never hope to provide comfort, support, or even understanding to others in need, for we would have no personal reference upon which to draw.

It is important to understand when one is in the midst of pain, loss, and adversity, it is hard for even the believer to remember that these experiences are the “necessary ingredients” of eternal diamonds. I believe not only was this the circumstance with Naomi, but also for many of us.

The story is told of a kind-hearted naturalist who was concerned about the struggle that the merging butterfly had to make in order to break through and free themselves from their cocoon. He, therefore, made a small slit in the cocoon in order to reduce the struggle. He then learned, to his sad experience, that all the butterflies made it out of the cocoon only to die shortly after. He came to realize too late for some, that it was their struggle to escape the protective coating of the cocoon that gave them the strength they needed to live once they were on the outside. Author unknown. I believe this is true for each of us.

Naomi and Ruth now take up residence in Bethlehem. However, due to their limited resources, it is necessary Ruth labor to gather the left-over crops for their substance. You will recall from the law of Moses the corners of the fields are not to be cut by the owner, but are left for the poor to gather for their own food. The question of where Ruth should go to gather food is answered by Naomi.

Ruth 2:1-2

**1 And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, or the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.
2 And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.**

Ruth, not knowing the owner of the field, is guided by providence to the field of Boaz. (see Ruth 2:3). Boaz chances to see Ruth gleaming in his field and inquires of his servants.

Ruth 2:5-7

**5 ...Whose damsel is this?
6 And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab;
7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.**

Boaz, recognizing the service that Ruth is providing for her mother-in-law, speaks directly to Ruth.

Ruth 2:8-9

8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:
9 Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee: and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

Ruth is overcome by his generosity to her, a stranger in the land. Boaz explains why he has chosen to be kind to her.

Ruth 2:11-12

11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.
12 The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Boaz believes Ruth has been guided to his field by the Lord. She has not come by chance. He admires her devotion and dedication to her mother in law and the personal sacrifice she has made to come to this land. In his kindness to Ruth, he demonstrates his own character. Boaz does not stop there with his thoughtfulness. He gives further instructions to his young men.

Ruth 2:15-16

15 ...Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:
16 And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

Wright G. Ernest states,

"Harvesting was difficult work and demanded long hours. Young men moved through the fields grasping handfuls of the grain and cutting through the stalks with sickles. These small bunches of grain were then bound into bundles called sheaves. As the men worked rapidly, a number of stalks fell to the ground. If the men were careful and took the time, these too could be gathered up. However, any stalks the dropped were allowed to remain where they fell. Poor people, following the reapers, were permitted to 'glean,' or gather the random stalks-possibly all that stood between them and starvation. In addition, the edges of the field, where the sickle was not as easily wielded, were left unharvested. The poor were welcome to that portion as well." (Great People of the Bible and How They Lived. Pleasantville, New York: Reader's Digest Association, 1974, 129).

Because of Boaz's generosity, Ruth is able to gather more than she would have been able were she confined only to the edges of the fields. Ruth now returns home to share the days gleaning with her mother-in-law and her meeting with Boaz.

Ruth 2:19-20

19 And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.
20 And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

Unknown to Ruth she had been guided by the Lord to one of Naomi's living relatives. His generosity to Ruth leads Naomi to recognize the Lord's protective hand over each of them and gives her hope for a better day. As a result of Boaz's offer, Ruth will continue to glean from his fields through both the barley and wheat harvest. (see Ruth 2:23).

Naomi now sees the possibility of marriage for her daughter-in-law.

Ellis T. Rasmussen clarifies,

"Naomi wanted to help her faithful daughter-in-law secure a husband and family. To do this Naomi considered the levirate marriage, a practice that had prevailed for many years in Israel...[see Deuteronomy 25:5-10 for the scriptural

reference for the levirate marriage obligation in Israelite families]...The function of the Hebrew go'el, rendered in the King James English translation as 'kinsman' is correctly translated as 'redeemer.' The function of a go'el was to make it possible for a widow who had lost home and property to return to her former status and security and to have seed to perpetuate her family." (Introduction to the Old Testament and Its Teachings, Vol. 1. Second Edition. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1972, 157).

Following the custom of her people, Naomi gives Ruth instructions as to how she is to communicate to Boaz her interest in him as a potential husband. Ruth, in spite of being a foreigner, demonstrates her complete trust in her mother-in-law, notwithstanding the possibility that the customs of marriage amongst her people may be entirely different.

Ruth 3:2-5

2 ...Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.
3 Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.
4 And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.
5 And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.

Ruth went to the threshing floor and followed her mother-in-law's instructions precisely.

Ruth 3:8-9

8 And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.
9 And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

Ellis T. Rasmussen notes,

"When Boaz awoke from his sleep by the pile of grain (which he and the others were guarding, as was customary at harvest time), he was startled by Ruth's presence. She was direct in her response, for the Hebrew word meaning 'skirt' is also the word meaning 'wing.' Her request, therefore, was not unlike our idiom, 'take me under your wing': it was a proposal of marriage." (A Latter-Day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 227).

Boaz is pleased with Ruth's offer, commends her for her virtue, and takes upon himself to speak to the nearest kin.

Ruth 3:10-12

10 And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.
11 And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.
12 And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.

True to his word, Boaz goes the next day to the gate of the city in order to speak to Naomi's next of kinsman. Initially, the kinsman desires to honor the obligation and receives "a parcel of land," he is interested in, until he learns there is more than land involved.

Ruth 4:5-6

5 Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.
6 And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.

Boaz now concludes the legal transaction as he, being the next kinsman, desires to fulfill all the obligations of the levirate marriage obligation.

Ruth 4:9-10

**9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people,
Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that
was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's,
of the hand of Naomi.
10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have
I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the
dead upon his inheritance that the name of the dead be
not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of
his place: ye are witnesses this day.**

The way is now open for the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.

Ruth 4:13, 17

**13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he
went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she
bare a son.
17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying,
There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name
Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.**

Stephen D. Ricks states,

"[D]espite the fact that [Ruth] was a foreigner, ...through God's love she was permitted to become a mother in Israel and to play an even larger role in God's design as the ancestress of David (see Ruth 4:22) and his greater Son Jesus (Matthew 1:1)." ("Ruth" in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 256).

As we conclude our study of the book of Ruth, I am aware of how divine providence guided her life. She was determined to return to Bethlehem with Naomi despite Naomi's reluctance for her to leave her land. She came primarily in order to care for her mother-in-law with whom both sisters-in-law had developed a special relationship. You will recall both wept at the possibility of separation (see Ruth 1:9). Ruth was determined and would not be persuaded otherwise. She was a hard worker providing for the daily needs of her mother-in-law. Her industry, commitment, and total obedience to Naomi brought the admiration of many, including her future husband.

While there may be many reasons why the book of Ruth is included in our scriptures, I believe one reason is the fact that like many of us, she was a very common individual who sought only to do what was already a part of her character, to care for others with no desire for recognition or honor. In the process, she was blessed beyond measure by the Lord for her kindness. Her life reminds me of the words of Jesus, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

6. Conclusions

The Old Testament Institute Student Manual observes,

"The Canaanites and Philistines are gone today. But are not the offspring of their gods, metamorphosed into modern form and made intellectually acceptable, still with us? And what of apathy, disobedience, vacillation, and rebellion? Is not our greatest enemy within? If so, then the same kind of courage displayed by...[Deborah, Gideon, and Ruth] is as necessary now as it was then." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 257).

We must also not forget the lessons to be learned from the life of Samson. Samson's misfortunes began when his confidence in God turned into conceit and pride. His life of self-indulgence, immorality, selfish seeking revenge, and violation of the covenant turned his life into one of the great tragedies of history.

Israel forsook her covenants with the Lord and, according to Judges 17:6 and 21:25, "...every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Israel's problems, however, did not stem from the pagan masses they faced. They lay within their own hearts. Their greatest enemies were not the power-hungry Midianites or Moabites but inward vacillation, apathy, disobedience, and rebellion. Their outward enemies raged through them constantly only because their inward weaknesses raged unchecked also. If we can learn this lesson as individuals and as a nation, then the message of the Old Testament will truly have been written within our hearts, and not just in our heads.