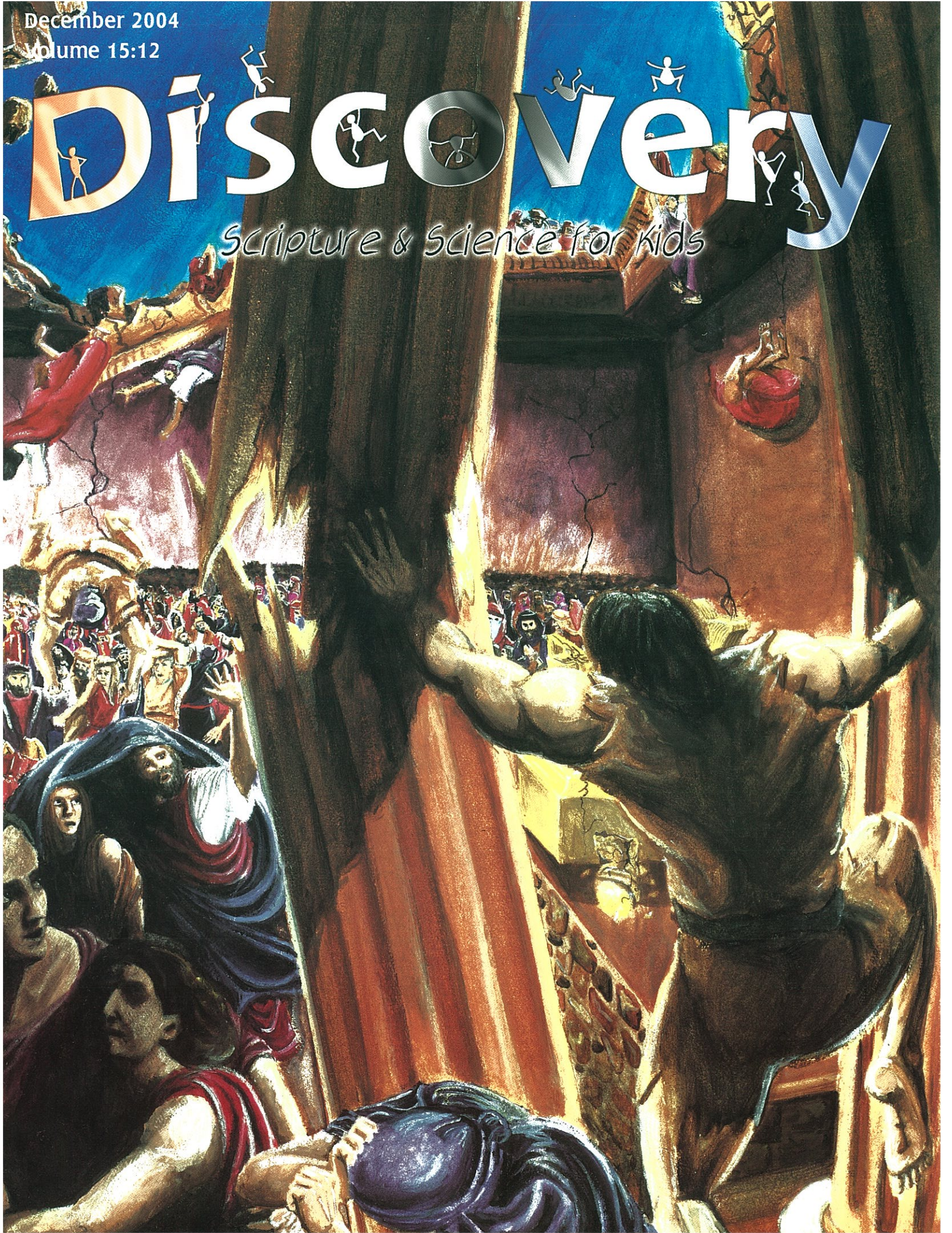


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Discovery

Scripture & Science for Kids



The Cycle of Judges

AMELIA CORTEZ

From the days of Moses and Joshua until the time of Saul (about 300 years), the Israelites were ruled by judges. In the United States' judicial system, a judge is someone who is supposed to uphold the judgment of the law in criminal cases. With no sovereign authority, however, the judges of Israel governed the people almost like a king, leading the armies of the people into war and delivering them from oppression from their enemies.

Why were the Israelites oppressed? After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, the Israelites were blessed by being allowed to enter the land of Canaan, and they were faithful to the Lord for a full generation. But after a while, "another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). This new generation began to worship idols such as Baal and Ashtaroth. When God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites, He commanded them to destroy the altars and idols that the people of that region used in their worship of false gods. But the Israelites did not obey God. In Judges 2:1-3, we read that God sent an angel to tell the people that they would be punished for their disobedience. God did exactly what He said He would do.



When the Israelites began to worship idols like this golden calf, God would deliver them over to their enemies for a time. When they repented, God would send a judge to save them.

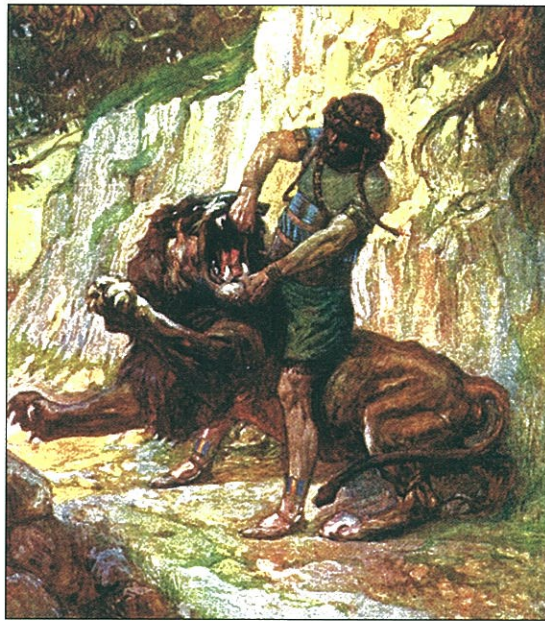
God punished the people by allowing their enemies to invade the Israelites' land and oppress the people. After a period of time, God would call a judge to deliver the people from their foes and to cleanse Israel of idolatry. There would then be a period of faithfulness and rest until that judge died. But soon the Israelites would become corrupt again. When this happened, God would again deliver them to their enemies for a period of time, until the people cried for help. Then He would call a judge to lead the people from their oppressors. This was the cycle of the judges.

This cycle would not have been necessary if the Israelites had obeyed God. Because of their disobedience, God had to show the people that He always means what He says. The cycle of the judges teaches us that defiance to the will of God ultimately brings punishment, but true repentance always brings blessings.

The Bible tells of a man who was blessed by God, and who had an amazing amount of strength. This man was so strong that he killed a roaring lion with his bare hands, and he killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey! You have probably guessed his name. He was Samson, the thirteenth judge of the Israelites. You can find his story in Judges 13-16. You may remember the story of his great strength, but you may not know about the women who were able to make this strong man very weak.

The first woman was from Timnah. She was a Philistine whom Samson decided he wanted to marry. Samson's parents urged him not to marry her, because she was not one of God's people. The Philistines worshipped false gods. Samson made a huge mistake by going against the will of his parents to marry the Philistine woman. Disastrous events, including a big fire and many deaths, came as a result of Samson's bad choice. One lesson we can learn from Samson's bad decision is that we must obey our parents and listen to godly advice. Additionally, even while you are young, decide to marry a Christian who can help you go to heaven.

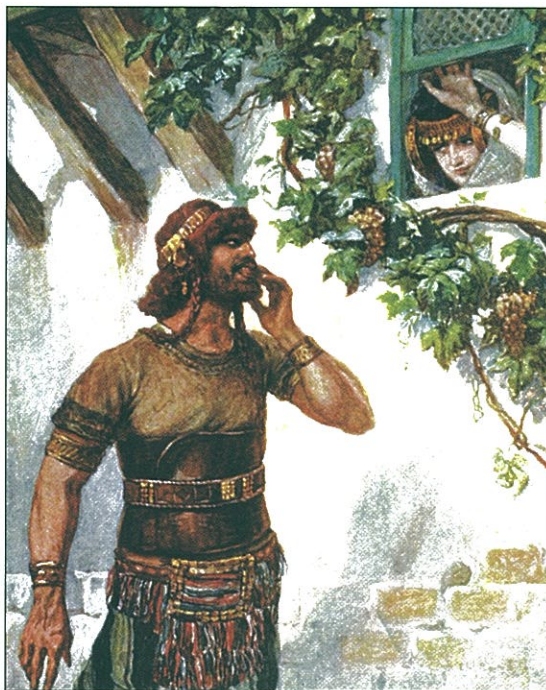
The second woman was a harlot from Gaza. Samson violated God's law regarding purity by being in the house



The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and helped him to kill a young lion with his bare hands (read Judges 14:5-6).

A STRONG MAN'S WEAKNESS

MALLORY BAKER

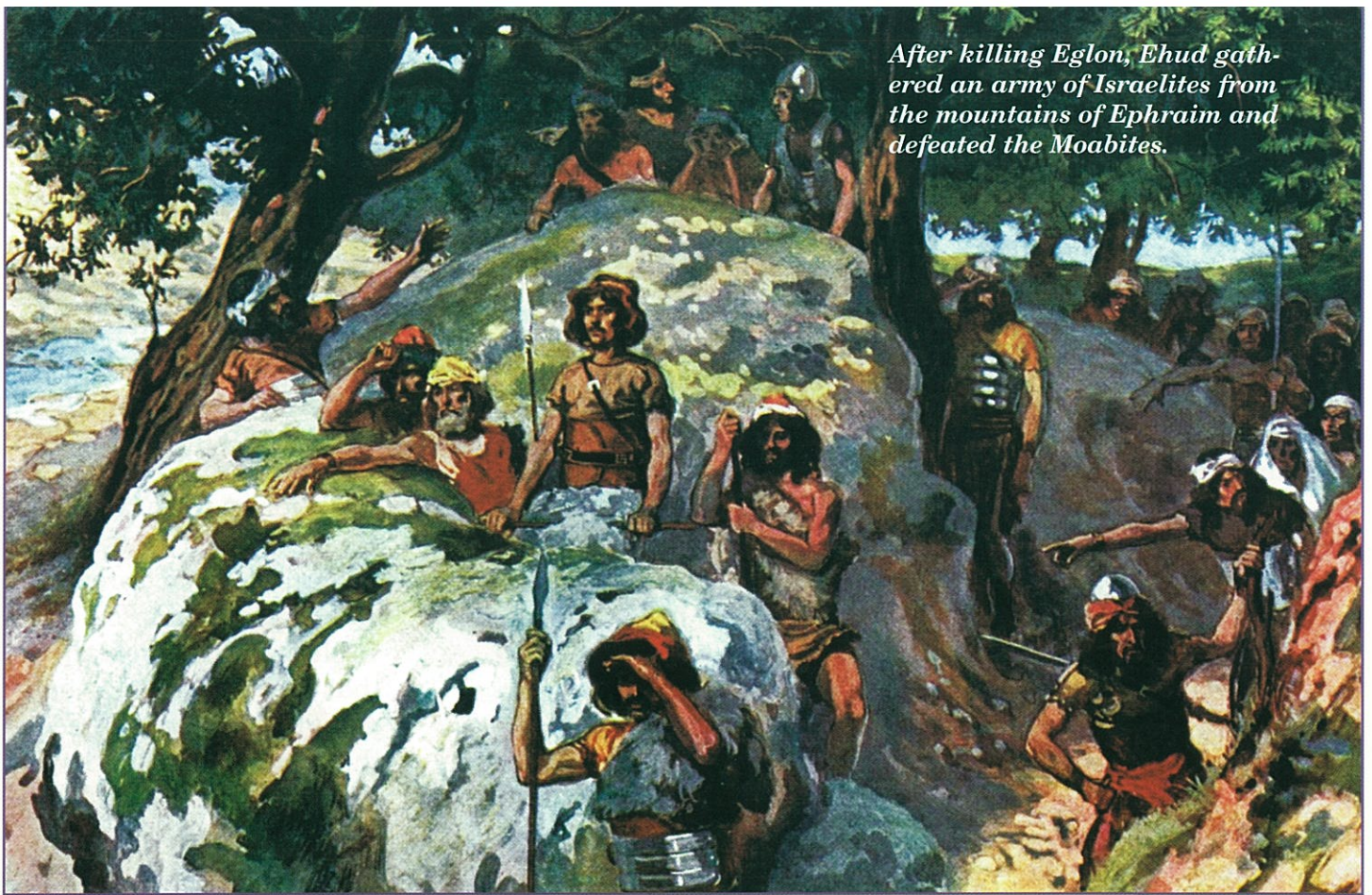


Even though Samson was physically strong, he had a weakness for pagan women that caused his destruction.

of this woman. Even though he showed great strength in taking the gates of her city and putting them on a hill, he was paving the way for his enemies to capture him. From this part of Samson's life, we can learn that we must be very careful not to go to places where it will be difficult for us to do the right thing.

Delilah, from Sorek, was the third woman. The Philistines told Delilah that they would give her money if she could discover the secret behind Samson's strength. Samson did not go to her house intending to tell her, but she begged him over and over. After a while, he broke down and revealed his secret. She had Samson's hair cut while he was sleeping, and his strength left him. He then became a prisoner of the Philistines. As we can see in Samson's life, sometimes the devil can convince us over time that sin is not so bad, and we can become prisoners of sin!

Young girls, remember the powerful influence that these women had over one of the strongest men who ever lived. Decide now that you will encourage people to be great servants for the Lord, not try to keep them from obeying God. Young men, remember that truly strong men are those who are able to do what is right, even in the face of temptation.



After killing Eglon, Ehud gathered an army of Israelites from the mountains of Ephraim and defeated the Moabites.

EHUD AND A FAT KING

HOPE ESTABROOK

The story of Ehud is told in Judges 3:12-30. In this passage, we learn about a brave man and a forgiving God. The Israelites had again turned away from God, and God allowed them to be captured by the Moabite king, Eglon, who was helped by the Amelakites and Ammonites. After eighteen years of slavery, Israel cried out to God for help.

One theme that is repeated throughout the Old Testament, especially in the book of Judges, is that our God is a forgiving God. The Israelites had turned away from God many times and worshipped other gods. But when they were truly repentant and needed God, He would always help them. This teaches us that no matter how many bad things we do, if we repent and obey God, He will forgive us. This is just one of God's many great attributes.

On this occasion in Judges chapter 3, God sent Ehud, a Benjamite, to deliver Israel. Ehud, on behalf of his people, took tribute (taxes) to Eglon, the king of the Moabites, who was a very fat king. After presenting the trib-

ute, Ehud said that he had a secret message to give the king. King Eglon ordered everyone to leave so that Ehud could tell him the secret message. When Ehud and the king were alone, Ehud told him that he had a message from God. Then Ehud stabbed the king with a double-edged dagger. The dagger went into King Eglon's belly and was completely covered by his fat. His servants later found him dead on the floor. Ehud escaped and returned to his people to lead them to victory against the Moabites.

As you can see, Ehud was a very courageous man. He was not afraid, nor was he intimidated by the enemy's king. One reason for this was his faith in God. He believed that God would take care of Him, and he knew that God had chosen him to save Israel.

Ehud could not have done this without God. We should always pray for God to be with us and give us courage. Even though we may not have the same obstacles as Ehud, we need God's help to live righteously every day.

❖ JEPHTHAH ❖

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

DEBBIE TARPLEY

Do you have troubles that you feel are too big to overcome? Have you ever made a promise, then regretted it? Meet Jephthah. Jephthah's brothers did not like him, because they had different moms and Jephthah's mom was a prostitute. In fact, they chased Jephthah away from his home. Jephthah then went to live with a group of men whom the Bible describes as "worthless"—not a very good start for a man who became a leader for God.

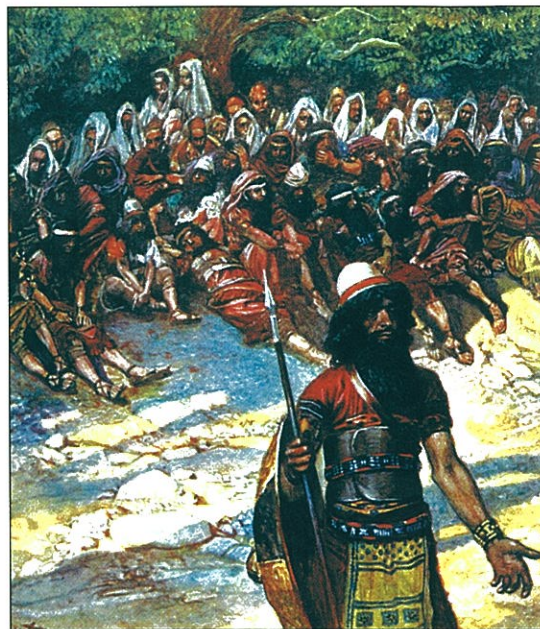
Before and during the time that all this happened to Jephthah, Israel turned away

from God and began worshipping idols. As a result, God allowed the Philistines and the Ammonites to oppress the Israelites. When the Ammonites were about to attack, Israel cried out to God for help.

God reminded the people how He had delivered them many times in the past, and how they still had rejected Him. He told them "to cry to the gods you have chosen," knowing that those false gods could do nothing to help Israel. Israel begged God to help them, and He eventually came to their aid.

Now they needed a leader. Jephthah had obviously proven himself to be "a mighty man of valor," because when it was time for the elders of Gilead to choose a leader, they put Jephthah's past out of their minds and went to him. They wanted Jephthah to lead them.

Jephthah tried to reason with the Ammonites, but that didn't work, so the Israelites had to fight them. Before the battle, Jephthah made a vow to God. He said that if God would deliver the Ammonites into his hands, when he returned home, whatever came out of his door first would be sacrificed to God. The battle was fought and Jephthah and Israel won. Judges 11:33 says they defeated the Ammonites with "a

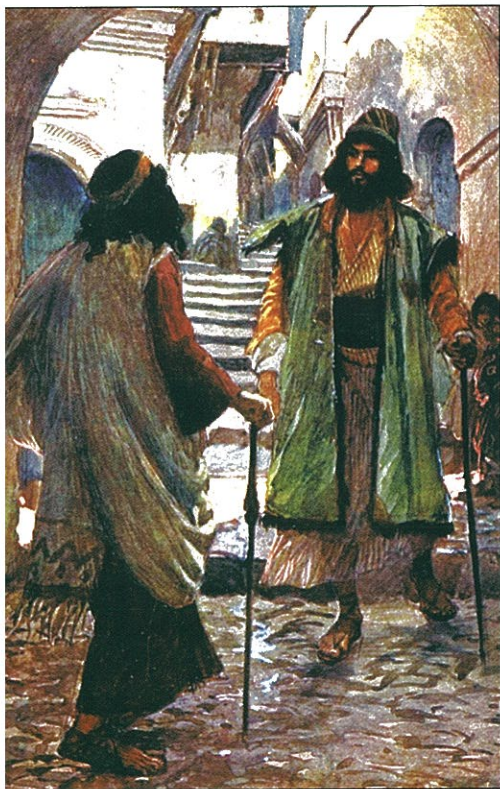


Later in Jephthah's life, he became a mighty judge whom God used to lead the Israelites to victory against their enemies.

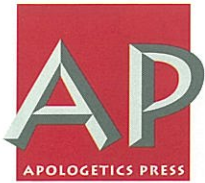
very great slaughter" and that "the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel."

Jephthah returned home, rejoicing in the victory God had given him. His rejoicing turned quickly into sorrow, however, because his only child, his daughter Mizpah, was first out of his door to greet him. Sadly, Jephthah was forced to fulfill his vow.

Jephthah went on to judge Israel for six years. He proved himself to be a man who could overcome adversities and be a strong leader for God. We can learn from Jephthah that with God's help, we can overcome our struggles. What battles do you need God to help you overcome?



At the beginning of Jephthah's life, he associated with men who were not good influences.



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DEBORAH

A BRAVE WOMAN

KIMBERLEY PINEDO



The wise judge Deborah went with the army captain Barak to defeat the evil forces of Jabin, king of Canaan.

In Judges chapter four, we read about a man named Jabin, who was king of Canaan. Jabin ruled harshly over the children of Israel for twenty years. He had 900 chariots of iron (vs. 3)! You can imagine that the children of Israel were afraid of Jabin.

At that time, a prophetess (a female prophet) named Deborah was judging Israel (4:4). The children of Israel would come to Deborah and ask for her judgment. Deborah must have been a very wise woman.

One day, Deborah asked Barak, commander of the Israelite army, “Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, ‘Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and the sons of Zebulun and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him to your hand’” (vs 6-7)? Even though Barak was a man, listen to his reply to Deborah: “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go” (vs. 8).

Why would Barak say this to a woman? He must have trusted in her very much, and he must have known that she was brave. Deborah replied to Barak that she would go with him, but that there would not be any glory for him because “the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (vs. 9). Barak then called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh, and he went with ten thousand men and Deborah. After Sisera heard this, he gathered his 900 chariots of iron and all his people. The Bible says, “The Lord routed (or defeated) Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak,” and Sisera got out of his chariot and fled (vs. 15).

Even though Sisera escaped (only temporarily, because he was killed shortly thereafter), none of his army survived (vs. 16)! We can learn from this story that God uses men and women to carry out His plans. Also, we learn from Deborah’s bravery that she was a woman who showed courage, faith in God, and obedience to God’s commands.

ANSWERS

8-Eglon; Across 3-Delilah; 5-Barak; 6-Judge; 7-Sisera.
 3. Ehud; 4. Samson; 5. Ehud; 6. Samson; 7. Jephthah; 8. Deborah. **CROSSWORD CHALLENGE:** Down 1-Benjamin; 2-Baal; 4-donkey; 6-Jabin; **NAME THAT JUDGE:** 1. Deborah; 2. Jephthah; **COMPLETE THE BIBLE VERSES:** 1. generation, know, Israel; 2. everyone, right.

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