

OLD TESTAMENT GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

Green Mountain 1st Ward, Lakewood, Colorado

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Lesson 19: The Reign of the Judges (Judges 2; 4; 6–7; 13–16)

Introduction



President Gordon B. Hinckley told of a time when he planted a young tree in his yard but neglected to use supporting stakes to help it grow straight. In time, the wind caused the tree to lean badly to one side. President Hinckley realized that if he had tied the tree to stakes, it would have been supported until it was strong enough to resist the wind on its own. (Ensign, Nov. 1993, 59.)

We may sometimes be like that young tree, unable to withstand the wind (the temptations of Satan) on our own.



In the book of Judges we learn about some of the “stakes” that can support us.

Lesson Highlights

- The strength of righteous parents and the consequences of forsaking their ways
- Deborah—the strength of a righteous friend
- Gideon—the strength of faith in God
- Samson—the strength of covenants and the consequences of breaking them



THE STRENGTH OF RIGHTEOUS PARENTS and the consequences of forsaking their ways

Background: Led by Joshua, the Israelites conquered much of the promised land. After Joshua died, Israel was not united under a single leader until the days of the prophet Samuel and King Saul. During this interval, 12 judges served as Israel’s rulers and military leaders. Most of their reign was tragic as Israel went through the cycle of apostasy, bondage, repentance, and delivery many times.

Offsetting the tragic parts of this history are stories of people who remained true, setting powerful examples of how to exercise faith and courage in an apostate world. Deborah and Gideon were both righteous judges whom the Lord raised up to deliver Israel. Deborah’s faith was largely responsible for delivering Israel from a Canaanite army. Gideon’s reliance on the Lord allowed his 300-man army to miraculously defeat the Midianites. In the book of Judges, the children of Israel experienced several cycles of righteousness and apostasy. The cycle begins with **freedom**, degenerates to **apostasy**, which leads to **bondage**, which eventually awakens them to **humility and repentance**, which results in deliverance before beginning again.

Judges 2:10, 12, 17, 20, 22 - The rising generation of Israelites “knew not the Lord” and initiated a cycle of apostasy as they left God, worshipped idols, and left both the ways and the covenants of their parents.

Parent’s contribution to their children’s worldliness

Judges 1:21, 27-33; 2:1-4 - The failure of the rising generation of Israelites to remain faithful was not entirely their own fault; it was laid by the parents’ failure to drive out the Canaanites. Even though the parents were strong enough to resist the influences of the world around them, their children were not.



A study of this lesson will encourage us to seek influences that will strengthen us in living the gospel in a challenging world.

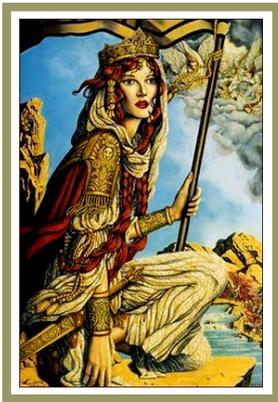
Next Week

#20 “All the City...Doth Know That Thou Art a Virtuous Woman” (Ruth; 1 Samuel 1)

Some parents today expose their children to worldly influences, making the same error as the parents of that “rising generation” of Israelites.

Children sometimes forsake the righteous teachings and ways of their parents, but parents can help their children be faithful.

Recognizing the early signs of apostasy is crucial to breaking the cycle of apostasy. Think about how we might appropriately help a family member or friend who seems to be falling away from the truth.



Deborah—THE STRENGTH OF A RIGHTEOUS FRIEND

Judges 4:6-7 - The Lord commanded Barak to go toward mount Tabor and take Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army.

Judges 4:8 – Barak was willing to go to battle against Sisera and his 900 chariots only if Deborah would go with him.

Judges 4:4-9, 14 - Deborah went with Barak to lend strength to him on this mission.

We can learn from Deborah that true friends inspire us to obey the Lord and give us the strength to do what is right. Friends help us face difficult challenges or obey the Lord’s commandments.

Think about how you can be a better friend to others. Ask yourself: (1) are you like Deborah to your friends and (2) are these friends like Deborah to you?



Gideon—THE STRENGTH OF FAITH in God

Judges 6:14-15 – Gideon was commanded to save Israel from the Midianites. Gideon responded that he was poor and “the least of [his] father’s house”. He thought he wasn’t the right man to do this.

Judges 6:16-23, 36-40; 7:9-15 - The Lord assured Gideon that He had commanded him to deliver Israel and that He would be with him and help him. He gave Gideon three signs to reassure him - two of which involved a fleece and dew.

Judges 7:2 - When Gideon believed that the Lord had truly commanded him to de-

liver Israel, he went forward with faith. The Lord then told Gideon that his army of 32,000 men should be reduced to 300 to fight the Midianites. This was to be done so that the Israelites would have to acknowledge the Lord’s protection, learn to trust him, and be forced to recognize his power, not their own might.

Some of us today “vaunt [our]selves”. Instead of recognizing that our blessings and strength come from the Lord, some of us claim to have earned all that we have through our own efforts. Scripture study and

humble prayer can help us overcome that problem.

Judges 7:16-23 - Gideon and his 300 men faced the Midianites with trumpets and lamps, scaring the enemy so badly that they slew each other in confusion and the survivors fled in fear.

Judges 7:20 - Gideon had his men shout, “The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon” because Gideon knew—and wanted his men to know—that the Lord was with them. We learn from Gideon that when the Lord commands us to do something, he will help us accomplish it.



Samson—THE STRENGTH OF COVENANTS and the consequences of breaking them

Judges 13:2-3 - Samson’s mother, who was barren, learned that she would have a son from an angel.

Judges 13:4-5 - The angel told Samson’s mother that he would be a Nazarite and he would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Nazarites made covenants with the Lord to separate themselves from the things of the world

and become holy. The Nazarite vow is set forth in Numbers 6:2-6, 8.

Judges 13:24-25; 14:5-6, 19; 15:14-15 - The Lord gave Samson spiritual and physical strength to help him fulfill his mission to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

As a Nazarite and a member of the house of Israel, Samson made covenants with

the Lord. However, he soon broke his Nazarite vow and his covenants as a member of the house of Israel. Some of the covenants Samson broke are listed below:

Judges 14:1-3 - He married outside the covenant house of Israel

Judges 16:1 - He was immoral with a harlot



Battle of Gideon Against the Midianites (detail)
Nicolas Poussin, 1625-26



Samson and Delilah
Alexandre Cabanal, 1878

Judges 16:4-20 - He had his hair cut.

Judges 16:17-21 – As a consequence of Samson’s violation of his covenants, he lost his spiritual and physical strength, and the Philistines blinded him and bound him. Note that Samson’s hair was not the source of his physical strength. Rather, his hair was a sign of his covenant with the Lord, and when his hair was cut, the Lord took away his physical strength because the covenant was broken. Samson had such great potential. The angel who announced his birth said he would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines, but he never fulfilled his potential because of his weaknesses.

When we violate our covenants the Lord may take away our power and spiritual blessings.

Many of us have signs of our covenants with the Lord. Those covenants we make with the Lord should be a source of strength, guidance, and commitment in our lives. Faithful Latter-day Saints make covenants with the Lord to be obedient, faithful, chaste, and to build up his kingdom on earth.

Those covenants strengthen us by helping us resist Satan’s efforts to blind or bind us.

Judges 15:7; 16:1; D&C 3:4 - The Lord blessed him with many gifts, including great physical strength.

Inner weaknesses—self-indulgence, immorality, seeking revenge, and violating covenants—caused his downfall.

Judges 16:15-17 - Consider why, after Samson knew that Delillah had tried three times to betray him, he told her the secret of his strength. He was foolish and self-indulgent. Consider Genesis 39:7-12 and contrast Samson’s responses to Delilah with Joseph’s responses to Potiphar’s wife.

How can we resist or overcome persistent temptations?

How can we overcome weaknesses that may hinder us from fulfilling our potential?

“For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him.”
—D&C 3:4

Conclusion

In the book of Joshua the Israelites fought and won many physical battles against the Canaanites. However, in the book of Judges the Israelites began to lose spiritual battles, letting themselves be influenced by the Canaanites’ worldly practices and false gods. We face similar spiritual battles. We can succeed in these battles as we (1) follow the ways of righteous parents and ancestors, (2) make good friends, (3) increase our faith in the Lord, and (4) keep our covenants.

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- How has the Lord helped you do something that he asked you to do that was difficult?
- How can we resist or overcome persistent temptations?
- How can we overcome weaknesses that may hinder us from fulfilling our potential?