

# Lesson 19 - The Reign of the Judges

## Judges 1 - 21

### Purpose

To encourage class members to seek influences that will strengthen them in living the gospel in a challenging world.

My lessons take a different path than the Gospel Doctrine lesson manual. The lesson outline looks closer at the doctrinal topics included in the lesson purpose and scripture block. The lessons are designed to challenge mature, active Latter-Day Saints who have a solid Gospel foundation and are looking for insights into the scriptures that will broaden their faith and understanding.

If you are interested in downloading the Powerpoint file, links to source material or reading posts about improving Gospel Doctrine class preparation, delivery and engagement, you can join my Facebook Group and have full access to the content posted there. The link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188904648521022/>



## **Last Week's Lesson Challenge**

In some of his final words to the Israelites, Joshua challenged them to make a choice – serve themselves and man or serve Jehovah. He led by example – “for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Consider this week how many times you choose between yourself, humankind and the Lord. Further consider how you could choose the Lord over other things on a more consistent basis.

Would anyone share their thoughts or experiences on this subject?

## **The Book of Judges - Why Study This Book?**

The book of Judges recounts the history of the children of Israel from the time they settled in the land of Canaan after Joshua's death to the birth of Samuel (approximately 1400–1000 B.C.). Besides the short narrative of the book of Ruth, Judges provides the only biblical account of this time period.

The book of Judges describes a cycle that repeated itself multiple times during the reign of the judges. Because the Israelites failed to remove wicked influences from the promised land, they became entangled in sin and were conquered and afflicted by their enemies. After the Israelites cried unto the Lord for help, He sent judges to deliver them from their enemies. However, the Israelites soon returned to their sins, and this cycle was repeated. (See Judges 2:11–19.)

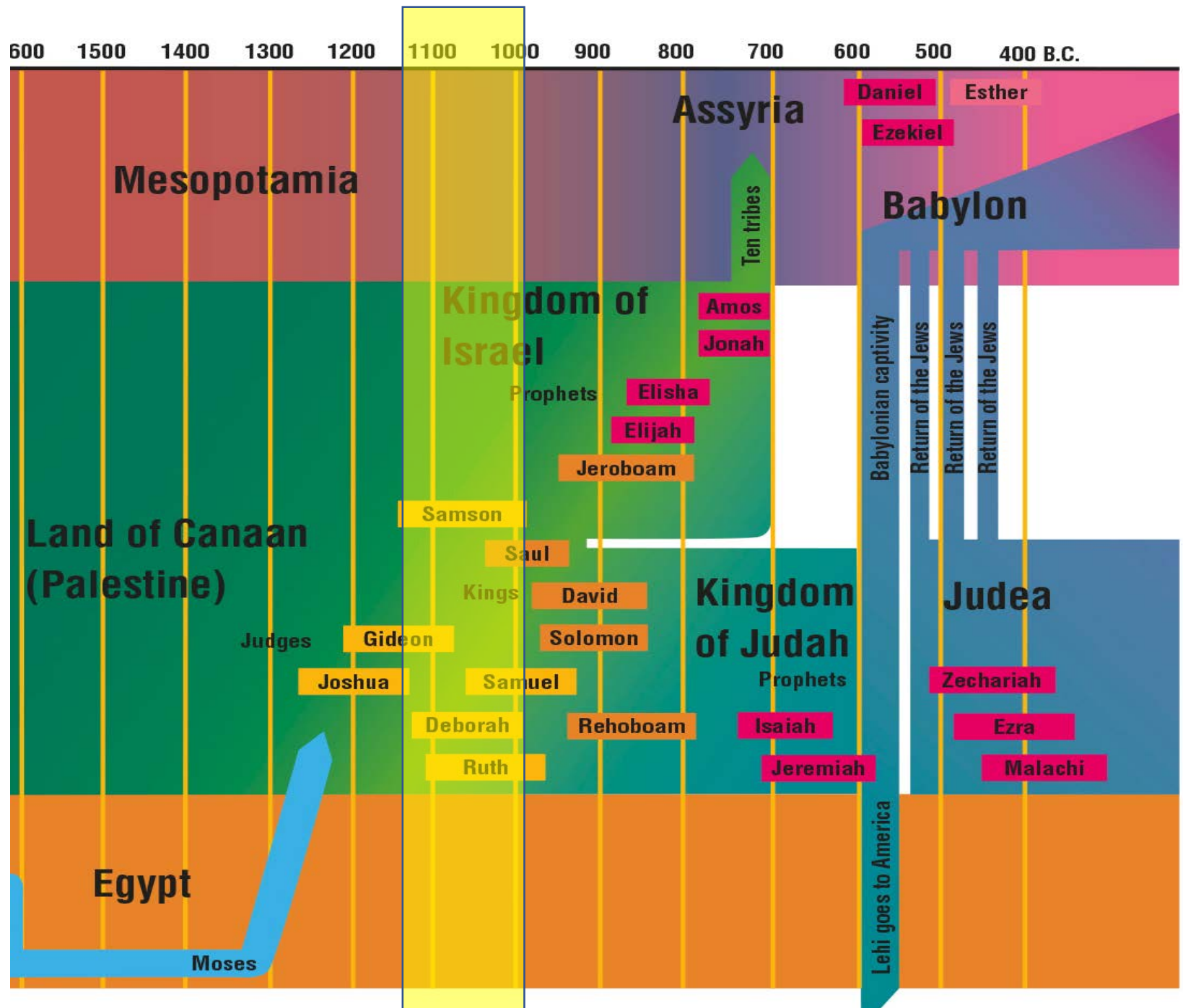
The book mentions the names of 12 judges who ruled with various degrees of effectiveness. The account of Deborah as a judge of Israel is unique considering the patriarchal society in which she served (see Judges 4–5). Gideon, like many who are called and chosen by the Lord, felt he was an unlikely leader (see Judges 6:15), but because the Israelites trusted in the Lord, he and 300 soldiers achieved victory over an immense Midianite army (see Judges 7–8).

Samson is another notable figure in the book of Judges (see Judges 13–16). The distinctive story of the events leading up to his birth parallels the accounts of other important figures in the Bible (e.g., Moses, Samuel, John, Jesus), whose births are reported to emphasize divine involvement in and the significance of their life's mission. Despite this promising beginning and the great physical strength the Lord had given him, Samson ultimately failed to help the Israelites turn to the Lord and forsake their sins, which they needed to do before the Lord would deliver them from their enemies.

In Judges 17–21 we read about the lawlessness and disorder among the tribes of Israel under the judges as they placed their trust in the wisdom of men and chose to disobey the commandments of the Lord. In the closing sentence of the book, the writer says, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

<https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-study-guide-for-home-study-seminary-students-2015/introduction-to-judges?lang=eng>

# The Book of Judges in the Old Testament Timeline



# The Judges (Eli and Samuel are included from 1 Samuel)

1. Othniel	40 years	(Judges 3:9-11)	Edomite Oppression
2. Ehud	80 years	(Judges 3:15-30)	Edomite Oppression
3. Shamgar	Unknown	(Judges 3:31, Judges 5:6)	Moabite Oppression
4. Deborah/Barak	40 years	(Judges 4:4-5:31)	Canaanite Oppression
5. Gideon	40 years	(Judges 6:11-8:32)	Midianite Oppression
6. Abimelech	3 years	(Judges 9:1-57)	Midianite Oppression
7. Tola	23 years	(Judges 10:1-2)	Midianite Oppression
8. Jair	22 years	(Judges 10:3-5)	Midianite Oppression
9. Jephthah	6 years	(Judges 11:1-12:7)	Ammonite Oppression
10. Ibzan	7 years	(Judges 12:8-10)	Ammonite Oppression
11. Elon	10 years	(Judges 12:11-12)	Ammonite Oppression
12. Abdon	8 years	(Judges 12:13-15)	Ammonite Oppression
13. Samson	20 years	(Judges 13:1-16:31)	Philistine Oppression
14. Eli	40 years	(1 Sam 1:1-4:18)	Philistine Oppression
15. Samuel	12 years	(1 Sam 2:18-4:1)	Philistine Oppression



## How Do the Judges Fit Into the Time and Organization of Israel During Their Time?

### Judges 2:11 – 13

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.

<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/ot/judg/2.11-13?lang=eng#p10>

During Joshua's life, Israel was united behind him and their cause to conquer Canaan. However, they grew tired of war and failed to rid Canaan of its inhabitants as Jehovah had told them to do.

After Joshua's death, Jehovah did not choose a single prophet / leader, like Moses or Joshua, and Israel went back to its tribal origins. Israel was a loose confederation of tribes.

In Israel's disobedience to Jehovah, the surrounding nations (Edom, Midian, Ammon, Philistia, etc) conquered and subjugated them. In what is called the **"cycle of apostasy"** (Sound familiar – Book of Mormon)

- Israel would cry to Jehovah
- Jehovah would call a "judge" to call Israel to repentance and unite
- Israel would repent
- The Judge would lead Israel with Jehovah's blessing and they would overcome their oppressors
- Israel would prosper and forget Jehovah and the cycle would start again

There are three judges that play the most significant role during their time – Deborah, Gideon and Samson. The remainder of our lesson will focus on their stories.

The story of Deborah, a prophetess, and Barak is found in Judges 4 – 5. She was a judge for 40 years and lived during the Canaanite oppression of Israel.

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.*



<https://www.thoughtco.com/deborah-israels-only-female-judge-701157>



## **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 47:22). 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.)

## Judges 4:6-9

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.

[Judges 4:10-17](#) – King James Version

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.

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.

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.

NIV Version

10 There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

11 Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law,[a] and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh.

12 When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor,

13 Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him.

15 At Barak's advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

16 Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left.

17 Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.

## Judges 5 – The Song of Deborah and Barak

Like other examples we have studied in the Old Testament, Jehovah is praised by Deborah and Barak in the form of a “song”. Today, we would refer to Deborah’s “song” as a poem, or a form of poetic praise to Jehovah. In the literary form of it’s time, “songs” we not necessarily sung, but were a high form of praise to Jehovah.

Deborah and Barak’s song recounts the events that led to Jehovah’s victory and how miracles are performed to pave the way for Israel battle.

There is one poignant and memorable verse in Judges 5 as Deborah, “a mother in Israel”, is summoned by Jehovah to bring together the armies of Israel’s tribes to free Israel from oppression.

### Judges 5:7

*The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.*

Judges 6 – 8 tell the story of Gideon. Elder Manfred H. Schütze, Area Authority Seventy taught the following in an April 2002 Ensign article (Next 5 slides).

Every year for seven years a powerful confederation of nomadic tribes from southeastern Palestine had overrun the land of Israel. This was done each year at harvesttime, not by armies arrayed for battle, but with people “as grasshoppers for multitude.” They invaded, pitching their tents and grazing their animals as they wandered through the land. So devastating were these migrations that they stripped the land of everything that could sustain life (see Judg. 6:1–5). The Midianites were like unwelcome distant relatives who came each year and stayed too long, eating the Israelites out of house and home.

So impoverished and desperate were the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. The first thing the Lord did was send a prophet, whose name is unknown, to rebuke Israel for its disobedience (see Judg. 6:7–10). Next, He sent an angel to a young man named Gideon as he secretly threshed wheat under an oak tree, hoping to keep the grain from the Midianites. The angel said: “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior. ... Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand.”



## “I Am the Least”

Gideon did not think he was a mighty warrior and replied, “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.” The angel replied, “Surely I will be with thee and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man” (Judg. 6:15–16; emphasis added). To smite as one man means that the vast masses of Midianites would be conquered as if they were but a lone man. This seemed unbelievable to Gideon, so he asked the angel for a sign, to prove that he was truly sent from God. Evidence was duly provided, and Gideon bowed in humble submission to the Lord’s call (see Judg. 6:17–24).

The first task the Lord gave Gideon was not to save all Israel from the Midianites but to cleanse the sin of idolatry from his father’s household. This he did bravely, going forth by night with 10 friends and destroying the altar and worship area of the false god Baal used by his father and his community leaders. This made the leaders angry.

When they learned that it was Gideon who had done this act, they demanded that Joash, Gideon’s father, surrender him for punishment by death. To his credit, Joash defended his son before the hostile crowd, saying, “If Baal really is a God, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.” Thus Gideon’s service in his new calling as a “mighty warrior” not only confronted idolatry, it awakened spirituality in his own father. This exploit earned Gideon a new name, Jerubbaal, which means “he that striveth with Baal”.

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/2002/04/the-sword-of-the-lord-and-of-gideon?lang=eng>

Having established himself in the eyes of the people as a servant of God, Gideon became more confident in doing what the Lord commanded. As harvest time neared, the Midianites again gathered, this time in the valley of Jezreel. “The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet,” mustering an army of 32,000 men from throughout Israel (see Judg. 6:34). Gideon then asked for and received a spiritual confirmation that the Lord would save Israel (see Judg. 6:36–40). So off to battle they went, camping at the well of Harod.

“The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands,” the Lord told Gideon (Judg. 7:2). The Lord was concerned that when the battle was won, the Israelites would think that they, not the Lord, had gained the victory. The Lord told Gideon to send home anyone who was “fearful and afraid.” Some 22,000, almost 70 percent, left for home. There were still too many, so the Lord commanded Gideon to have his troops quench their thirst at the nearby spring. Whoever drank water by scooping it into his mouth with his hands was separated from those who knelt at the water’s edge and gulped it directly from the spring. The 300 who drank with their hands were chosen for the battle, and the rest were dismissed (see Judg. 7:1–7).

Gideon was uneasy, worried, and unable to sleep that night. He had only 300 men to drive away the innumerable Midianites. The Lord went to Gideon and told him to immediately go down and eavesdrop on the Midianites. Gideon secreted himself on the edge of camp and overheard two men express fear that the God of Israel would deliver them into the hands of Gideon (see Judg. 7:9–14).

With renewed courage, Gideon awoke his men and organized them into three groups. He equipped each man with a trumpet (ram's horn) and a clay pottery jar with a burning lamp inside. He told them to take positions on the hillside above the Midianites and at his signal blow their horns and break their jars. Normally only a comparatively small number of men in an army carry trumpets. As the Midianites lay sound asleep, the sound of 300 trumpets blaring and jars breaking jolted them to their feet to see the blazing lamps nearby. The battle cry "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" reverberated through the valley (see Judg. 7:20).

Believing they were under attack from thousands of Israelites, the Midianites, in their confusion and terror, began killing each other. They fled southward in disarray. Gideon called out men from the tribe of Ephraim to cut them off in their retreat and force them east across the Jordan River and out of Israelite territory. Thus the Lord had vanquished Israel's enemies without a single Israelite casualty (see Judg. 7:21–25). Truly the Lord had kept His promise to Gideon: "Thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/2002/04/the-sword-of-the-lord-and-of-gideon?lang=eng>

So often the Lord calls inexperienced people to His service and gives them important and decisive assignments. At first, like Gideon, they may be fearful of the task. “If any brother or sister feels unprepared—even incapable—of responding to a call to serve, to sacrifice, to bless the lives of others, remember this truth: ‘Whom God calls, God qualifies.’ He who notes the sparrow’s fall will not abandon the servant’s need.” As we read the stories of those whom the Lord has called out of their weakness, we can have the assurance that we will receive the strength to fulfill callings. “God does not begin by asking us about our ability, but only about our availability, and if we then prove our dependability, he will increase our capability.”

“The Lord has a great work for each of us to do. You may wonder how this can be. You may feel that there is nothing special or superior about you or your ability. ... The Lord can do remarkable miracles with a person of ordinary ability who is humble, faithful, and diligent in serving the Lord and seeks to improve himself. This is because God is the ultimate source of power.”

The Lord showed great patience and understanding with Gideon as he sought to realize his place in the work of the Lord. So will the Lord do with each of us if we will follow His counsel: “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me” (D&C 19:23).

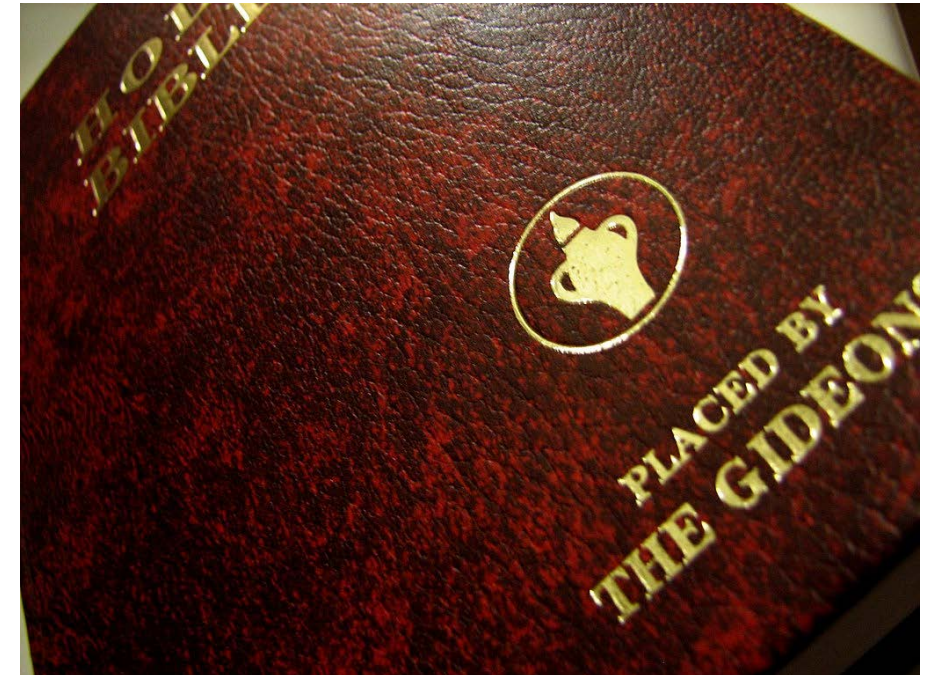
<https://www.lds.org/ensign/2002/04/the-sword-of-the-lord-and-of-gideon?lang=eng>

## More Modern References to Gideon in History

Much like the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, Gideon has become symbolic of military success of a small elite force against overwhelming numerical odds. The 12th-century Prefatio de Almaria invokes "the strength of Samson and the sword of Gideon" in the context of the Reconquista of Almería led by Ponce Giraldo de Cabrera (1147). Benedikt Gletting (16th century) invokes the "Sword of Gideon" in a call for a pious and confident defense of the Old Swiss Confederacy against the threat of the Franco-Ottoman alliance. The Gideon narrative was invoked by Covenanter commander Archibald Strachan prior to Battle of Carbisdale (1650). The Gideon Force was a small British-led special force in the East African Campaign during World War II.

It would seem that Jehovah was correct in minimizing the size of Gideon's army. References to Gideon and his battle today, leave out the most vital feature as to why Gideon's army was only 300 men. Jehovah wanted to make it clear to Israel that He was responsible for their victory and that He would continue to protect them if they would obey Him and live His commandments. Modern references to Gideon omit this important aspect.

In addition, Gideons International is an American organization dedicated to Christian evangelism, founded in 1899, dedicated to the distribution of free Bibles. The organization's logo represents a two-handed pitcher and torch, symbolizing the implements used by Gideon to scare the Midianite army.





The curious story of Samson is found in Judges 13 – 16. The LDS Guide to the Scriptures states the following

*In the Old Testament, the twelfth of the “judges” of Israel. He was known for his great physical strength, but he was not wise in some moral choices and actions (Judg. 13:24–16:31).*

*(<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/gs/samson?lang=eng>)*

The LDS Bible Dictionary adds the following to its description of Samson

*Of the sun. Son of Manoah, and the twelfth of the “judges” of Israel (Judg. 13:24–16:30). He seems to have been a man notorious for his great physical strength but weak in intellectual and moral character.*

*(<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bd/samson?lang=eng>)*

A modern Jewish source had this to say about Samson.

*Samson is the biblical Hercules, a man of super-human strength who nonetheless could not escape tragedy. Samson’s story is found in the Book of Judges chapters 13-16. He is the last of the major judges who led the Israelites, but he is hardly an ideal role model or savior. Samson breaks vows, marries outside of the people of Israel twice, and functions more as a vigilante than a leader. (<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-story-of-samson/>)*

It appears as though Samson is known for both his great strength and also as a poor role model because of the choices he made.

## Judges 13:1 - 5

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.

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.

The distinctive story of the events leading up to Samson's birth parallels the accounts of other important figures in the Bible (e.g., Moses, Samuel, John, Jesus), whose births are reported to emphasize divine involvement in and the significance of their life's mission.

What is a Nazarite ? The Bible Dictionary states the following. *“A consecrated man. A man under a vow to abstain from wine, from any cutting of the hair, and any contact with the dead (Judg. 13:5; 16:17; 1 Sam. 1:11; Amos 2:11–12; for full regulations see Num. 6). The vow might be lifelong, or for a short, definite period.”*

<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bd/nazarite?lang=eng> The Nazarites are defined and explained in Number 6. The Numbers 6 summary states the following: *The law of the Nazarite is explained, whereby the children of Israel may consecrate themselves to the Lord by a vow—They drink no wine nor strong drink and if defiled must shave their heads—The Lord reveals the blessing to be used by Aaron and his sons in blessing Israel.”*

A Nazarite was a man or woman who took a voluntary vow to separate his life for the service of the Lord, or to live consecrated unto Him (see Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary, 1:3:34). Being a Nazarite had nothing to do with coming from the town of Nazareth.

A Nazarite took three vows: he would abstain absolutely from wine or strong drink, including any products of the vine in any form (see Numbers 6:3–4); he would not let a razor touch his head, but would let his hair grow naturally as a crown to God (see Numbers 6:5); and he would not allow himself to draw near a dead person, even a member of his own family (see Numbers 6:6). His life and all his efforts were completely and expressly dedicated to the Lord. This consecrated life bore some resemblance to that of the high priest (see Leviticus 21:10–12). Those who seem to have taken such vows, or had parents who made the vows for them, include Samson (see Judges 13:5), Samuel (see 1 Samuel 1:11, 28), and John the Baptist (see Luke 1:15). In some cases, these Nazarite vows were for life, but more often they were for a specific period of time, after which the person returned to a normal life. (Two instances in the New Testament that seem related to this vow taking are recorded in Acts 18:18–19 and 21:23–26.)

<https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-student-manual-genesis-2-samuel/numbers-1-12-wilderness-wanderings-part-1?lang=eng>

The story of Samson is well known because it has been immortalized in music, theater and film. The following is a summary outline of Samson's life:

- Born to Manoah, a Danite, whose wife was "barren". They are to give up Samson to be a Nazarite and he will deliver Israel from Philistine oppression.
- Samson falls for a Philistine woman; over his parents objections they go to marry her.
- A young lion came upon them and "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him" (14:6)
- Samson kills the young lion with his bare hands.
- Samson returns to the lion carcass and finds bees making honey in it and eats the honey.
- Samson and his father hold a wedding feast for the Philistine woman that is attended by 30 of her companions.
- He gives them a riddle that they must solve in 7 days or give him 7 sheets and garments.
- He gives them a riddle about the lion, bees and honey.
- The companions threaten the woman to get the answer to the riddle from Samson. She cries to Samson over the 7 days and finally tells her the answer. She passes it on to her companions.
- The companions tell Samson the answer, he is very angry and goes to Ashkelon and kills 30 men, strips them of their clothes and give the clothes to the 30 companions.
- He returns, "burning with anger", to his father's home and his wife is given to one of his friends at the wedding.
- Samson has second thoughts and returns to his wife's home with a goat as a present and her father refuses to let him see her.
- In his anger, Samson catches 300 foxes and ties them in pairs by the tail. He attaches a torch to each pair and lets them loose in the Philistine grain fields, orchards and vineyards. The Philistine harvest is destroyed by fire.
- The Philistines burn his wife and her father because of what Samson has done. They march 3,000 soldiers to Judah.
- The Judeans take Samson prisoner to turn him over to the Philistines. When he sees the Philistines coming to get him, he is enraged and kills 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.

- Samson is enticed by Delilah, a Philistine, and marries her.
- The Philistines ask Delilah to find the source of Samson's strength so that they can kill him.
- Samson lies to Delilah three times about his strength and each time she fails in subduing him.
- She finally pleads with him to tell her and he tells her that his strength is that he has never cut his hair.
- During his sleep, Delilah cuts his hair and his strength has gone. The Philistines capture him and she is paid.
- Samson must have been in the Philistine prison for years as his hair grows back. Why don't keep his hair short is a mystery.
- Samson is brought before the Philistines to entertain them.
- He asks a servant to take him to the pillars of the temple that surrounds them and the Philistines.
- Samson prays to Jehovah for strength and he begins to push against the pillars that hold up the temple which begins to collapse.
- Samson and his captors are killed as the temple falls.
- Samson's body is found by his family and is taken back to buried in the family tomb.



## 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.

## 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 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.

## **This Week's Lesson Challenge**

The stories of Deborah, Barak, Gideon and Samson provide us very different responses to Jehovah's commandments. Deborah, Barak and Gideon were faithful and followed the commandments and promptings they were given. They prospered and Israel was saved from their oppressors. Samson did the opposite. He lived his life the way he wanted to, often the opposite of the commandments. He was hurt throughout his adult life, was imprisoned and ultimately died as he returned to Jehovah's commandments. Israel did not prosper during Samson's time, actually the opposite.

The choices we make are simple, to follow the commandments and the promptings we receive or to live as we please forsaking those things. As you make choices this week, consider what is your motivation and purpose. Are you serving yourself or are you serving the Lord.