

Excerpts from the book

Bible Battles

by Lettice Bell & Jessica Erskine

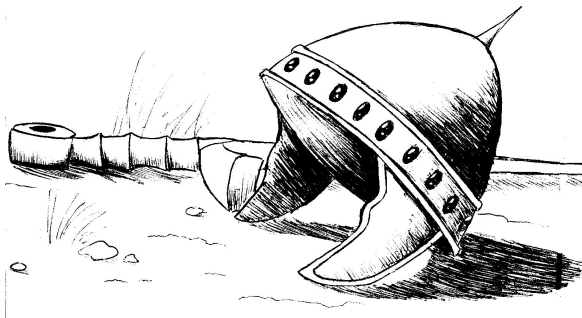
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Bible Battles

by

Lettice Bell & Jessica Erskine

illustrations by Jessica Erskine



HOMEWAY PRESS

Canmer, KY

*This is a substantially rewritten and revised edition
of the book "Bible Battles" by Lettice Bell,
which was originally published in 1915.*

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A NOTE ABOUT THE TEXT



*This book may be read and enjoyed on its own merits, but it may also be used as a tool to draw young readers into the Scriptural accounts themselves. Words in the text which are taken directly from the King James Version of the Bible are indicated in **bold**, accompanied by a partial reference to its location. Students wishing to look these up and complete the reference will quickly become familiar with the original Biblical text from which these stories are taken. –JRE*

Gideon's Battles

Before Joshua died, he divided the Promised Land into twelve parts. One for each of the tribes. He instructed them to go on and conquer the whole country, assuring them that God would still go before them and drive out their enemies, if only they trusted and obeyed Him. Because they failed to do this, and made terms with the inhabitants, allowing them and their idols to remain, the Israelites were always in trouble. Time after time the nations outside attacked them, and they could not drive them out.

In their despair they cried to God to help them, and He never failed then to come to their rescue. By Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Barak, He delivered them from the King of Mesopotamia, the King of Moab, the Lords of the Philistines, and the King of the Canaanites.

This story begins when, for the fifth time, they cry for deliverance, and Gideon is sent to save them from the Midianites.

How Gideon Saw A Miracle

“It was not hard, we think, to serve Him, If we could only see.”

Gideon was the sort of boy who always must see before he would believe – which, as you know, is exactly opposite to God’s order for boys, and the rest of us. His favorite Bible stories were the ten plagues, and the path through the sea: whenever he heard of what God used to do for Jacob’s family, he would sigh and say: “But there are no **miracles** (Judges 6:) now.” Because he could not see God’s power, he began to think God had **forsaken** (Judges 6:) them altogether.

The Israelites were up to their heads in fear and hopelessness. Always some enemy came upon them, and ruined the things they had labored so hard for. Every summer, as far back as Gideon could remember, the fierce Midianites warriors came upon them like a plague of **grasshoppers** (Judges 6:), stole all their **sheep** (Judges 6:) and cattle, gathered all their grapes, cut all their corn, and killed anybody who dared to resist them.

The terrified farmers didn't stay and attempt to protect their homes. Their courage had disappeared long ago. They didn't have a

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captain, and they could not fight without one. Guards were stationed to be on the look-out for the enemy. When the guards spotted the Midianites in the distance, they blew a long blast on their horn. When the people heard the alarm, they dropped whatever they were doing, grabbed up their children, and ran for safety.

In those perilous times, each family had their own secret hiding place **in the mountains** (Judges 6:). Every time the enemies came, they deserted their houses, and ran to the mountains. They stayed there until the Midianites took their fill of plunder and food, and went back to their own homes. From their **caves** (Judges 6:) on the hills, the bewildered fugitives watched as the Midianites and their allies made use of their houses and gardens, and everything they didn't use, they destroyed. The Israelites hated their enemies, and cursed inwardly when they looked out from their hiding places. "Why does God allow these people to torment us?!" a man cried in rage and despair, but no one answered him.

It made the boys furious to see their homes ruined. But Gideon did not feel as angry as he felt miserable. It was really worse for him than for his brothers, for he did not care about adventures. To most boys, perilous exploits and daring excursions would have caused their worries to lessen. But Gideon did not see it the same way as his brothers. Whenever the other boys laid plans for sneaking down the mountain, to try and steal provisions from the plunderers, he always hung around in the back of the cave, trying his best to look busy.

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He thought his brothers the bravest of heroes because they dared to take their lives in their hands, creep past the tents of **Zebath and Zalmunna** (Judges 8:), the Midianite generals, and dodge back again to the cave with their spoils.

Nobody knows exactly how it happened, but one day the brothers' plans went all wrong. They had miscalculated the sentries time to change posts, and were spotted as they crawled toward their home.

"After them!" a sentry shouted, pointing his spear at the two intruders. The boys stumbled over their own feet, and ran as hard as they could back to the hideout in the mountains. They kept going, their enemies right behind them. The sentries thrust out their spears and yelled at them, until the boys breath was coming in ragged gasps, and their legs shaking. Finally they reached Mount **Tabor** (Judges 8:), and they could run no longer. The enemies grabbed them roughly by the back of their necks, and threw them on the ground. There on the mountain, one by one Gideon's brothers were brutally murdered. Zebah and Zalmunna stood over the lifeless bodies, and gave a cry of victory, as if they had done something noble.

Gideon saw what a terrible fate had taken his brothers, and that day he was no longer a youth. "**Why** (Judges 7:) do all these horrible things happen to us?" he sobbed bitterly. "God must have forsaken us. He does not care." The misery of it all was almost more than he could bear, he longed for a Captain to come and deliver them from the Midianites cruel oppression.

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After the tragic murder, the Midianites moved from **Ophrah** (Judges 6:) to plunder yet another other village. Gideon's family came back to their wrecked homes with fear in their hearts, and the heavy burden of having to repair their **impoverished** (Judges 6:) farm.

Then God answered Gideon's "Why?"

He **sent** (Judges 6:) a preacher through the villages, to tell the Israelites why things were like this. Gideon heard the sermon and learned that the answer to his question was "Idols." All this misery had come to Israel because they worshiped heathen **gods** (Judges 6:). It was not a message the people wanted to hear, most of them would not listen. "There is no harm in our idols," they said. But the preacher continued his sermons, whether they listened or not, and Gideon went on sighing. "I wish I could see a miracle, then I should know that God has not forsaken us."

One hot day he was thinking these thoughts, while he was hiding behind the old **wine press** (Judges 6:) threshing some **wheat** (Judges 6:). He had to do it in an unsuspected corner, for bands of wild Arabs were always prowling about, ready to seize any little bit of food the farmers had managed **to hide** (Judges 6:).

Gideon had no idea that a strange pair of eyes were watching him from the **oak** (Judges 6:) tree by the house. When he straightened up to rub his back, he saw something from the corner of his eye. Though such terrible things happened to his brothers by strangers, Gideon was not afraid; he could tell that they were the eyes of a Friend before a word was spoken.



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“The Lord is with thee...mighty man (Judges 6: 12),” said the Stranger as he stepped away from the tree. Gideon was amazed. First because he was not mighty, and secondly because this man knew his thoughts.

“But,” said Gideon miserably, **“if the Lord be with us, why** (Judges 6: 13) **does He not save us by a miracle?”**

The Stranger did not answer the question. He looked at Gideon, and said slowly: “God is going to send you to save your people from the Midianites.”

“How can I save them?” cried Gideon, appalled at such a thought. “Look at me. I am the youngest of the family. I belong to one of the smallest tribes. My father is **poor** (Judges 6: 15). I have no money, no men, and no wisdom.”

Again the Stranger ignored Gideon’s numerous excuses, and simply told him that men, money and wisdom were not needed by a God-chosen captain. “I will be with you.” He said, “and you shall **smite the Midianites** (Judges 6: 16) as easily as if they were one man.”

Gideon began to realize who it was that was speaking. Suddenly he didn't feel so small, and it didn't seem so impossible for him to conquer the Midianites. *If I really knew that God was sending me and would be with me, I could do it*, he thought inwardly. Turning to the Stranger, he said aloud: **“Show me** (Judges 6: 17) **a miracle, and then I will know for sure; but wait until I come** (Judges 6: 18) **back.”** Without another word he ran into the house, and put some meat and cakes into a **basket** (Judges 6: 19) and some soup into a **pot** (Judges 6: 20), and brought them out.

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Close by the tree was a flat **rock** (Judges 6:). “Put the bread and meat on that rock,” said the Stranger. “Now **pour out the broth** (Judges 6:) over them.”

Gideon **did** (Judges 6:) this, and from the sodden bread and the dripping meat, he saw rivers of soup trickling all down the sides of the rock. Then as he looked, the Stranger **touched** (Judges 6:) the food with the end of His stick, and, as if by magic a blaze of **fire** (Judges 6:) burst out of the wet rock. In a moment all the food was burnt to ashes.

So Gideon learned that the days of Wonders were not over. The miracle he had seen was quite as marvelous as any in the old time before him. He could never say again: “Where are the miracles?” From that moment he knew that a God who could make **fire out of ...rock** (Judges 6:) could turn even a poor creature such as he into a hero and a deliverer.

He believed because he saw. Splendid as it was for Gideon to see, we remember with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: “**Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed** (John 20:).”

Gideon's First Conquest

"Once for the least of children of Manasses

God had a mission and a deed to do."

-- F.W. H. Meyers.

The first thing Gideon did after he had been given his orders to **smite** (Judges 6:) the enemy, was to make a pile of stones near the oak tree.

"What on earth is that for?" his family asked.

"The Lord is going to **send peace** (Judges 6:) to us," answered Gideon; "and I am building this **altar** (Judges 6:) to remind us of His promise."

Gideon had just been talking with his Captain, otherwise he would never have had the courage to do what he did in broad daylight. No one laughed at Gideon's "Altar-of-peace," and his father Joash stared remorsefully at the pagan **altar** (Judges 6:) he had built on his property.

A little way from the house was a circle of trees. No one might touch those trees, for they were sacred. Within this little

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grove was an altar to a heathen idol-- a hideous, chiseled block of stone called Baal. It belonged to Gideon's father, and it might as well have been the "Altar-of-war." Because the Israelites built the altars, worshiped the idols, and **forsook the Lord** (Judges 2:), war and misery had come upon them.

Although his father followed the tradition, getting up early in the morning to fall on his knees and pray to Baal, Gideon did not go with him. As he built his Altar-of-peace beneath the oak, his cheeks would burn with shame at the thought of the Altar-of-war hidden behind the little grove.

The sun sank behind the horizon, and soon **night** (Judges 6:)fell. Exhausted with the hard work, Gideon climbed into bed. As he lay in the dark, God came to his side, and told him that his first battle was to be against the idol in the sacred Grove. Gideon felt his heart leap when he knew that Baal's altar was to be torn **down** (Judges 6:), but he wasn't all too thrilled when God told him he was the one to do the smashing.

What would the **household** (Judges 6:) say? And what about **the men of the city** (Judges 6:) what would they do? Gideon wondered if he would have enough courage to fight his first battle, especially when it would bring such fury on his head. Gideon slept fitfully that night after he received his first order. Even the memory of his miracle brought him no strength. Yet somehow the hard thing had to be done, for it never entered into Gideon's trembling heart to say "No" to his Heavenly **Captain** (Judges 5:).

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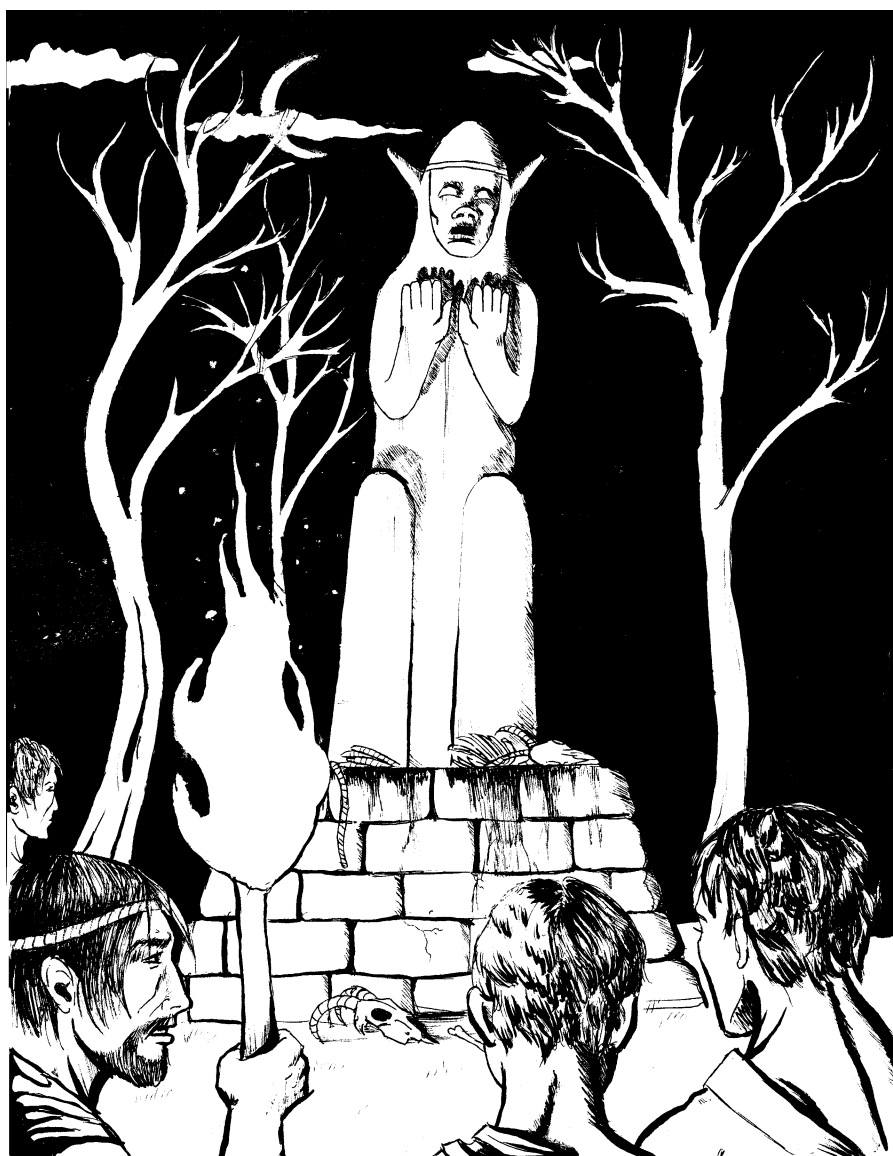
Early in the morning (Judges 6:) a shuffling of feet stirred in the house, and Gideon knew his father was getting up to attend Baal's daily sacrifice. For the life of him, Gideon **could not** (Judges 6:) move a muscle, though he longed to run and smash the idol before the wicked service began.

"But I can't do it in broad daylight," he told himself; "I must wait until it is **night** (Judges 6:), then I truly will." Feeling sick with fear, and very much like a sneak, the miserable Gideon waited for the sun to set. Then in the darkness he gathered up enough courage to creep around to the servants' quarters, and tell **ten** (Judges 6:) of the most trustworthy to arm themselves with axes and hammers, and to meet him by the Idol Grove at midnight.

While the city slept the men came out, armed and ready. Gideon led his first army into his first battle. The men pulled down stones, throwing them aside like sticks, they threw the idol Baal to the ground, and crushed it. Then at Gideon's command, they destroyed the sacred **grove** (Judges 6:) of trees as well. Motionless in the moonlight they lay-- the heaps of rubble and the hideous god who could not return a blow to save itself, not even a stone cried out in protest against the insult.

There was one more step in Gideon's battle orders. Having smashed up Baal's altar, he was to **build an altar** (Judges 6:) to the true God. Upon it, he must sacrifice a **bullock** (Judges 6:) out of their own farmyard.

In the gray mist of the morning the wisp of smoke from that sacrifice curled upwards, speaking to Heaven itself of Gideon's



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obedience. To God the obedience of a coward seemed to be of just as much value in Heaven as the obedience of a hero. Indeed most of God's heroes have won their victories in spite of fears, very encouraging for some of us, isn't it?

Having carried out his orders, Gideon went back to bed, and presently his father arose. Gideon stared at the wall, fear clutching his heart as he listened to him put on his sandals and open the door to walk to the Grove. It was fortunate there was no turning back for Gideon, for his heart was beating wildly, and there was no knowing what Gideon might have done to save himself. Gideon had not feared the wrath of the city for nothing. Joash was walking through the dewy meadow, and stopped in shock at what he saw. A furious, murder-crazed crowd had gathered around the ruins of their altar and were speaking of revenge.

"Who hath done this? (Judges 6:)" he shouted. And with dismay Joash heard the angry answer from all sides: **"Gideon (Judges 6:), of course."**

The people knew it was Gideon, for he was the only one who didn't worship Baal with the rest of Ophrah. No other man in the place had kept true to the Lord who had brought them out of **Egypt** (Judges 6:). When you are tempted to despise Gideon, don't forget that. Adventures and exploits may become too much for a hero, but **through faith** (Hebrews 11:) they can have the courage to stand up alone for what is right, day after day.

The furious idolaters shouted and crowded around the bewildered Joash. "Gideon, we want Gideon!" they yelled, **"bring**

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out (Judges 6:) your son, he shall die for this!"

Gideon's father, in his heart of hearts, was more than half inclined to serve the Lord. He had little real faith in Baal's power. He was a strange old man too, and he thought of a strange thing to say to save his son's life. "Look here, my good people," he said, holding up his hands. "A god that is worth anything can take care of himself. Surely Baal does not need you to stand up for him; **if he be a god, let him plead** (Judges 6:) his own wrongs. Let him order Gideon to die."

A dead silence spread over the group of men and women as all turned around to stare at the altar, and wait for Baal to speak. Some of them really expected their idol to walk out of the pile of rubbish and destroy the insulter. When absolutely nothing happened, the people began to slink away speechless. There was nothing left to say, and they felt ashamed. We can only hope they learned that day to distrust a bit of stone that could not speak, and to listen to the Lord who pleads the **cause** (Proverbs 22:) of all those who cry to Him.

Gideon didn't feel proud of his night's work, but he did feel very thankful for the way God had turned his father into his defender and delivered him from the men he so greatly **feared** (Judges 6:).

Miracles To Order

“Filled him with valor, slung him with a sword.”

-- F.W.H. Myers

After Gideon's victory over Baal **all the Midianites** (Judges 6:), joined by the Amalekites and hordes of wild desert Arabs agreed to come down for their annual raid on the Israelites' unprotected farms.

Gideon was encouraged by the result of his first battle, and awed by the Lord and His might. So Gideon walked to the place where Baal and his alter once stood. Gideon climbed up on the highest part of the ruins, and **blew** (Judges 6:) the alarm of war.

God had promised long before this; that whenever the priests sounded the silver trumpet to call the men to battle against any nation that oppressed them, He Himself would be their Leader, and would save them from their **enemies** (Numbers 10:). Gideon blew the trumpet with the long ago promise on his mind.

The people of Israel stopped their work and looked around them. It had been so long since they had heard the call to war.

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Gideon's family came running **after him** (Judges 6:), and the first to climb up on the ruins beside Gideon was Jether. As he looked up at Gideon his mouth grew dry, and he fingered his knife in anticipation, hoping with all his heart that his father would not send him back. The men of the city, who just a few days before were ready to kill Gideon, gathered around him too. Gideon sent **messengers** (Judges 6:) running to the cities of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and at once men from these four tribes dropped what they were doing, gathered their weapons and hastened **to meet** (Judges 6:) the new leader, and fight under his command.

Gideon stood at the head of the great army, both feet were planted on the ruins of Baal, and he looked out over the people before him. All he had done to gather them was to blow **a trumpet** (Judges 6:) and send a message. The God of **wonders** (Psalm 77:) did the rest, and filled the people with a desire for a leader, and courage to defend themselves. There Gideon stood with his army and God's promise. "I have sent thee Gideon to **save Israel** (Judges 6:)." Yet, at the moment of triumph, fear unexpectedly gripped his heart and he was afraid. "I wonder," he kept asking himself (or Satan kept whispering in his ear), "if we shall ever be able to win." He looked out over the city to the mountains and felt his heart skip a beat as he remembered what happened to his brothers. Suddenly he didn't feel so strong. "I wonder if God really means to save Israel **by mine hand** (Judges 6:)."

He faltered, and his sword fell from his feeble grasp at the

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very idea of venturing to use it. If only he could be certain that God would really give them strength to win! If only he knew God would really fight for them!

Gideon had already seen one miracle, but the strength it had given him disappeared. He desperately needed something to show him God had kept his promise. The promise itself was not enough. So he cried out to God, and this is the miracle he asked to see.

A row of sheep-skins was hanging out in the sun to dry. "I will take one of those dry sheep-skins, and leave it on the ground all night," he said. "In the morning if I find the skin soaking wet with dew, and **all the earth beside** (Judges 6:) it hard and dry, **then shall I know** (Judges 6:) Thou wilt save us, **as Thou hast said** (Judges 6:)."

He took a crisp skin off the line and set the hard coarse wool on the ground, and left it as he went to bed. The moon was only half full that night, its light fell across the dry sheepskin, and streamed through the window where Gideon lay fully awake. He stared at the moon and let his thoughts wander. He wondered if God would make the skin soaking wet, and the ground parched in the morning, or if nothing would happen at all. *The Midianites are strong, much stronger than us*, he thought. *What if you are so scared to lead an army that you cannot lift your sword Gideon? What will you do if God denies you in your time of need?* Sweat broke out on his forehead as he tossed and turned in fitful sleep.

Gideon was **up early** (Judges 6:) the next morning. With his heart in his mouth, he crept towards the oak tree. The ground



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he trod was hard and dry, not a trace of moisture could he find. Hesitantly he looked down at the skin. Was it wet? That was the point, had dew fallen at all? He bent down and caressed the thick fleece. He took in a sharp breath, hardly able to believe it was wet. He grasped the wool in both hands, and water poured from it like a fountain, his doubts ceased. It was as though he had plunged his hand into cold water; the fleece was soaked-- completely soaked. Gideon carried it into his house so he could get a basin to squeeze the water into. There was a trail of puddles behind him as walked into the house. **A whole bowl full of water** (Judges 6:) came out when he wrung the fleece.

But the worst part of believing by seeing, is that you always want to see more and believe less. Instead of going off to his army strong and brave, full of the remembrance of God's miracle, Gideon still felt shaky, and still said "Maybe": "Maybe it was only a servant who threw water on the skin. Suppose I was mistaken about the ground being dry?"

Feeling like a terrible coward, and faithless, Gideon made a new arrangement. If God would only show him one more miracle, then he would go and fight the Midianites, believing with his whole heart that he would win.

"Give me a sign just **once** (Judges 6:) more," he pleaded, "and I will not ask again."

This time Gideon changed the order of the miracle. **"Let it now be dry only upon the fleece** (Judges 6:)," he prayed, "and let there be dew everywhere else."

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As he had done the previous day, he removed another sun-dried sheepskin from the line, and laid it under the oak tree, and went to bed. "I wonder if it will be dry," was his sleeping as well as waking thought. Again he was up early, and this morning his feet were soaked with dew before he reached the skin. The moment he caught sight of it he knew without even touching it that the miracle had been done for him. The edges of the skin were stiff and curled, and Gideon knew it was **dry** (Judges 6:).

Gideon bent down and picked it up, he felt it on both sides. He rubbed his cheek up and down the wool, and winced as the hot dry fleece scratched him. There was not a trace of water anywhere. God had spoken to him in the way he had asked. His eyes brimmed with tears and there was no longer room for doubt. He was indeed God's chosen leader; God would **save** (Judges 6:) Israel by his hand. Gideon was positive of this, but even so, he trembled in his sandals like a leaf.

How could he ever lead his army inside that strong fortress?

Joshua stared at the walls, trying to think of
a way to enter the city. As he looked, a man
with a sword in his hand stood before him.

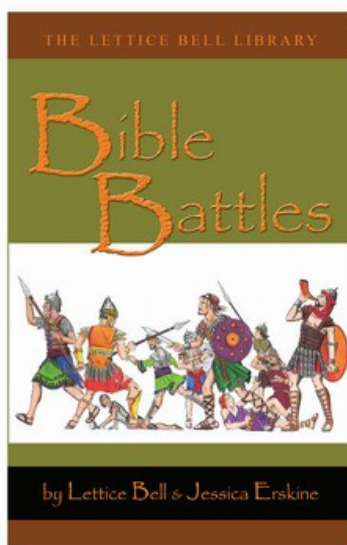
Joshua leapt to his feet and challenged the
stranger: "Friend or foe?"

"I am Captain of the Lord's army," said the man—and
Joshua suddenly realized this was no stranger at all,
but his own leader who had said: "I will be with
thee; I will not fail thee..."

*Rediscover the stories of the great battles that took place in the pages of the Bible,
and meet the men that God used to lead his people to victory: Joshua, Gideon and
Saul. Their amazing stories are retold in this delightfully engaging book for
younger readers by master storyteller Lettice Bell, edited and adapted for today's
audience by Jessica Erskine.*

Cover illustration by Jessica Erskine.

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