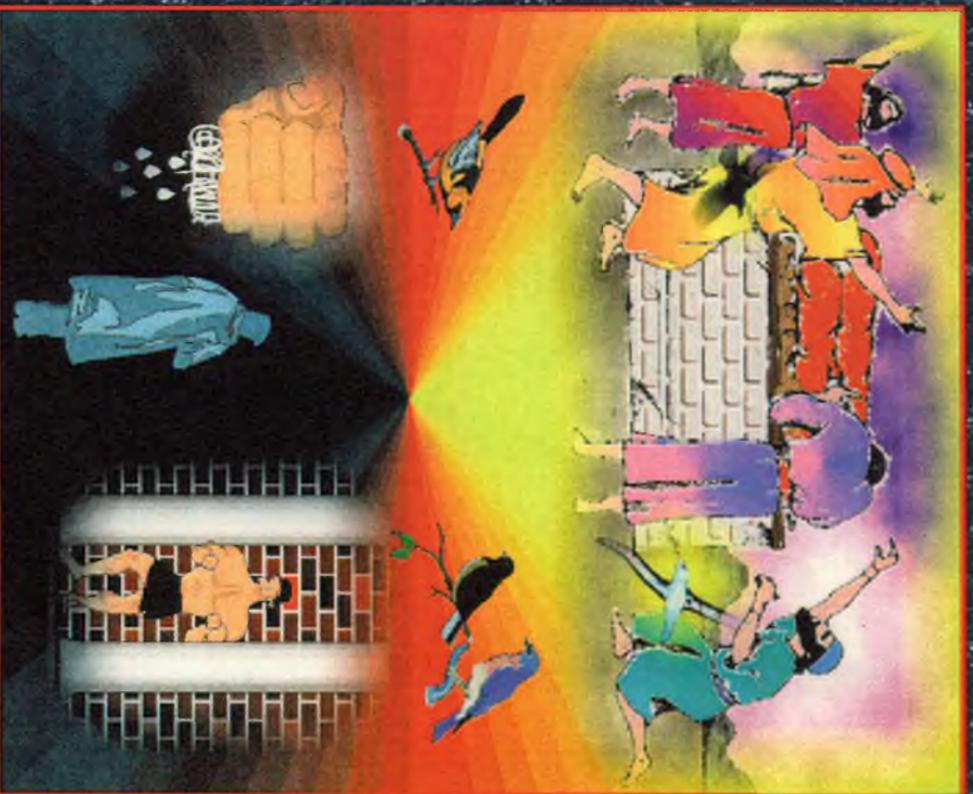


APRIL-JUNE 1990

GU

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

Judges: Heroes and Heroines



CAN YOU FIND THE PAINTER?

It took art historians years...

To understand what a 15th-century painting is all about takes a certain kind of detective work. For example, art historians in this century were surprised to find that the artist, Jan van Eyck, has included a tiny portrait of himself.

Where? Check the details.

This scene depicts the marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini, a successful merchant in Flanders (now Belgium), and Giovanna Cenami. The year is 1434.

The painting is a kind of marriage certificate, complete with dates and signatures. Yet at the same time, as a work of art, elaborate detail and symbolism are used to convey the sacredness of matrimony.

For example, the shoes not being worn signify that the two are on sacred ground.

The dog represents fidelity, coming from the Latin word for canine: Fido.

Fruit on the window sill refers to the fruitfulness of marriage. The traditional role of woman as wife and mother is implicit in the pregnant appearance of Giovanna.

Still don't see the artist? Look on the back wall and find the round mirror. On careful inspection you should see two tiny figures in the reflection—the legally required witnesses to the ceremony. One is probably a family friend, the other is the artist, Jan van Eyck. The whole concept of this painting signalled

a new approach to art. A period that would be known as the Renaissance.



Jan van Eyck, *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride*, 1434, oil on wood, 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", National Gallery, London

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JUDGES: HEROES AND HEROINES

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Sabbath
School

JUDGES: HEROES AND HEROINES



Contents & Contributors

- 1 Unfinished Business** _____ **10**
Glenorchy (Tasmania) Seventh-day Adventist Church
Editor: Glenn Townend
Contributors:
 Lisa Butler Nigel Fehlberg Cynthia Sleight Meyles
 Gino Dal Pont Heather McCourt Glenn Townend
- 2 Ups and Downs** _____ **18**
Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Editor: Silvia Renata de Souza Marski
Contributors:
 Elmar Storch Borges Keily Archanjo Mansor Silvia Renata de Souza Marski
 Viviani Prego Fragoso Artur Elias Marski Ezequias Rodrigues dos Santos
- 3 Don't Miss the Point** _____ **26**
Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada
Editor: Steve Little
Contributors:
 Shawn Brummund Brian Leavitt Steve Little
 Timothy Dunfield Laurie Little David Schwinghammer
- 4 Defeating Your Siseras** _____ **34**
Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama
Editor: Sherman Cox
Contributors:
 Lisa Bishop Ann-Marie C. Buchanan Sherman Haywood Cox II
 Kesslyn A. Brade S. Haywood Cox Roger Wade
- 5 Signs of Security** _____ **42**
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland
Editor: Jeff Scoggins
Contributors:
 Carla J. Bass Soraya Lola Homayouni Jeff Scoggins
 Patty Davis Rick Kajjura Darcy Smith
- 6 A Few Good Men** _____ **50**
Pacific Union College, Angwin, California
Editor: Mike Dunn
Contributors:
 David Appel Mike Dunn Bryn Seyle
 Jeremy Duerksen Mark C. Phillips Eric Welty

- 7 Royalty and Disloyalty** _____ **58**
University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Eldoret, Kenya
Editor: Lester A. Parkinson
Contributors:
Steve R. Apola Mary Laabs Mesfin Mandefro
Kebebe Daka Michael Kuyenga Lim Lester A. Parkinson
- 8 Repentance or Rash Promises?** _____ **66**
Antillean Union College, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico
Editor: Sandra E. Araújo
Contributors:
Sandra E. Araújo Jorge L. Figueroa Leroy Miller
Javier Díaz Gretchen López Carlos Moretta
- 9 Born to Win** _____ **74**
Montevideo (Uruguay) Central Seventh-day Adventist Church
Editor: David Brinckhaus
Contributors:
David Brinckhaus Daniel Costa Gisalle Sturralde
Rut Brinckhaus Mario Vilar Gabor Kenny Vicente
Becher Cabrera Pamela Sicalo
- 10 The Ungolden Rule** _____ **82**
Eastside Seventh-day Adventist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana
Editor: Clarence E. Hodges, Jr.
Contributors:
Clarence E. Hodges, Jr. Ruben D. Luna Martí Damon Spight
Loretta Martí
- 11 Tragedy and Triumph** _____ **90**
Bellevue (Washington) Seventh-day Adventist Church
Editor: Maylan Schurch
Contributors:
Marion Burt Jim Learned Maylan Schurch
Marian Brincken Forschler R. E. Owens Cecille Thompson
- 12 Misguided Devotion** _____ **98**
Stillwater (Oklahoma) Seventh-day Adventist Church
Editor: Robin Widmayer Sagel
Contributors:
Aaron Gates Jeremy Lynch Christine Mitchell
Joseph Gates Monica Lynsky Robin Widmayer Sagel
- 13 Civil War** _____ **106**
Ann Arbor (Michigan) Seventh-day Adventist Church
Editor: James A. Stringham
Contributors:
Lorin Christensen Lucy Kwon Janell Stringham
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Welcome to *CQ*'s World!

The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writing groups that have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School quarterly, more than 300 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000. It is published in the English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Finnish languages.

Have you wondered?

■ You've read a lesson that particularly intrigued you. Is there a way to give **CQ** some direct feedback? ■ You have a particularly fulfilling personal Bible study approach and wonder if others might benefit if it were applied to the **CQ** lessons. ■ Or maybe you're looking for a way to get your young adults' group more involved in Bible study.

There's a simple answer . . .

. . . write for CQ.

The very best way of sharing your ideas and reactions to our lessons is to tell us. In fact, we couldn't survive without reader input. But an even better way to get involved is to become a contributing writer for **CQ**. Tell us you're interested by writing to the **CQ Editorial Office, Department of Church Ministries, General Conference of SDAs, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A.** Or call (301) 680-6160.

CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

This Quarter's Artists



Marcos and Arlene Leão, the illustrators for this quarter's issue of *CQ*, live and work in Brasilia, Brazil. Arlene teaches art at the Seventh-day Adventist school there and works with the hearing impaired as well. Her artwork was exhibited at the third South American Adventist Youth Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1990. Marcos, a systems analyst, has frequently focused on the production of computer art. Both have contributed a great deal of their talent to church projects and programs.

Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

Facts You Should Know

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult quarterly find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give yourself an overview of the lesson.

3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

4. Read remaining sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

"Introduction" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"Logos" (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

"Testimony" (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"Evidence" (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

"How-To" (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"Opinion" (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

CQ and the Church

CQ is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.*

UNFINISHED BUSINESS



“I [the Lord] said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you’ ” (Judg. 2:1, NIV).

Who's in Charge?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Judg. 2:2

“Hey, Lord, things would be a lot better around here if You would do the blessing and let *me* make the decisions and do the leading.”

Well, OK, maybe you've never *actually* said those words to God,—yet how many times have you lived them, how many times have you reacted to life with God as though all you want is His blessing for your decisions?

If you are like me, too many times.

It's your life, but who is in charge?

Incat Tasmania builds catamarans—huge aluminum, seagoing catamarans. Their latest “sea cat” was *Condor 11*—700 tons, \$40 million—built for a British company to serve on the English Channel. Each completed vessel is tested on the Derwent River near Hobart, Tasmania, to assure that safety and handling are up to scratch.

On October 8, 1994, at approximately 9:00 p.m., it happened. During high-speed trials, a mistake was made—*Condor 11* hit Black Jack Rock, traveling at top speed, and her momentum pushed her up onto the semisubmerged rock, to

***Condor 11* hit Black Jack Rock, traveling at top speed, and her momentum pushed her up onto the semisubmerged rock.**

finish, parked neatly, high and dry, right next to a flashing warning beacon.

What went wrong? Who was in charge? Whom can we blame?

There were 15 people on the bridge that night. Who took the blame? The man at the helm—the man in charge. Six weeks later, after much head scratching and many unsuccessful attempts by salvage experts, *Condor 11* was finally dragged from the rock by five tugboats. Success came, much to the relief of Incat Tasmania's managing director, Mr. Bob Clifford—the man in charge.

There were problems settling the Promised Land. God asked Israel the crucial question: People, who is in charge around here? (See Judg. 2:2.)

Follow God's directions, agree to His goals—total dependence on God. Is this the formula for success?

Hey, Lord, things would be better around here if You would do the blessing, and . . . yeah, I *depend* on Your leading, as well.

Scary? Exciting? It is your life, but who is in charge? Is God? Are you?

By Nigel Fehlberg, a land developer in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

God Is a Yes-man

LOGOS

Judg. 1:1–2:5

Joshua had led the tribes of Israel into new lands promised to them by God. Just before his death, he reminded the leaders of two things. First, the promise: “The Lord your God himself will drive them [the other nations] out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land” (Josh. 23:5, NIV). Second, He warned of the consequence of associating with the other nations. If Israel did this, the Lord would not drive these nations out, and they would be a snare for Israel (verses 12, 13).

The promise of the land had first been given to Israel’s forefathers. Abram, Isaac, and Jacob had lived in the land, but it was not theirs—yet (Gen. 15:16; 26:3, 4; 28:15). They believed God’s promise by faith (Heb. 11:8-22).

The first chapter of Judges begins positively. The people call on the Lord, and He gives Israel success.

What are the successes that God gives Israel in Judges 1:2-26?

Caleb was one of the only two survivors of the 40 years in the wilderness, yet he conquered the giants of Anak that had terrorized his contemporaries (Num. 13:33; 14:24). By faith Israel took God at His word and received the promise of more land.

However, despite continued success, the tribes lost heart in the face of superior technology (Judg. 1:19) and determined opposition (verses 27, 35). Israel failed to dislodge the other inhabitants (verses 21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33) and instead settled for second best. In time, Israel proved superior and pressed the other nations into forced labor (verses 28, 30, 33, 35), but was that the promise?

Failure to activate God’s promise brought the angel of the Lord to Bokim. The angel’s message had three parts. First, he reminded Israel of God’s promise for land and the covenant the people had willingly entered into with God. Second, the angel exposed the people’s failure to take God at His word. Third, he foretold the consequences of their disobedience and compromise (2:1-3).

The New Testament gives a number of reasons that people do not activate the promise of God.

1. *Satan*: His continual lies undermine trust in God’s promises (Mark 4:15; John 8:44).

2. *Opposition*: Negative opinions of friends, family, and society defeat us (Mark 4:16, 17). We hear and fear the roar of the lion (1 Pet. 5:7) more than we hear or fear the power of God (1 John 5:18). Satan’s seemingly greater technology and control of the world keeps us paralyzed (Judg. 1:19).

3. *Complacency*: We are happy with what we have now. The blessings of God, like land, food, and security, become the care of our world, and we gradually drift into complacency (Mark 4:18, 19; Heb. 2:1).

4. *Weariness and impatience*: Activating God’s promises requires self-discipline and patience. We are encouraged not to become weary but to persevere (Gal. 6:9; Heb. 3:14; 6:12; 10:36).

5. *Unbelief*: We think God could not be that good or that powerful, and our un-

belief turns us away from further promises (Heb. 3:12; Rom. 4:20, 21; Gal. 3:14).

6. *Pride*: We desire God's promises, but we work for them in our own strength, forgetting His grace and power (Rom. 9:32).

7. *Unwillingness to act*: We do not put our money where our mouth is. Faith in God's promise means willingness to do something about it (James 2:17, 18).

Which of the above factors stopped the Israelites in the first chapter of Judges from receiving the complete promise? Which is inhibiting you from taking hold of the full promise of God in Jesus?

God wants to give us many blessings beyond our present experience. These are activated only by faith in Him. The danger in the Christian life is that we lower our belief to the realm of our experience. God desires that the faith He has given us will raise our experiences to the level of belief in His promises. We are to cooperate with God to do what He said He can do.

Many people succeed through drive, vision, dreams, goals, and values, but only faith in God gives us access to:

- the favor, grace, and blessing of God (Rom. 5:2).
- the close fellowship with God (Heb. 11:6).
- complete victory over sin within and without (Eph. 2:8).
- the realm of the miraculous power of God (Mark 11:22-24).

“Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal.”

Which promise do you need to claim now? What great things could God have in store for you?

Since I was a teenager, I've kept a motto that I saw on a poster: "Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal." Israel received partial fulfillment of the promise of God—their goal. But obstacles got in the way. It's true we will have trouble in this world, but Jesus overcame the world (John 16:33), and we can be overcomers in Him (Rom. 8:37). When Christians take their eyes off Jesus and His promises, there are consequences, but when they put their faith in Jesus and activate the promises, they are conquerors.

In his message to the wayward Corinthian church, Paul said, "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20, NIV). God is a Yes-man. He wants us to fulfill all our God-given potential. He does not want our problems to frighten us, but rather to allow those problems to stretch us. God never settles for second best; after all, He gave us His only Son.

In what areas of life are you settling for second best? How do you plan to overcome the obstacles and activate the promises of God?

By Glenn Townend, pastor of the Glenorchy Seventh-day Adventist Church, Berriedale, Tasmania, Australia.

The Danger of Partial Obedience

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Rom. 12:1, 2

God's promises are conditional on the obedience of His people. The Old Testament bears witness to a nation that was favored by God but that persistently failed to fulfill the obedience requirement. Yet how often do we seek to claim God's promises while we obey His directions only to the extent that feels comfortable? In the passages for this week's study is found another instance in Hebrew history of partial obedience to God's command. Of this Ellen G. White has written:

"After the settlement in Canaan the tribes made no vigorous effort to complete the conquest of the land. Satisfied with the territory already gained, their zeal soon flagged, and the war was discontinued. . . .

"The Lord had faithfully fulfilled, on His part, the promises made to Israel; Joshua had broken the power of the Canaanites, and had distributed the land to the tribes. It only remained for them, trusting in the assurance of divine aid, to complete the work of dispossessing the inhabitants of the land. But this they failed to do. By entering into league with the Canaanites they directly transgressed the command of God, *and thus failed to fulfill the condition on which He had prom-*

By entering into league with the Canaanites they directly transgressed the command of God.

ised to place them in possession of Canaan. . . .

"God had placed His people in Canaan as a mighty breastwork to stay the tide of moral evil, that it might not flood the world. If faithful to Him, God intended that Israel should go on conquering and to conquer. He would give into their hands nations greater and more powerful than the Canaanites. . . .

"But regardless of their high destiny, *they chose the course of ease and self-indulgence; they let slip their opportunities for completing the conquest of the land; and for many generations they were afflicted by the remnant of these idolatrous peoples*" (italics supplied).*

In failing to dispossess completely the Canaanites of their land, the Israelites placed their own will ahead of the will of God. They felt satisfied in their achievements, not sensing the danger of secular influences. Critically, the Israelites did not feel a need to change their style for life. The prevailing attitude was one of self-sufficiency rather than complete reliance upon—and commitment to—God. That this led them away from God and His blessings is a warning to us today to maintain complete confidence in, and obedience to, His will as expressed in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 543-545.

Complete Commitment

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Sam. 15:22

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites were without a spiritual and authoritative human leader. While the influence of Moses and Joshua faded, the people wandered from God, each doing what was right in his or her own eyes. As a consequence, the people spiraled back into sin.

At war with the Canaanites, the Israelites were only partially successful. The history of Judges 1 records battle after battle. However, despite these efforts, when the heat of the battle had subsided, the Israelites were inhabiting the mountains, left only to watch the Canaanites in the rich plains of Jezreel below. This divided the nation. In defending their claim of land, the Canaanites succeeded in cutting off national communication.

Why was the Israelites' quest only partially successful? Why had God allowed them to become a divided nation? Was not this the Promised Land?

Israel's failure was a direct result of their refusal to activate God's promises fully. God's promises are conditional and activated only by obedience. The passage in Judges 1:27-36 shows that the people wished to do things their way. God required them to drive out the Canaanites, yet they preferred, instead, to keep

God required them to drive out the Canaanites, yet they preferred, instead, to keep them as slaves.

them as slaves. As a direct result of disobedience, Israel lost contact with its lifeblood—God—and idolatry and sin slowly crept back into the Hebrew camp.

Throughout Old Testament history, Israel failed time and again to fulfill God's conditions completely. We have only to look at the experience of King Saul to find but one instance of this. In his battle with the Amalekites, Saul was commanded not to spare one man, woman, child, or animal. However, thinking only of himself and *his* efforts, Saul kept the king and some animals as victory trophies. He obeyed God only partially. His obedience was not 100 percent. As a direct consequence, Saul was rejected as king (1 Samuel 15).

Today, God offers us the promise of eternal life with Him. However, it is up to us to accept that gift. Acceptance and claim to the gift cannot be made without a *complete commitment* to God. A complete sacrifice of self is required. But remember, you cannot do this alone. God is there, just awaiting your call for His help.

REACT

1. What is our part in fulfilling God's promises?
2. What part does obedience play in fulfilling God's conditions?
3. What are the consequences of sin for us today?
4. What effect does disunity have on the church today?

By Lisa Butler, final-year law-and-commerce student at the University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia.

It's Who You Know

HOW TO

Scripture: Phil. 2:13

The Israelites from the book of Judges had a problem. They needed a homeland, but their success in getting their promised land didn't depend on how talented they were or what good fighters they were. Their success depended upon a relationship with God.

No relationship is static. It either grows closer or farther apart. It never stays in one spot. My personal relationship with God seems to have setbacks at times, but also has the most wonderful growth spurts. Each time He teaches me something new, it's like a window opening to another whole aspect of truth.

Some good ways I've found to develop my relationship with God are:

1. **Be totally honest with Him.** He knows it all anyway.
2. **Begin to chat with Him about what is on your mind while driving to work.** Praise and thank Him—before asking Him for something. Don't feel bad about asking for things. James says we don't receive because we don't ask (4:2). If you struggle with sin, tell Him. Even if it is a sin that you love, tell Him so and ask for His help. You may discover His gentle approach and willingness to make things easy for you in that regard.

3. **Demonstrate what faith you have.** Don't say, "I believe in miracles," unless

If you don't act on your faith, it is not real faith at all.

you plan to ask for one. If you don't act on your faith, it is not real faith at all. The belief that counts here is believing that God *can* rather than that He *will*. You will find God will be glad to encourage you and help you take things one step at a time.

4. **Keep a spiritual diary.** How quickly we forget little spiritual triumphs. Write down what you pray about and what answers to prayer you receive. If you have an opportunity, join a small Bible-study group. Discover the dynamics in finding Jesus together with some like-minded friends. Church is a vital support structure for any Christian. You need the support of your church, and your church, in turn, needs your support.

Sometimes allowing God to show me something new or different can be challenging. If it weren't stimulating, how bored I would be! Take that step of faith, and let Him wash into your soul; enjoy the ebb and flow of the Spirit. That's what the Israelites did not allow, but what you may if you want to.

REACT

1. How can you build relationships of faith?
2. In simple, everyday terms, what does it mean to act on faith?
3. What answers to prayer have you had in the past week?

By Cynthia Sleight Meyles, administrative officer for National Directory Services, Tasmania, Australia.

Choose Your Side

OPINION

Key Text: Josh. 24:15

Once upon a time, there was a group of little people who called themselves “the Royal Descendants.” They took great pride in the fact that they had learned some special knowledge that others did not have. One day, their great leader, King Omni, gave them a special gift. This special gift involved some land. He also gave them the power to make the inhabitants leave. You see, “the Alternatives” (the name of the people living there) did not want the Royal Descendants’ special knowledge. They had devised their own knowledge, which they could change as they pleased.

The Royal Descendants moved into the land, but some of them became friends with the Alternatives. As a result, they chose not to use the power given to them, but they let the Alternatives live on the land with them.

Everything went well for a while, but as time went by, some of the Royal Descendants became restless and discontented. As they learned the ways of the Alternatives, they began to ignore the special knowledge they had been given. You see, to them the Alternatives were free. They could do as they pleased, rather than having to follow knowledge that had been given to them.

Although the change took place slowly, over time the Royal Descendants chose

As time went by, some of the Royal Descendants became restless and discontented.

to ignore more and more of the special knowledge until they were no longer Royal Descendants, but had become Alternatives.

I’m sure you all understand the simple analogy in this story. The Israelites thought that they could live with the Canaanites and not lose sight of God’s principles (the special knowledge). God recognized the influence of culture and told the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites. He said, “You shall not make a covenant with the people of this land” (Judg. 2:1, 2, NIV). In Judges 1, however, there are many examples where Israel did not do this.

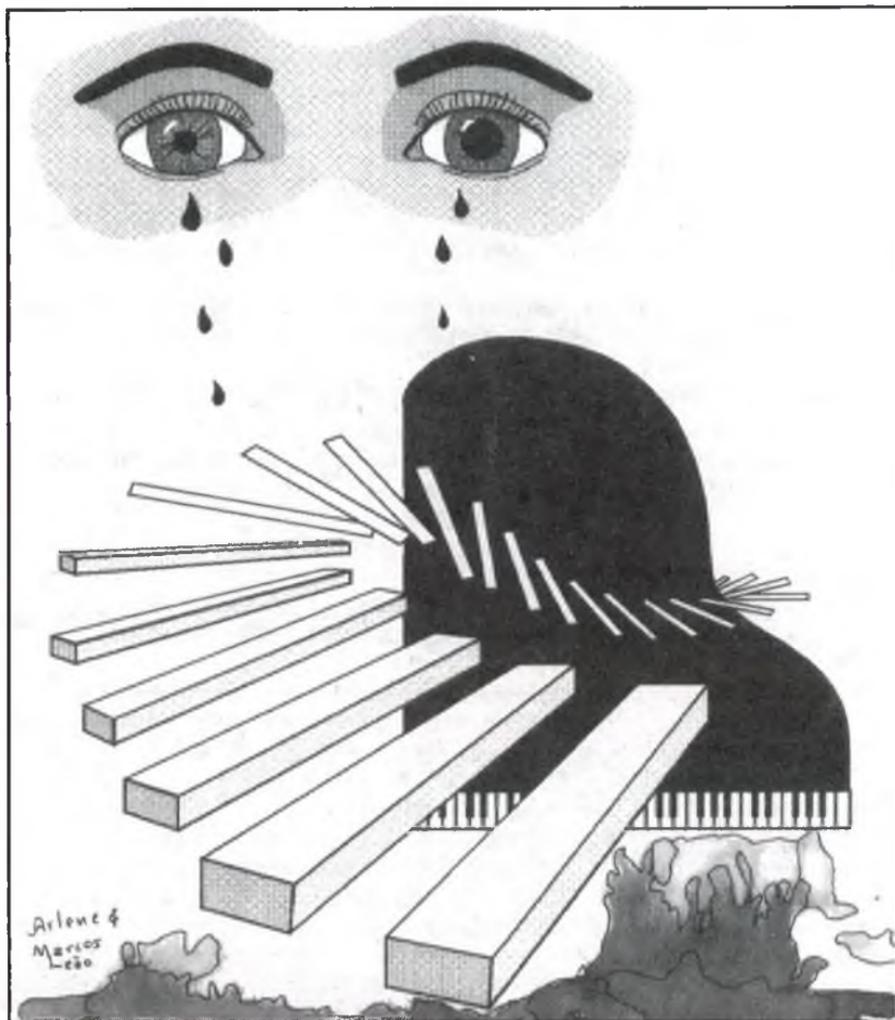
We are very fortunate to have principles and the commandments, set out for us in the Bible as guidelines for living. We need God’s help to maintain consistency in all aspects of our lives. In this way we can be a positive influence on those around us and make the best decisions in our own lives.

REACT

1. Who are the equivalent of the Israelites today, and who influences them away from God?
2. How do we decide on issues for which the church does not set guidelines?

By Heather McCourt, year-six teacher, Hilliard Christian School, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

UPS AND DOWNS



“Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord’s commands” (Judg. 2:16, 17, NIV).

The Piano Competition

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Judg. 2:16, 17

I was 15 when I got the chance to participate in a piano-playing competition. For my age I was quite advanced and could easily win. I was bursting with excitement. Winning a piano competition would mean much more than a gift to my parents. I registered for the competition.

My piano teacher was very dedicated. Like a mother, she taught me step by step how to assure my victory. My friends from school encouraged me to meet the challenge, and they built a solid wall of support about me.

A young man from my school had also registered for the competition in a different category. He and I became shining examples of determination and courage.

As time went on, I began to rely less and less on my teacher's counsel. I began thinking I knew enough to make it on my own. I ignored the help that qualified professionals kindly gave me. I began to believe I needed no one but myself. And so I let time pass.

One week before the competition, it dawned on me that I wasn't really prepared for it. Despair came over me. Sadly I learned it was too late to do anything about it.

The young man who not for a moment took his eyes off his teacher, who tried

I began to rely less and less on my teacher's counsel.

to follow every tip offered by qualified persons, went to the competition without me. With tear-filled eyes, I watched him go. And my tears only increased as I saw him come back, his face beaming for having won second place.

The Christian life is a big opportunity we also have. Through it we see Jesus as the Master Teacher, our Guide, so that we can experience truly happy living.

But sometimes we think we're self-sufficient, and we don't give ear to any divine help. It's when we take our eyes off Jesus because we think we know what is best for us that we come upon the worst moments of our lives. Without God as teacher, as friend, we will always experience disappointments.

That's what happened to the children of Israel when they decided to take their eyes off the Father. Because of their attitude, they gave Satan room to act. The Israelites gave themselves up to worldly pleasures. They accepted worldly customs to gain the friendship of the Philistines. But it was these so-called friends who brought great destruction upon Israel.

Let's face it once and for all. We need a guide in our lives. We'll never gain victory on our own. Jesus stands ready to accompany us at every moment. All we need to do is accept His guidance. Then we'll know what real happiness means.

By Viviani Prego Fragoso, editorial production assistant for the Est  Escrito telecast in Niter i, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Seesaw Religion

LOGOS

Scripture: Judg. 2:6–3:6

What is the worst that can happen in life? Without a doubt, it's experiencing the shame of failure. Failure is terrible.

On the other hand, what is the best that can happen to a person? Obviously, it's to experience victory, success. There's nothing so wonderful as the feeling of success.

What can we do to experience fewer failures and more victories? First of all, we need to discover the secret of success. It is recorded in the history of Israel during the period of the judges. If we will learn the lessons that can be found in their history, our lives will be more victorious. Let's go, then, to this history, which can be divided into four stages:

1. Experiencing Victories

Under the leadership of God's courageous servant Joshua, the children of Israel experienced victory after victory. Who would have believed that Jericho and 30 other cities with their powerful kings could be overcome? Such a thing was far beyond the capacity and might of the Israelites.

Then what was the reason for so much success? The secret is found in God's words to Joshua: "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Josh. 1:8, NIV).

The secret of success lies in our intimate relationship with God and His Word. There's no other way. While they served God with all their hearts, the Israelites could claim the Lord's blessings and victories. But when they forsook the Lord, they distanced themselves from divine protection, and problems began to come up.

2. Experiencing Failures

After the death of Joshua and other leaders who had been eyewitnesses to God's great victories in behalf of His people, the Israelites were quick to forget the Lord. What a pity! They stopped trusting in God's power and started to imitate the pagan customs of the neighboring countries. They allowed themselves to become involved with the corrupt influences surrounding them. They "forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth" (Judg. 2:13, KJV).

The Israelites experienced a spiritual failure. Their enemies became stronger and began to assault them. It was at this great moment of despair that God "raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders" (verse 16, NIV).

How merciful God is! Although the Israelites were ungrateful to Him and went so far as to forget Him, the Lord did not forget them. We might give up on God, but He never gives up on us. God always finds a way to free us from despair if we seek Him with all our hearts. He is powerful, and He is loving!

3. Experiencing Ups and Downs

While the judges were living, the people turned to God. But when the judges died, the people abandoned the ways of the Lord. They had a seesaw kind of reli-

gion, filled with ups and downs. To them, religion was like a game. But this game always ended on the down side. It makes no sense to exchange the assurance of eternal victory for a few moments of worldly pleasure.

A seesaw religion is full of ups and downs, and, sad to say, it always ends on the down side—on the ground. A seesaw ride lasts a few minutes, but the up-and-down religion can last a lot longer. The Israelites experienced this kind of religion for hundreds of years. Referring to this sad period in Israel's history, Ellen White said, "They chose the course of ease and self-indulgence." They forgot that the path to victory is narrow. Jesus counsels us, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matt. 7:13).

4. Experiencing Forbidden Friendships

The Israelites had a serious problem that took them into complete apostasy: "The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods" (Judg. 3:5, 6).

The Israelites forgot that they were a chosen people, set apart to be different. The friendships they made with the wicked led them to become wicked also. They

A seesaw ride lasts a few minutes, but the up-and-down religion can last a lot longer.

bound themselves through marriage to the pagans, so they also became pagans.

That's why God said, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). He gave us this command for our well-being and happiness. Ancient Israel failed because they didn't follow God's command.

On page 16 of his book *Marriage and the Home* in Portuguese, Billy Graham makes the following appeal: "The husband and wife must be one in Christ. I beg the youth not to marry, under any circumstance, an individual who is not connected to Jesus Christ. For if you do, you will head straight into serious trouble."

It always pays to obey and follow Jesus Christ! There's no failure with Him.

REACT

1. Why was apostasy such a problem among the children of Israel? What was the root of this problem?
2. What can we do to keep from falling into the same trap?
3. After studying the factors and causes for ancient Israel's failure, do you think you face some of the same problems today? Explain your answer.
4. Is your life like a seesaw? Are you at the top or the bottom right now?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 544.

By Artur Elias Marski, youth-ministry pastor for the East Brazil Union, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Top or Bottom?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 2:17

A seesaw serves as a good example that aids us to understand the spiritual journey of ancient Israel. Most of us have ridden a seesaw. In a moment we're up high, feet dangling in midair. The next moment we're down low, feet touching the ground.

What about Israel's ups and downs? What caused them? "The disregard of the Lord's restrictions on the part of those who came in possession of Canaan sowed seeds of evil that continued to bring forth bitter fruit for many generations."¹

As long as the people felt their need for God and His power, obedience was the order of the day. But as soon as they felt secure, with the promise of overcoming Canaan fulfilled, they thought worshiping God was no longer needed. After being at the height of their spiritual life and relationship with the Lord, they thought they could make it on their own without a relationship with God. "Those who fail to realize their dependence upon God will be overcome by temptation."²

The generation that conquered Canaan forgot the marvelous works God had performed. This forgetting of the greater Power and this increase in self-reliance resulted in the separation of humanity from God.

Judges were set up to remind the people of God's wonderful works and to keep

This was a people in clear violation of divine dictates.

them from following after their inclinations. "Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them" (Judg. 2:17, NIV). They began to believe they knew more than God Himself.

Basic orders, such as that of expulsion of people from conquered territory, were neglected. "I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you" (Exod. 23:31-33, NIV).

This was a people in clear violation of divine dictates, and they never attained victory. They had the chance to be at the top spiritually and economically, through an obedient relationship with God. But they made the wrong choice.

History repeats itself in many cases. But don't despair. The solution is simple: accept God's will without restrictions.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 545.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 382.

By Elmar Storch Borges, religion teacher at the Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) Adventist Educational Center.

Worshipping Other Gods

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Deut. 6:14

It's thrilling to reflect on God's great love. Throughout history, His children have abandoned His way but later have always come back. The fact is that this flight from His presence continues even today. We run away from His presence and ignore the homage due the King of the universe. How we lack love.

The people of God have a roller-coaster relationship with their Maker—ups and downs, an inconstant relationship. We seek His love and forgiveness, but then we turn our backs on Him.

The Bible is filled with warnings against worshipping other gods (see the first commandment), yet we always return to it, whether those gods be cars, clothes, travel, or career. The fact is that we're always placing things or people above our Father.

Fortunately, what we see is that He loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son, and this love becomes infinite through His promise to come back and take us to live with Him.

If we will only invite Jesus to come into our hearts and give Him first place

We're always placing things or people above our Father.

in our lives, everything will change. We can't begin to estimate the incredible blessings we would receive and the immense love we would experience. Then we would be living witnesses, and the world would be ready to receive its King and Creator.

REACT

1. Why am I in the habit of exchanging Jesus for the first worldly, perishable thing I find?
2. How can I make God first in my life when I love other things so much more than His gifts to me?
3. What is at the root of any idolatry?
4. How can a person recognize the presence of idolatry in his or her life?

By Keily Archanjo Mansor, a journalism major at Estacio de Sa University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Be a Joshua

HOW-TO

Key Text: Judg. 2:16, 17

Before Joshua's death, he again met with representatives of the tribes of Israel in Shechem. There they reviewed God's covenant with Abraham and Jacob, as well as their own solemn vows when they entered Canaan. Joshua recounted the history of Israel, highlighting God's marvelous workings so all could glimpse His love and long-suffering. The people themselves were witnesses to the fact that God had kept His promise to them.

Satan fools many into believing God's love is so great that He will forgive their sins regardless of their actions. But by the biblical record we can see that after Joshua's death, the generations born in Canaan and subject to the corrupt, idolatrous influences broke the covenant with God and suffered the consequences.

Often we experience the same problems that Israel did—only in a modern, modified form. Let's cite some of the ways.

1. Joshua always reminded the people about the covenant they had with God. After his death the people forgot about the covenant and worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth. Hardly ever do we thank God and count the blessings we receive from Him. Usually our prayers are a long list of requests. Seldom do we tell others what God has done for us. Many times we follow our own intuition and not divine

What would happen if each of us were a leader like Joshua?

guidance. So false doctrines make their way into our midst, causing us to break our covenant with God.

2. The people served God throughout Joshua's lifetime. It's good to keep in mind how great an influence a faithful leader can have. Sometimes we young people have numerous opportunities to be Christ's representatives and to witness of Him to our friends. In other words, we have the opportunity to be a Christian leader and to influence many young people who have not heard the truth. Joshua was such a leader. Have you ever stopped to think what would happen if each of us were a leader like Joshua?

3. Though the Lord designated judges, the people would not listen to them. Through His chastisement, the Lord gave them an opportunity, but unfortunately they didn't take advantage of it. How many times we suffer because we don't obey God! Today, God is giving you another chance. How about grabbing it now and becoming a great leader by helping young people who, at this very moment, are facing problems that have to do with drugs, family, alcoholism, hopelessness—maybe they're even in a hospital, suffering the consequences of sin. Go to this young person today, and let him or her know that God is offering one more chance. Don't let this opportunity go by.

By Ezequias Rodrigues dos Santos, engineer and systems analyst for the East Brazil Union, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Unadulterated Success?

OPINION

Key Text: Josh. 1:8, 9

In choosing a profession, we usually picture in our minds what life will be like. Maybe a brand-new car, a beautiful house, traveling on vacations. In every area of our lives, our objective is to experience success, and the idea of success adulterated by failures does not appeal to us.

The Israelites had everything going for them. After all, they were God's chosen people. But going against all expectations, they rebelled. God always had to send a guide to remind them of His love and to bring them back to worshipping Him. They didn't forget God all at once. First, they stopped nurturing their relationship with Him; only later would they stop offering sacrifices, observing feast days and ceremonial laws, for these seemed monotonous and unnecessary. They would value things in the place of God, and this always brought them failures.

Many times we might be tempted to think that if we were in the place of the children of Israel, with all of God's manifestations of love and mercy, we wouldn't rebel against God. But we forget that we, too, have the same opportunities that they did, for we, too, are God's chosen, and yet we are rebellious. Rebellion comes about when we put aside communion with God, then shy away from accepting the name of Christian because it involves sacrifice. We put the things of this world in

The idea of success adulterated by failures does not appeal to us.

the place that rightfully belongs to God, which brings us failure. Normally we rebel little by little, and we don't realize what has happened until we find ourselves at the lowest point, and this discourages us. The love and mercy God showed Israel hasn't disappeared; He still holds His hand out to us—all we have to do is accept His company.

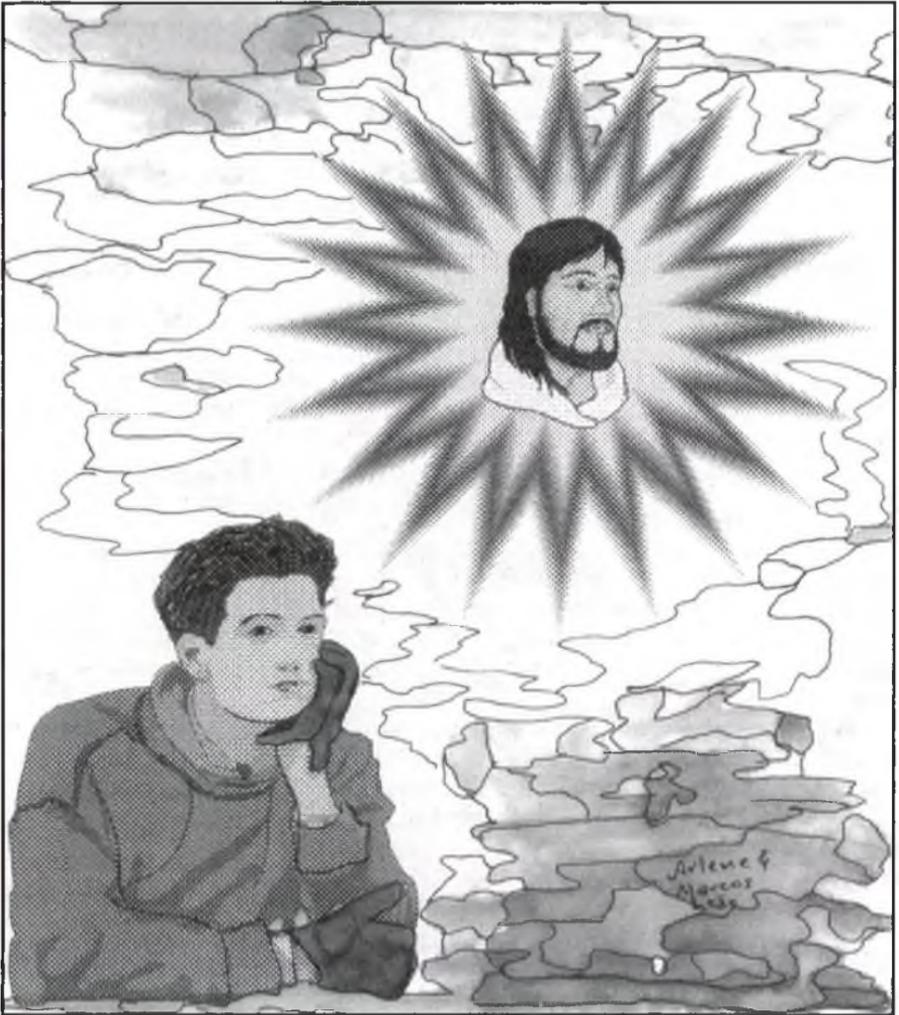
When we let Christ take first place in our lives, there is no discouragement, for He will make us successful. Failures will be a thing of the past when Christ is guiding our lives, for we will be His friends. Through us, others will see that the presence of Christ in our lives makes a difference.

REACT

1. Why is it difficult for us to give God the credit when we experience success?
2. Why is it that even with the example of the children of Israel we would still rather take care of our lives our own way?
3. What is your definition of the word *success*?
4. What is the relationship, if any, between financial success and the Christian life?

By Silvia Renata de Souza Marski, dentistry student at Fluminense Federal University, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

DON'T MISS THE POINT



“And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel. . . . And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him” (Judg. 3:9, 10).

An Answer to Despair

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eph. 6:12; Judg. 3:9, 10

The night was dark,
No moon, No stars.
Despair, Black.

My fiancé had brought me here to “Inspiration Point”—but what was the point? It should have been romantic—the city lights glinting, the balmy summer air, the night sounds. For me there was only gloom. I felt that God must be fed up with my lack of commitment, my shallow spirituality. I had committed no great sin, yet I felt cheap and dirty and superficial—a hypocrite, a fake. I knew that I couldn’t love someone who could take me for granted and who would fall repeatedly, as I had. So how could God?

Steve knew something was desperately wrong. I was very upset; tears flowed silently down my cheeks. As I began to tell him how I was feeling, he tried to listen and speak words of hope. But I hadn’t told him the root of my despair. Listening to him, thinking I had heard it all before, I turned away from the twinkling lights

Steve knew something was desperately wrong. I was very upset.

of the city below to stare out the side window of the car. Cynically I thought, *How can God love someone like me?*

Opening my eyes, I saw a face—bearded, full of sorrow, a crown of thorns. Jesus! He looked at me, and the words that washed over my fevered mind broke the resistance that was smothering me. “How can you doubt that I love you?”

In the book of Judges, Israel felt as I did—desperate, afraid, huddling in the darkness. God sent a deliverer. One of the main roles of the judges was to deliver Israel from their enemies. Today, like then, He sends a Deliverer. I’m so glad Jesus is my Deliverer—my Judge!

By Laurie Little, a homemaker from College Heights, Alberta.

God Delivers

LOGOS

Judg. 3:7-31; 10:1-5; 12:8-15

Some have suggested that the theme of the book of Judges is best summed up by the phrase “In those days there was no *king* in Israel, so every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (see Judg. 17:6; 21:25; compare 18:1; 19:1).

This lack of leadership was not the main reason “every man did what was right in his own eyes.” The lack of godliness among God’s people was the problem.

God’s Presence: The Key to Godliness

Tragically, the people of Israel had forgotten God: “After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (2:10, NIV).

Without God there is godlessness—it’s just that simple. Godliness, on the other hand, is a term for God’s presence. When God is near to the minds and hearts of believers, there is godliness. When God is absent from the minds and hearts of believers, there is sin, there is chaos, there is despair. In short, there is *godlessness*.

But the good news about the gospel is that God remembers His people when they have forgotten Him. Our heavenly Father desires to dwell among us. He wants to infuse us with godliness. Interestingly, God speaks to us of our need and of His provisions by raising up religious leaders, or judges, as they were called in the early days of Israel.

Do you sometimes find yourself forgetting God? What causes you to forget? How is God attempting to make your life more godly? How would you describe your walk with God: a romantic walk on a moonlit evening, a race against time, or stuck in the mud? Explain your answer.

Our Sense of Need

God’s deliverers, or judges, arose in response to the cries of God’s people. We often miss this incredibly important fact.

God’s power to redeem fails when God’s people fail to feel their need. Indifference is a dangerous thing. Recall the tragic history of God’s people. He repeatedly raised up prophets and visionaries, but they were despised, rejected, mocked, and ridiculed.

As Stephen declared just before the Jews stoned him, “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it” (Acts 7:51-53).

Our sense of need is our key to success. As it is today, so it was in the day of the judges. God’s people repeatedly cried for help; *then* God would provide a deliverer (see Judg. 2:11-16; 3:7-9, 12-15).

In what area of your life are you crying out for God’s help? Are you listening to God’s leaders—or have you turned a deaf ear to His appointed messengers? If so, how could you begin learning to listen once again? What role should loyalty

to church leaders play in a Christian's life? How would you describe your sense of need: like a child crying out in the night for its mother, like a wealthy homeowner relaxing by the pool, or like a tourist seeking directions in a foreign city?

God's Leaders

It's interesting to meditate on the story of Ehud (see 3:12-31). God called Ehud to deliver Israel. Ehud accomplished God's purpose by plunging a sword into the belly of Eglon, the Moabite king.

Deliverance! By a sword! This is such an unspiritual-sounding story. Ehud was a warrior—the Schwarzenegger of the ancient world. There was blood on his hands and fire in his eyes.

But I like this story. It tells me something about God's leaders. They are people of courage and daring. Think about it. Ehud walked right into the headquarters of the enemy. He looked Eglon right in the eye and said, "I have a message from God for you." Further, he inspired his people by blowing a trumpet and ordering them to follow him.

I wonder how many of us have the courage to stand before those who would mock us and say, "I have a message from God for you." I wonder how many have so close a connection with God that we might challenge the rest of God's people to follow us.

God's leaders are men and women of courage and daring. They have advanced the kingdom of God by fearlessly attacking the strongholds of the enemy. God's

Ehud was a warrior—the Schwarzenegger of the ancient world.

leaders inspire our confidence and help us reconnect with God. They denounce our godlessness and point us to Him who alone can make us godly.

Is God still in the business of raising up people to work for the deliverance of others? How do you know? How can you tell the difference between a self-proclaimed spiritual leader and one who is truly called of God? Notice for a moment the significance of Judges 3:9, 10. Is God calling you?

By Steve Little, chaplain, Canadian Union College and Parkview Adventist Academy, College Heights, Alberta.

God Provides a Deliverer

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 3:7-31

Throughout history, God's people have demonstrated first a pattern of faithful allegiance to their God, only to be followed by rebellion and disloyalty, and then once again faithfulness. At each point when God's people were farthest away from Him, God would send a deliverer to reprove them and bring them back into a closer relationship with Him. In spite of this cyclical behavior—from faithfulness to disloyalty—God's patience in working with His people has been consistently demonstrated.

“They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt,’ and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.’ ‘They provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.’ Therefore the Lord ‘forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among them; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand.’ Judges 2:12; Psalm 78:52, 58, 60, 61. Yet He did not utterly forsake His people. There was ever a remnant who were true to Jehovah; and from time to time the Lord raised up faithful and valiant men to put down idolatry and to deliver the Israelites from their enemies. But when the deliverer was dead, and the people were released from his authority, they would gradually return to their

“As the Israelites were prone to idolatry, so are the people of the present age.”

idols. And thus the story of backsliding and chastisement, of confession and deliverance, was repeated again and again.”¹

Just as the children of Israel went through stages of faithfulness and rebellion, so God's people today tend to follow similar relational patterns.

“As the Israelites were prone to idolatry, so are the people of the present age. The same adversary that succeeded in leading them astray, is now at work with ten-fold power to entice God's professed people from their simplicity, their sincerity, their earnestness and piety. His devices are all too successful. Worldly things are allowed to attract the attention and absorb the interest. Professed Christians unite with the ungodly, and Christ ceases to be a welcome guest.

“The only safety for God's people is to put away the impious ambition to make a league with the world, to imitate her customs and practices. They must seek a closer connection with God, and give diligent heed to His word in counsels, reproofs, and promises.”²

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 545.

2. *Signs of the Times*, June 9, 1881.

By Brian Leavitt, vice-president for student services, Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

Progressive Revelation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Judg. 3:7-11; Eph. 2:1-10

Scholars have often identified the author of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings as the Deuteronomistic historian. The historian recorded history through the eyes of the prophets and developed a theme throughout these books reflective of their understanding of God and the times in which they lived: do good and be blessed; do evil and be cursed. Because we read the book of Judges, we find evidence of these themes in Israel's history. The Deuteronomist repeatedly made record of Israel's backsliding into idolatry. As this was considered evil in the eyes of the Lord (Judg. 2:11; 3:7; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), they were punished and led into captivity.

While in repeated captivity, Israel pleaded for God's deliverance, and, as a result of their repentance, God provided a deliverer. This theme is finally broken in the Old Testament in the book of Job. Job's friends maintained that all the problems Job encountered were a direct result of his sins (do evil, be cursed), which was the rationale of the times. Job, however, could say with great conviction that his crisis was not a result of any one sin in his life.

There is a theology that suggests that humanity controls God's actions. It suggests that by our doing good God will be moved to bless, and when we do

Job's friends maintained that all the problems Job encountered were a direct result of his sins.

evil, then God has no other choice but to punish. Today, there is a distortion of the biblical position. Someone who does good thereby *earns* God's blessings and eventually eternal life. This suggests that our obedience is the basis, or cause, of our salvation, and not the inevitable result of Christ's dwelling in us.

Is every trial or tribulation that comes our way a direct result of our disobedience? Some may argue yes, but our perception of God is quite different from that. Our tribulations are not always a direct result of any evil we have done, nor is our prosperity a direct result of the good we have done in our lives. Although we often choose a path that leads to hardships, God never forsakes us and is always in control. We understand the wages of sin to be death, but we also can know with confidence that God has paid the price for our sins. Our part is only to come to Him with a repentant heart, to strive to know him more intimately. As God raised up a deliverer for Israel, so He has given us a Deliverer through Jesus Christ. And beyond our deliverance, we are made "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37, NIV).

Thank You, God, for Your grace and for the unconditional love You show to us every day.

By David Schwinghammer, a sophomore theology student at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

Watch and Pray

HOW-TO

Key Text: Judg. 3:9, 10

Before my eyes even opened, my mind was already buzzing with all the things that needed to be done. Last-minute term papers seemed overwhelming, and there were finals to consider as well. Would I find enough time and energy to accomplish this great task of finishing up the requirements of the semester?

My remaining moments of time had to be prioritized; certain things had to be sacrificed. I went straight from my bed to my study and immediately began working on my most urgent papers. *Wait a minute—I haven't spent my normal time of Bible study and prayer with God this morning. But I'm already involved in the momentum of this all-important term paper. Maybe it would be best to put my regular devotional time with God aside until after finals to save time.*

This—and ones like it—is a challenge we face as Christians. The Israelites had their parallel challenges. They found the distractions and pressures of this world capable of interfering with their relationship with God and then found themselves falling for the counterfeit gods of idolatry.

How can we prevent ourselves from losing our relationship with Christ and falling for the modern counterfeit gods of our world? Or how can we escape from

My mind was already buzzing with all the things that needed to be done.

suspected counterfeit gods in our lives now? Here are some suggestions:

1. “Watch and pray” (Matt. 26:41). Watching for distractions, deceptions, or temptations that will affect your fellowship with Christ is most effective through regular study of God’s Word. Regular prayer is your direct line of communication with your Creator and Redeemer—don’t lose it. Also be honest with Him.

2. When in prayer, as it was with Othniel, ask for the Spirit of the Lord to come upon you to empower you and to give you deliverance from the temptations of this world. God will *always* answer your sincere prayer in this regard.

3. Cry out to God. When the Israelites recognized that they were being oppressed because they had lost their relationship with God, they cried out to God and were given repentant hearts and a deliverer. If we find ourselves in this position today and then cry out to the Lord as the Israelites did, then God sends us Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as our deliverer. God is waiting at the door to be invited in and to deliver our hearts from the oppression of sin.

REACT

1. Are there distractions in my life that are hindering my fellowship with God?
 2. Do I feel stronger than the Israelites of long ago and therefore feel no need to have continual reliance on God?
-

By Shawn Brummund, sophomore preministry student, Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

Will the Real Leaders Please Stand Up?

OPINION

Key Text: Joel 2:27-29

“Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:27-29, NIV).

Each of us is called to be a leader in Christ’s church on this earth. The longer we look to and expect our appointed leaders to give us answers, power, motivation, and direction—in essence doing all the work—the longer it will take us to spread God’s message of love.

It’s up to each of us to pray to the Lord that He send His Spirit on us personally so that we might better present God’s love to the world.

It is not our church leaders or any gifted individuals who are to be our deliverers. Jesus Christ alone is our deliverer, to deliver us from a spirit of apostasy and into a spirit of courage (2 Tim. 1:7). As our text in Joel suggests, let God pour out His Spirit on you. Don’t be satisfied to let someone else receive the Spirit,

The longer we expect our appointed leaders to do all the work, the longer it will take to spread God’s message.

but be willing to be part of God’s “kingdom of love” and ask for the Spirit of power to be poured out on you personally.

Although God has appointed leaders for His people throughout history, it is sad that at most times, these leaders have been needed because God’s people were in such a poor spiritual state themselves.

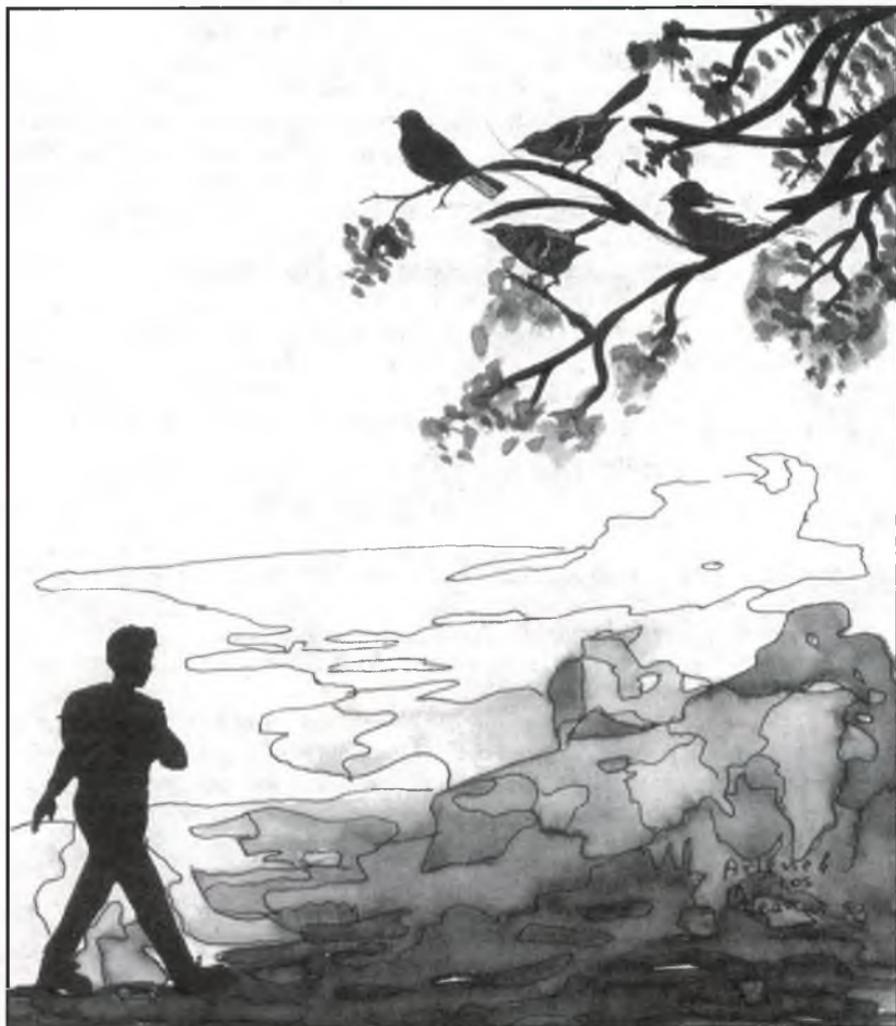
Now is the time to pray for the outpouring of God’s Spirit on us individually so that we do not fall into the same trap as the Israelites of old. Now is the time to take an active role in the leadership of God’s church so we may spread His message of love to the world as quickly and as effectively as possible.

REACT

1. What constitutes Christ’s church on this earth?
2. What does it mean to be a leader in Christ’s church?
3. How can I experience the Spirit in my life in a practical way?
4. What parallels do you see between the way God delivered Israel from her enemies and the way Jesus delivers us?
5. What similarities are there between the judges of the Old Testament and the spiritual leaders of our church? What differences?

By Timothy Dunfield, a third-year theology student at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

DEFEATING YOUR SISERAS



“My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the Lord” (Judg. 5:9, RSV).

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The Birds

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 3:4-6

I awakened this morning feeling somewhat pressured by all of my responsibilities: schoolwork, office work, personal work. It was all overwhelming. This pressure had persisted for about eight weeks, and I was tired—physically, mentally, and even spiritually. All my faculties were drained.

Though I was extremely tired, I felt that a nice morning walk would relieve me. After falling on my knees to thank God for another day of life, I began pulling on my jogging suit and lacing up my sneakers.

Here I was, out of the dorm and into the fresh, brisk morning air. The slightly chilly breeze made me fully alert.

I began walking toward the college church, when I noticed a flock of birds playing in and around a tree. It appeared as though the whole family was there. They were all amazingly quiet around the tree. I imagine they were joining in an effort to gather the morning's breakfast. After this goal was reached, one bird flew away. The other birds followed immediately. They almost appeared to be perfectly synchronized. When the leader landed, so did the remainder of the family. I was amazed at such order!

As I continued my walk, I pondered the lessons of the birds. My first thought

God is, in fact, a God of order, but He allows us to make choices.

was that God is, in fact, a God of order, but He allows us to make choices. Had the other birds not followed the leader, who had the food, they would not have been fed. In fact, they would have been lost and hungry.

My thoughts went elsewhere. The birds were intelligent enough to realize that without a collaborative effort, no physical nourishment would have been gained. With that collaborative effort, everyone was fed.

Last, I considered the mentality of the leader. Knowing that the other birds trusted, obeyed, and served him may have caused pressure, but under God's direction, he was able to lead his birds to "higher ground."

These lessons can be applied to all of us. Though the pressures may build, the Lord has promised to direct our paths (Prov. 3:4-6). If a leader is directed by God, this should be recognized by the disciples, and there should be a willingness to follow. In following the Lord's will, there will be worship, obedience, trust, and service, as there was with the birds.

It is proven! We can learn a lot from God's creations. Who would have thought that we would learn how to lead from "bird brains"? Praise the Lord!

By Kesslyn A. Brade, a senior social-work major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

The Third Apostasy

LOGOS

Judges 4 and 5

The Military Strength of Jabin (4:1-3)

After 80 years of peace, Israel again grew careless in spiritual commitments and forsook God. As a result, the Lord allowed Jabin, described as the king of Canaan reigning in Hazor, to overrun the northern territory of Israel and to bring the nation again under foreign domination. The name *Jabin* was probably a dynastic title (see Josh. 11:1; Ps. 83:9). According to the records in Joshua 11, the Israelites conquered the city of Hazor and killed Jabin, king of that city. It seems that the Israelites, however, though gaining victory in the area, were not able to consolidate their position, and the Canaanites had quickly retaken and rebuilt the city. During the time of Joshua, Hazor was the head of the kingdom in that area (Josh. 11:10).

It is not impossible that Hazor achieved a similar position in the time of the judges under the leadership of Jabin and his general, Sisera. Sisera is described as having dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles (Judg. 4:2). This site is generally identified with modern Tell Amar, situated at the place where the Kishon River passes through a narrow gorge to enter the plain of Accra. The military strength of the Canaanites was impressive. In addition to thousands of foot soldiers, Sisera commanded 900 iron-reinforced chariots (verses 3, 13).

Preparations for Battle (verses 4-13)

Following the 20 years of oppression, the Lord raised up a prophetess and judge by the name of Deborah, who sat in judgment somewhere between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim (verse 5). The time came when battle preparations should be made against Jabin and Sisera. Deborah called on Barak, an experienced general from the tribe of Naphtali (verse 6). Using 10,000 men, he was to meet Sisera and the Canaanite armies in the area of the river Kishon (verse 7). Barak refused to go without Deborah. He should not be judged as lacking faith at this point. He merely wanted someone present who could give divine guidance and help for such an important occasion. Deborah reminded Barak that the victory that God would give would not result from Barak's genius, but would be the Lord's victory. The ultimate downfall of Sisera would be at the hand of a woman—not Deborah, but Jael (verses 18-21).

Encounter and Victory (verse 14–5:31)

The battle followed, and the Scripture tells us that the Lord discomfited Sisera and his chariots (verse 15). At this point we are not given any details as to what method God used in immobilizing the chariot force of Sisera. However, in the victory hymn of Deborah and Barak, recorded in chapter 5, an additional clue is given: the river Kishon “swept them away” (verse 21, NIV). We might suppose from this that the Lord brought rains, thereby flooding parts of the valley floor and causing the chariots to be immobilized.

As the battle continued, Sisera recognized the hopelessness of his situation. When his chariot could no longer move, he fled on foot (4:17). On his way north-

ward, he came to the tent dwelling of Jael, the wife of Haber the Kenite. He fully expected protection to be provided by the small clan of Kenites, for they had joined peaceably with the Canaanites. Remember that the Kenites originally were settled in the area of Hebron along with Caleb (Josh. 14:10-15; 15:15-20; Judg. 1:16).

Evidently Jael was not in agreement with the coalition made by her husband and others with the Canaanites, and she used this occasion to express her dissatisfaction. She invited Sisera to her tent for refreshment and rest, as would have been the custom. But once he was asleep, she brought his life to an end with a tent peg and mallet (Judg. 4:21). The great victory on that day did not result from Barak's genius or the aggressiveness of Jael, but to the power of God (verse 23). This victory brought peace and prosperity to Israel for about 40 years (4:24-5:31).

The Song of Praise (5:1-31)

The song of victory was, in all probability, written by Deborah. It is a song expressing praise to God for His intervention in behalf of His people. It recognizes His great patience in the light of Israel's infidelity. Even though written in highly poetic style, utilizing difficult archaic Hebrew vocabulary, it nonetheless is a song of beauty and one that provides us with interesting details about Israel's past history. For example, verse 4 describes the Lord bringing rains during the day

Sisera fully expected protection to be provided by the small clan of Kenites.

of the wilderness wandering. Living conditions in the day of Shamgar and Jael are also described in verse 6. The highways were unoccupied because the enemy controlled them. This was a time of open idolatry (verse 8) and tribal independence, for not all of the tribes participated in the war against Sisera (verses 15-17). The reference to Dan as remaining in ships (verse 17) implies that the migration of the Danites recorded in Judges 18 had taken place prior to the time of Deborah and that the Danites had experienced some degree of amalgamation with seafaring Phoenicians to the northwest. After a brief description of the battle in poetic form (verses 19-27), the writer then gives us a look into the household of Sisera.

REACT

1. What specific things can we learn about faith from the experiences of Deborah and Barak?
2. Why doesn't God deal with apostasy today in the same way He did with that of the Israelites?
3. In what ways does apostasy affect the Seventh-day Adventist Church today?
4. How would you approach people in the church who think they are above being witnessed to?
5. Why would you consider yourself worthy to be one of God's helpers?

By S. Haywood Cox, chaplain and director of campus ministries and world missions, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

A Gospel Each Day

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 28:19, 20

“The Lord has signified that His work should be carried forward in the same spirit in which it was begun. The world is to be warned. Field after field is to be entered. The command given us is: ‘Add new territory; add new territory.’ Shall we not as a people, by our business arrangements, by our attitude toward a world unsaved, bear a testimony even more clear and decisive than that borne by us twenty or thirty years ago?”¹

“All can do something. In an effort to excuse themselves, some say: ‘My home duties, my children, claim my time and my means.’ Parents, your children should be your helping hand, increasing your power and ability to work for the Master. Children are the younger members of the Lord’s family. They should be led to consecrate themselves to God, whose they are by creation and by redemption. They should be taught that all their powers of body, mind, and soul are His. They should be trained to help in various lines of unselfish service. Do not allow your children to be hindrances. With you the children should share spiritual as well as physical burdens. By helping others they increase their own happiness and usefulness.”²

“All who commune with God will find abundance of work to do for Him. Those who go forth in the spirit of the Master, seeking to reach souls with the truth, will

“The command given us is: ‘Add new territory; add new territory.’”

not find the work of drawing souls to Christ a dull, uninteresting drudgery. . . . They will become more and more vitalized as they give themselves to the service of God. It is a joyous work to open the Scriptures to others.

“Young men and women should be educated to become workers in their own neighborhoods and in other places. Let all set their hearts and minds to become intelligent in regard to the work for this time, qualifying themselves to do that for which they are best adapted.

“Many young men who have had the right kind of education at home are to be trained for service and encouraged to lift the standard of truth in new places by well-planned and faithful work. By associating with our ministers and experienced workers in city work, they will gain the best kind of training. Acting under divine guidance and sustained by the prayers of their more experienced fellow workers, they may do a good and blessed work.”³

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 54.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 9, pp. 118, 119.

By Ann-Marie C. Buchanan, a senior social-work major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

When the Battle Is Over

EVIDENCE

Key Text: James 1:12

Today's key text says that a victorious celebration or coronation is planned for us. The Lord of lords and King of kings will place the crown of victory on our heads. However, we are to follow exactly what our Commander in Chief, Jesus, orders.

We are in the midst of a war, fighting battles of which we have no idea. This war started long before Creation. According to Revelation 12:7, war broke out in heaven and is continuing to this day. Michael, our Commander in Chief, has given us the weapons needed to fight the battles of this war. Victory is promised us if we obey our Commander in Chief.

Anyone who joins their country's military is duty bound to follow every command given. When the joint chiefs of staff meet, they have knowledge of information that is not shared with each soldier. They have every conceivable intelligence report, from satellite images to spy reports. Soldiers are not privy to this information, but are expected to carry out their mission without question.

The same scenario applies to God's army. In His infinite wisdom, God knows the beginning from the end. We do not have all the intelligence reports on the devil; we cannot even see the enemy, but we do see his destructive results.

Throughout the Old Testament, the children of Israel often missed victory cel-

Soldiers are expected to carry out their mission without question.

brations. Joshua's army was defeated by the people of Ai (Joshua 7 and 8). God told him that Israel had sinned and that His anger was kindled against them. The people of Israel needed to be cleansed of evil. God could not use sinful, unclean vessels to glorify His name. *One* man's sin caused Israel's defeat. Great distress is placed on us when we do not follow God's command. Distress comes in different forms—disappointments, embarrassments, rejections, separations, frustrations, setbacks, and failures.

But imagine the peace, victory, satisfaction, contentment, and joy when we follow God's command. The victory celebration will be one of never-ending happiness with unimaginable joy and peace—a celebration that no victor of any earthly war has ever experienced before.

Under the leadership of Deborah and Barak, Israel triumphed over Sisera because they followed God's command. We can wear the crown of victory at the end of this great controversy if we do as the soldiers in the battle and follow the commands of our Commander in Chief.

By Roger Wade, a theology major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

God Will Defeat Your Sisera

HOW-TO

Key Text: Judg. 4:14

Israel had been oppressed by a powerful nation for 20 years. The children of Israel cried unto the Lord, and God freed them from their bondage. This is a simple story, but when we look closer we see that God overcame the enemy of Israel, but He used people to accomplish this feat.

As we study this story, we need to learn the four steps to the defeat of the Siseras in our life:

1. We must receive a word from the Lord. Deborah and Barak did not take on this great army without a command from the Lord. Deborah says, "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?" (Judg. 4:6). God told them to go. The first step in defeating Sisera is to receive a word from the Lord. With this word from the Lord, we are ready for the next step.

2. We must believe the word. This is as important as the first step. If we do not have belief in the word, it does not do us much good. Deborah definitely believed the word: "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" (verse 9). She knew the Lord would defeat Sisera. Now that we have

God overcame the enemy of Israel, but He used people to accomplish this feat.

the belief, we can go to our next step.

3. We must act on the word. Without action our faith is dead (James 2:26). Through action we find out whether we really do believe the word. Deborah and Barak took this step: "So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him" (Judg. 4:14). At this point the defeat of Sisera came to its fulfillment. God used Deborah and Barak to win. In the euphoria of victory, we must not forget step 4.

4. We must praise God. Judges 5 records a song to the glory of God. He is the One who overcame the enemy. He is the One who will help us overcome. Without giving the praise to God, we tend to take the credit ourselves. God defeated the enemy through human agents. Let us not forget that even though God uses us, it is He who overcomes our enemies (4:23).

REACT

1. What are the consequences of not having a word from the Lord?
2. How are steps 2 and 3 related?
3. What will happen if we neglect step 4?

By Sherman Haywood Cox II, a graduate student at the University of Alabama at Huntsville.

Running Away

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Cor. 15:57

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57, NIV).

When the Lord sends us on a mission, we often find excuses to avoid the work that He has assigned us. Jonah was one of many who tried to escape from God's call. Yet by allowing a large fish to swallow Jonah, God showed him that he could not hide from Him.

Sometimes we have the misconception that the Lord is unable to provide protection at times when He sends us places where it may be considered too dangerous to go. Yet we should keep these words in mind: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Ps. 121:1).

Was Jonah witnessing while he was on the ship going to Tarshish? (Jon. 1:6-11.) His so-called escape from his responsibility became an opportunity for the Lord to reveal Himself among the other sailors. Despite the fact that Jonah tried to escape God's call, the Lord still used him to witness to others.

Although Jonah tried to disobey the Lord, God still blessed him. When He used Jonah, the outcome was so powerful that the Ninevites heeded Jonah's message

We often find excuses to avoid the work that God has assigned us.

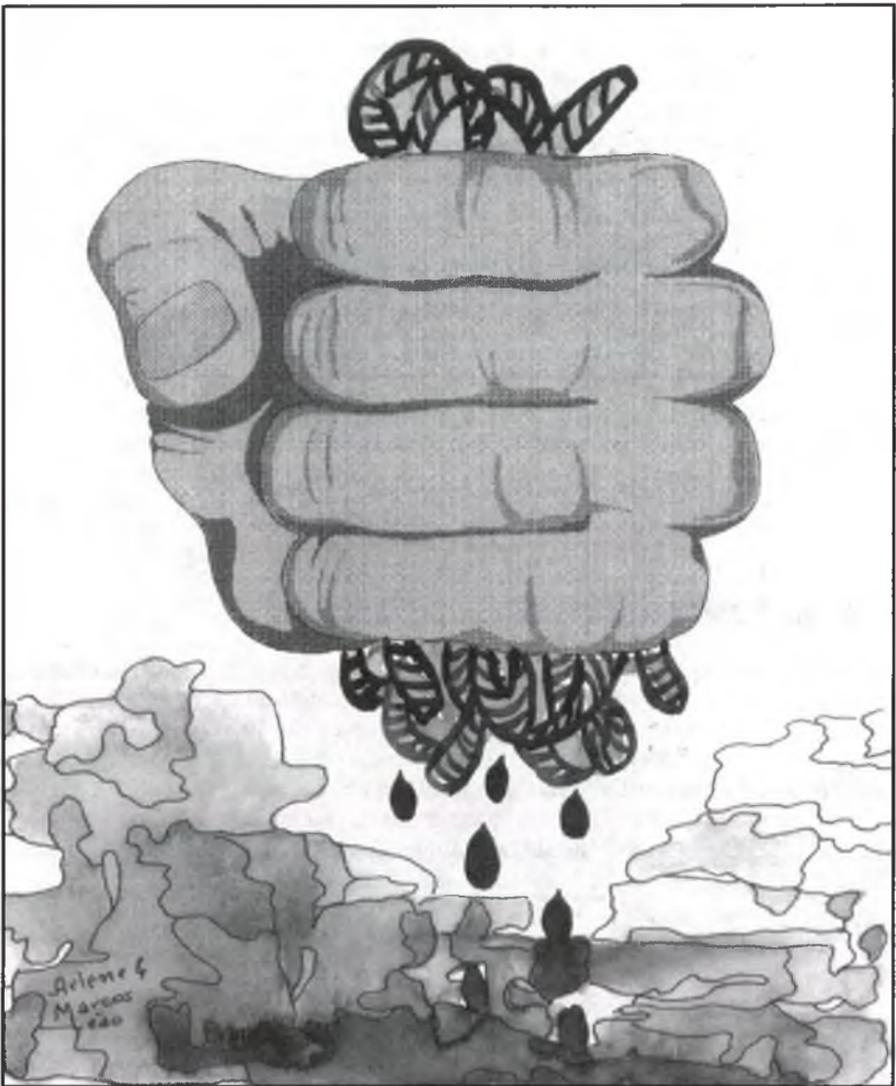
and repented of their sins. Not only did the people of Nineveh repent, but the king of Nineveh also repented. Was the Lord being just in letting the people of Nineveh repent, yet in allowing Jonah to be swallowed up by the fish? (See Jonah 4.) The gourd was used as an example of the foolishness of Jonah's attitude toward people. He cared more for the gourd's vitality than he cared for the salvation of the Ninevites. When the Lord requests us to do a task, we should be willing to follow through with His plan. We should be willing to be used as instruments so that God can be glorified.

REACT

1. Is God's protection with us on every mission?
2. When someone is hurt or killed during God's service, has God's protection been removed? Explain your answer.
3. What might have happened to the people of Nineveh if the Lord had granted Jonah's wish?
4. What are some of the weapons God has equipped you with to fight your battles?
5. How can you ensure your participation in the victorious celebration with Jesus?

By Lisa Bishop, a biology major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

SIGNS OF SECURITY



“When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.’” (Judg. 6:22, 23, NIV).

The Power of Positive Thinking?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Judges 6

Ever wonder why Gideon did it? I mean, I'd think at least twice about taking 300 men against an entire army just because some fleece was wet or dry. It would take a lot more than some wet wool to convince me that I should go up against odds like that. But that is exactly what God told Gideon to do.

If God came down and told you that you could face incredible odds and still defeat a major army, would you believe it? Would you believe enough to gather up a small army to face them? And then on top of that, would you believe enough to tell more than half of that already entirely-too-small army to go home because of the way they happened to drink water? Would you believe enough to risk dying with a spear in your back or an arrow through your heart? That's what Gideon did.

There are those who would say that Gideon is a prime example of the power of positive thinking. "Believe in yourself enough, and you can do anything," they say. After all, Benjamin Franklin said, "God helps them that help themselves."

I believe the reason God chose Gideon was because he didn't have enough faith in himself. God used Gideon because Gideon knew that without God he would lose. Gideon himself said, "How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest

I'd think at least twice about taking 300 men against an entire army.

in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (verse 15, NIV). That doesn't sound like a positive thinker to me.

So if Gideon wasn't such a positive thinker, why did he ask for such a simple sign? Why didn't he ask God to blow up a mountain? A sign like that would have gone farther in causing me to consider facing a huge army.

The reason Gideon asked for a sign wasn't to test God's strength. After all, how much power does it take to dry a fleece? I can do that. No, Gideon asked for a sign so he would know that God was there and that God was on his side. And once he knew that God was on his side, he was ready to take on the world.

By Rick Kajiura, assistant director, General Conference Communication Department, Silver Spring, Maryland.

“God May See a King”

LOGOS

Judges 6

Gideon was nothing special before God called on him to free His land from the marauding Midianites. In fact, he was one of the least likely to be given such a commission. Not only was his clan the weakest in Manasseh, but, of his household, he was the least (verse 15). Why did God choose him? Why not someone who had some experience in administration? After all, that’s what it would take to lead the kind of force required to defeat an army whose number was compared to sand on a beach. Why didn’t God select someone with a little tactical experience? Why did He choose a farmer who had never had so much as a karate lesson?

Look through the Bible, and you quickly see that God has a habit of appointing the least-likely people to do some of His heaviest jobs. Think of David, a shepherd-musician, who killed Goliath and became probably Israel’s greatest king. Or Paul, a Christian killer. Esther, an orphan. Or even a little boy on the side of a mountain with a few pieces of bread and fish. The list goes on and on.

You may have heard the song Ray Boltz sings about David that says, “When others see a shepherd boy, God may see a king.” God has a special purpose for each person. But why does He choose the kind of people He does to fulfill some of His most difficult tasks? You’ll probably agree when I say that many people who are accomplished, who have a little more confidence in themselves than is good for them, are generally more difficult to work with than those who realize they have a lot to learn. God runs into the same problem with people.

It’s not that self-confidence is bad. On the contrary. But consider what the conversation may have been like if the angel came to, let’s say, a general in the then-defunct Israelite army:

“You want me to what? Get rid of the Midianites? With what and who? My army is gone. We’ve tried before and gotten spears in our backs for our trouble—I know, I was there. Besides, Mr. Angel, even if we did have an army, we don’t have enough food for them anymore since the enemy has taken everything. Just think of the logistics of such an endeavor. I mean, the books all say that you should never go onto the battlefield without . . .”

Gideon wouldn’t have known where to start arguing much less think he might know a little more than God in this matter. Therefore, if God wanted to accomplish something in the way He wanted it done, Gideon was a prime candidate. He *had* to rely on God. And that’s what God asks of each of us—that we simply trust Him and His way of doing things.

The next time you’re tempted to think that you’re not qualified to do much of anything for God, think of all those very young, underexperienced, underqualified people whom God used—and still uses. But never forget *why* God takes so much pleasure in using them.

When others see a low GPA, a criminal record, a jaded background, or no potential, God may see an effective evangelist, a top executive, a Nobel Prize winner, or, who knows, maybe even a king.

REACT

1. With which biblical characters can I best identify whom God used in dramatic ways? Explain your answer.
2. Does the fact that God often uses underqualified people suggest that we should not try to better ourselves?
3. What makes it easiest for God to use us for His purposes?
4. What signs in the natural world give me personal confidence that God is in control?
5. Why does God give obvious signs to answer some requests and not others?
6. What Bible promises have I memorized that I can call up when I'm unsure of my direction?
7. In your personal experience, has God ever broken some rules or natural laws to help you?
8. Why were the miracles worked for Gideon so important?
9. How can a Christian know when it is appropriate to ask for a sign from God?

By Jeff Scoggins, communication coordinator, Philanthropic Services, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

What Sign? Where?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 6:17

I stand, halfway between earth and sky, by the side of a road slung against the mountainsides. The view from Going to the Sun Highway in Glacier National Park is truly awesome! With mountains piling above and valley falling away beneath, a majestic eagle riding the wind far below me captures my attention. She circles, rising higher and higher, serenely floating upon the air currents. Effortlessly she rises level with me, then, still slowly circling, disappears against the sun.

Ellen White tells of the eagle of the Alps being beaten down by mountain storms, “separating her from the sunny heights where she has made her home. Her efforts to escape seem fruitless. . . . At length, with a note of triumph, she darts upward, and, piercing the clouds, is once more in the clear sunlight, with the darkness and tempest far beneath.”¹

Two eagles, one floating peacefully on unseen currents of a summer day; the other fighting its way through tempestuous storm clouds. Peace and calm, storm and darkness.

My life is like that. Sometimes I’m at peace, trusting God and confident He’s in control. But at other times—times of doubt, discouragement, questioning—I long for a positive indication of God’s guidance.

The view from Going to the Sun Highway in Glacier National Park is truly awesome!

The Bible provides many examples of providential signs, but how can I be certain of God’s direction in *my* life? Does He always give us the billboard-obvious? No. However, He does give assurances in nature. “The birds of the air, the flowers of the field . . . , the springing grain, the fruitful branches . . . , the recurring seasons—all these may teach us precious lessons of trust and faith.”² These are signs from God that we can feel secure in His love, in His willingness, even eagerness, to guide in every circumstance.

“When those who are weak in faith ask for a sign He often honors the request. However, as faith develops, God expects men to take Him at His word and depend less and less upon confirmatory signs.”³ We may experience doubt and uncertainty, but “beyond the clouds God’s light is shining. Into the sunlight of His presence we may rise on the wings of faith.”⁴

1. *Education*, p. 118.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 579.

3. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 345.

4. *Education*, pp. 118, 119.

By Patty Davis, a secretary for Risk Management Services, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Fire, Water, and Physics

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Judges 6

Judges 6 is a whirlwind look at a drought in history—a drought of faith among God’s people. It tells of His people’s straying and of how God allows trials to bring them back. It gives evidence of the slavery of sin and the destruction that comes from worshiping other gods. But the chapter gives hope as well that throughout earth’s history, God has His people. They may not be perfect, but if they are willing to be used, He’s willing to use them.

God uses three interesting evidences that He is with Gideon, a man living in a faithless generation who himself lacks confidence. These signs prove that it really is God who is promising success, because nobody could possibly have control of these factors. God is willing to break some of the rules to help one man have faith for the battle ahead.

First, there’s fire. Fire leaps from the rock and burns up the sacrifice. But it’s a sacrifice drenched in broth, thus making the miracle even more convincing.

Then Gideon requests another miracle. Notice a contrast. “You are not going to die” (verse 23, NIV). Once, when these words were spoken, they were a lie. Now they are the truth. In the beginning, the first fallen angel enslaved a snake to say those words. But Lucifer doesn’t have the power to sustain life. Now those

Once, when these words were spoken, they were a lie.

words are spoken to allay Gideon’s fears. They are spoken by Yahweh Himself—another evidence of a loving God making Himself known to the one He’s chosen to use. Even though the rules state that if you see God or any form of divinity you will die, God is willing to build Gideon’s faith by letting Him catch a glimpse and still live.*

The final manifestation to Gideon that God is real has to do with physics and the way water travels. In short, God manipulates the morning dew, once to soak a patch of wool, leaving the surrounding earth totally dry, and once leaving the patch of wool dry while soaking the ground around it.

These three manifestations of divine intervention defy any human attempt to explain them away. They are miracles performed by a loving and all-powerful God to convince an honest-hearted man that victory is just around the corner.

* *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 343.

Altar Renovation

HOW-TO

Key Text: Judg. 6:25, 26

Gideon was pretty much your ordinary guy, minding his own business. He was not looking for any challenges or a change in career. Food for today, food that the Midianites had not destroyed, was his biggest concern. However, God had much bigger plans for Gideon.

He recruited Gideon for a task he would never have imagined. Conquering the Midianites aside, God's asking Gideon to tear down his father's altar to Baal and to challenge the status quo of worship and belief of his time, these were not part of Gideon's plans for his future. In fact, the command of the Lord filled him with fear.

What enabled Gideon to face this challenge? What does it take for us to tear down the altars of Baal in our church, in our lives?

1. Who We Are Not. The youngest of his clan Manasseh, the poorest and weakest clan, that was Gideon. Yet God called him to deliver His people at a crisis in their history.

Even though Gideon was before Paul's time, he experienced what 2 Corinthians

God's asking Gideon to tear down his father's altar was not part of Gideon's plans for his future.

12:9 states so eloquently: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (NIV). God's power shines forth the brightest in weak people. When we are weak, God is strong! It is at those times God does things in our lives that we never could have imagined.

2. Who God Is. Gideon was questioning where the miracles were that his ancestors had seen in their deliverance from Egypt. Where was God in *his* time? God told him, I, Jehovah, the I Am, will be with you. The same word is used in Exodus 3:14, where God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. God was pointing Gideon to the past and how He had led Israel. The I Am, the same God of Moses, was with him now.

I AM! God was in the time of Gideon, He is now, and He will be throughout eternity. How has God led your church, your family, or yourself in the past? Take hope; God is still who He said He is, and He is still in control.

Let God outdream you in your ordinary life!

By Carla J. Bass, a CPA working for the General Conference auditing service in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Little Epiphanies

OPINION

Key Text: Mark 8:12

I once knew someone studying to be a minister who received impressions from the Holy Spirit. He knew these “little epiphanies” were genuine because they were always accompanied by a solemn shiver down his spine. If you happened to be talking to him and he shivered, his eyes widened, and he’d say with deep sincerity, “I know what you’re saying is coming from the Lord, because as you spoke, this chill ran up and down my back.”

When I get a chill up and down my spine, my first thought is not that it’s a message from the Holy Spirit but that I need to put on a coat. It is important to distinguish between faith and feeling, between the voice of God and our own voice doing a ventriloquist act.

Some people are always looking for a sign from God. Jesus said to the scornful Pharisees who taunted Him to display His divine power, “Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation” (Mark 8:12). We live in a visual age in which seeing is believing. How many times have you said, “I just don’t see what you’re saying,” when you really mean, “I just don’t understand”?

The Word talks about another guy famous for his skepticism—Thomas. He

It is important to distinguish between the voice of God and our own voice doing a ventriloquist act.

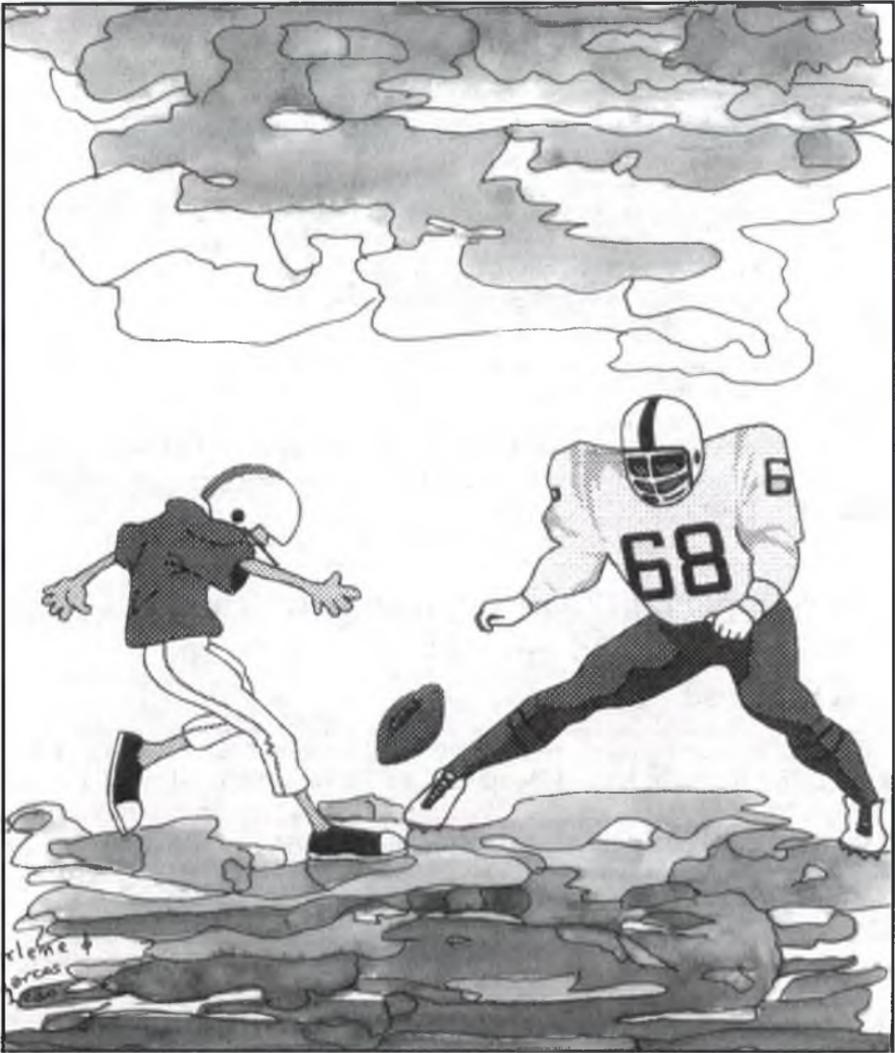
refused to believe in Jesus’ resurrection until he could personally touch the wounds in Christ’s own hand. Jesus showed Thomas His hands, and Thomas joyously believed. But a gentle rebuke framed Christ’s response to His doubting disciple when He told him that he believed only because he saw and touched, but those who believed without seeing were blessed before heaven.

Jesus said that His sheep know His voice and follow Him. That voice may be audible, as it was to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Or it may be the still small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking silently to our consciences, as it did to Elijah’s when he ran from Queen Jezebel.

So, how do you know whether it is really God’s voice speaking to you or that the sign or miracle revealed to you has truly come from Him? God doesn’t contradict Himself, and His Word is truth. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). When you can’t trust what your senses show you, are you prepared to trust blindly in the Word?

By Soraya Lola Homayouni, a premed student at Montgomery College, Rockville, Maryland.

A FEW GOOD MEN



“The Lord said to Gideon, ‘You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead’”’ (Judg. 7:2, NIV).

The Water-Boy Quarterback

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Judg. 6:14-16

Joe Smith is a backup water boy for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, one of many professional football teams oppressed by the Dallas Cowboys in recent years. He is scrubbing the inside of a Gatorade cooler one day and dreaming impossible dreams of the Cowboys' downfall, when he suddenly feels a hand on his shoulder. Whirling around quickly, he is amazed to see the commissioner of the National Football League standing there with a smile on his face. "Joe," the commissioner says, "I've heard the groanings of my favorite team, the Buccaneers, and I want you to rally the team. I will give you all the support you need, as the new starting quarterback, to beat the Cowboys."

After administering a couple of small "tests" involving a piece of artificial turf, Joe is finally convinced that the commissioner really wants him to lead the Bucs to victory.

Later in the week, the commissioner approaches Joe again, this time with a suggestion. "Why don't you get rid of all the reserve players," he encourages. "They aren't really necessary." The very idea is preposterous, but Joe respects the commissioner's opinion and cuts the mentioned players from the team.

On game day, the commissioner shows up in the locker room and stuns Joe

God seems to delight in giving some of the wimpiest, lowliest, nerdiest dweebs a chance to share in the joys of His triumphs.

again. "You have too many players," he observes. "Why don't you bench the defensive players and half your offense." This is almost too much for Joe, but he's a real believer in the commissioner, so he prepares to face one of football's greatest teams with only five other players. . . .

Of course, this is an absolutely absurd story. Or is it? Throughout the Bible, God displays His tremendous power to overcome seemingly impossible situations. Incredibly, He also seems to delight in giving some of the wimpiest, lowliest, nerdiest dweebs a chance to share in the joys of His triumphs.

The story of Gideon provides a good illustration of this. God personally asked the most insignificant member of the weakest clan in a little-known tribe to save the nation of Israel from the Midianites. God revealed His power in the ensuing conflict and helped Gideon to accomplish the unthinkable. That Power is still around. Just listen to the words of the Great Commissioner: "Surely I will be with you . . . , to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NIV). Our Great Commissioner has a great victory planned for the future, and He's offering us a chance to share in the spoils.

By David Appel, junior theology and business-administration major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

God's Hands and Feet

LOGOS

Judg. 7:1–8:21

As I look at my hands and feet, I become very proud. My feet have helped me travel all of my life, taking me from destination to destination, while my hands perform great tasks in the world. My hands can create and reach out to others. But then, I thought, my hands and feet are simply useless limbs extending from my body; *the real source of their power is what commands them to move.*

It's easy for Christians to take credit for things we've accomplished, but often we forget the real source of our power—our heavenly Father. God is looking for ambassadors of His power; He is looking for men and women who seek divine help. And when we allow Him to work with us, we can see Him perform great things through us.

God used a man named Gideon to lead a small Israelite army against a fierce Midianite army (Judg. 7:1-22). The Israelites encamped just north of the Midianites (verse 1). The Midianites “had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore” (verse 12, NIV). Israel's army contained only 32,000 soldiers (verse 3). The Midianites numbered 135,000.*

God used the odds in favor of the Midianites to test Gideon and the Israelites. He decided to make the already-underdog Israelite army *smaller* in number and increase the odds “in order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her” (verse 2). God instructed Gideon to free all men who were fearful of the Midianite army—and only 10,000 Israelites remained (verse 3).

After cutting the Israelite army by more than a third, God said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there” (verse 4). At the river God favored the men who drank with their hands to their mouths and promised Gideon, “With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands” (verse 7).

That same night, God instructed Gideon to go down to the Midianite camp. There, God promised, “you will be encouraged to attack the camp” (verse 11). Gideon and his servant arrived outside the enemy's camp and heard a man sharing a dream with his companion. The companion answered the man and said, “This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands” (verse 14). When Gideon heard of the dream, it was then that “he worshiped” and returned to his camp, proclaiming, “Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into our hands” (verse 15).

Gideon gathered the 300 soldiers, divided them into three companies, and gave each a trumpet and a torch inside an empty pitcher. Then he instructed the Israelite army on a signal to blow their trumpets and shout, “For the Lord and for Gideon” (verse 18). Gideon and his hundred men approached the camp and blew their trumpets and broke the pitchers in which each man's torch had been concealed. The other two companies of a hundred did as Gideon and his men had done. “While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled” (verse 21).

In Judges 6:15, 16, the Lord appeared to Gideon and commanded him to save

Israel from the hand of the Midianites.

Gideon replied, "How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (verse 15). Gideon did not realize that God does not need the many; He is more powerful than the odds.

The Lord said to him, "I will be with you, and you will strike down the Midianites together" (verse 16).

Gideon believed in God's promise and cooperated with Him to achieve His purpose and, later, defeated the Midianites. Gideon was God's instrument (an ambassador, a hand or a foot of God). God proved to Israel that it was only through Him that they overcame the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon realized this and immediately praised God.

Picture yourself as one of the 300 men facing the Midianite army. How would you feel? As Christians, we must be devoted to overcome the odds and to make a sacrifice. We can receive power from the most awesome force in the universe, and

It's easy for Christians to take credit for things we've accomplished.

the only thing stopping us from receiving that power is ourselves. Let God help you overcome the odds, and when you do overcome them, remember, it is God working through you.

REACT

1. What other people in the Bible overcame great odds through the use of God's power?
2. What odds do we face in comparison to those of Gideon's time, and how can we use God's power to overcome those odds today?
3. Why did God increase the odds against the Israelites? Has He done the same to you, as well? Explain your answer.
4. On what basis should a person accept or reject an assignment that the church may offer him or her?
5. What are some jobs you think God could use you for?
6. What forms of encouragement do you think you would need to do God's work?

* *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2.

Am I the Right Person for This Job?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 6:15

When God asks me to do something for Him, I often react like a person going down a water slide, careening from one side to the other. Part of me says, “Sure, Lord, I could do that. I’m willing to try. Good choice. I probably am the right man for this job.” To be honest, my bravado quickly vanishes when God’s will involves big risks or the possibility of embarrassing failure. That’s when the other side of me says, “Oh, Lord, I know You aren’t supposed to make a mistake, but asking me to do this might be Your first.”

Now, if I have something that needs to be accomplished, I ask the person who has the best abilities to complete the task successfully. Yet God just does not work that way. He seems to delight in asking people who are ridiculously unable to achieve what He requires. Gideon is a prime example of this odd tendency. God operates from a selection criterion that does not seem to place much stock in human ability.

Reflecting on the Gideon story, Ellen White makes this interesting comment: “Before honor is humility. The Lord can use most effectually those who are most sensible of their own unworthiness and inefficiency. He will teach them to exercise the courage of faith. He will make them strong by uniting their weakness to His

God is taking applications. He has a host of impossible jobs that must be filled.

might, wise by connecting their ignorance with His wisdom.”

“Sensible of their own unworthiness and inefficiency.” These are interestingly chosen words. *Sensible* implies an honest-yet-healthy awareness of one’s abilities. This awareness is neither overinflated nor self-deprecating. It just admits the facts and is willing to turn to the Power outside ourselves.

God always chooses willingness over ability. According to this quotation, He is prepared to teach courage to the timid and to make the weak strong according to His might. He will even make the ignorant wise. Our inabilities do not worry Him. He is the creator of ability.

His search is for willing hearts—hearts that step out on the limb of faith because His Word says we should—hearts that trust God more than themselves; hearts that admit their own brokenness and limitations, but cling to His omnipotence.

I believe He is taking applications. He has a host of impossible, Gideon-type jobs that must be filled. Required job qualifications are unworthiness and inefficiency. On-the-job training is provided, and, as they say, “The benefits are out of this world.”

* *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1003.

By Mike Dunn, chaplain, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Judg. 7:14

The Old Testament is full of people who were asked to do mighty things for God. All the way back to Abraham and even before him, men and women relayed God's commands to their neighbors, built a gigantic boat, and laid down altars. With all those stories, Gideon should not have been surprised when he was asked to do the impossible. He should have remembered the driving force behind the feats of his forefathers—God's encouragement.

For years the Eastern people had hounded the Israelites. One hundred thirty-five thousand Midianites were gathered in the valley, together for what kings Zebah and Zalmunna hoped would be Israel's last fight. Thwarting their plans, God again called on one of His people who, along with His encouragement, could wipe out Midian.

Here is where we can recognize God's replaying of history and be secure in the thought that He will continue to replay it. Ellen White says God "never asks us to do anything without supplying the grace and power to do that very thing. All His biddings are enablings." Gideon realized God would be running the battle when he overheard the Midianite soldier relate his dream (Judg. 7:14). God had been testing Gideon's loyalty up to that point. And, just when Gideon's loyalty was

God "never asks us to do anything without supplying the grace and power to do that very thing."

failing, God gave enough encouragement to satisfy any officer.

The history of God's encouragement is vast. Jacob envisioned a ladder to heaven. Noah was inundated by thousands of animals on his doorstep. Moses could keep going when God provided water from a rock. Joshua had renewed faith when the Jordan parted. No matter how big and seemingly invincible the problem was, God provided the encouragement needed.

Today, God is still asking us to do things for Him—maybe not the dramatic request to wipe out 135,000 people or float a zoo, but every day He is asking, and each day many of us say Yes. Is He asking you to be a student missionary? An architect? Maybe He needs a politician in office who can implement His agenda. The problems we face today of hunger, prejudice, abuse, genocide, pollution, church politics, and many others are no more insurmountable than Gideon's problem. By ourselves we can't succeed, but with God's encouragement we are enabled. Listen and watch for encouragement. It can come in any form, even from the tent of the enemy!

* *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 9, 1897, p. 5.

By Jeremy Duerksen, freshman graphic-design major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

My Prayers Really Are Answered!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Phil. 4:6, 7

God is so amazing. Every time I put His will first, things in my life seem to go great. I used to wonder why things went so well when I put His will first. One thing I know is that I believe God has a will for my life. I've found that as I grow older, become more knowledgeable, and get to know God better, I seem to hear His voice so much more.

But how is it that I hear His voice? I'm not quite sure. One day I asked God for advice with one of my problems. I believe He answered me. I immediately went to test this answer, and it worked. So, I decided, *I think I'll try this again!* Here is where I feel my story applies to everyone. As a result of the experience I had, I have become a more committed believer. He's right here with me—every step of the way. Maybe a part of my experience could apply to you.

Steps to success:

1. Test God. He loves a challenge. Although it may seem as if He doesn't want

Here is where I feel my story applies to everyone.

to give us what we pray for, if we ask, He'll always give us what we need.

2. Have faith. Faith isn't all that easy for me, but it is a requirement if the answers to our prayers can be directly applied to us.

3. Prove it. Prove to yourself and to God that the answer you received and believe in by faith will work. Prove to yourself that you do have the faith to act on the answer. Prove to God that you trust Him enough to put that answer to work.

Once you have done all these things, keep praying. Remember, God likes challenges. And finally, if God trusts us enough with His stuff, shouldn't we trust Him with ours? I'll be praying for you!

REACT

1. Is it a sin to worry about anything? Explain your answer.
2. In what practical ways can someone overcome anxiety?

By Eric Welty, sophomore business-administration major with an emphasis in marketing, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Does God Need Our Help?

OPINION

Key Text: Phil. 2:12

God could do it all. After all, He spoke the universe into existence; why would He need human help for anything? Maybe the question should not be, Why does He need our help? but rather, Why does He use us to carry out His will?

From personal experience, I believe that God is doing us a favor by involving us in His plan. As humans, we tend to learn best by involvement. If we allow ourselves to be involved, we are enriched by each experience we are a part of in life. Both good and bad are used by God to teach us lessons and enrich our relationship with Him. This is true not only of the times when things happen to us, but also when God asks us to do something for Him. Many times in doing God's will we receive more than we give. We learn compassion for our fellow humanity; whereas, if God took care of each situation on His own, we could stand back and appreciate, but we would never fully understand the impact He has in our lives.

As Christians we strive to be Christlike. By seeking to do God's will, we are, in a sense, seeking to understand Him more fully—to be closer to Him. By giving us a part to do in His plan for the world, God has not only created an effective way

God is doing us a favor by involving us in His plan.

to get things done, but He has given us yet another path to bring us closer to Him. So by doing God's will, we learn more of what it is to be truly Christlike, which, in turn, allows our relationship with God to grow stronger.

As I was growing up, I found that when my parents asked me to do something, it was usually because they were trying to teach me to be a certain kind of person. By following their guidance, I learned not only those lessons, but I also grew to know more about them—their values, beliefs, and, most of all, their love for me.

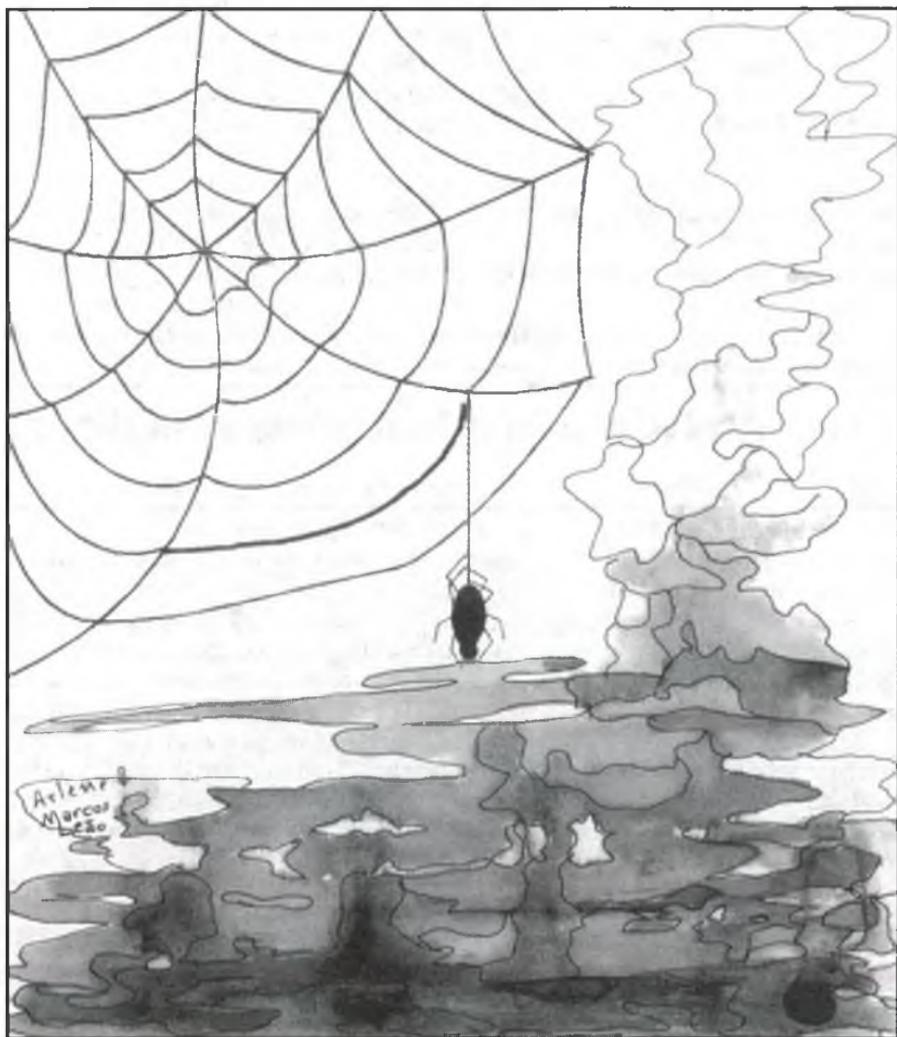
God teaches us in so many ways. So many times we turn away from His will because we cannot see the “plan behind the plan.” God works in those who do His will. As we allow God to work through us, He can work in us as well. It seems wonderful to me that a God so powerful would love us so much that He works with our sinful selves to carry out His perfect plan.

REACT

In practical, everyday terms, what does it mean to “work out your salvation” (Phil. 2:12, NIV)?

By Bryn Seyle, sophomore psychology and fine-arts student, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

ROYALTY AND DISLOYALTY



“Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you” (Judg. 8:23).

Cobwebs and Spiders

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: John 8:34-36; Judg. 8:23

Whenever the pastor asked an old woman to pray in church, she had only one prayer request: "Lord, please remove the cobweb of sin from our lives." One day when she was praying, the pastor added aloud, "Lord, please kill the spider that produces the cobweb of sin."

These two prayers are related to the history of the children of Israel and also to our lives today. The people of Israel during the period of the judges had many problems with repeated disobedience and rebellion. Clearly, we see the problem of sin depicted. Is it not the same problem with us today?

The Israelites were tired of repeated problems. After Gideon freed them from the Midianites, they enjoyed their freedom and victory and wished Gideon and his descendants would rule over them. They thought if they had a human king, their problem of cobwebs would be solved. Was the issue the lack of human leadership? Or was it their frequent rejection of God's rulership?

We know that as long as the spider lives, cobwebs will also be present. Unless we destroy the roots of our problems, the fruit is likely to reappear. When we appre-

**Unless we destroy the roots of our problems,
the fruit is likely to reappear.**

ciate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our response will be loyalty and faithfulness to His demand, and a person who is loyal to their Creator and Saviour will also be loyal to their fellow human beings. True appreciation will lead us to loyalty.

The question is, Who is the ruler of our lives? Are we still slaves to sin? If people accept Jesus as Lord, their actions will speak louder than their words. If Jesus becomes the Lord of our families, then they will become loyal to Him and loyal to one another. If the church allows Jesus to be her ruler, the church will shine as the light to the world. If nations choose Jesus as their king, we will experience peace flowing like a river, justice ruling overall, and friendship flourishing in each corner; however, this is only if we allow Jesus to be the king.

Today, if God gives us a chance, who shall we choose as our leader? Will we choose the "thornbush" (Judg. 9:14, NIV), as the Shechemites did? If we do, then we will be letting "the fire come out of the thornbush and consume us." If we receive Jesus as our Saviour, "I in Jesus," then we have to accept Him as our Lord—"Jesus in me." If not, then our rejection means allowing ourselves to live with the cobweb of sin.

By Mesfin Mandefro, senior theology student at the University of Eastern Africa Baraton, Eldoret, Kenya, East Africa.

At the Crossroads: God and Humanity

LOGOS

Judg. 8:22–9:57

It is interesting to note how people interpret and relate to God. Our idea about this supreme, eternal, omnipotent Being is really a reflection of our human existence. To an outstanding extent, all theology is inculcated anthropology. And finding myself biologically and geographically identified in the African continent, this reasoning has substantial impact.

Notoriously religious, my tradition-bound grandparents would carry their belief about God throughout the activities of the day. It was God who brought fish into their nets and made a bonanza harvest of cotton and sweet potatoes. When the community was good, there was peace and prosperity. When people displeased the gods, vengeance struck through bloodshed, pestilence, and death. Diviners alone could atone, with the blessing of the royal chief or king, who was both lavishly adorned and typically adored.

From the theocratic society of ancient Israel and their aggressive judge, Gideon, there is much to identify with, as narrated in Judges 8:22–9:57.

The Royal Offer (Judg. 8:22)

Gideon had just returned victorious over Zebah and Zalmunna, atrocious kings of the Midianites. The Lord had faith in Gideon's potential as a "mighty man of valour" (6:12). The Lord had also fulfilled His promise in Gideon that "surely I will be with thee" (verse 16) and that "I will wait until you return" (verse 18, NIV). But Gideon had even more tangible potential for the position as a leader. His father owned the land on which stood the city shrine (verse 25), servants waited on him (verse 27), and he and his brothers had a royal resemblance (verse 18). But above all, the people were ready! "Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian," they demanded (verse 22).

Attractive offer! Clicking the OK button would almost instantaneously crown him king! But such lust for power could prove destructive. His job description was to deliver Israel (6:14), not rule over it.

Patience had taught him trust. Trust had facilitated faith. And faith begot humility. So Gideon replied, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you" (8:23). God was the sole monarch of redeemed Israel, and Gideon was not about to flirt with changing this arrangement!

God had placed a fine judge over Israel. In history Gideon learned that God was the Creator and, He alone, Lord. In business administration, God was the Administrator, and humanity but stewards. Gideon also learned that accounting meant giving God the credit. Gideon graduated summa cum laude, knowing who was in charge!

The Priestly Ephod

A divinely prescribed vestment, the ephod is first mentioned in Exodus 25. Moses was instructed of God to design this unique garment for priestly use. Patterned after an apron, and covering the front and back, it was made of "gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen" (Exod. 28:5, NIV), offered by the Israelite congregation.

But, alas, for our human conqueror! His previous good act was offset by a single wrong move. Gideon was flattered that he had received angelic revelation. After all, didn't the people need an avenue through which they might hear from God during these troubled times? Moreover, it is probable that the rightful high priest was not doing his job. There is no indication of consultation of the Urim and Thummim during this time. Why not play the priest? So he did! And all Israel played the harlot. They worshiped the vestment whose "value was estimated at \$25,000" (Judg. 8:26, TLB).

I believe the Almighty God whom Israel had deserted was worth more than that! One act of disloyalty in the human relationship did provoke a particular God. Israel forgot its memory gem about their jealous God, who consequently visited "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Exod. 20:5, RSV).

The Haughty Bramble (Judg. 9:7-15)

The bramble was the consequence of Israel's harlotry (idolatry).

From my traditional background, stories by the fireside were animated. Grandparents usually would bring the inanimate world into spirited humans and the animal kingdom to represent human relationships. Effectually, the fables left tremendous impact on the moral, social, and spiritual conduct throughout that generation and were transmitted similarly to the next.

Jotham could find no better means to impress divine admonition. Abimelech, Jerubbaal's (Gideon's) son, represented the lowly yet haughty bramble of the first

Clicking the OK button would almost instantaneously crown him king!

recorded parable. Abimelech's first stratagem was to advance north to Ophrah, slaughter his 70 brothers on a single stone to obliterate any rival, and then organize his coronation. With his mission accomplished, he returned to Shechem for his investiture service.

The bramble had potential to do two things: choke other growth and, through friction in dry summer, start a forest fire. Abimelech embodied two characteristics: crime and pride. The first chokes and destroys all human relationships. The second is self-exultation and consequently consumes the individual.

In relating to Yahweh, the Almighty God, Abimelech would rather consider "How Great I Am" than "How Great Thou Art." The royal King of the universe allowed the disloyal Shechemites to reap their sowing—destruction by Abimelech and Jotham's curse.

Human nature, as contrasted to divine nature, is superficial, self-righteous, and self-destructive. But though we are in our filthy rags, God has, through Christ, called by name and has made His personal, private, property (Isa. 64:6; 43:10) all who hear and pledge their loyalty to Royalty.

REACT

To what extent have I realized Christ's love and His possession of perfect righteousness, even though I am, at times, disloyal to Him?

By Michael Kuyenga Lim, senior theology major at University of Eastern Africa Baraton, Eldoret, Kenya, East Africa.

Two Ways to Catch a Dagger

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 8:22, 23

An African saying advises: When fate throws a dagger at you, there are only two ways to catch it—by the blade or by the handle. If you catch it by the blade, it will cut you. If you catch it by the handle, you can use it to fight your way through to victory.

The lives of David, Solomon, Uzziah, Joash, and Amaziah after his successful campaign in Edom (2 Chron. 25:14-16) all teach us the inability of the human heart to drink a full cup of success without intoxication.

How far did Gideon pass through such temptation uninjured when the devil offered him a free ride on a slippery path of worldly greatness? His great faith, his humility of purpose, his trustful obedience, his total surrender to the will of God without fear of the results of his successful campaign, were all tested by Satan, who requires that God's people "sacrifice integrity, disregard conscience, indulge selfishness."¹

Ellen White says, "None of us are beyond the power of temptation."² "Satan is continually changing his temptations. . . . We shall be in different circumstances; . . .

"None of us are beyond the power of temptation."

we shall be surrounded by fresh dangers, and constantly assailed by new and unexpected temptations."³

But Christ, whose "heart yearns over us in all our trials and temptations,"⁴ has made it possible "for every member of the human family to resist temptation."⁵ And "however great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul . . . it is not in the power of earth or hell to compel any one to do evil."⁶ "It is Satan's act to tempt you, but your own act to yield."⁷ Therefore, "temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for sin."⁸

REACT

1. How do you resist Satan, who is concentrating all his energies to bend your will to his?
2. How do you feel or react when you are praised for accomplishments?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 130.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 425.

3. *Gospel Workers*, p. 257.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

5. *Medical Ministry*, p. 264.

6. *Messages to Young People*, p. 62.

7. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 623.

8. *Messages to Young People*, p. 67.

By Kebebe Daka, assistant professor in the department of theology and religious studies, University of Eastern Africa Baraton, Eldoret, Kenya, East Africa.

Power Struggle

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Judg. 8:23

Gideon was humbled by God's sovereignty. He refused to take God's rightful place in the leadership of Israel, and he recognized that his accomplishments resulted solely from God's power. "He had been called of God to perform a special service for the nation, and he had accomplished it."¹

As a true son of Israel, Gideon had learned the Israelite creed (Deut. 6:4), the commandments (Exodus 20), Israel's history of bondage in Egypt, with God as deliverer (Exod. 14:18), provider and sustainer (Deut. 28:1; Exod. 15:24-26; 16:3-31; 17:1-8), and defender of justice (Exod. 23:1-9; Num. 35:11). He had personally experienced God's hand in the battle against the Midianites (Judg. 7:7, 22). Gideon knew all these attributes and more, summarized in one sentence: "For I the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (Exod. 20:5, NIV). To accept the kingship would have been tantamount to denying God's reputation. The issue at hand was a power struggle between self and divine guidance. In all spheres of life, men and women have shown inspiration in their service to God and humanity, inspiring nations to prosperity and giving hope to posterity.

The ugly side explodes into reality when power-drunk leaders turn into tyrants.

The issue at hand was a power struggle between self and divine guidance.

History tells us of political leaders obsessed with wiping out whole races for the sake of a few. Our own church history has not been spared, and it testifies of some church leaders who turned out to be self-seeking egoists. "When men cast off the fear of God, they are not long in departing from honor and integrity."²

Although his earlier faith is commended (Heb. 11:32), Gideon's later life reveals that more than good intentions are required to make an act right.³ He took his own initiative to make a priestly vestment, which is a priestly prerogative, and set it up at Ophrah (his hometown), where "all Israel prostituted themselves by worshipping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family" (Judg. 8:27, NIV). Later, Gideon's son murdered his 70 brothers to proclaim himself king over Israel. Thus a small act of unfaithfulness causes suffering.

Greater success in God's service exposes us to evil whenever divine guidance is neglected. God calls all to a life of service devoid of pride. Love for God is reflected in our commitment to a life of faith and trust in divine guidance while serving humanity.

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 354.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 557.

3. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 355.

By Steve R. Apola, theology and business student, University of Eastern Africa Baraton, Eldoret, Kenya, East Africa.

The Dangers of Success

HOW-TO

Key Text: Judg. 8:23, 24

After the Israelites celebrated their Gideon-led victory, one sees Gideon's humanity. His vulnerability, after all the jubilation and honor bestowed upon him, left him open to follow temptation away from God. Ellen White understood his problem when she penned the words "The season of inactivity that succeeds a great struggle is often fraught with greater danger than is the period of conflict."

Without a consistent Spirit-led life, we tend to spend time jumping the fence between obedience and adaptation—being truly obedient to God's will some of the time and adapting to rules we've grown up with the rest of the time. It is quite possible, and reasonably easy in a conservative church setting, to practice religiosity but lack spirituality. After all, we *know* what is expected of us!

And the temptation just to follow prescribed rules often follows a time of triumph—a sermon skillfully preached, a tough exam passed with flying colors, a well-deserved salary raise, a gracious compliment. The good feeling that comes from success can leave us vulnerable because of a new false confidence. Choices made at such times are often not Spirit-led.

How do we handle this very human problem?

“The season of inactivity that succeeds a great struggle is often fraught with greater danger than is the period of conflict.”

1. It is important to recognize that no choice is too unimportant to ask for guidance. No matter whether our cup of confidence is overflowing or only half full, God wants to be intimately involved in all our decisions.

2. We must recognize our vulnerability after good—sometimes mountain-top—experiences. We can fall into this trap when we are tempted to become *too* excited about experiences. Then we must remind ourselves that “this period will pass, and reality will return soon”—the old “what goes up must come down” syndrome.

3. All opportunities we have must be recognized as times to bring God, not ourselves, glory. Then our joy can be for the praise we are bringing to Christ, and we need not enter the picture—except as a mere tool. With that mind-set, there is no false sense of confidence to battle.

Gideon's lesson was a difficult one. He and his family paid a high price because Gideon, after his moment of triumph and glory, began adapting instead of being obedient. His was a lesson that affected generations to come. Our challenge is to look to Christ *especially* during the times of greatest vulnerability.

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 555.

By Mary Laabs, lecturer, department of theology and religious studies, University of Eastern Africa Baraton, Eldoret, Kenya, East Africa.

Prescription for Human Relations

OPINION

Key Text: Phil. 2:5

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5, RSV).

“Aluta continua!” rang the chorus of voices in the newly independent former Portuguese colony of Mozambique, in response to a similar chant by their newly elected president and charismatic leader, the late Samora Machel. What this dynamic military leader was chanting was a reminder as well as a challenge; *aluta continua* is interpreted to mean the “struggle continues.” President Machel was reminding his followers that although Mozambique had experienced political change by gaining freedom from its colonial masters, the struggle against imperialism, oppression, poverty, and war will not cease with independence, but will indeed continue.

Similarly for the Christian—the child of God—the struggle with sin in general, and self in particular, is an ongoing process. The enemy seeks to make the slogan “Aluta continua” a daily reality in and with each of us.

Why, in our churches and institutions, are human relations not stressed as much as Sabbath keeping and healthful living?

Paul made it known that Jesus emptied Himself of the attitude of “my right.”

Christ was not partial. All were the same in His sight.

Jesus did not believe equality with God was to be grasped. When a poor man drinks, he is classed as a drunkard; when a wealthy man drinks, he’s viewed as easing his tension, calming his nerves. The measure by which we judge and relate to others is often predicated on *who* is doing something, rather than on what is being done.

We must therefore empty ourselves of all that may separate us from God. To empty ourselves may mean that prejudice and superior attitudes must take flight. We cannot allow prejudice and superior attitudes to control our actions. Christ was not partial. All were the same in His sight. He helped the poor and the rich, the mighty and the small, the strong and the weak. He related to all.

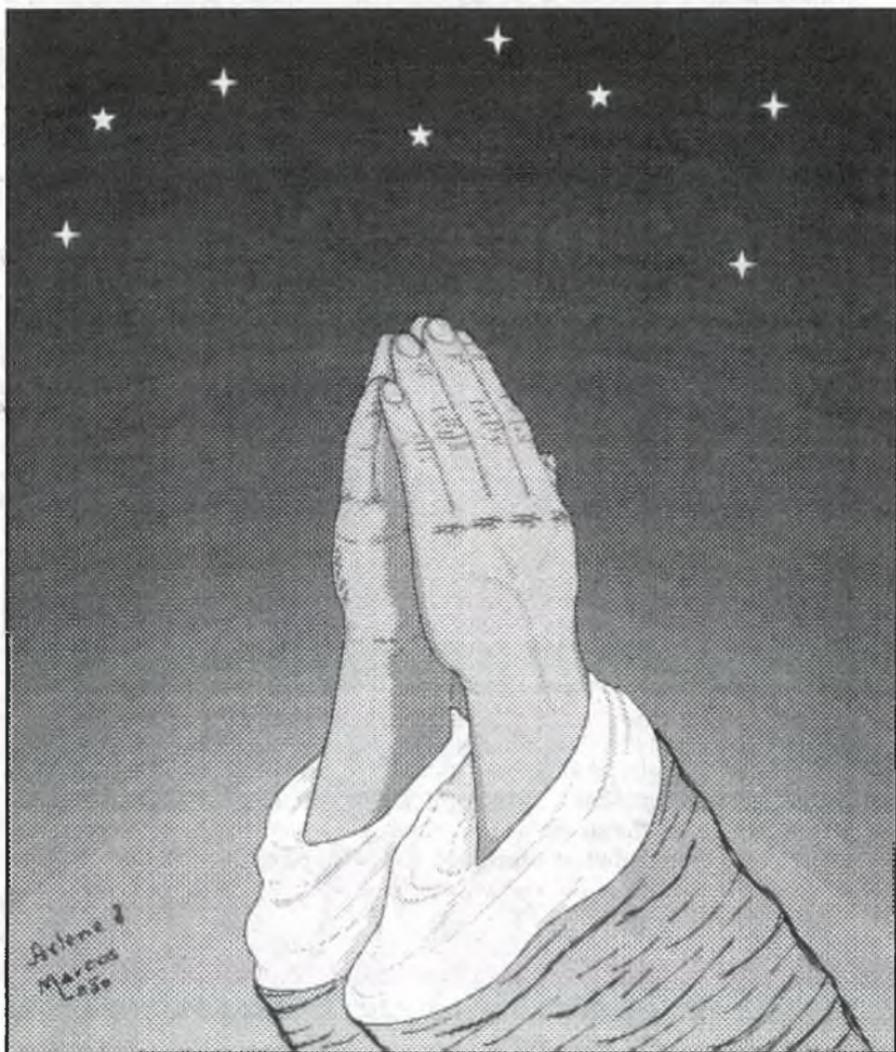
If we but adopt the mind of Christ, we, too, shall be exalted. Empty yourself, humble yourself, and obey God. You will be victorious in your struggle with sin and self, and peace will reign in your life.

REACT

1. Do you agree or disagree that the issue of human relations is often minimized in our church? Explain your answer.
2. Explain the relationship between human relations and Christianity.

By Lester A. Parkinson, senior pastor and chaplain, University of Eastern Africa Baraton, Eldoret, Kenya, East Africa.

REPENTANCE OR RASH PROMISES?



“So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord; and he became indignant over the misery of Israel” (Judg. 10:16, RSV).

We've Been Through This Before

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 11:28

"Dear Father," she whispered, "I've fallen again." Her hands trembled as she spoke. "I know that we've been through this before; I have asked for forgiveness, and You have graciously granted it. By now You probably think I don't really mean I'm sorry. I've been in this vicious circle for some time now, playing with the enemy until he captures me and then making out of repentance a routine I go through to quiet my conscience. I guess I'm glad I still have a conscience, even though it isn't as strong as it used to be.

"But, Father, You have to believe it's different this time. You opened my eyes to the pain I cause You every time I choose my own way. I don't want to hurt You, my family, or myself anymore. For the first time in a long time, I can say I am truly sorry. I don't want to fall every time I come to that hateful trap on the road; I want to feel Your powerful arm around me, lifting me over the rubble, guiding me through the path of happiness."

She paused, got up from her knees, and looked out into the starlit sky. She fumbled nervously with her hands. "Am I forgiven? Do I need to do anything else?" It seemed hard to believe that God would accept her repentance at face value. She raised her voice in a lonely, desperate plea. "God, how can I show You that this time

"I don't want to hurt You, my family, or myself anymore."

it's for real? I know I don't deserve Your forgiveness. If I promise, will You forgive?"

Do you ever feel as if God expects you to prove your repentance by making an extraordinary promise? I know at times I've felt that telling God "I'm sorry" isn't quite enough; I need to do penance to show Him how I really feel.

The prodigal son made the same mistake. Knowing the extent of his wrong, he promised his father he would be as one of the farm's hired hands. But, like the loving father of the parable, God stands with His arms outstretched and says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28, NIV). So you see, it's not so much what we can promise Him, but rather, what He has promised us.

God doesn't ask us to inflict punishment on ourselves to prove our sorrow, nor do our pious vows gain us favor in His sight. All He asks is that we allow Him "who began a good work in" us "to carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6).

By Sandra E. Araújo, associate director of public relations and alumni, Universidad Adventista de las Antillas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

Cyclical Apostasy

LOGOS

Judg. 10:6–12:7

“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him” (Judg. 10:6).

One of the saddest and most tragic times in the history of the children of Israel occurs during the period of the Judges. The best-fitting analogy to describe the experience of the Hebrews is that of a spiritual roller coaster. In a vicious circle, apostasy took over the nation. One of the most common expressions of that time was: “The children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.” It is important to highlight the word *again*, because it shows that God’s special people got trapped in a vicious circle, falling and getting up again and again. But if a constant back-sliding into sin demonstrates rebelliousness and insensitivity toward God, much more evident is God’s forgiving spirit and mercy for the sinner. The apostle Paul paints a clear picture when he says, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20).

After Joshua’s death, Israel turned away from God. In order to teach them a lesson and to see whether they would choose to serve Him or worship the pagan gods, God allowed the pagan nations to grow around them. Being a headstrong people, they went beyond the sin of other pagan neighbors, practicing a religious syncretism that was hard to match.

Circumstantial Repentance

As a result of this cycle of apostasy, the Israelites suffered oppression and indescribable calamities. This, in turn, motivated them to go to God in a series of circumstantial repentances that were evidently superficial. In spite of this, God showed Himself generous and forgiving. “And his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel” (Judg. 10:16).

Apparently, the Israelites tore the gods down from their altars but not from their hearts. In this way the cycle was perpetuated, and they continued doing evil in the eyes of God.

“Repentance has a double aspect; it looks upon things past with a weeping eye, and upon the future with a watchful eye.”

Pondered Decisions

One of the most important virtues is the ability to make thought-out, pondered decisions. Jephthah was a unique judge of Israel. The inspired writer describes him as “a mighty man of valour” (11:1). This description spells success! However, he had some characteristics that ruined the good he had accomplished. Jephthah turned a great victory into sad mourning. This skilled warrior was rash, reckless, impetuous, and imprudent. It isn’t right to try to bribe God. Jephthah didn’t take into consideration the consequences of his rash vow. He should have taken into account that our promises shouldn’t go against God’s established principles.

REACT

1. What is essential for genuine and sincere repentance?
2. Why shouldn't repentance be based upon consequences of wrongdoing?
3. What role does faith play in true repentance?
4. What does Jephthah's experience teach us?
5. Should Jephthah have gone back on his vow? Explain your answer.
6. How can I know I have truly repented?
7. How does God treat those who repent?

* Robert South, *Illustrations Unlimited*, James Hewett, ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), p. 440.

By Javier Díaz, dean of students at Universidad Adventista de las Antillas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

One More Time

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 10:16

John sank in the car seat as the approaching bright-blue lights told him beyond a doubt that he was being pursued. Yes, he was sorry.

“I’m sorry. Really, I mean it, Officer. I shouldn’t have done it. You see, this is my dad’s car, and I’m not supposed to be out with it.”

Expressionless, the officer interrupted. “May I see your license and registration, please?”

“Uh, ah, . . .” John fumbled through some papers in the glove compartment. “I know it’s here somewhere.” It seemed like an eternity, and he couldn’t find the vehicle registration; but worst of all, he knew he didn’t have a license.

“Officer, please give me a break,” he pleaded, catching his breath. “I’m truly sorry. I know I broke the law, but please don’t give me a ticket. I promise I won’t do it again.”

The officer saw the frightened boy and thought he was sincere.

“Go on home,” he said. “If I ever catch you on my highway again, speeding and without your papers, I won’t be as lenient.”

Finally, John’s heartbeat became normal again. As he drove home, he thanked God for the kind police officer.

Fear of consequences doesn’t bring about genuine repentance.

The next morning, John got up late. When he came to the kitchen to get breakfast, he saw his parents’ note. They had gone and wouldn’t be back until late. A few minutes later John was on his way to the beach—in his father’s car. Apparently, his repentance had been short-lived.

“True repentance is more than sorrow for sin. It is a resolute turning away from evil”¹ (see 2 Cor. 7:10, 11). Fear of consequences doesn’t bring about genuine repentance. Instead, a “pious sadness” is placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit when we realize what sin really is, in the light of the justice and love of Jesus.

Furthermore, genuine repentance gives way to genuine transformation. It doesn’t shy away from the consequences of the sins committed; rather, it confronts them, hoping never to make the same mistake again (Judg. 10:15).

“The Israelites now humbled themselves before the Lord. ‘And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served Jehovah.’ And the Lord’s heart of love was grieved—‘was grieved for the misery of Israel.’ O, the long-suffering mercy of our God! When His people put away the sins that had shut out His presence, He heard their prayers, and at once began to work for them.”²

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 595, 557.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 558.

By Jorge L. Figueroa, senior theology student at Universidad Adventista de las Antillas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

Red Spots

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Kings 19:14

There is a leprosy of the character that surprises one in moments of utter despair. Two Old Testament prophets illustrate quite clearly how harmful the effects of this illness are.

Elijah, “weary and prostrate,” was discouraged and felt like murmuring. He said, “Now, O Lord, take away my life.”¹ In the Hebrew text, the word translated “enough,” *rav*, provides us with a key to the prophet’s supreme anguish. From the root word, *rav*, comes the familiar term Rabbi, “my great one.” Elijah’s anguish, then, was intense. “He had high hopes that Israel as a nation would return to their allegiance to God.”² But finding himself in sudden mortal danger, he surrendered to sudden rashness; a superficial eruption of red spots broke out through his character in his zeal to accomplish his mission, weakening his faith in his Maker.

Jonah, following his powerful delivery of God’s message to sinful Nineveh, being a witness to heaven’s infinite mercy, also pleaded rashly that the Lord should take away his life. The red spots of rashness are, out of necessity, followed by acts of repentance for steps taken in haste and outside God’s timely plans. We must “see the big picture” to understand that God is still on the throne and that He does

God does nothing without some specific purpose.

nothing—nor permits anything to happen to us—without some specific purpose. The most effective remedy for the red-spot rashness is the council given us in Scripture: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10, NIV).

REACT

1. Have I rashly walked ahead of the Lord today in my zeal for living?
2. How do I manifest my regret for not having trusted the Lord more fully?
3. What lessons can we take from the experiences of Elijah and Jonah to overcome discouragement?
4. What specific, practical things can a Christian do to prevent discouragement from affecting his or her relationship with God?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 289.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

By Leroy Miller, English professor at Universidad Adventista de las Antillas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

Grilled-Cheese Rationale

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 46:1

As our tiny Chevette hummed at 40 m.p.h. over the thin layer of ice that covered the highway, the unexpected happened; the car stalled, the wheels locked, and on came a series of 360-degree spins. One of my friends cried for his mother, and the other became as pale as snow. I quickly threw myself over my fresh A&W grilled-cheese sandwiches to make sure not one was damaged.

My life was spared that day. In retrospect, I ask myself, “Why did I react so irrationally?”

Just over a decade ago, after Air Florida’s 737 crashed into the Potomac River, I remember reading an interview with a survivor of the crash. As he thrashed around in those icy waters, waiting to be rescued, he admits that the primary concern on his mind was where he had left one of his shoes and why the other one was so wet.

Generally speaking, when we find ourselves in a crisis, rational thinking isn’t the first thing that comes to mind. However, crisis situations need not always be met with rash thinking.

Here are some steps that can help, even amidst irrational circumstances:

1. Decide what your crisis is. To make an accurate request for help, you must

I quickly threw myself over my fresh A&W grilled-cheese sandwiches.

first know the extent of the need.

2. Go to God, not the sandwiches, knowing He will have either an immediate or a long-term solution. God will provide you with the means to solve your dilemma. However, remember that you must always ask for God’s will to be done, not your own.

3. Don’t let your crisis overwhelm you so that you go to God only as a last resort. Go to God in the good times, as well as in the bad. You will cultivate a valuable habit.

4. Don’t make drastic promises to God. Remember, for every crisis you may have, God has an equivalent promise. Don’t make void God’s promises by making up your own. Claim His promises, knowing that He will always fulfill them.

In crises most people don’t trust anyone. I’ve been a gymnastics coach for five years. When a gymnast psyches himself out over the performance of a difficult maneuver, even when I’m spotting, I always ask, “Have I ever let you fall while I was spotting you?” I can almost hear God asking me in my own crises, “Have I ever let you fall while I was spotting you? If I have, you may doubt Me. If I haven’t—and I haven’t—you may trust Me fully and completely.”

By Carlos Moretta, senior pre-dentistry student at Universidad Adventista de las Antillas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

Promises: Who Needs Them?

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Pet. 3:9

When we make a promise to God, we should think twice. We should not shun indebtedness and responsibility, since our lives should be a debt of responsibility toward God. Sometimes our promises have the intention of manipulating God. We use them to make God bend to our desires. Are we so wrapped up in our circumstances that we forget that He knows us better than we know ourselves? He knows our needs; He knows what makes us happy and what could harm us. Knowing this, why is it so hard to trust Him completely?

God's promises are true and eternal; they are always fulfilled. What may vary is how, when, and where we receive their benefits. In return, all He asks for is a grateful heart.

Whoever said that "words are words" wasn't at all correct. Our promises to God should be as strong as stone. Proverbs 12:22 says that lying lips are an abomination to God. That is why it is important, if we promise, to do so judiciously. When we don't keep our promises, we lie; it is as simple as that. However, promises can also be a double-edged sword. If they are not thought out sufficiently, they can

When we don't keep our promises, we lie; it is as simple as that.

backfire on us, as in the case of Jephthah (Judg. 11:30-40).

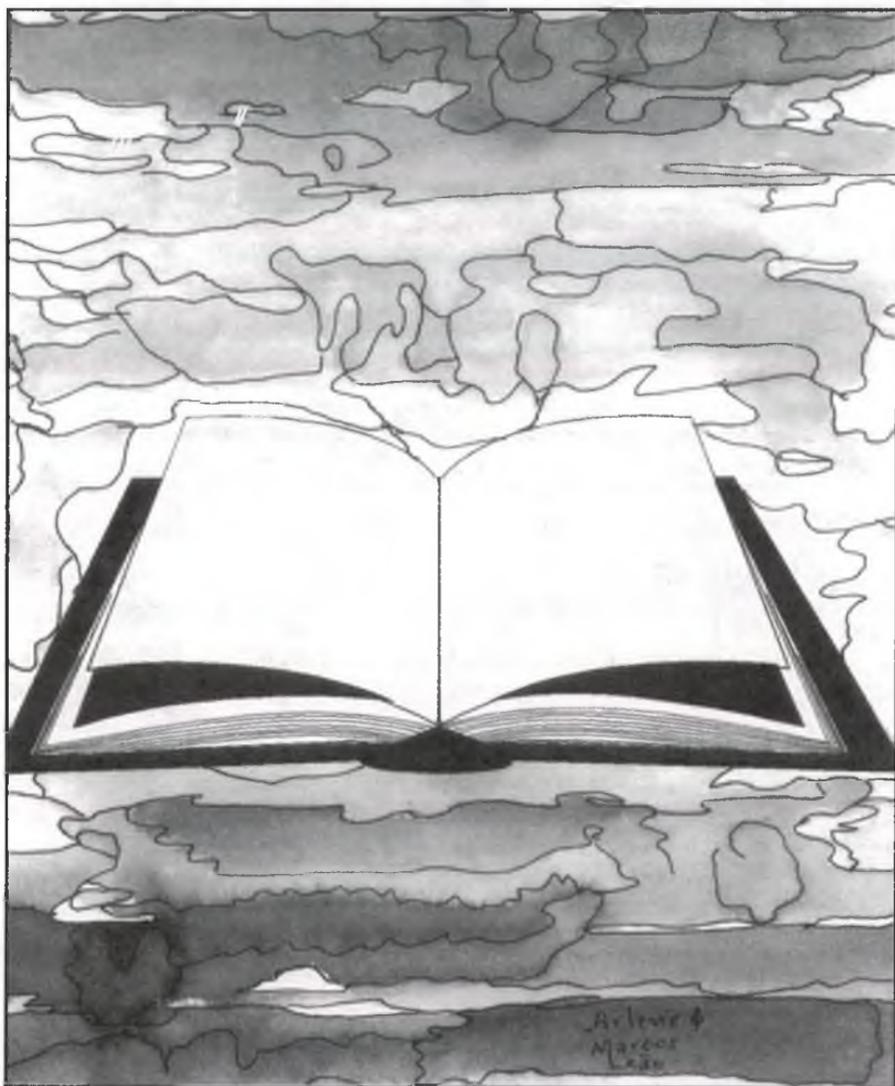
In the Bible, God has left us hundreds and hundreds of promises. Let's strive to receive the blessings of these promises. Surely among them you will find the answer you're looking for.

REACT

1. When is it appropriate to make a promise to God?
2. How can I claim God's promises?
3. In what specific ways can I develop my trust in God?

By Gretchen López, senior Spanish student at Universidad Adventista de las Antillas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

BORN TO WIN



“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” (Judg. 13:3).

What Is in Your Table of Contents?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Judg. 13:5

Samson was born during the early years of the Philistine oppression that started in the year 1120 B.C.* Once again God acted in behalf of His people in those first few years under foreign domination. This time Israel's deliverer would be neither a powerful personality nor a humble peasant; instead, it would be a child set aside for sacred service from the very moment of his conception.

This child had to be raised in a home in which he could learn about the love and power of the Lord; for this reason, God chose Manoah and his wife, a faithful and dedicated couple who were ready to obey and to live the divine precepts.

God designed a plan for Samson's life—to begin the deliverance from the Philistine domain and, at the same time, to be an example for Israel of how God's power is manifest in His dedicated children. For this reason, God gave Samson the necessary resources so that from his early infancy he could fully develop as a human being and as a man of God. In spite of having everything in his favor, however, his mission failed, and others had to finish the work of deliverance.

God has also designed a plan for each of us. In His infinite love, He gave His only begotten Son so that, through faith, we can be saved. And living a life of faith,

The books of our lives still have blank pages.

Christ entrusted us with a specific mission: to proclaim the eternal gospel, to shine with His light wherever we might be, to be an instrument so that those around us can see God's love. However, just as He did not force Samson to follow the way He had traced, neither will He force us to walk in the right path; instead, He waits patiently for you and for me to set our life in harmony with the plans that heaven has for us.

As we read through the pages of Samson's biography, we feel very sad to see how he wasted opportunities to serve God. The books of our lives still have blank pages, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the reading of these pages in heaven be joyful.

* *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 36.

Born to Win

LOGOS

Judg. 13:3

The story of Samson is not merely an account to thrill children with amazing feats. It also has a clear example of the way in which God is developing His plan of deliverance. And at the same time He must face the contingencies of human response as an expression of our freedom of choice.

God has a plan of deliverance (Judg. 13:1-7).

Oppression and ruin follow apostasy (Ps. 106:34-36). However, tragic as it might be, it will not impede God from implementing His plan of deliverance, which includes the elimination of oppression and the restoration of the spiritual experience of His people. This time God looks for a faithful couple (Manoah and his wife), because He wants to act through human agents and because He always finds dedicated children among His people.

The heavenly announcement to Manoah and his wife was really good news; it was the miracle of conception for a barren woman. And although they did not know it, the “admirable” angel who spoke to them was Jesus Christ.¹ The instruction given to the parents for the formation of the child’s character through heredity and education is “a lesson to all who should be mothers to the close of time.”²

“The effect of parental influences is by many parents looked upon as a matter of little moment; but heaven does not so regard it. The message sent by an angel of God, and twice given in the most solemn manner, shows it to be deserving of our most careful thought.

“In the words spoken to the Hebrew mother, God speaks to all mothers in every age. ‘Let her beware,’ the angel said; ‘all that I commanded her let her observe.’ The well-being of the child will be affected by the habits of the mother. Her appetites and passions are to be controlled by principle. There is something for her to shun, something for her to work against, if she fulfills God’s purpose for her in giving her a child. If before the birth of her child she is self-indulgent, if she is selfish, impatient, and exacting, these traits will be reflected in the disposition of the child. Thus many children have received as a birthright almost unconquerable tendencies to evil.”³

However, to the significant prenatal influence we must add the importance of the early education of the child. “The lessons learned, the habits formed, during the years of infancy and childhood, have more to do with the formation of the character and the direction of the life than have all the instruction and training of after-years.”⁴

Human response is vital.

The reaction Manoah and his wife had to the heavenly announcement was admirable. In his prayer (verse 8), Manoah reveals absolute trust in God’s promise, and at the same time, a total need for instruction about the way in which they should conduct themselves as the child’s parents. We should notice that although this event was a miracle, the parents still needed divine instruction that was to be followed carefully. Notice how in verse 12 this matter comes up: “Now let thy words come

to pass [promise to be believed]. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him" (commandments to be obeyed).

This is a clear and practical example of how faith and obedience make up the life of the Christian. And it leads us to think of the sacred responsibility of parents, who should not be content to do the minimum when facing the miracle of parenthood, but should use all the instruction the Lord has provided to realize fully His plan of salvation for our children.

God develops His deliverance plan today (Heb. 10:35, 36).

We live in a time of such great uncertainty and apostasy that it threatens to prevent human eyes from becoming aware of God's truth. The Lord, in His evident plan of deliverance, is looking today for men and women who are faithful, who will take seriously the promise of good news in Him, and believing it, will be willing to obey every divine instruction.

This instruction has the far-reaching purpose of developing a sanctified character in the church of Christ, ministered by the Holy Spirit and based on the laws of heredity and education, and of developing a character that will allow us to be suitable to participate in the glorious triumph of God's plan.

The heavenly announcement to Manoah and his wife was really good news.

REACT

1. If God's plan of salvation for your local congregation were delivered by an angel, what miracle would he announce, and what precise instructions would he give?

2. What relationship do you see between this lesson's theme and the text in Hebrews 10:35, 36?

3. Why do you think God allowed Manoah's wife to be barren and then gave her the gift of maternity?

4. The church also has a plan to follow—the spreading of the gospel to the world. Can our church fail in this mission? What would be the outcome if that should happen?

5. If God had to choose a couple to whom to entrust a new Samson, would He chose your home? Why?

6. If Samson failed, why is he mentioned among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11?

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1006.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1005.

3. *Temperance*, pp. 171, 172.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

To Win or to Lose

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 28:20

The Lord has a plan for a child, and the first stages of this plan take place before the child is born. “Fathers as well as mothers are involved in this responsibility, and they too should seek earnestly for divine grace that their influence may be such as God can approve. The inquiry of every father and mother should be, ‘What shall we do unto the child that shall be born?’”¹

“The nobler the aims, the higher the mental and spiritual endowments, and the better developed the physical powers of the parents, the better will be the life equipment they give their children. . . . Even before the birth of the child, the preparation should begin that will enable it to fight successfully the battle against evil.”²

Some children of God, because of their parents’ influence, can say: “Truly, we were born to win”; but there are other children of God who, for the same reason could think: “We were born to lose.” If the home influence was not the best, if the inherited tendencies are not in accordance with heaven, here are some important thoughts:

“A genuine conversion changes hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong.”³

“Angels are ever present where they are most needed. They are with those who have the hardest battles to fight, with those who must battle against inclination and

“Even before the birth of the child, the preparation should begin.”

hereditary tendencies, whose home surroundings are the most discouraging.”⁴

“The very ones whom God purposes to use as His instruments for a special work, Satan employs his utmost power to lead astray. . . . But none need be overcome. . . . Help is at hand, and will be given to every soul who really desires it.”⁵

REACT

1. How do prenatal influences affect your salvation and the fulfillment of your mission?
2. Imagine that you could interview Samson and his parents. How would they respond to the above question?

1. *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 135, 136.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 371.

3. *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 145.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 568.

By Daniel Costa, economics teacher and accountant of the South American Division, Brasilia, Brazil.

Infertility

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Judg. 13:2, 3

Many doctors consider barren a couple who have not had children after two years of regular sexual activity without the use of contraceptives. Manoah's wife was barren, and there is no doubt about the diagnosis, since it was confirmed by the angel who visited her.

Besides all the expected frustration to the natural desire for parenthood, we must add the prejudices of those days when society considered barrenness in women as one of the worst possible misfortunes and a divine curse (Job 24:21; Gen. 30:2).

Today, it is estimated that approximately 10 percent of all couples cannot conceive. Let's suppose you are living this experience:

- Concerning your relationship as a couple: (1) Has it been affected negatively, or has it improved? (2) How can you offer support to your spouse (1 Sam. 1:5)? (3) Do you believe that marriage is an end in itself and that it can reach a feeling of accomplishment beyond child rearing (1 Sam. 1:5; 1 Corinthians 13 [substitute in verses 1-3 with "If I had children"])?

- Concerning your relationship with others: (1) Have you felt jealous for those

Prejudices of those days considered barrenness in women as a divine curse.

who are parents (Gen. 30:1; Psalm 73)? Have you noticed how many children are orphans or abandoned and could be adopted with love? (See Matt. 24:12.)

- Concerning therapeutic possibilities: (1) Have you looked for counsel with your partner from a professional, seeking diagnosis, support, and possible solutions? There are many causes for infertility in women, as well as in men, that can be treated surgically or with medical or psychiatric therapy. Lately, there are also other options such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogate mothers. Up to what point can we use therapy without compromising our Christian ethics?

- Concerning your relationship to God: (1) Has it improved? (2) Do you believe that the profoundness of your love for God depends on His affirmative answer to your request for a child? (See Hab. 3:17-19; Job 13:15; Rom. 8:28; Psalm 40.)

REACT

1. What responsibilities do today's parents have at such an important time in the world's history?

2. How much responsibility falls on the parents for their children's salvation?

By Kenny Vicente, a physician, and Gisalle Sturralde, a psychologist, both from the Vida Sana Adventist Center, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Nazirite Children

HOW-TO

Key Text: Judg. 13:5, 7

Nazirite means “set apart” or “consecrated.” By divine mandate, Samson would be a Nazirite until death, and his life was destined to deliver Israel from the harassment of the Philistines.

Jehovah made sure to communicate clearly His plan to Manoah and his wife. Parenting can become very difficult if God’s will for the child is unknown. In our present time, when a spirit of possession and selfishness reigns, parents often feel that their children are their exclusive property, dominating their lives in such a way that, little by little, God’s image will dim. On the other hand, if they understand that they have been called to be stewards of their children’s lives and that the children are a divine gift with a divine mission, they will, first of all, take the responsibility of consecrating their children to God.

The example of Manoah and his wife helps us understand that they were faithful and careful with the promised gift—Samson. How did they do it?

1. Judges 13:8, 12: “How shall we order the child?” All parents should constantly raise this prayer and search for God’s help in His Holy Word because they carry the responsibility of preparing these little ones to fulfill God’s plan for them. It is not possible to raise children in the admonition and discipline of the Lord

Manoah also felt intimately involved in the guidance of the hoped-for child.

without divine guidance.

2. Judges 13:12: Although God’s messenger had delivered the first instructions to Manoah’s wife, Manoah also felt intimately involved in the guidance of the hoped-for child, so much so that he used the term *we* as he addressed his question to the angel of the Lord. Too often the responsibility of raising the children falls on one parent only, or worse yet, on a third party. The example of Manoah and his wife is what God wants to see in each home, since the united effort of both parents is essential for an adequate education.

3. Judges 13:13, 14: Temperance plays an integral part of the Christian development of the child. It is through the parents’ example that children learn that their life belongs to their Creator, and for this reason they should preserve it by observing the principles of health.

4. Judges 13:19: Parents should honor God daily by bringing their children to the altar of family worship. It is their responsibility to conduct adequate and attractive worship services, considering the age and personality of the children, so that they will learn to relate to God.

By Rut Brinckhaus, a medical student, and Pamela Sicalo, a psychology student, both from Montevideo, Uruguay.

God Keeps His Promises

OPINION

Key Text: Judg. 13:5, 17

The story in the book of Judges covers a period of transition in the history of Israel that takes place between the time of Joshua's death and the time of Samuel. Chronologically, we should place it between 1200 and 1050 B.C. During this time, loyalty to God had allowed the nation to stay united and victorious; disobedience, however, caused division and slavery.

This historical context helps us to understand the importance of the Angel's promise to the wife of Manoah concerning the child she would bear. How do you think the woman in this story felt as she received the kind of news that she did? It must have been difficult, from a human standpoint, to think that the deliverer of Israel was announced in that way. A barren woman would experience the miracle of conception and then realize that this tender and defenseless child had been chosen to begin the deliverance of Israel.

Only through eyes of faith can we see this; then we are ready to accept the words that later were given to us in the Gospel: "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

There is a parallel between this "incredible" promise made to Manoah and his

At the beginning of their lives, these two boys were surrounded by favorable conditions.

wife and the one made by the same messenger many centuries later to Zacharias and Elizabeth. Both women were barren, but in spite of that, they would conceive and give birth (Judg. 13:4; Luke 1:15), and their children had specific and transcendent missions to fulfill—missions appointed before their births. Samson was chosen to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines; John was chosen to turn "many of the children of Israel . . . to the Lord their God" (Luke 1:16).

At the beginning of their lives, these two boys were surrounded by favorable conditions to aid in the development of physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral fortitude. God kept His part. As with many of the Lord's promises, to be fulfilled, we need to do our part. The lives of Samson and John the Baptist speak of this: "The very ones whom God purposes to use as His instruments for a special work, Satan employs his utmost power to lead astray."^{*}

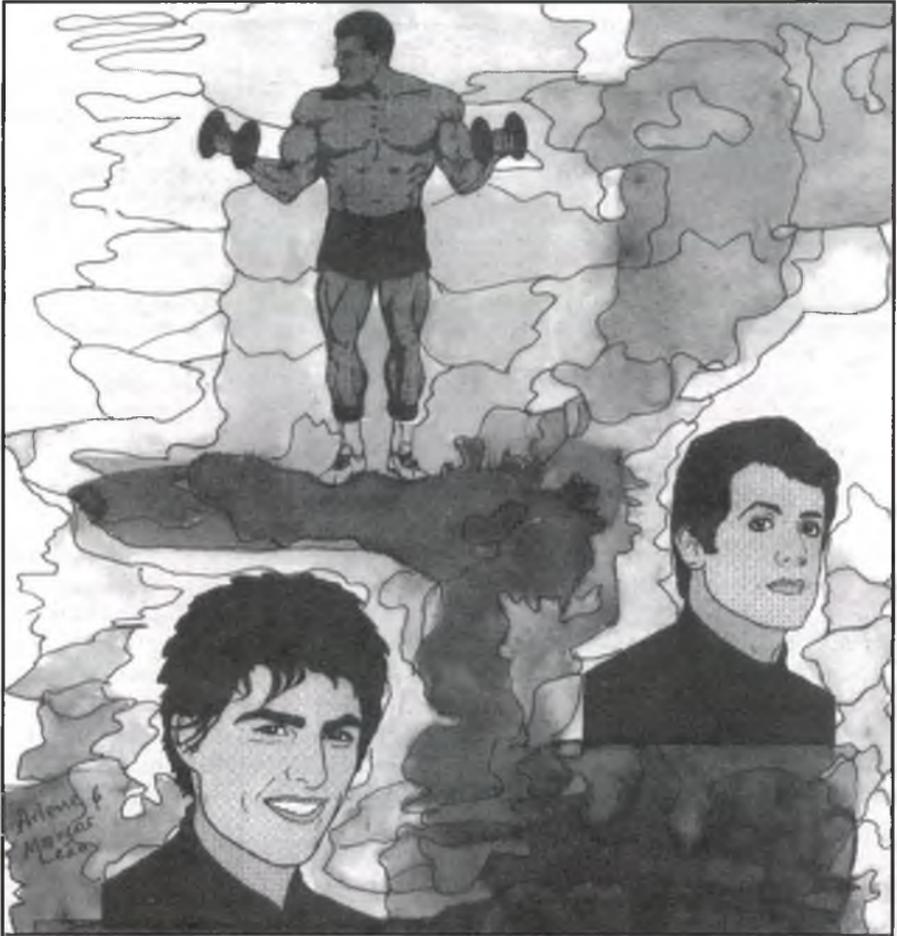
REACT

1. Do I approach life with trust through the eyes of faith, or do I ask God for proof so that I can believe?
2. Do I, through my actions, testify that the Lord does keep His promises?

^{*} *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 568.

By Mario Vilar Gabor, physician and director of the Vida Sana Adventist Center, Montevideo, Uruguay.

THE UNGOLDEN RULE



“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions” (Heb. 11:32, 33, NKJV).

Stud or Dud?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 16:7

With my schedule I seldom have time for TV viewing. But occasionally I will stumble upon a tabloid talk show. I spotted one whose topic that day was “STUD OR DUD—You Be the Judge.” That day, women in the audience were venting their anger at the apparently handsome, but promiscuous men who were once their lovers. These “gentlemen” were said to consider themselves “God’s gifts to women.” Now the judges had to decide whether the men were worth taking back. It resulted in little mercy for those proscribed popinjays.

My mind takes me back to an ancient man labeled strong, robust, and in the vigor of manhood. Samson was truly one of God’s gifts to Israel. However, it seems from the surface that most of his life was spent having God bail him out of trouble.

Webster defines *stud* as a virile young man. And *dud* is defined as a failure. Could a man be labeled as both? Whom would God consider a stud or a dud? In which category would He put men like Wesley Snipes, Sylvester Stallone, Denzel Washington, or Tom Cruise? An inspired writer stated that “the real greatness of

In which category would God put men like Wesley Snipes, Sylvester Stallone, Denzel Washington, or Tom Cruise?

the man is measured by the power of the feelings that he controls, not by those that control him.”*

Was Samson worthy of being taken back by the Lord? (Remember the story of the prodigal.) Was he a stud or a dud? This week, you be the judge.

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 568.

By Clarence E. Hodges, Jr., a voice-over announcer for commercials and promos throughout the city of Indianapolis, Indiana.

Fatal Attraction

LOGOS

Judges 16

A recent production has made popular the phrase “Good men are hard to find.” Sufficiently adding validity to that phrase is the reality that in several key institutions women tend to outnumber the men. I have conducted many Sabbath services and prayer meetings in which women were the majority by an easy ratio of four to one. Only a few times have I seen the men outnumber the women.

Women are looking for good, potential mates, and too often the church is an unlikely source, not only because men are fewer in number, but also because—as the women state—the churchgoing men are just like the men of the world.

Men, as well, are challenged. At the time of their search for a good potential mate, discouraged by crippling relationships and maltreatment, many reject the idea of establishing pure and meaningful partnerships. Economic hurdles and technological advances have forced educational and/or occupational attainment to play more critical roles in mate finding; some bachelors may find themselves less marketable because they fail to meet the “necessary” criteria. Logically surfacing from those observations is the question whether one having difficulty finding a mate in the church should seek a mate who is a nonbeliever or, specifically, of another denomination.

Judges 13:1-5

From his conception, Samson was to be both a leader of his people and a representative of spiritual integrity (verse 5). To fulfill these roles, ultimately, he was required to adhere to both the Israelite covenant and the Nazirite vow. Under that covenant, he was forbidden to be intimate with or to wed the daughters of the surrounding nations (Deut. 7:1-4, 12, 13; 2 Cor. 6:14-16). The Nazirite vow required that “no razor come upon his head” (Num. 6:5).

The Bible speaks of four personal relationships that impacted Samson’s life. Three of those relationships, which can be noted as “fatal attractions,” resulted in direct violation of either the Israelite covenant, the Nazirite vow, or both. The first attraction took place when Samson went down to Timnath. There he saw a woman of the daughters of the Philistines and requested his parents to “get her for me to wife” (Judg. 14:2). Fearing for her father’s life and her own, she soon betrayed Samson.

Angry because the Philistines had cunningly plotted against him by using his wife, Samson returned home. Restless to be back with her, he returned to Timnath and soon learned, however, that his wife was no longer his. Again he had been betrayed. His father-in-law had given her to a close friend. Enraged, Samson destroyed valuable Philistine property. In immediate retaliation, they burned his wife and father-in-law (15:1, 2, 4-6).

Samson departed from Timnath and went to Gaza. Desperate for love, he saw a harlot and “went in unto her” (16:1). This one-night affair resulted in a nearly fatal attempt by the Gazites to destroy his life (verse 2).

Judges 16:4

And it came to pass that he loved a woman, Delilah, in the valley of Sorek. Sorek

was famous for its wine, and it was in this valley that Samson became drunk with Delilah's love. She was a type of woman God had forbidden the Israelites to become intimate with. His attraction to her eventually numbed his spiritual senses. Her enticements drew Samson to a point of submission that resulted in the shaving of his head, forfeiture of his divinely appointed power, and his enslavement by the very ones whom God had called him to conquer.

Samson was not able to see God's message to him until his eyes were physically removed. Unlike the blind man to whom Christ gave his vision, Samson's was providentially taken away so that he might see more clearly. The resulting darkness he experienced was a sign of how vexed God had become with him because of his disregard for his commitment to God as dictated by the Nazirite vow and the Israelite covenant.

Amos 3:3

For too long, Samson had walked according to the desires of his flesh rather than the will of God, and his path ended in his becoming enslaved in sin in the camp of sinners. The Bible warns that if we walk according to the flesh, forsaking the will of the Spirit, then we will reap according to the flesh (Rom. 8:6-8, 12-17). Hence we have Samson's final words, "Let me die with the Philistines." "Samson's infatuation seems almost incredible. At first he was not so wholly enthralled as to reveal the secret; but he had deliberately walked into the net of the betrayer of

Some bachelors may find themselves less marketable because they fail to meet the "necessary" criteria.

souls, and its meshes were drawing closer about him at every step."

This tragic account of one who could have been a valiant spiritual leader and role model of spiritual integrity warns us of several inherent dangers to which we are subject when pursuing relationships in violation of our spiritual commitment to God: (1) we will lose those to whom we are very close; (2) betrayal will stalk our doors; (3) revenge will threaten our spiritual and physical livelihood; (4) stealthily placed traps will be arranged by Satan for our spiritual and physical destruction; (5) our spiritual leadership and example will be regretfully compromised; and/or (6) if we fail to repent, then we will die with the sinners from whom God desired to deliver us.

REACT

1. What relationship with people or things are in my life that damage my spiritual leadership and integrity?
2. How can I rely upon the power of Christ to deliver me from potential fatal attractions?
3. How do the decisions that I make affect me, my parents, my peers, and my wonderful God?

* *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1007.

By Damon Spight, secretary for a group of physicians in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Connection

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 14:3

“Just as he was entering upon manhood, the time when he must execute his divine mission—the time above all others when he should have been true to God—Samson connected himself with the enemies of Israel.”¹

By connecting himself with the Philistines, Samson brought pain to himself, his parents, his peers, and his God. This connection made his life miserable (Judg. 16:20, 21). His eyes were gouged out. He found himself enslaved in a prison house. And the Lord departed from him because “he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited.”²

This connection prolonged the blindness of his brothers and sisters in the Lord. The Israelites needed a consistent demonstration of living faith with a covenant-keeping God. They needed a living presentation by someone to whom they could relate. They needed to see that true freedom occurs when fallen beings allow them-

Samson brought pain to himself, his parents, his peers, and his God.

selves to be united with God. With God’s enabling grace, Samson could have provided this consistent demonstration. Instead, his spiritual family “tamely submitted to the degradation which they might have escaped, had they only obeyed God.”³

This brought tears to the eyes of the Angel whose name is *Wonderful*—a pain similar to the one He experienced when He was denied by Peter. “While He was undergoing the mockery of an examination before Caiaphas, Christ had been denied by one of His own disciples.”⁴

At the lowest ebb of his life, Samson, with a repentant heart, found strength in God’s mercy and justice. He discerned God’s mercy in allowing:

- his life to be preserved.
- the avenue of his downfall to be gouged out.
- his hair to grow again.

At the lowest ebb of his life, Samson allowed himself to be connected with the God of the overcomers.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 563.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 566.

3. *Ibid.* p. 564.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 710.

By Ruben D. Luna Martè, a program analyst for the Monroe Guarantee Insurance Company, Carmel, Indiana.

“I’m Here for You”

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 3:5

On a typical afternoon, Danny arrives home. “Boy, school’s been rough today,” he sighs as he hurls his backpack effortlessly through the air and turns on the television. “Mom, I’m home,” he calls.

Mom glances around the bedroom door. “Boys will be boys,” she says with a chuckle. Danny surveys his room and wonders about the commotion outside.

“There is too much going on in the streets,” Mom says. “It’s like a continual ringing in my ears.” But the vigorous activity surrounding Danny’s home has captured his imagination. “Get to your homework,” Mom says.

“Yes, Mom,” he replies. A surgeon, a lawyer, they say? All that he can see is loneliness. Gangs tattooed Danny for a position in their group, which he accepted without his mother’s knowledge. It’s no fun being different.

In another place and time: “Boy, those Philistines are some cool guys,” Samson said with admiration. “I know there’s a plan for my life, but when can I start making my own decisions? I can’t eat what I want; I can’t dress as I want. It’s no fun being different.” What mistake initiated Samson’s downfall?

Samson decided to rely on his own human strengths and make his life deci-

Gangs tattooed Danny for a position in their group.

sions in spite of the blessings of the Lord. From his birth, Samson was branded an achiever, one who would precipitate the beginnings of the deliverance of Israel. Many mistakes befell Samson, but in the middle of these shortcomings, God showered His Spirit upon His servant in his hours of need. Samson was blinded by his own desires, and it was only in his final act that he saw the essence of his real power (Judg. 16:28-30). This is the only recorded place where Samson actually called out to his heavenly Father with a feeling of utter repentance. In so doing he recognized the redeeming blood of our Saviour, regardless of his multiple sins. Through bitter experience, Samson learned that: ETERNAL LIFE = Blood (Eph. 1:7) + Humility (Luke 14:11) + Repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Danny, too, grows from dependence on self to dependence on *Him*. “Lord, I know that getting involved in that gang was not the smartest thing I’ve done. I know that life is not easy, but I also know You’ll always be with me. Lord, remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. According to Thy mercy, remember Thou me for Thy goodness sake,” whispers Danny from a hospital bed.

At the same time, many miles away, his mother prays, “Lord, may Danny learn to rely on You and not on his own judgment.”

REACT

How have your experiences intensified your Christian life?

By Loretta Marté, psychology major at Indiana University at Indianapolis.

Jesus' Love Connection

HOW-TO

Key Text: Amos 3:3

When pondering the topic of marriage or dating, many people wrestle with common questions. Should I associate only with church members? What about someone of another race? Is it OK to date outside the church and not marry? Is interracial dating acceptable as long as you don't marry interracially?

Many single individuals, particularly women, are frustrated that so few choices are available in the sphere from which they came. Some desperate bachelors resort to homosexuality as a means to find a soul mate. Everyone is born with the inner need to feel loved. Many fantasize to the point of the taboo word—masturbation.

The most important question is, Does God have restrictions on whom we date or marry? What about Samson? The Angel outlined his lifestyle habits. Was there a guideline for dating or marriage? Was it heaven's plan that Samson remain celibate? After all, raising a family might prove to be an obstacle in his appointed work.

You may ask yourself, What does God want for my social life? Here are some steps that may help you find out:

1. Pray—a cliché on the surface, but I don't mean your routine prayers. Center

Is interracial dating acceptable as long as you don't marry interracially?

at least one prayer on the dating or marriage topic. Dialogue with God; demand answers as Job did (Job 42:4).

2. Seek counsel from your parents. They may know you better than you think. They should also have a little more knowledge than you, in spite of their past mistakes.

3. Read biblical examples of courting relationships. Weigh the pros and cons.

4. Keep an open mind, and "in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6).

REACT

1. Is it a sin to date or to marry someone incompatible with me?

2. How would you define *compatibility* as it relates to the selection of a life partner?

3. Describe a personal experience in which something at first felt right and then, afterward, proved to be wrong.

By Clarence E. Hodges, Jr., a voice-over announcer for commercials and promos throughout the city of Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Gospel According to St. Samson

OPINION

Key Text: Heb. 11:32, 33

As the oldest of four children, I tend to take sides with other people who are eldest amongst siblings. I do this especially with Bible characters who have been notoriously labeled. Cain, Esau, Eliab (David's older brother), and the prodigal son's older brother all had valid points. I've always believed that society did not give these people a fair hearing.

Samson is no exception. Probably the oldest of Manoah's children, he is often stereotyped as a whoremonger who forsook his divine calling. Like me, he was likely reminded throughout his childhood, "Now you're the eldest. You must set an example. Your father is a church role model. He would be disappointed if he saw you misbehave."

As human as Samson was, however, he possessed often-overlooked noble qualities. He provided for and respected his parents (Judg. 14:9). He knew when to pray even when it appeared that God and everyone else had forsaken him (15:18; 16:28). We need to learn this lesson before the end of time. When our enemies surround us and threaten us with death, and we may suffer a little, it is then that we must have faith and call upon God. Samson's benevolence toward his treacherous countrymen (15:11-13) reminds me of a Man who was also mistreated by His

Cain, Esau, and the prodigal son's older brother all had valid points.

countrymen and prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Samson referred to himself as "God's servant"; another writer agreed, calling him a man of faith (Heb. 11:32-34). And God honored his faith—even at the last. Samson had problems, but who among us does not?

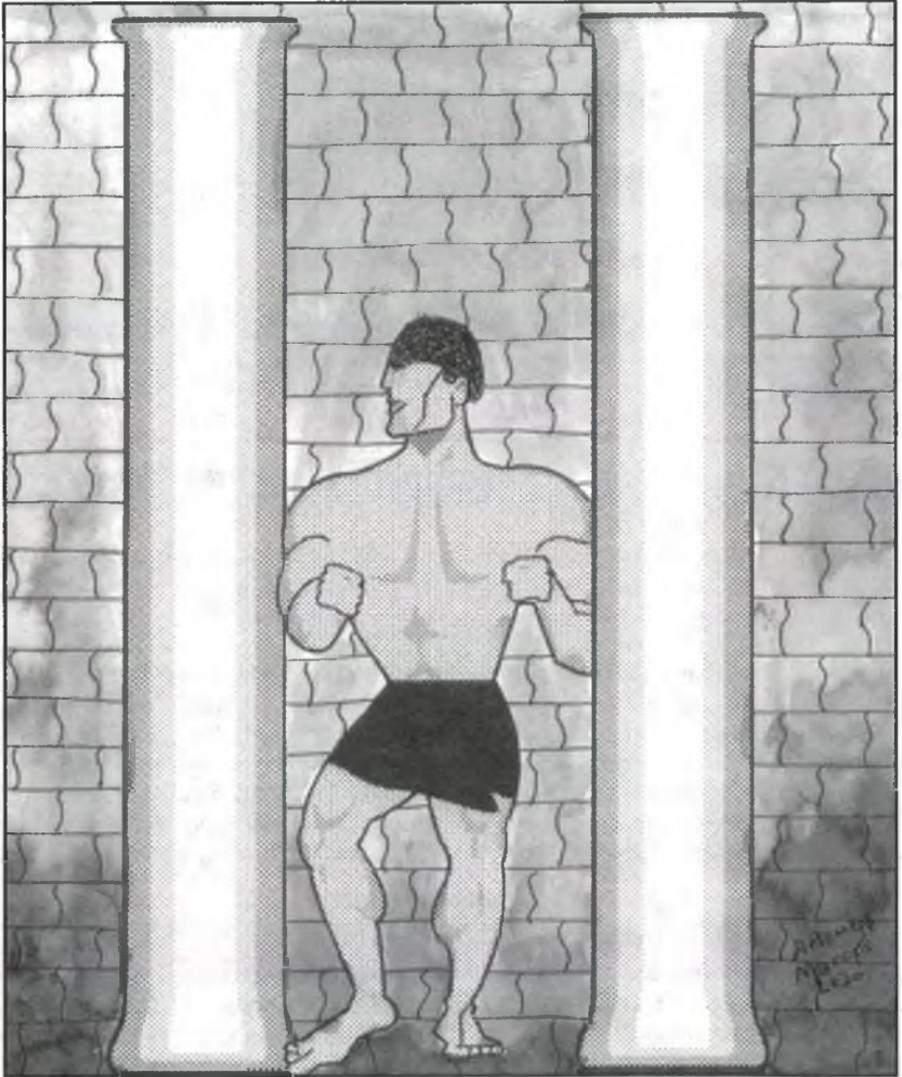
The life of Samson presents a contrast, but also a strange similarity, to the life of Christ. Both were born of miraculous birth at a crisis in the nation's history. One died with outstretched arms between two pillars, the other with outstretched arms between two crosses. Both saved more individuals at death than in life. Christ's life is the pleasing example of a Man performing the will of God—in God's way. Samson denotes the sad example of a man doing the will of God in man's way. The results are plain.

REACT

1. What qualities do I have that could remind someone of Christ's life?
2. What is the difference between "living well" and "dying well," as they relate to Samson's experience?
3. If, like Samson at his death, you had one thing to pray for, what would it be? Explain your answer.

By Clarence E. Hodges, Jr., a voice-over announcer for commercials and promos throughout the city of Indianapolis, Indiana.

TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH



“He did not know that the Lord had left him” (Judg. 16:20, NIV).

Who Maimed Samson?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Judg. 13:5

From the *Israel Times* (AP)—Samson ben Manoah, a well-known Danite, died last week in the spectacular collapse of the Philistines' Dagon Temple. Samson, who served for 20 years as judge of Israel, was credited with causing the collapse of the building by dislodging the two central columns. Thousands of celebrating Philistines died with Samson in the most deadly disaster of its kind in recent history. Among the deceased are top Philistine leaders, who had gathered to celebrate the capture and maiming of Samson, their prisoner.

Samson's career as judge was marred by some of his relationships with both Israelite and Philistine women; the latter in spite of the national taboo against involvement with Israel's enemies. An ethics committee has secretly been investigating citizen complaints in this area, but because of Samson's position (and his unusual strength, which he has used to terrify and destroy Israel's enemies), the group failed to reach a consensus.

God had great plans for Samson to free Israel completely from the oppression of the Philistines by using the strength He gave him. His famous hair was only one

Samson ben Manoah died last week in the spectacular collapse of the Philistines' Dagon Temple.

of the symbols of his connection with God, which would have enabled him to complete his mission. Abstinence from grape juice in all its forms, as well as from unclean things, completed the conditions.

The cutting of Samson's hair was the loss of the last symbol left of his connection with God, so it should be no surprise that God then withdrew His supernatural power from the errant judge. Instead of making all plans and choices based on his mission and connection with God, Samson lost sight of his goal and focused instead on sensual indulgence. He turned his strength to weakness. He and Israel suffered dearly for this lack of direction. Even though Samson took many Philistines with him, he failed to eradicate the Philistine threat as God had planned.

By Marian Brincken Forscher, a freelance writer from Renton, Washington.

No Spin-docs for Samson

LOGOS

Judg. 15:20–16:31

Last week I was listening to the “BBC Newshour” on a local public radio station. A prominent televangelist, whose activities had landed him in prison, had finally been released from custody, and the British broadcast was doing a short feature on his emancipation.

True to the BBC code, the announcers were the soul of gentility and detachment, but I wondered how much private enjoyment the news team had felt as they combed through this man’s TV broadcasts to select the excitable and rather ridiculous voice clip they used. After making some passionate assertion or other, his voice rose to an intense falsetto as he said, “Jesus-Jesus-Jesus-Jesus-Jesus!” This from a man who, in Jesus’ name, had defrauded many humble viewers of millions of dollars. As the feature concluded, I know I wasn’t the only Christian whose stomach knotted in shame.

Sadly, no era has been free from the curse of talented religious public figures whose actions have brought derision rather than devotion from thoughtful observers. Can you imagine what it must have been like to be a God-fearing Israelite in Samson’s day?

Your children would strut around the house flexing their muscles and playing “Samson and the Philistines” the way today’s kids play cops and gangs. Your backslidden relatives would have snickered behind their fingers when Samson’s name was mentioned—and would use his profligacy as an excuse for their own.

Perhaps the one redeeming virtue of the Judges 16 portion of Samson’s story (aside from the sleepless nights he must have provided a good number of Dagon worshipers) might be a cluster of cautionary observations about his life, against which we might check our own.

1. Samson focused on his abilities and ignored his Enabler. As I try to visualize Samson, pictures of TV wrestlers crowd irresistibly into my mind: hoarse and cocky, chests and chins out, flowing manes tied into loose ponytails. And though Samson’s world-championship belts were entirely authentic, chapter 16 seems to signal that he’d succumbed to the idea that his strength was what gave him his worth. He seems preoccupied with it.

Take the Gaza-gate incident (verses 1-3). Deep into Philistia Samson walks, not airily but indifferently, trusting so much in his strength that he flaunts it in the embrace of a harlot. Then at midnight he slips away from her brothel toward the city gate, where his enemies wait for him. Perhaps they are almost ready to leap out upon him when they hear the horrible creaking of timbers as the posts of the gate-frame grate away from their foundations. Samson may have even gleefully strained his ears to catch the frightened whispers as his enemies conferred.

And take the three false strength-trials (verses 4-14). “Where do you get your strength, Samson?” Delilah asks. A God-centered leader would have seen in this question a perfect chance for sharing his faith, but self-centered Samson plays with her—and only when she makes him miserable does he grudgingly tell her the truth.

2. Samson allowed moral “blind spots” to form in his character. Two chap-

ters earlier he demanded that his parents approve of his marriage to a Philistine (14:1-4), and in response to their timid suggestion that there were many eligible Israelite girls, he tells them bluntly, "Get her for me." And what is so interesting (and sobering) is that the Lord evidently recognized that Samson's tendency toward blind spots was so irreversible that He decided actually to use it for short-term gains against the Philistines (verse 4)!

And here in chapter 16, Samson commits the sin of fornication with both the Gaza harlot and Delilah and the even greater sin of betraying himself, his ministry, and his God into the hands of his enemies. There is something gruesomely reminiscent in the taunts of the Philistine crowds there in the temple as they see the blinded Samson being led in. "Our God has delivered our enemy into our hands," they sing. Similarly, today's cynical religion observers nod their heads as they see the foolish disgrace of once-powerful spokespersons for God.

3. Samson refused to reserve a private place in his heart for God. Other judges such as Deborah (chapters 4, 5), Gideon (chapters 6-8), and eventually Samuel, dialogued privately with God. But you get the feeling that Samson never took the time.

Samson cherished no "hidden person of the heart" (1 Pet. 3:4, RSV), as did, for example, Mary, who "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19, NIV). He did not hide God's word in his heart so he would not sin

What must it have been like to be a God-fearing Israelite in Samson's day?

against Him (Ps. 119:11). His two recorded prayers betray his self-centered focus: he begs once for a drink of water (15:18) and once for vengeance on the Philistines because they put out his eyes (16:28), but never for the advancement of God's agenda. And the secret he did share with God (the covenant conditions of his strength), he carelessly betrayed during a playful romp with a female spy.

Yet God uses no spin-doctors. He prints this story as one of many "examples . . . written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:11, 12, NIV). That's why, before I wrote this final sentence, I personally prayed through each of the above three points. May God preserve us all from Samson's errors.

REACT

1. What can I do about an indecent obsession?
2. What are the legitimate perks of a prophet?
3. Why is a Christian leader's sexual immorality considered to be such a comparatively serious offense?
4. What would you consider a fair and just way to deal with a Christian leader's sexual immorality?
5. With all his failings, why do you think Samson was included among those who are described as faithful in Hebrews 11? In what way or ways does he fit into this group?

By Maylan Schurch, pastor of the Bellevue (Washington) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

O Sovereign Lord, Remember Me

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judg. 16:28; Ps. 130:7, 8

A hero—a folly—an infatuation—a companion—an enchantment—a stupidity—and an ending. Is the story of Samson merely another puzzlement in the picture of God and how He acted (or acts) to save His people? Or is it (as I believe) a story of how God's grace stepped into the scene where a man had so sinned that he could not extricate himself by his own efforts?

God asked of Samson and He asks of me, "My child, give Me your heart, and I will show you a more excellent way." Sin proliferates within me, but Christ is also enthroned in my heart by the Spirit, and because of this I can step out in confidence.

"When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. . . . No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God."¹

"There is one safeguard against Satan's deceptions and snares—that is the truth as it is in Jesus. The truth planted in the heart, nourished by watchfulness and prayer,

Is the story of Samson merely another puzzle- ment in the picture of God?

nourished by the grace of Christ, will give us discernment. The truth must abide in the heart, be felt in its power in spite of all the alluring enchantments of Satan, and your experience and mine must be that the truth can purify, guide, and bless the soul."²

"Grace is an attribute of God exercised toward undeserving human beings. We did not seek for it, but it was sent in search of us. God rejoices to bestow His grace upon us, not because we are worthy, but because we are so utterly unworthy. Our only claim to His mercy is our great need.

"The Lord God through Jesus Christ holds out His hand all the day long in invitation to the sinful and fallen. He will receive all. He welcomes all. It is His glory to pardon the chief of sinners. He will take the prey from the mighty, He will deliver the captive, He will pluck the brand from the burning. He will lower the golden chain of His mercy to the lowest depths of human wretchedness, and lift up the debased soul contaminated with sin."³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.

2. *The Upward Look*, p. 349.

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 161.

By Marion Burt, a worker in the operating room at Swedish Hospital, Seattle, Washington.

The Best Little Whorehouse in Hebron

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Proverbs 2

Anybody who was anybody knew about Delilah's Place—and Delilah's body. So fascinating, it could set any man to dreaming; she was voluptuous, vivacious, world-class—and expensive. Even at two thousand dollars a queenly performance, a steady stream of patrons fought to win her favor. However, Delilah had one thing in common with the ordinary call girls: you knew you couldn't trust her. She was vicious. All she cared about was money—and her gorgeous body. Seduction was the game she loved to play. And she always won.

Then there was the most powerful man in the world, who loved to match wits in power games because, magically, *he* always won too. It seems that Samson was always at least half-a-dozen steps ahead of the craftiest men (and their gods) who dared to challenge him. Honesty and innocence? He never had any use for them, because no one could bring him to justice—after all, he was the judge. What he said and thought determined the outcome of events. He didn't make mistakes.

He was a regular customer at Delilah's Place. She had the sparkle and the spunk that he could never find in Israel. And he was more gifted than any dozen men in Philistia put together. And there was passion—irrational, unscrupulous, and irresponsible. This couple would have been pleased to know that Universal Studios

What they didn't realize was that Delilah's Place was a two-story house.

was doing a documentary on their "private" lives.

What they didn't realize was that Delilah's Place was a two-story house. The ground level housed two narcissistic power players. But overhead were Yahweh and Beelzebub staging the cosmic drama. Vignetted in the bedroom below were struggling global kingdoms. They were just "making love," some would say. But if the truth were known, on nearby Golgotha Hill, plans were forming for a production a thousand years yet unborn. And the climax came as Love would set the record straight with the heart cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The denouncement is no less dramatic— "Forgive them, Father, for they don't know what they are doing."

'Tis all a checkerboard of nights and days
Where Destiny with men for pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
and one by one unwittingly pays tribute to the phrase,
God is love (*Omar Khayyam*, adapted).

Not yet, but one day, Victory and Virtue will be wed. Watch for signs to the feast!

By Jim Learned, an aircraft engineer at the Boeing Company, Seattle, Washington.

How to Be Stronger Than Samson

HOW-TO

Key Text: James 1:5-8

When I was a boy—and I have a feeling I'm not alone—I admired the daring and machismo of the heroes of the Old Testament. David's bravery made me yearn to be as brave as he was. Joshua's commanding the sun to stand still made me long for that kind of power. Elijah's calling the fire down from heaven warmed my little pyromaniac's heart.

And I don't think there's a Christian or Jewish boy alive who hasn't craved the kind of muscles Samson had. If only God would give that strength to me, just watch how I could play fullback! I'd be the heavyweight champion of the world! I might even wreak havoc upon the local bully! Somehow great physical strength seems to be the ultimate symbol of manhood.

But sadly, Samson's end tarnishes his story. As boys, we don't want to learn that great physical strength isn't enough. Yet as we become older and stronger, it slowly dawns on us that there is more to life than muscles. We gradually learn that there are other and better ways to open city gates than by brute force.

Solomon comments, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). It takes an incredible amount of strength to rule one's spirit.

Jesus demonstrated this type of strength. Physically exhausted, but with the

Elijah's calling the fire down from heaven warmed my little pyromaniac's heart.

power to call 12 legions of angels, He refused to allow Himself to be provoked to Samson's rashness. Instead, He ruled His spirit and by so doing gently opened the gate to a thief's heart, a gate that had defied all the power of Roman constabulary.

All may have this inner strength that Jesus had. The question is how?

1. Ask God. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all" (James 1:5, NIV).

2. Follow God. Jesus comments, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NIV).

3. Trust God. Paul adds, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13, NIV).

Brute force is useful, even necessary, in the right place. Yet inner strength is mandatory for all who would see heaven.

REACT

Would you say sexuality is a major theme of the story of Samson? Explain your answer.

By R. E. Owens, a computer programmer at Computer Management Systems, Lynwood, Washington.

Frightened Hearts

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 4:18

What is it in humans that rankles at someone's being *more* than we are—whether more intelligent, more talented, or, as in Samson's case, more powerful?

Why are we like this? I think the main cause is fear. In Samson's story, the fear is obvious—the Philistines had experienced his strength being used against them and wanted to stop him. Other situations require peeling back surface behaviors and feelings to find the fear.

Scratch a jealous person, and you'll find a fearful soul. It's the same for someone who is unnecessarily critical, too controlling or angry or sarcastic when confronted by someone who has more of something than they do.

My freshman year at Southern College found me in honors composition. I had a hard time in that class, not because the work was so difficult but because for the first time I wasn't the best writer in the class. I was in a whole class of "best writers," and I admit I was often envious of the others' talents. An important basis for my self-esteem was being threatened.

For the first time I wasn't the best writer in the class.

What is especially sad about our reacting from fear is that it shows a basic lack of love. John tells us that "perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18, NIV). We find it difficult to accept love, to believe we are lovable, so we often can't love others fully. Then put-downs, jealousy, and defensiveness can raise their ugly heads, protection against that person who is more than we are.

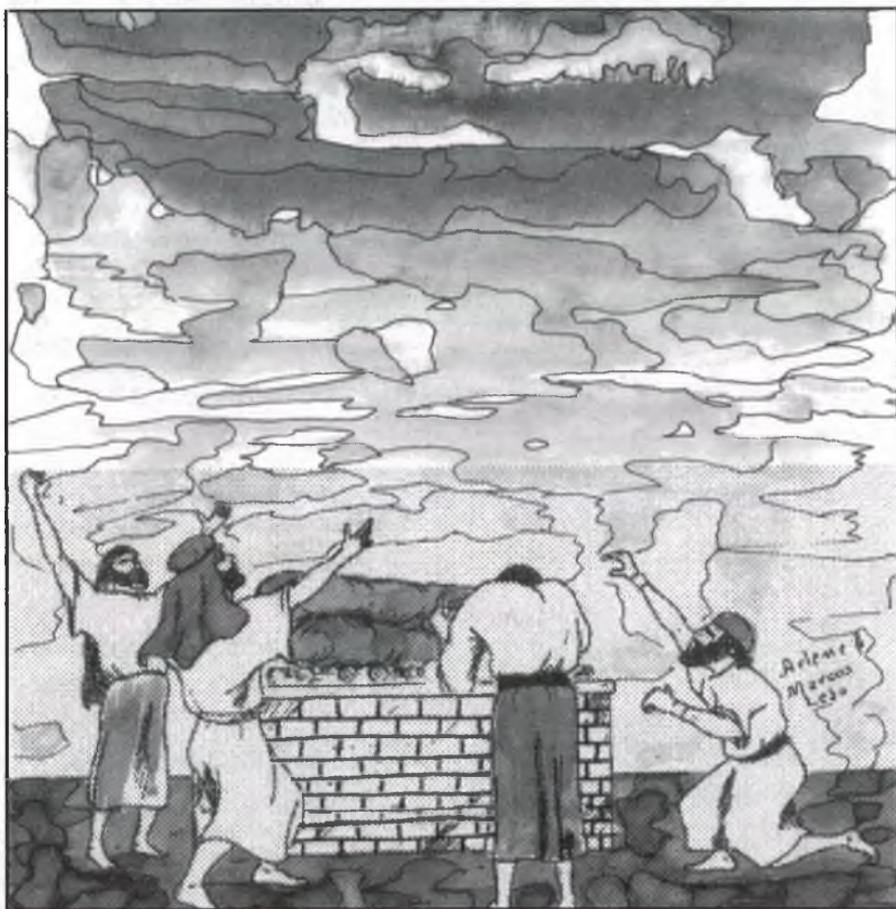
When we are truly glad that someone we know has something we wish we had—when the couple who has been trying to conceive is excited for their newly pregnant friend, when the unemployed man honestly congratulates the person who just landed her dream job, when the music major is proud of her roommate's winning the part she too auditioned for—that is when we rise above fear and show ourselves as true lovers.

REACT

1. What is the difference, if any, between jealousy and envy?
2. What is the relationship, if any, between envy and competition?
3. Explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: A person cannot compete with another in any activity without being affected, at least to some degree, by envy.

By Cecille Thompson, a records manager at Parker, Smith, and Feek Insurance Brokers in Seattle, Washington.

MISGUIDED DEVOTION



“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me” (Exod. 20:4, 5, NIV).

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The Lord Is God

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:39

The crowd gathered as soon as the word got around. It would be the test of a lifetime. They stared as a scruffy man clambered up the rocky hillside. Four hundred fifty singing, laughing prophets of Baal rode up, all dressed in the finest of clothes. These prophets confidently pushed their way to the top. The ragged man stepped up on a stone to speak. His voice roared over the mountain.

“How long will you have two opinions? The time has come to make your choice. Will you follow the God of your fathers, or Baal, an image of stone?”

The people stared in silence. He cried out again, “Today will be the test. I, only I, represent the Lord, while Baal has 450 prophets here. Bring two bulls. We will each prepare a bull for a sacrifice. They will call on their gods, and I will call on the Lord. And the God who answers with fire will be the true God of the people.”

He strolled over to the other prophets. “Choose which animal you want to use. You go first. Call on your gods, but *do not* light the fire!”

The prophets quickly prepared the bull and laid it on the altar. They leapt and shouted. Around and around they danced; singing, praising, entreating, begging.

They looked at the other man, standing there with a confident smile.

The sun rose higher. Always the sound of the prophets rose, “Oh, Baal, hear us! Light this fire!”

Nothing. The people scanned the skies. They looked at the other man, standing there with a confident smile. He watched as the dancing grew frantic. Finally he spoke, “Cry louder. Your god may be talking to someone else. Or maybe he’s out hunting and can’t hear you. He could even be sleeping; you have to wake him!”

The dancers jumped wildly around the altar, cutting themselves until the blood gushed. The sun just grazed the horizon when he spoke again. “There is no answer. It is my turn.”

He quietly gathered 12 stones and built an altar. He placed the wood and prepared bull on this altar. After digging a trench around the altar, he called for barrels of water from the stream nearby to be poured over the altar. The bull, the wood, the stones were soaked, and water filled the trench. Then he knelt down in the dirt and prayed quietly, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God” (18:36, NIV). Before he finished praying, fire flashed and burned up the bull, wood, stones, and water.

“The Lord is God,” the crowd murmured in awe.

By Christine Mitchell, a freelance writer from Perkins, Oklahoma.

GOD or gods?

LOGOS

Exod. 20:4, 5; Judges 17, 18; 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 40:18-20; 44:6-20; 46:1-9

Early Days of Idolatry (Exod. 20:4, 5)

It's hard for humans to think in abstractions. Since earth's earliest days, they have felt a need to make representations of their gods, something concrete to worship. Israel was by no means immune to this problem. One early biblical example occurred at Sinai. Even as Moses stood on the mountain, speaking with God—in fact, receiving the commandment forbidding idol worship, along with the other nine—the people began to doubt God's power.

Aaron, Moses' brother and assistant, was convinced to make a golden calf (an image borrowed from Israel's former masters in Egypt) to remind them of God (Exodus 32). This spiritual leader of Israel, one who should have led in upholding the untainted worship of God, instead yielded to the people's demands for an idol. In the visible presence of God (the cloud on the mountain), error still crept in.

Micah's Idols (Judges 17, 18)

In the days of Israel's judges, a man named Micah and his family began to worship idol(s). In apparent sincerity, no matter how misguided, Micah even built a shrine for the idol(s) and made replicas of some of the accessories used in the sanctuary. One out-of-work Levite, Jonathan, was so impressed with these false trappings of worship that he agreed to be Micah's family priest. No doubt he also saw a chance for personal advancement. Once again truth and error were intermingled.

A group of Danites going to a town called Laish consulted Jonathan, who told them they would be able to conquer Laish. They later returned and persuaded him to be their priest, and Micah, with his inferior military capability, was unable to stop them from taking his priest and his gods too.

The Danites did conquer Laish, changed its name to Dan, and settled there, worshipping the gods they had stolen from Micah. Micah was apparently soon punished for his worship of idols, but what of the Danites? We aren't told much more about them, but Judges 18:30 seems to indicate an end to their prosperity. The captivity mentioned here occurred earlier than the Assyrian captivity (Judges 18:31 suggests that it happened about the time the sanctuary was moved from Shiloh); maybe this captivity was the Danites' punishment. Commandment breakers may *appear* to prosper, but eventually they are always punished (Prov. 14:12).

Interestingly, some translations of the Bible identify Jonathan, the greedy priest, as a grandson of Moses (Judg. 18:30). If so, it is sad indeed that a supposed spiritual leader of Israel so closely related to Moses could have wandered—and led others—so far from God's true worship.

The Trouble Continues (1 Sam. 15:22)

When Israel, and later Judah as well, were ruled by kings, the problem of idol worship arose repeatedly. Perhaps the influence of Micah's idols was still felt centuries later. Every time the practice seemed to be eliminated, another leader came along to resurrect it, and most of the nation followed willingly. After David's godly

rule, his son Solomon was beguiled by some of his heathen wives into worshipping other gods (1 Kings 11:4-13), and the nation was never again completely free of idol worship until after the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The on-again, off-again worship of God continued through the time of Judah's King Josiah, who largely cleansed the nation of idolatry (2 Chronicles 34). He was succeeded by the last four kings of Judah, who reversed his reformation and brought about the end of Judah as a kingdom (2 Kings 23:31-25:30). Israel's history is heartbreakingly similar to Judah's.

When the Lord could bear His people's sins no longer, He allowed both Israel and Judah to be carried into captivity. This severe measure brought many to their senses, and the widespread worship of graven images ended.

Yet even then, Israel seemed to need something tangible to worship. By the time of Christ's sojourn on earth, the beautiful sanctuary system had become merely another means of desecrating and cheapening the worship of God. All the once-meaningful symbols had degenerated into simply the perceived means of working one's way into heaven. In their close scrutiny of the minutiae of the Mosaic laws and ceremonies, most Israelites lost sight of their real purpose. When Christ came,

Since earth's earliest days, humans have felt a need to make representations of their gods.

most rejected Him, thus ensuring *their* collective rejection as God's people.

Idolatry Today

Today, we don't see many graven images. True, a few people worship what we usually think of as idols, but most idols today are much more intangible. And even now, some of the people who worship fame, fortune, possessions, and other worldly allurements seem to prosper greatly. But we needn't worry that we are missing anything, for their prosperity is short-lived. At the very most, they have a lifetime to enjoy their ill-gotten gains. They don't have the promise of eternal life. We who hold fast to the true worship of God, however, have not only the promise of the Lord's strength now, but of eternal life at Christ's return (Ps. 37:34-40). Aren't these things much better than a few years of so-called success here on earth?

REACT

1. In what ways might we make idols of the doctrines and forms of worship of our church?
2. How can we avoid setting up Mrs. White and her writings as gods and exalting them above God and the Bible?

By Robin Widmayer Sagel, homemaker and freelance writer from Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Why We Shouldn't Worship Idols

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Exod. 20:4, 5

Through Ellen G. White, God has given us reasons for refusing to worship idols. When Israel worshiped the golden calf at Mount Sinai, punishment was swift and terrible.

“Though God had granted the prayer of Moses in sparing Israel from destruction, their apostasy was to be signally punished. The lawlessness and insubordination into which Aaron had permitted them to fall, if not speedily crushed, would run riot in wickedness, and would involve the nation in irretrievable ruin. By terrible severity the evil must be put away. Standing in the gate of the camp, Moses called to the people, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me.’ Those who had not joined in the apostasy were to take their position at the right of Moses; those who were guilty but repentant, at the left. The command was obeyed. It was found that the tribe of Levi had taken no part in the idolatrous worship. From among other tribes there were great numbers who, although they had sinned, now signified their repentance. But a large company, mostly of the mixed multitude that instigated the making of the calf, stubbornly persisted in their rebellion. In the name of ‘the Lord God of Israel,’ Moses now commanded those upon his right hand, who had kept themselves clear of idolatry, to gird on their swords, and slay all who

Even Solomon worshiped idols toward the middle of his reign.

persisted in rebellion. ‘And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.’ Without regard to position, kindred, or friendship, the ringleaders in wickedness were cut off; but all who repented and humbled themselves were spared.”

Another example is King Solomon. He was a good person, you say; yet even he worshiped idols toward the middle of his reign. But he repented: “Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father’s sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son” (1 Kings 11:11, 12).

REACT

1. How could somebody like Solomon, a positive role model, participate in idol worship?
2. How would you define the term *idol*?
3. In what specific ways does someone discontinue his or her worship of an intangible idol?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 324.

By *Jeremy Lynch, an eighth-grade student at Ripley (Oklahoma) Junior High School.*

Egypt's Idolatry

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 1:25

Since the Israelites probably took their idea for the golden calf from their Egyptian masters, a basic knowledge of Egyptian mythology might shed some light on their slip into idolatry. This fall is amazing, considering that they were in the visible presence of God.

Egyptian mythology evolved from primitive polytheism to a more progressive form of monotheism. Each of the first settlements on the Nile probably had a few gods for protection and worship. As these cities united, their religion became a confusing mixture of many different—and sometimes conflicting—beliefs.

Ra, god of all human virtues as well as of the sun, and Osiris, god of the afterlife, eventually emerged as superior to all the others. Ra was said to control the first life; Osiris, the afterlife. According to legend, Osiris was originally the king of this world but was killed by his brother, Seth. Osiris's wife mummified his body, and he was resurrected to rule in the underworld. Ancient Egyptians considered the pharaoh a human representation of Osiris's son, giving more credibility to the pharaoh's authority in spiritual and political matters.

Inferior gods were mostly personifications of natural phenomena. Gods repre-

The Israelites probably took their idea for the golden calf from their Egyptian masters.

sented most animals and almost every cycle in nature. The golden calf may have actually been an Egyptian idea, elevating God's creation to the status of a god, worshipping "the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). The influence of this kind of religion on Egyptian culture was not generally positive. Philosophy was limited under this system. Egyptian art, which was unrivaled at the time, lacked the creativity that could have made it even more impressive. Much human potential and state revenue was wasted in preparing temples and tombs for the afterlife of the pharaohs.

When the Israelites turned away from the one true God, they also suffered the consequences. God blessed them so much when they followed Him, but still they turned to idolatry many times. Each time, God brought them back to Him. He does the same thing for us when we become too caught up in our material idols. God is always involved in our lives, trying to guide us back into a relationship with Him in which we are able to receive His blessings and serve Him in the proper way.

REACT

1. How could the Israelites turn away from God so easily at a time when He was blessing them the most?
2. How can we avoid making their mistakes in our lives?

By Aaron Gates, junior at Parkview Adventist Academy, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Idolatry Then and Now

HOW-TO

Key Text: Deut. 4:23

The creator of sin, Satan, has become successful in turning humanity away from God (2 Cor. 4:4). Yet we have never been without a hope in overcoming sin. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God implemented a plan to erase sin. He would sacrifice His own Son as an atonement.

In patriarchal times, animal sacrifices were a foreshadowing of how a Saviour would overpower sin. The Israelites, however, had regressed from observance of the sanctuary service to the worship of golden images. Yet the prophets, such as Isaiah and Micah, and the believers looked forward in hope.

Even as these prophets looked forward in hope, so does modern-day spiritual Israel. A most significant form of idolatry today is Sunday worship. The observance of the false sabbath will come as a test for every soul. The Sabbath test will be a choice between God's commandments and human commandments.

Today's world is filled with Ahabs and Jezebels as in the days of Elijah. We also have present-day idolatry. There are no outward shrines for the eye to see, yet many follow after the gods of this world—riches, fame, and pleasure. Humanity has be-

In patriarchal times, animal sacrifices were a foreshadowing of how a Saviour would overpower sin.

come confused by worldly customs, to the extreme that it's hard to discriminate between right and wrong. God gave His law to humanity as a definite plan for happiness and eternal life. Satan's only hope for defeating God's plan is to get us to disobey this law. Satan's plan to separate God from His people was to erect a false sabbath. Just as in the days of Ahab and Elijah, God is jealous for His law: "God will not break His covenant, nor alter the thing that has gone out of His lips. His word will stand fast forever, as unalterable as His throne. At the judgment, this covenant will be brought forth, plainly written with the finger of God; and the world will be arraigned before the bar of Infinite Justice to receive sentence."

REACT

How are we in danger of becoming like the Israelites when they fell into idolatry?

* *Prophets and Kings*, p. 187.

By Monica Lynsky, a sophomore at Perkins (Oklahoma) High School.

Modern Idolatry

OPINION

Key Text: Num. 3:4

Idolatry can come in many forms. It can be something much smaller than literally worshipping someone or something other than God.

When I was young, I idolized Superman. I had Superman action figures, pajamas, and everything else they ever made with Superman on it. I was always pretending to be Superman; the only problem was, I couldn't fly. In fact, I was so preoccupied with Superman that he was all I ever thought about.

It is much like that with many people today. They get so caught up in their lives that they forget the One who gave life to them. This is when people really begin to have problems, because as quickly as God can give, He can take away.

Nadab and Abihu, for instance, offered strange fire before the Lord, which may seem like a small thing at first, but to God it was a major mess-up. He immediately struck them dead. Today, we have many things between us and God that may seem small or insignificant, but to God they are serious mistakes. Although God is very unlikely to strike us dead today as He did with Nadab and Abihu, disobedience of His law will mean certain death in the end.

REACT

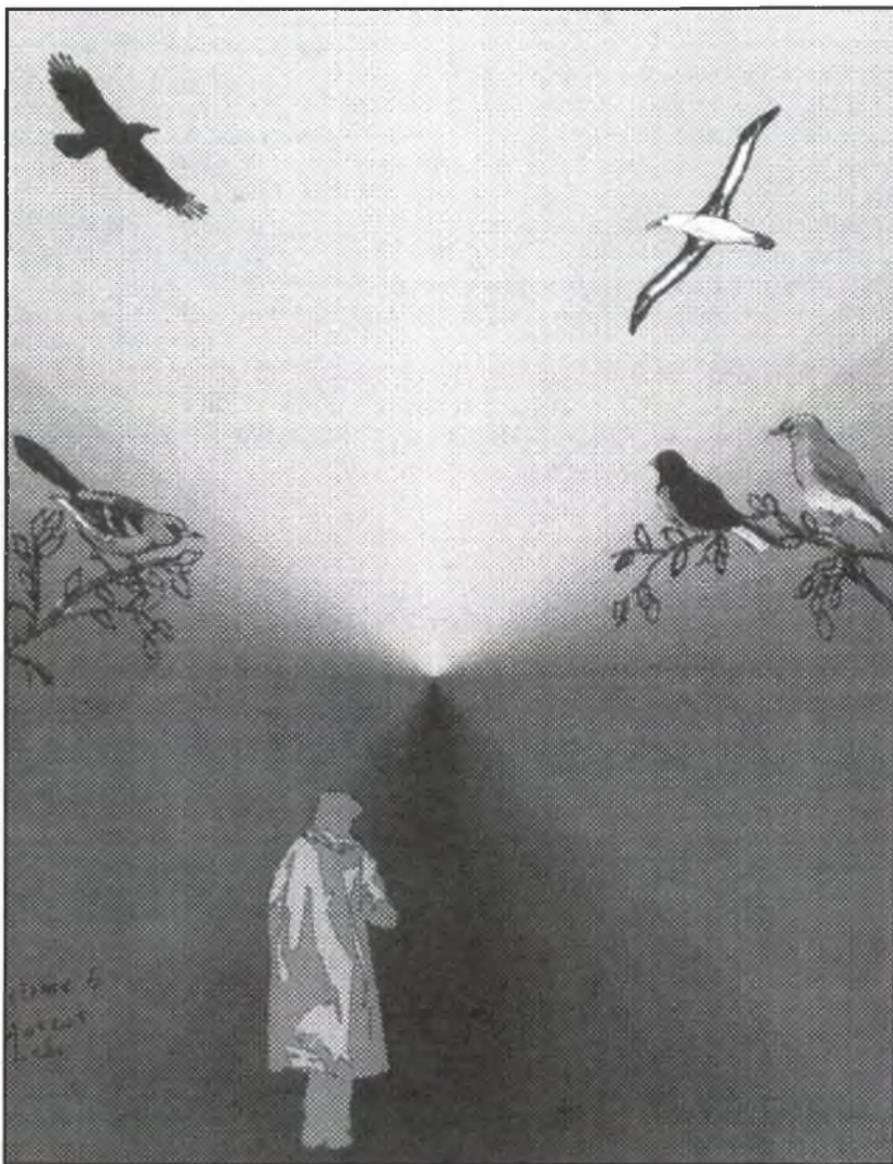
1. Do you have anything in your life that you value more than God? If so, what?

When I was young, I idolized Superman.

2. What can you do to change this situation and put God first in your life?
3. What is the modern equivalent of "offering strange fire"?
4. How can we know what is an important principle and what is a less significant specific in our relationship with God?

By Joseph Gates, a freshman at Parkview Adventist Academy, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

CIVIL WAR



“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judg. 21:25, NIV).

Morning Light

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Judg. 21:25

Morning light sets the sky ablaze with color. Beautiful reds, oranges, and golds scream across the great expanse, giving praise to the Father in heaven. The birds start their morning chorus, awakening animals and people alike. The birds' sole desire is for all to see the spectacular display. Only the animals will see the true grace of the morning. The earth creates a breeze to dance the song of life. Jumping and dancing through trees, tickling leaves, and making the mighty oak shake off the morning chill with a warm laugh. The wind now caresses rocks and grass. Slowly the meadow awakens to the day.

Scraggly and unshaven, bruised and banged, they peer through the holes between the rocks. Unaware of the awesome beauty all around them, they know the armies are coming, but when? They are scarcely the mighty warriors they were yesterday. Fear now possesses them throughout. Are there any threads of hope left to cling to? They no longer have any desire for food or warmth; now it's just merely to survive. Thoughts of families, friends, and homes run riot through their minds.

Are there any threads of hope left to cling to?

What kind of God would send brother against brother? A week ago, life was peacefully sublime. Now in the chaotic aftermath, these few were fortunate to be alive. Many questions. Resolutions would be slow to come. All because . . . there was no King.

By Janell Stringham, a junior elementary-education major at Spring Arbor College, Jackson, Michigan.

Everybody Is a King = Nobody Is a King

LOGOS

Judges 19–21

The events chronicled in Judges 19–21 are shocking, disturbing, and seemingly out of place in the Bible. One is tempted to ignore the horrors of the account of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine and move on to more pleasant territory. Further inspection, however, reveals some profound truths about the nature of humanity without God.

Introduction (Judg. 19:1)

Chapters 19–21 of Judges form the second half of the epilogue to the book (chapters 17–21), illustrating the complete moral degeneracy and chaos that resulted from Israel's rejection of God. The account begins with a simple-yet-telling statement: "In those days Israel had no king" (21:25, NIV). It seems plausible that this verse refers not only to the lack of a literal king, but to the apostasy; everyone was their own king.

Gibeah's Wickedness (19:11-28)

It is appalling to read the account of the callousness and outright depravity of God's chosen people. Despite the servant's suggestion that they spend the night in Jebus (verse 11), the Levite insisted on continuing on to Gibeah, which (unlike Jebus) was a city of the Israelites. Upon arriving there, they could expect to be treated hospitably. But among the people of Gibeah, no one would take them in, except an old man who was not even a Benjamite (verses 15, 16). This lack of hospitality in itself points to moral decay on the part of the Benjamites, but what follows is even worse: the wicked men of Gibeah fell to the same depths as the wicked men of Sodom (Genesis 19). It is unthinkable that such wickedness would exist among God's chosen people, but unfortunately the Bible (especially the book of Judges) gives a clear record of Israel's failure to follow God.

The Levite's Disregard for His Concubine (Judg. 19:22-28)

To save himself, the Levite sent his concubine outside to the mob, which raped and abused her all night (verse 25). When they let her go, she attempted to return to the one place where she believed she could find safety, but she died alone, outside on the doorstep, while the Levite was safe inside. As Christians, are we comfortable and secure while disregarding the needs and struggles of those "outside"?

The Benjamites' Refusal to Deal With Wickedness (20:12-16)

Whipped into a frenzy because of the treatment of the concubine, Israel assembled to punish the people of Gibeah (verses 1-11). They sent men to gain the Benjamites' support against the people of Gibeah. But the Benjamites refused to surrender the men of Gibeah and in the ensuing series of battles (10:17-48) were nearly wiped out as a tribe. There is a simple lesson here: if we are unwilling to give up the evil in our lives, we will be destroyed.

Persistence and Encouragement (20:17-28)

God does not promise us a life of ease, even when we are following His leading.

Often we must be persistent, not losing faith when we face trials or disappointments (1 Kings 18:41-46; 2 Kings 4:29-35; Matt. 15:21-28; James 1:3, 4). The Israelites demonstrated this in their response to the first (unsuccessful) battle against the Benjamites. Rather than giving up, they “encouraged one another” (Judg. 20:22), took up their battle positions again, and inquired of the Lord whether they should continue—always a sound course of action—and their persistence brought results on the third day of battle.

Taking Matters Into Their Own Hands (20:39–21:24)

Judges 20:35 makes it very clear that “the Lord defeated Benjamin,” but the Israelite army was not content with merely the defeat of Benjamin and destruction of Gibeah. In the excitement of the war, they set themselves to the eradication of the entire tribe, to the point that they took an oath not to allow the Benjamites to marry their daughters (21:1). Even after the Benjamite army had been defeated, the Israelites “cut down five thousand men along the roads” (20:45) as they fled, and they destroyed all the towns of Benjamin (verse 48). With the battle ended, the people regretted their hasty actions and oath, weeping over the loss of the tribe of Benjamin (21:2, 3, 6, 7). To find wives for the Benjamites necessitated destroying another entire city (verses 10-12), and finally instructing them to hide in the vineyards and kidnap women from among those of Shiloh to be their wives (verses

These words ring uncomfortably true in today’s world.

16-23). By not letting God have control, the Israelites ended up resorting to kidnaping to try to undo a problem they themselves had caused by rashly following their own ideas.

Conclusion (21:25)

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (verse 25, NIV). These words ring uncomfortably true in today’s world, which seems to lack moral absolutes. Only by making God the King of our lives can we (both individually and as God’s chosen people) avoid the wickedness and depravity that results from following human plans.

REACT

1. Analyze the positive and negative actions of the following characters from the story: the Levite, the concubine, the concubine’s father, the old man from Gibeah who took them in, and the leaders of the Israelite army.

2. God does not seem to take a very active role in this story. What evidences do you see of His leadership and direction?

3. How might the story be different if He had taken a more active role?

4. How does Israel’s condition in the time of the judges compare to the condition of the world today? Give some similarities and differences.

By James Kosinski, a graduate student in mathematics at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Self-insulating Independence

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Judges 19–21

This is the last biblical instance in which the children of Israel are without a king. Throughout their history of dual leadership—between God and themselves—they continually asked for a leader to whom they could physically go to seek solutions to their problems. But God had planned that He should be their divine leader and that they should have faith in His ability to guide them.¹ However, they continually reverted to their self-sufficient way of doing things. (Sounds like someone I know!) Their pride and self-reliance often closed their hearts and minds to God's influence.

They just hadn't gotten through their heads the great lesson of faith in God: when you surrender yourself entirely to Him, you will be rewarded by a victory of joy and peace such as you have never experienced. All through their history, the children of Israel usually ended up putting themselves in a bad situation (sound familiar?), which required divine help. They thought things went the way they did because there was no one immediately to look over them and prevent them from getting themselves into a fix. Of course they had the Ten Commandments, but how easy it was to let them slip out of the forefront of their thoughts. How could God

Their pride and self-reliance often closed their hearts and minds to God's influence.

know their needs and desires every minute of every day? They didn't see Him as a "personal" God; instead, they saw Him as a can-you-help-me God.

They wanted a king, not only for the satisfaction of having someone there physically to rule over Israel, but also to show to other nations that they had an Almighty Ruler. But as Ellen G. White tells us, "Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme, are in grave peril. It is Satan's studied effort to separate such ones from those who are channels of light, through whom God has wrought to build up and extend His work in the earth."² So as we insulate ourselves with pride and self-sufficient independence from God, Satan gains a tighter hold on our destiny. We must put our faith in the will of God, for His plan can be modified only for the worse when our choice goes contrary to His.

REACT

1. In what ways has your independence insulated you from God's plan?
2. Can you be a Christian and still be independent?
3. To what extent does independence become insulation from Christ?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 603.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 164.

By Jon D. Lindner, a commercial-credit analyst at First of America Bank, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Bad Company

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Cor. 5:11-13

At the beginning of Canaan's conquest, God commanded Israel to drive out or destroy the Canaanites (Num. 33:51, 52). These drastic measures were necessary to safeguard Israel from the Canaanites' immoral influence. In many cases, however, Israel chose to compromise with sin.

By the time of the judges, the effects of these compromises were apparent. In this week's lesson, the sins of Gibeah's people catch our attention, but the response of the other Benjamites is more noteworthy. The Benjamites had lived so long with this sin among them that, when confronted by the other tribes, they chose to ally themselves with evil against their kinsmen, their high priest, and God Himself (Judg. 20:13, 14). As a result, the entire tribe was nearly destroyed.

The principle is valid for Christians as well. Although God doesn't command us to engage in bloody inquisitions to root out evil, He has given us a clear mandate to resist it and to remove sin from our lives and our churches (1 Cor. 5:11-13; 6:9-11; 1 John 3:7, 8).

Aside from the obvious application to church discipline, God's instruction has a personal application too. As with Israel's incomplete conquest of Canaan, failure

Removing sin is a challenging task, whether in a church or in one's heart.

to allow God to expel sin from our lives keeps us from living victoriously today and sets us up for more serious problems. Ultimately, a day will come when each of us will face a choice similar to the Benjamites': Forsake sin and be saved, or cling to sin and be destroyed. No third option will exist.

Thinking about that day can be frightening. Removing sin is a challenging task, whether in a church or in one's heart. In both cases, the longer it is tolerated, the harder it is to remove. Grim reminders of this fact appear throughout the biblical narrative. But the good news is that we are not left to perform this work by ourselves, just as Israel was not left to conquer Canaan alone. In a world with no king, we can turn to the King of the universe, Jesus Christ, who is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). If we are willing, He is able! In contrast to the fleeting pleasures of sin, Christ offers us love, forgiveness, and victory. Why settle for anything less?

REACT

1. How can we harmonize Christ's instruction to "Judge not" with other New Testament injunctions to remove evil and not tolerate sin?
2. In what ways might cherished sin in my life be destructive to those around me? To my church?

By Lorin Christensen, a junior computer-science major at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Where Is Our Focus?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rom. 9:18-23

The scene is still fresh in my mind: the bright lights, the deafening sirens, and the nauseating smell. The girl's face is contorted; her limbs lie at odd, unnatural angles. Turning away from the horrific real-life drama, I see a familiar face.

"What happened?" I inquire.

"Oh, it's just another rape and murder case," she carelessly replies.

"Just another rape and murder case?" I ask in disbelief.

"Well, that's just the way the cookie crumbles . . . hey! There's a TV camera! Maybe . . ." The rest of her words are lost as she scrambles away with the entire crowd to catch a shot at fame.

I stumble away from the violent scene, leaving behind a degenerated and desensitized people much like the Israelites in Judges 19–21. I wonder where, among the terrible biblical and present stories, is the love of God? What lesson are we to learn from it all?

1. We will all face tribulation and trials, but God will never leave us. It is difficult always to be optimistic when we are faced with struggles. Too often, we may ask why God has allowed these things to happen to us. Do you sometimes wonder, "Why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" (Rom. 9:19,

"Oh, it's just another rape and murder case," she carelessly replies.

NIV)? I'm sure that is how the Israelites felt when God twice allowed them to be struck down. The good news is that God never leaves us. His steadfast love, patience, grace, and mercy are ever upon us. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (8:37). Yet without the trials, how are we to grow? (See James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-5.) Without the tribulations, how are we to become more dependent on God?"

2. Keep your perspective. The tribes of Israel were without a king, and "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judg. 21:25). To what extent do we also do what is right in our own eyes? How many times do we, like the Israelites, jump right in to solve our problems and *then* ask God for direction? If we would only take our problems to God first, we would be relieved from much of the trials and setbacks that will otherwise occur. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). We should not become disillusioned by anxiety and turmoil, but instead focus on the wonderful love that God showers on us. With our eyes fixed on God and trusting in Him completely, we will all become "objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory" (9:23).

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 329.

By Lucy Kwon, research assistant in biochemistry at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Leadership

OPINION

Key Text: Gal. 3:24

How would you describe a true leader? What kind of characteristics does one have? Noel Tichy, an authority of organizational transformation at the University of Michigan, indicates the rules that one leader, Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric Corporation, lives by¹:

- Face reality as it is, not as it was or as you wish it were.
- Be candid with everyone.
- Don't manage—lead.
- Change before you have to.
- If you do not have a competitive advantage, don't compete.

We do know that true transformational leaders—or the ones whom we have heard of—seldom live to see the results of their labor. Examples such as Gandhi, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Joan of Arc come to mind, people from all races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and religious upbringing.

Judges 17:6 and 21:25 indicate that without God or a leader (human king), “everyone did as he saw fit” (NIV). A form of leadership (government) is necessary. Each person must lead out, realizing that laws and governments have been appointed to keep order in society.

A *Wall Street Journal* article reported how ludicrous it is to assess a person's

True transformational leaders seldom live to see the results of their labor.

character or intellect by the color of his or her skin. Let's be realistic. It happens. The more I can do to create a positive assessment, the better off I am as a human being, the better example I set for my gender, and the better picture I paint for my race. The more time I take to understand others and to get to know the individual, the better off I am as a human-resource manager and future leader.

Lawlessness in the book of Judges showed itself in many forms. Theft, rape, murder, incest, and idolatry are a result of a lack of leadership. What do I see when I look at other persons? How do others see me? I wish others would get to know me before making an assessment. It doesn't happen that way. It never does.

I must, as a steward of Christ, take it upon myself to represent Him as a law-abiding citizen. I must promote ethical behavior and *lead out* in showing that sense of responsibility to others.

1. Noel Tichy and Stratford Sherman, *Control Your Destiny or Someone Else Will* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1993).
2. *Wall Street Journal*, “Race, Pathology and IQ,” October 10, 1994.

By Cordell J. Thomas, a graduate student in business administration at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Next Quarter's Lessons

End-Time Landmarks

If you have not yet received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 1996, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Christ the Focus of Scripture

Scripture: Luke 24:27, 44; Isa. 7:14; 9:6, 7; Ps. 2:1-12.

Theme: Because all Scripture focuses on Christ, all Bible teaching is best understood in the light of the cross.

Lesson 2: Christ Our Righteousness and Salvation

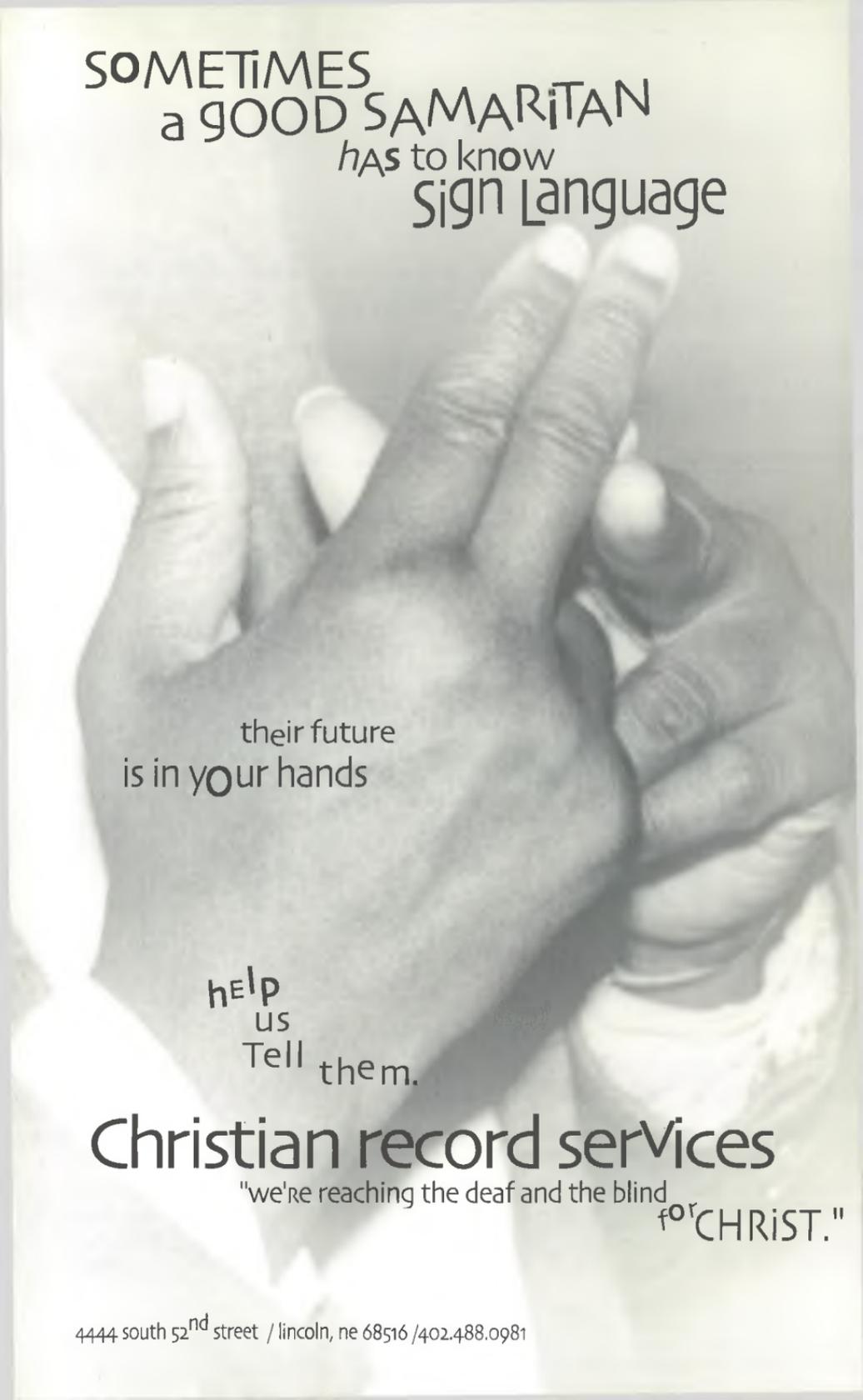
Scripture: John 3:1-21.

Theme: The most important landmark of Bible teaching is the truth of righteousness and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

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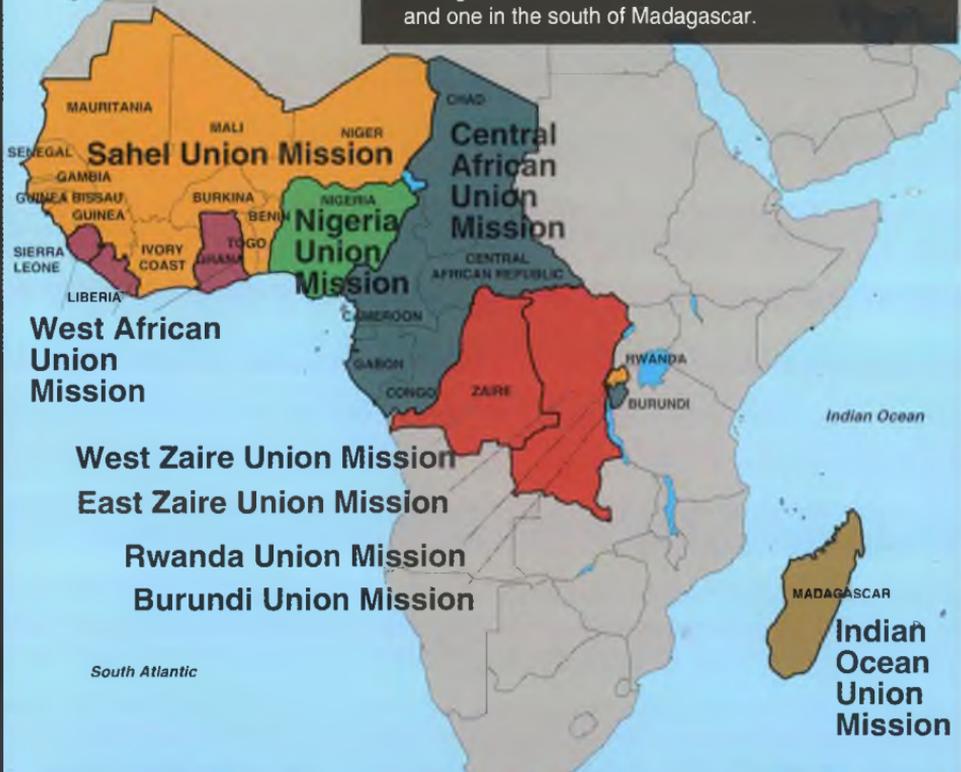
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Mission Projects:

- Sahel Union: Build chapels for new groups of believers.
- West Zaire Union: A medical clinic in Mbandaka, Zaire, and a medical launch to treat people living along the Zaire River.
- Nigeria: Build a multipurpose/classroom building on the campus of Adventist Seminary of West Africa.
- Madagascar: Build two medical clinics, one in the north and one in the south of Madagascar.



AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN DIVISION

Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
Burundi Mission (Attached Field)	117	40,863	6,000,000
Central Africa Union Mission	651	72,235	26,700,000
East Zaire Union Mission	812	169,729	22,383,250
Indian Ocean Union Mission	225	44,374	15,538,883
Nigeria Union Mission	539	123,083	98,100,000
Rwanda Union Mission	806	285,440	7,500,000
Sahel Union Mission	86	11,439	69,900,000
West Africa Union Mission	592	192,154	25,845,669
West Zaire Union Mission	293	109,440	20,106,750
Totals December 31, 1994	4,121	1,048,757	292,074,552