



COGNWM Youth Bible Lesson – Lesson 8

Israel During The Time Of The Judges

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites failed to completely rid the land of Canaan of its inhabitants as God had instructed. So the Israelites gradually adopted the idolatrous ways of the Canaanites and other nations around them.

As punishment, God allowed enemy nations to attack the Israelites and to oppress them. But when the people cried out to God for help, He would raise up a judge to lead and deliver them.

This lesson will show what happened to the Israelites during the time of the Judges.

One day an angel appeared to the people of Israel at Bochim. He had come to deliver a message from God. The people gathered around him to hear what he had to say.

“I have brought you up from Egypt and into this land I promised to your fathers,” he said. “I made a covenant with you that if you would obey Me, I would help you conquer the land. You were to destroy all pagan altars. You were forbidden to make agreements of any kind with your enemies. But you have not obeyed me. As a result, I will no longer help you drive out the inhabitants of the land. I will let them be as thorns in your sides. No longer will I protect you” (Judges 2:1-3)!

Years later, God allowed a cruel man named Eglon, king of Moab, to invade the land of Israel. Eglon forced the Israelites to pay him tribute each year. God was no longer watching out for the Israelites as He once had. Enemy soldiers now told them what to do.

When the Israelites finally cried out to God for help, He raised up a man named Ehud to deliver them.

Before continuing, we should realize that some of the things that happened in Old Testament times were very bloody. Although God does not permit such violence among His people today, it was He who allowed, and in some cases commanded, His people to kill their enemies. God could do this because it is He who gives life, and therefore has

the right to say when it shall be taken away. As we'll learn in the Fall Festival lesson, these same people will be brought back to life in the future and be taught God's way.

Ehud sharpened a dagger on both sides and hid it under his clothing. He then went to King Eglon and told him he had a secret message for him. The king sent his guards away, leaving that two men alone.

"Quickly now, what is this important message you have for me?" Eglon demanded.

"It's a very important message from God," replied Ehud.

Then Ehud quickly removed his dagger from beneath his clothes and thrust it into Eglon. The king slumped over, dead, then rolled to the floor (Judges 3:16-22).

Ehud quietly left the room, locking the door behind him. By the time Eglon's body was discovered, Ehud had already reached safety.

When Eglon's soldiers in Israel learned that he was dead, they panicked and fled to their homeland. But Ehud and an army of Israelites met them as they tried to cross the Jordan River. A battle began, and ten thousand of the enemy were killed. God had rescued Israel.

Ehud became a judge in Israel, and under his leadership God gave the people peace and safety from their enemies (Judges 3:30).

After Ehud died, the Israelites returned to their evil practices. Again, God allowed a pagan king to punish them. This time it was Jabin, a strong ruler of the Canaanites. He oppressed the Israelites and made them servants for twenty years. general of his army was the dreaded Sisera.

Again the Israelites cried out to God for mercy. God heard their cries and used a woman named _____ to rescue them (Judges 4:4). God told her to choose a man named Barak to lead Israel's soldiers into battle. But Barak feared to do it alone. He wanted Deborah to go along with him. Deborah agreed to go, but told Barak that because of his lack of courage, God would allow a woman to get credit for the victory.

Israel's army stood waiting on the flat area of Mt. Tabor, located near the Sea of Galilee. Sisera's army camped on the plain below. His large and well-equipped army included nine hundred chariots plated with iron. Only God's supernatural help could save Israel from this dreaded foe!

Inspired by God, Deborah informed Barak that the Israelites should charge down the slope at once and attack. "God will be with us and deliver the enemy into our hands," she told Barak

Barak and his men quickly ran down the mountain to attack the Canaanites. Caught off guard, Sisera's army turned and fled.

God then sent a heavy rain, causing a river, that the enemy hoped to cross to turn into a raging torrent. Their chariots became stuck in the mud. Soldiers who tried to escape by crossing the river were swept away, while others were killed by the Israelites.

General Sisera, however, escaped on foot. After running many miles, he came to the tent of a woman named Jael. She met him at the entrance and offered to help. Tired and weary, Sisera went inside to rest. Before going to sleep, he asked for a drink of water to quench his thirst. Jael gave him milk to drink, and soon he fell into a deep sleep. Jael then killed him as he slept and later informed Barak.

Once again, God helped the Israelites achieve a great victory over their enemies (Judges 4:22-24)!

For the next forty years, Israel had peace. During that time, a new generation of Israelites grew up. They began to take it upon themselves to decide what was right and wrong, choosing to worship idols instead of the true God.

God was angry at the rebellious Israelites for having returned to idol worship. This time He allowed the Midianites to invade their land. The Israelites were forced to live in caves and dens in the mountains in order to be safe. They lived this way for seven long years.

One day an Israelite named Gideon was working in an area hidden from the Midianites. While working, he suddenly noticed someone sitting under a nearby tree. This individual was an angel sent by God with an important message. He said to Gideon, "I am sending you to save Israel from the Midianites. You will defeat the Midianite as though their army had only one man" (Judges 6:14-16).

That night, Gideon and ten of his servants destroyed a large idol of Baal the Israelites had been worshipping.

The next morning, some of the Israelites were enraged when they discovered their idol had been destroyed. They wanted to kill whoever had done it. After learning that

Gideon was responsible, an angry crowd confronted Joash, Gideon's father. They demanded that Gideon be handed over to them.

"What makes you people think you have to defend your idols?" Joash asked the crowd. "Isn't your god strong enough to avenge himself? It's an insult to Baal for you to fight for him!" The crowd had no answer, and quietly returned to their homes.

The Midianites soon heard rumors that Israel had a great leader. So they formed a large army to attack Israel. Gideon also formed an army. But before going to battle, he wanted to be sure that God was really with him, Gideon had begun to lose faith in God.

"I need a sign," Gideon told God. "Please show me again that I am the one You have chosen to lead Israel against Midian. I will spread a fleece of wool on the ground tonight. If it's wet in the morning and the ground is dry, then I'll know that You are with me."

The next morning, the fleece contained enough water to fill a bowl, but the ground was dry. God had answered Gideon with a miracle (Judges 6:38). But Gideon wanted another sign. "I will lay the fleece out again tonight," Gideon prayed. "This time if the fleece is dry and the ground is wet, I'll be certain you are with me."

"And _____ did so that _____, for it was _____ upon the _____, and there was _____ on all the _____" (Judges 6:40).

The next morning Gideon ordered the Israelite soldiers to advance against the enemy. There were thirty-two thousand men in his army, while the Midianites had more than one hundred thousand men!

"You have too many men," God told Gideon. "All those who are afraid and want to leave, may go," Gideon told his men. Twenty-two thousand returned home.

God told Gideon that he still had too many men. "Take the men to the nearest stream to drink. Send home all those who knelt down to drink. Keep all those who cupped their hands and bring the water to their mouths," said God. Only three hundred men cupped their hands to drink the water. This wasn't most of an army!

Gideon then divided his small band of men into three groups as God instructed. When night came, they surrounded the Midianite camp. Instead of weapons, each man carried a _____ and a lighted torch hidden inside a _____ (Judges 7:16).

The men waited silently for the signal from Gideon. Finally, it came. Gideon's shrill trumpet blast pierced the still night air. Then he broke his pitcher, holding his torch high for all his men to see. They did the same. Then they all shouted, "The _____ of the _____ and of _____" (v. 18).

The sleeping Medianites awoke at the sound of the trumpets and shouts of Gideon's men. Alarmed and confused, they thought the Israelites were attacking. Chaos broke out and the Medianites began to kill each other in the dark ness of night.

Meanwhile, Gideon and his men waited and listened. Soon, after killing many of their own men, the fearful Midianites fled toward the east.

When they reached the Jordan River, Israelites from Ephraim were waiting for them. The tired and weary Midianites were quickly defeated. Once again, God had delivered Israel from her enemies.

Because of Gideon's success in defeating the Midianites, the people wanted to make him king. "God is your king," he told them., refusing their offer.

For the next forty years, God allowed Gideon to judge, or administer the laws of God to Israel. During that time, the people enjoyed peace and quiet from their enemies.

Do You Remember?

1. A judge named _____ was chosen by God to free the _____ from King _____ of Moab.
2. General _____ was killed by a woman named _____
3. _____ helped _____ small army defeat the _____
4. Each of Gideon's men carried a _____ and a lighted _____ hidden inside a pitcher.

Again, however, the people of Israel returned to pagan practices. They were not thankful to God for the many blessings He gave them. Instead, they made idols and worshipped them.

Therefore, God sent the Ammonites to punish the people for their disobedience. They oppressed the Israelites for eighteen years. It appeared as if Israel would be destroyed by the Ammonites. Severely distressed, the people cried out to God and repented of their sinful ways. God answered their prayers by sending man named Jephthah to lead Israel.

Jephthah did not want war. He sent messengers to the king of Ammon, saying, ‘Why are you trying to take this land away from us? God gave it to us. Would you let someone take away your land if your god gave it to you?’

The king’s reply to Jephthah was, “come out and fight us if you won’t give us the land!”

Before going into battle, Jephthah did a foolish thing. He vowed to offer as a burnt offering whatever came first out of his house to meet him, if God would make him victorious!

With God’s help, Jephthah and his army defeated the Ammonites, “And Jephthah came to _____ unto his _____ and, _____ unto his _____ came out to _____ him with _____ and with _____” (Judges 11:34).

Jephthah suddenly realized what a foolish thing he had done. His happiness turned to grief at the thought of fulfilling the vow he foolishly had made.

Though the Bible does not directly say that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter to God, a lesson we can learn from this that one should never make rash or hasty promises.

In Old Testament times, God allowed people to make vows. But today, Christ tells us to never make oaths or vows (Matt. 5:33-37).

Again, the Israelites rebelled against God. As punishment for their sins, God allowed the Philistines to subdue them. In time, however, God chose a special person, even before his birth, to eventually deliver Israel from the Philistines. His name was Samson. He was to be a Nazarite from birth.

A Nazarite was a person who gave himself or herself over to special service to God for a period of time. The promise to enter such a special service was known as the Nazarite vow. Anyone who made such a vow was not to do three things. He was not to drink and alcoholic beverage nor consume grapes or any product of grapes such as vinegar or raisins; not to touch any dead bodies; and not to cut his hair (Num. 6:1-9).

In Samson’s case, he was to observe these rules all his life. As long as he did, God gave him great strength.

Even though he knew better, Samson liked Philistines women. One day he met a young lady he wanted to marry. His parents were greatly upset by this, but Samson insisted on the marriage (Judges 14:1-4).

While on the way to visit his soon-to-be-bride, Samson met a fierce lion. The beast lunged at him, paws clawing in the air. With the supernatural strength given to him by God, Samson killed the lion – bare-handed! He then went on to see his fiancée, and later returned home.

After some time, Samson returned to see the woman, this time to marry her. While on his way to the wedding, Samson went off the road to see the remains of the lion. Nothing but bones remained. Inside the skeleton he found a beehive. Samson scooped out some of the honey and ate it as he went on his way (Judges 14:8-9).

During the seven-day wedding feasts, Samson posed a riddle to thirty Philistine men who attended. “I’ve got a riddle for you,” he said. “If you can answer it before the feast is over, I’ll give each one of you a fancy shirt and an expensive robe. If you can’t, then you must give me thirty of each.”

The thirty men agreed. “Out of the _____ came forth _____ and out of the _____ came forth _____” (Judges 14:14).

The men tried to figure out the answer, but could not. Finally, in desperation, they went to Samson’s wife to learn the answer.

“Tell us the answer or we’ll burn down your father’s home and you in it!” they said.

Fearing for her life, she pleaded with Samson for the answer. As a result of her continual pleading, Samson finally told her. Then she went to the thirty men and told them the answer.

On the last day of the feast the men confronted Samson.

“We have the answer to your riddle,” they said. “What is _____ than _____? And what is _____ than a _____?” (Judges 14:18).

The men smirked as they waited for Samson to reply. Samson realized his wife had told them.

“Very well, I’ll get those clothes I promised you,” he said. Samson then left in anger. He soon returned carrying a large sack. “Here are the clothes,” he said. Later, thirty dead Philistines were found in the city of Ashkelon without shirts and robes!

Still angry, Samson returned home without taking his wife with him.

When his anger had cooled, Samson returned for his Philistine wife. He knocked on the door of her father's house.

"I've come to see my wife," Samson told his wife's father.

"She's not here," her father replied. "I didn't think you were going to return, so I gave her to another man."

Samson burned with anger. "Why not marry her younger sister?" the father quickly suggested, trying to calm him.

This only made Samson angrier. He stormed off, intending to get even with the Philistines.

Samson caught three hundred foxes and tied their tails together two by two. He then tied a torch to each pair of tails. After lighting the touches, Samson released the foxes in the Philistines grain fields. The raging fires that were started burned through the fields, destroying the grain as well as vineyards and olive trees (Judges 15:4-5).

When the enraged Philistines discovered that Samson had started the fires, they went to his father-in-law's house and set fire to it. Both Samson's wife and her father were burned to death.

When Samson heard about this, he appeared before the Philistines and told them that he would cause them trouble until the score was settled. So Samson and the Philistines fought until he had killed a great number of them.

Feeling between Samson and the Philistines were now very bitter. But God was allowing these events to occur in order to eventually free the Israelites from the Philistines.

Samson then left the area and hid in a mountain cave in the area of Judah. The Philistines encamped in Judah and threatened violence unless Samson was captured and delivered to them. Soon men from Judah came to capture him. Instead of fighting his fellow Israelites, Samson surrendered peacefully.

The men from Judah bound him with ropes and then took him to the Philistines. When Samson reached the enemy camp, Philistines soldiers began to taunt him.

Samson flexed his muscles with all his might. The ropes snapped as if they were mere threads! Samson was now free. But strong Philistines soldiers quickly surrounded him. Samson was unarmed and outnumbered.

Nearby lay the skeleton of a donkey. Samson dashed to it and snapped off the jawbone, providing himself with a weapon. Then the soldiers surged in on him.

Samson swung the bone so hard and fast that every Philistine soldier who came within reach was killed or severely wounded by the sharp blows. The remaining soldiers quickly retreated. When the battle was over, one thousand Philistines lay dead on the ground around Samson (Judges 15:16).

After this, Samson was very thirsty and tired. He prayed for water, and God caused a spring of cool, clear water to bubble up, this saving his life.

Samson then went to the Philistine capital city of Gaza. Because of his long hair and bulging muscles, the Philistines easily recognized him. He entered an inn to stay for the night. The Philistines planned to ambush and kill him the next morning as he left.

But Samson, outfoxed them by leaving the inn at midnight. When he reached the main gates of the city, he discovered they were locked and barred.

Using his mighty strength, Samson “_____ the doors of the _____ of the _____ and the two _____ and went away with them, _____ and all, and put them upon his _____, and _____ them up to the _____ of an _____ that is before _____” (Judges 16:3).

No matter what attempts the Philistines made to kill Samson, they failed. God help fight Samson’s battles for him. He would have been helpless without God’s miraculous help, as he would soon discover.

Samson loved another Philistine woman named Delilah. Unfortunately for Samson, she loved money more than she loved him. For a rich reward, she agreed to tell the Philistines leaders what gave Samson his great strength.

Many times she asked Samson what the secret of his great strength was. At first, Samson tricked her. He told her that if he was tied with new ropes he would lose his strength. Another time he told her that if his hair was put in a loom, he would lose his strength.

Finally, through her continual asking, she persuaded Samson to tell her the truth. ‘It’s my Nazarite vow,’ he said. ‘If my hair was cut off, I would be as weak as any other man’ (Judges 16:16-17).

This was the answer Delilah had been waiting for. Immediately she went to the Philistine leaders and told them the secret to Samson’s strength. Now they would act to

rob him of his strength. Soldiers came and hid behind one of Delilah's walls, waiting for Samson to fall asleep. Finally, Samson fell into a deep sleep.

A Philistine came into the room and gently clipped off Samson's long hair. Then the Philistines soldiers rushed in and tied him up. Samson strained at the ropes, but couldn't break them. His great strength was gone. God had taken away Samson's supernatural strength because his Nazarite vow had been broken.

The Philistines proceeded to blind Samson and then lead him off to prison. There he was forced to push a heavy millstone in the grain-grinding room of the prison.

One day the Philistines held a great feast in honor of their pagan god, Dagon. During the feast, Samson was led into the temple where about three thousand Philistines were gathered.

When the people saw Samson being led in by a little boy, they began taunting him and praising their god. 'Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands; the one who laid waste our land and killed so many of us,' they shouted.

The entire roof and balcony of the temple were supported by two pillars that were very close to each other. Samson told the boy to lead him over to the pillars so that he could lean against them.

Samson spread his arms out and felt the two pillars. He then made a special request of God.

"Great God," help me to avenge the sight of my eyes on the Philistines. Give me strength once more. Let me die with the Philistines."

"And _____ took _____ of the two _____ upon which the _____ stood, and on which it was borne up, of the _____ with his _____ hand, and of the _____ with his _____" (Judges 14:29).

God answered Samson's prayer and gave him tremendous strength. Samson pushed with all his might and the pillars buckled. The heavy stone pillars came crashing to the ground, followed by the stone roof and balcony, killing Samson and 3,000 Philistines with him. Samson thus killed many more when he died than while alive.

Following the death of Samson, the people of Israel returned to doing what seemed right to them. In Judges 21:25 we read that “In those _____ there was no _____ in Israel: _____ man did that which was _____
In _____.”

In our next lesson, we will learn about a young man named Samuel. We’ll see how God called him to be a great prophet in Israel.

Do You Remember?

1. A lesson we can learn from the experience of Jephthah is that one should never make _____ or _____ promises. Also, Christ tells us not to make oaths or _____.
2. Samson’s _____ vow was broken when a Philistine cut off his _____. As a result, he lost his God-given _____.
3. According to Judges 21:25, “_____ man did that which was _____ in _____.”