

JUDGES 2–4; 6–8; 13–16

Introduction

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers Judges 2–4; 6–8; 13–16.

[You can find the LDS outline of study and resources here.](#)

LDS Study Focus

LDS study material will focus on:

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

Biblical Focus

In the book of Judges, Israel has now settled into the promised land, but they disobeyed God and did not drive out all the heathen inhabitants. Because they failed to follow God’s command, Israel faced the constant temptation to turn away from the LORD and toward the gods of the people around them. The Philistines and Canaanites became a bane of their existence for generations to come. These heathen nations introduced God’s people to the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth.

The book of Judges contains a series of cycles. First, Israel rebels, then the Lord sends repression. Israel repents, and the Lord rescues. After a season of rest, the Israelites rebel once again, and the cycle repeats. See [Judges 2:16–19](#) for an excellent summary.

From Joshua to Judges, there is a subtle shift in themes. The exodus and journey to the promised land focused on Israel’s deliverance from slavery. Israel learned who the LORD was, and God adopted them through faith into his family. But now, during the time of the Judges, the Israelites are a free people, facing new temptations and a new set of enemies. Israel repeatedly turned to idols and forsook the Lord and thus repeatedly needed to be rescued from *herself*.

A significant subtheme throughout the book of Judges is the juxtaposition of man’s weakness and God’s strength.

JUDGES 2–4

Throughout Judges, God repeatedly raised leaders called “judges” to rebuke, rescue, and redirect his people so that they would not end up destroying themselves. When you hear “judge” in the Bible, don’t think ruler of a court of law so much as a tribal chieftain or military commander/leader.

Although it might be appealing to place these judges on a high pedestal, as you will see, they were complicated and sinful human beings, just like the people they led. Their stories included in this book show the tendency of human nature to get worse rather than better during times of success, safety, and security.

The stories of the judges Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, and Barak, filled with violence and gruesome bloodshed, sound more like the ingredients for the plot of a cable television series than about the workings of God. However, each one served as God’s instrument to deliver and direct the affairs of his people physically and ultimately spiritually.

Conversation Starter:

- **In what ways did the Israelites need to be rescued from themselves?**
- **In what ways do we need to be rescued from ourselves?**
- **What idols of fertility, prosperity, love, and war are people drawn towards today?**

Sharing Personally:

Unlike the people of Israel in Judges 2–4, I may not have the same temptation to worship Baal and Ashtoreth, the ancient gods of fertility, prosperity, love, and war. Unfortunately, however, I am all too susceptible to the idols of this age that equally urge and entice me to find peace, pleasure, and prosperity from them.

Thankfully, as God did by sending judges to rescue and redirect his people Israel, God has sent a true and better judge to save me. God then turns my focus away from the worship of the world and all the things of it to himself and the true spiritual peace and prosperity that comes from him alone.

JUDGES 6–8

By this point in Judges, Israel had cycled through rebellion, repression, repentance, rescue, and rest several times. Each cycle opens with the phrase, “Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord.” Just as Joshua had predicted, they could not serve the LORD, and the hand of a jealous God was against them ([Joshua 24:19–20](#)).

According to Judges 6:1–6, God is responsible for the Israelites’ oppression. This detail is essential because it shows that God is not just reacting to events; he is in control. This jealous God was not content to share Israel’s heart with Baal and Asherah but was willing to subject those he loved to pain to redeem them. Only when Israel had become completely desperate did she cry out to the Lord.

God heard their cry and called Gideon to serve the people as a judge. When God first spoke to Gideon, he called him a “mighty warrior.” Was this a joke or a prophecy? Take note of all the ways the Bible points out Gideon’s weakness. You might notice that his insecurities and calling are like Moses’.

- v. 11 Gideon is hiding his harvest work in the winepress. Threshing was usually done out in the open with the help of animals.
- v. 13 Gideon’s words reveal a lack of faith in the LORD.
- v. 15 Gideon is the least of the weakest.
- v. 17 Gideon asks for a sign.
- v. 27 Gideon was afraid.
- v. 36 Gideon asks for another sign.
- v. 39 Gideon asks for a third sign.

Gideon’s first battle for the Lord was against his fears, family, and Baal and Asherah. His actions insulted, mocked, and defiled the gods of his community and family.

Gideon’s father Joash’s remarkable response is like that of Elijah later with the prophets of Baal on top of Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18). *If Baal is god, he can defend himself.* The name Jerub-Baal means “let Baal sue.” Thus, with his father, Gideon declared the Lord to be his God and all others to be false.

After the account of his calling, the story of Gideon’s most significant “victory” begins with a backdrop of fear and doubt. The name “Spring of Harod” ([Judges 7:1](#)) mimics the Hebrew word for fear. Mount Gilead ([Judges 7:3](#)) means “mountain of fear.” The Israelites were filled with terror.

Gideon’s feeling of panic undoubtedly increased as God whittled down his army to a mere 300 men. From man’s perspective, the army went from “*maybe we have a chance to do some damage*” to “*trying anything is utterly insane.*” As we have seen throughout Israel’s history, God prefers to rescue the weak and lowly with impossible odds. What logical hope did 300 men have? Knowing Gideon’s needs, God graciously gave him yet another sign to strengthen his confidence and trust in him.

Just as he had done many times before, the Lord gave the Israelites the victory against all human odds. He showed his strength and power in the face of weakness. Moreover, he reminded his unfaithful bride, Israel, of his undying love and commitment to her.

Gideon's part in the story ends with a significant failure on his part. If we were writing a history of leaders, we might redact this part. However, it may teach us our need for a better savior, a mightier warrior. Gideon's ephod, made from the gold of the war spoils, went from trophy to idol. Why didn't he destroy it like he had the other false gods? Was it his ego or his own need for an idol to worship?

Another lesson that this account teaches is that good leaders are hard to come by. There are no "good" leaders; all are corrupted by sin. Gideon's failure left Israel longing for a better, perfect savior, a mightier warrior who would end all wars forever and overcome idolatry to restore us to God permanently.

Mormons significantly elevate their modern and ancient leaders. Help them see that the men that God chose were sinners just like us that God was able to use for his purposes. Often LDS members point out the tremendous moral character of the individuals in the Book of Mormon and in the early history of the LDS church. Help them understand that there are no genuinely moral people, and that God is ultimately the one in control and the one doing the preserving and saving work.

Conversation Starter:

- **What would you say to someone who thinks God is cruel?**
- **In what way is God jealous for *our* hearts?**
- **How does pain make us desperate for the LORD's help?**
- **Why do you think God picked a weak man with wimpy faith to be his tool for saving Israel?**
- **Talk about the purpose of pain. Does it always have a purpose? For what reasons might we suffer?**
- **How does Joash's (Gideon's father's) speech set up the rest of the story? ([Judges 6:31–32](#)) Can we have similar expectations for God?**
- **How would the story of Gideon's great victory be different if he had been allowed to fight with his full-sized army?**
- **Think back to Gideon's calling. The LORD called him a "mighty warrior." Why did God call him that? In what sense was it true? In what sense was it not true?**
- **Who is the mightiest warrior?**

Sharing Personally:

The story of Gideon in Judges 6–8 shows us what kind of a remarkable and reliable God we have. Like Moses before him, God chose Gideon, a man who didn't want the job to serve as the instrument of his divine deliverance.

Also, like with Moses, God used unconventional means to bring about rescue, proving that true victory doesn't come by the strength of man but by the power of God. Finally, God demonstrated to Gideon and us today that he is a God who is reliable in all he says and does.

Today, we, like Gideon, based on what God has said and done, can act in faith and follow God's directions for ultimate deliverance even when they seem foolish in the eyes of the world.

JUDGES 13–16

Perhaps the greatest of the judges, Samson, was given great physical power and a divine calling to deliver Israel. Yet his propensity toward arrogance and lust led him to a painful outcome that only God could redeem.

Once again, Israel cycled through rebellion, repression, repentance, rescue, and rest. Before Samson, the Israelites had suffered under the oppression of the Philistines for forty years.

The story of the miraculous birth of Samson is highlighted by the command for a unique and confusing Nazarite vow. A Nazarite was to avoid alcohol, grapes, and dead bodies. Uncut hair indicated that the vow taker was still actively keeping his vow. Once the vow time ended, he would ceremoniously shave his head. Samson's Nazarite vow was unique. Usually, this vow was temporary, but his vow began while he was in the womb. Also, this vow was connected to the calling that God had given Samson and the delivery of Israel ([Judges 13:5](#)).

After such a miraculous birth announced by the Angel of the Lord himself, how could we not be gravely disappointed? This man whom God called to rescue Israel from Philistia now demanded to intermarry with the Philistines.

Included in the details of Samson's story there is the odd little side story about the lion. First, the Spirit of the Lord gave him the power to overcome the lion, but soon after, Samson despises his Nazarite vow by touching the carcass to retrieve honey in its caverns. Later, Samson arrogantly uses his trespass to inspire his risky bet with the Philistines. Finally, God used even this to set Samson on a path toward defeating the Philistines. The following few chapters present a roller coaster of violence and revenge between the Philistines and Samson. The writer repeatedly reminds us that the "Spirit of the Lord was with him."

Samson then went on to lead Israel for twenty years. Through the strength given to him by God, he killed thousands of Philistines, making himself their number one enemy and at the top of their hit list. Finally, the Philistines enlisted one of their own, a woman named Delilah, to bring down Samson.

By now, we have established that Samson is not good at relationships. In Hebrew, the name Delilah means "to bring someone low" and "night." A fascinating name for the context!

We won't rehash the whole story here but recall information about the Nazarite vow ([Numbers 6](#)). The symbolic ending of the vow included cutting off the hair of the individual. Thus, when Samson allowed a razor to be used on his head, he ended the Nazarite vow, and the Lord left him. Unfortunately, Samson arrogantly assumed that he controlled his strength and he tested the Lord. The result was slavery.

In the temple of Dagon, Samson is thoroughly humiliated. Only from such a low point is Samson able to look up to God. His prayer implies repentance and complete reliance on the Lord for strength. (See [Hebrews 11:32](#) and the following for more information about Samson's faith.)

Like many other Biblical characters, Samson leaves us longing for a more substantial deliverer. Nevertheless, his life points forward to Christ. Help your Mormon friends wrestle with Samson's inconsistent and immoral character.

Conversation Starters:

- Read [Judges 13:24](#). Why did Samson have the gift of strength? (It is not because of his hair.)
- What were Samson's weaknesses?
- Read [Judges 14:4](#). How do we make sense of the phrase, "This was from the Lord?"
- Read [2 Corinthians 12:9](#). Why did God choose Samson? Why did God choose you?
- Why did Samson's strength return at the end of his story? Was it deserved? Upon whom did he rely?
- How can self-reliance lead us back to slavery?
- What role does humiliation play in the life of the Christian?
- Compare and contrast Samson and Jesus.

Sharing Personally:

When I read Judges 13–16, I think, "If only Samson had behaved better. Can you imagine all he could have done for Israel?"

My inner Pharisee is infuriated that God chose Samson and remained alongside him despite his arrogance and repeated moral failures. Why pick him?

If I get off my pedestal and explore how similar I am to Samson, there is grace hidden alongside our failures.

Can God even use my arrogance for his glory? Can God turn my acts of self-interest into blessings for his kingdom?

Despite my failings, God's will prevails. Therefore, I am still included in God's work despite my sins.