



Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture



Use “The Scene” to introduce *Young Teen Bible school Lesson 9*.

Members of a small religious sect have been making news recently. They have appeared on *Larry King Live*, *Oprah*, and other TV programs to stress the importance of returning children to their natural parents. But many question the fitness of the parents of the 416 children removed a few weeks ago from a west Texas ranch belonging to the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS).

Texas law enforcement officers raided the Yearning For Zion Ranch on April 3. The raid was a response to a phone call made by a 16-year-old girl. The girl claimed that the group forced her to marry a 50-year-old man and that he was abusing her. The FLDS believes that men should be allowed to have more than one wife and that the church leaders may arrange such marriages. This practice, polygamy, is illegal.

The FLDS is an offshoot of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), commonly known as Mormonism. Both the LDS and FLDS churches believe that in 1823, an angel visited Joseph Smith, the son of a farmer in upstate New York, and gave him instructions to restore authentic Christianity. (Smith’s version of Christianity varies greatly from what the Bible teaches and is considered to be cultic.) A disciple of Smith, Brigham Young, led the early Mormons to the territory that is now the state of Utah.

The FLDS split from the LDS because the original church altered its practices. In 1890, as Utah was trying to become a state, the Mormon president announced that God told him that polygamy was no longer acceptable. In 1978 a second major “revelation” proclaimed the equality of all races. Until that time, black men were not allowed full membership in the LDS church. The FLDS rejects both changes.

Texas prosecutors argue that the FLDS church encourages and arranges underage marriages and births, subjecting children to the risk of abuse. The state is now taking DNA samples from adults and children to determine actual parentage, since uncertainty abounds because of the unorthodox lifestyle of the community. A woman identified only as Kathleen responded bitterly to these accusations. “The state of Texas has confiscated our children on an alleged allegation that has no facts,” she countered. “And now they’re holding our children. And we want the children back.”

An FLDS member identified only as “Rulan” was a bit more conciliatory. He said that the FLDS is reconsidering whether girls under 18 should be forced to marry men two and three times their age. “[We will do] whatever we need to do to get them back in their peaceful homes,” said Rulan.

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above news story to read. After all teens have had the opportunity to read the article, discuss it in this way:

What have you heard about the raid on the Yearning For Zion Ranch? Do you believe that the state of Texas should return the children to the compound? Why or why not? How would you describe the fitness of the parents of these children? Defend your answer.

These anonymous men and women have become some of the most famous parents in the country during these past few weeks. Who are some other famous parents of fact or fiction? How would you describe those parents?

No parent is perfect. But good parents must recognize the importance of the task they have been given. God tells us in the Bible what He expects of parents. Let’s discover what those responsibilities are.