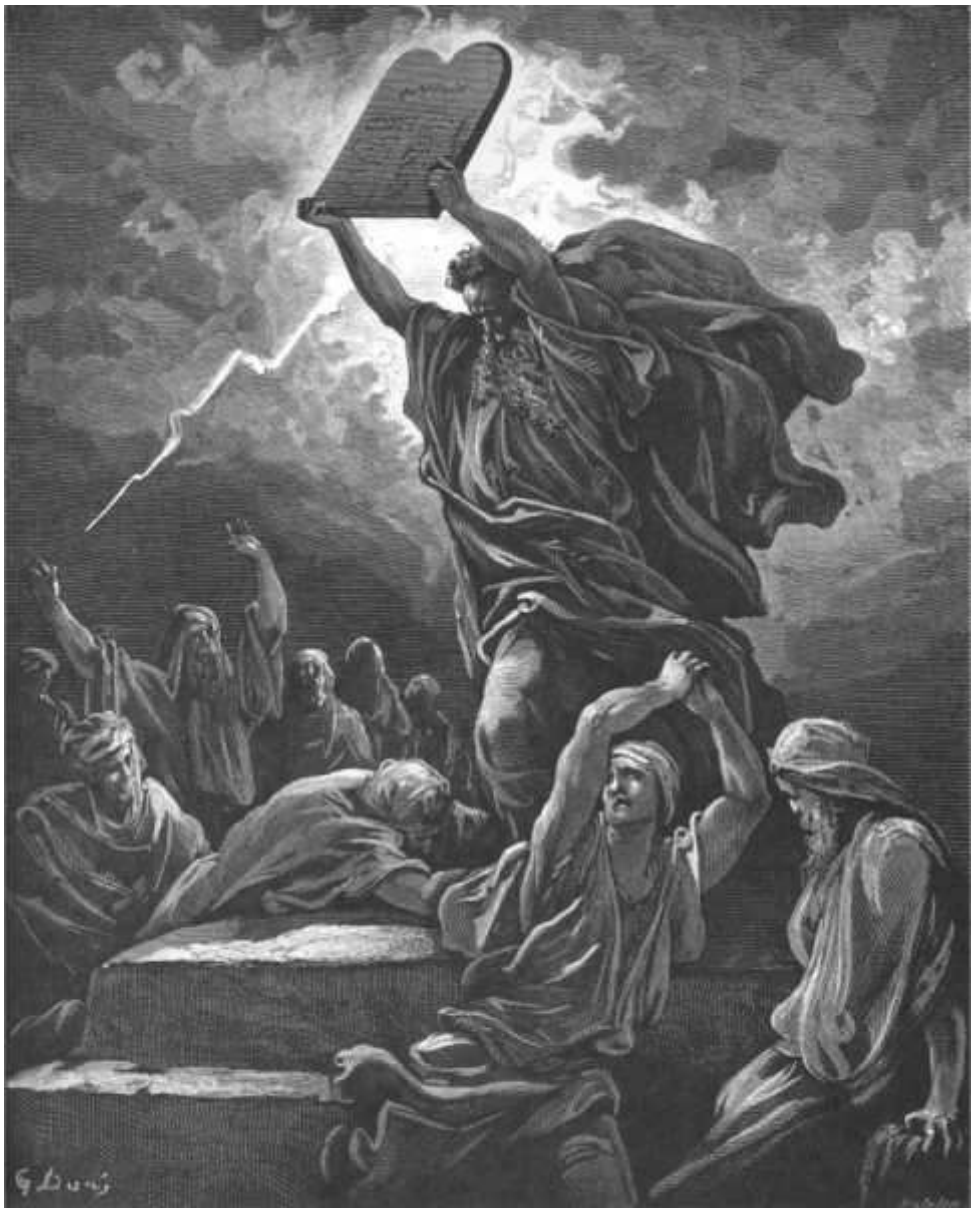

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I fear we are sometimes too harsh when we judge ancient Israel. Their faults are laid out before us, along with the Lord's judgments against them for those faults. But if we look more closely we may find that we have more in common with them than we would like to admit. Yet for all our own weaknesses, the Lord still wants us as his own peculiar people (a special treasure).

If you haven't already read through all the material for this lesson, be warned that there is enough subject matter to carry on discussions for multiple hours. Every class will have to choose the verses and passages they feel are most important to them. I have chosen to discuss those parts of the lesson that have to do with us becoming a holy people unto the Lord (which makes up the purpose and the closing of the lesson).

Setting the stage

First off, remember that the children of Israel God led out of Egypt serve to act as a type or an example for us. They provide the earthly, physical examples of the spiritual lessons we need to apply in our lives. In most cases their behavior and needs match ours point for point.

For example, God's desire was to bring the people to his holy mountain, give them the Melchizedek priesthood and the ordinances of salvation, so they could see his face. That was the plan. What is the Lord's plan for us? Isn't it the same? Before there were temples the prophets went to the mountains to commune with God. So nothing has really changed in that regard for thousands of years.

Comparing experiences

One may say that unlike what the Lord does for us, the children of Israel received special treatment. After all, the Lord performed many physical miracles for Israel that he doesn't do for us today. But then he isn't needing to deliver us from a stubborn Egyptian king either.

Let's look at some of the miracles performed for the sake of conversion of the Israelites and examine their modern equivalents.

THEN: Several days out into the wilderness the people began to run out of water. They found a pool, but the water was bitter, meaning that it was undrinkable. They named the pool the waters of Marah (bitter). So they did what they always did, they complained to Moses and accused him of trying to lead them into the wilderness to die of thirst. Sometimes Israel could get rather melodramatic about things. Moses went to the Lord and the Lord showed him a tree, which when thrown into the water made the water sweet, or drinkable.

NOW: In modern times when the Church is in transition, which it seems to be in most all the time, there are those who complain to their Church leaders that "this is inconvenient" or "that is troublesome." They point out that the Church is out of step with modern practices and the prophet is old and useless because he isn't keeping up with the times. One notable example of this was back in the 70s when much social change was afoot. With people giving freedom to the people of black South Africa, and women being allowed into the clergy of many Christian churches, there were those in

the Lord's Church who complained bitterly to the prophets that they were not keeping up with the times. What they didn't know was that the prophets had been pleading with the Lord for decades to allow every worthy male to hold the priesthood. Finally the revelation came, as usual, in the Lord's own due time, and what was the reaction? People accused the Lord's Church of giving access to the priesthood to all worthy male members only because they buckled under social pressure.

LESSON: Ancient Israel never seemed to learn the lesson that God is accessible. Instead of taking their concern or need to the Lord in humble and faith-filled prayer, they just whined and complained to the prophet. They never imagined they could go to the Lord themselves and communicate with him. It was Moses who took the matter to the Lord and got the answers for all the people.

When society was changing and it appeared that the Church was not in step with the ways of the world, there were those who yelled and complained about the Church leaders and didn't support the prophets. Then there were those who quietly importuned the Lord at their bedsides and waited patiently on the Lord, knowing that if a change would be made, it would only happen when the Lord saw fit in his wisdom for that change to occur. What the world had to say on the matter was not important, the will of God was the issue.

When the Lord finally allowed all worthy male members to hold the priesthood there were those who rejoiced, not because the Church now looked like it was keeping in step with the world, but because thousands of years of an unexplained practice had finally been changed, allowing all our brothers and sisters in this dispensation to receive the blessings of the temple. Again, it boils down to whether or not we put our faith in the Lord and his servants or put our faith in the arm of flesh.

THEN: Amaleki wanted to destroy Israel. The prophet sent Joshua out to fight for Israel. As long as the prophet held up his rod Israel prevailed, but when he let down his hands Amaleki prevailed. His faithful brethren placed Moses on a stone and literally held up his hands for him so Israel could win their battle.

NOW: When certain groups began to try to force the hand of the President of the Church to give women the priesthood, they used every trick in the social arsenal to get the Brethren to back down from their position and grant what the women wanted. The same kinds of trickery took place when certain groups tried to pass legislation on gay marriage that would have been damaging to the members of the Church.

Faithful members of the Church prayed, fasted, and mobilized, doing all in their personal power to support the position of the prophet that these things ought not to be. They exercised their personal righteousness to resist these demands from the world to save their people.

LESSON: The Lord will not be bullied. When we act in concert with the will of God, and follow and sustain his prophets, we will always be blessed. That doesn't mean that society will automatically heal itself, but our individual homes and hearts will prosper because of our personal righteousness.

THEN: The children of Israel complained that they missed the fleshpots (pots used to boil their meat) of Egypt. The Lord first flooded their camp with quail to eat, but in the morning they were given their first taste of 40 years worth of manna. Manna could be gathered then ground and baked into unleavened bread or boiled like dumplings or noodles. It could also be eaten as is, and tasted like crackers made with honey.

What was the point of manna? One of the points was that the Lord always provides for his people. When the Lord tells us that man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God, manna is a good example of that. It was a physical representation of man's dependency on what comes from God. Manna strengthened Israel from day to day, and so too do we need to go to the Lord and receive strength from reading his word in the scriptures. We need to take them into our lives and consume them to receive the power they contain. And also like the mana, our spiritual nourishment can be consumed in multiple ways through the use of modern devices.

NOW: We have temple covenants, with special garments that are to remind us of our duties and obligations to the Lord. We wear them every day. Weekly we partake of the sacrament to remind us of our covenants with God and his promise to give us the Holy Ghost to be with us every hour of every day. This sacramental promise is like the physical presence the Lord gave Israel when he gave them a pillar of cloud for shade in the daytime and a pillar of fire for light every night. He took such good care of them that during that whole 40 years of their repeated rebellions against their God he blessed them that their ankles wouldn't swell by walking in the sand and desert all day. I don't think we really know the half of what he really did for them.

LESSON: Moses was given the fullness of the gospel of Christ to give to the children of Israel, but they were still too focused on the gods of Egypt. They just didn't have the

faith needed to handle the demands of the Melchizedek priesthood. And without being able to handle the demands of that priesthood, and the accompanying ordinances, they couldn't be prepared to receive the blessings of that priesthood. So they were given a lesser blessing that, even then, they struggled to remain worthy of receiving.

The point of this lesson

What we receive from Christ, the doctrines, the ordinances, and all the blessings that go with them, is the bread of life and the water of life. If we want to eat and drink of the bread and water of life and live forever we will need to learn all we can about the Lord and his ways. We need to study the scriptures, seek to be close to the Holy Ghost, the personal tutor sent to us from God to teach us to be like Him, and partake of the sacrament worthily each week.

The Savior said that the water he offered to the people would be a well, springing up unto eternal life, and that those who ate of His bread and drank of His water would never hunger or thirst again. Just as Israel ate manna in the wilderness to survive, but they hungered the next day and had to gather more of it, so when we consistently study and consume the scriptures and the words of the prophets, sustain God's mouthpiece, and do works of righteousness of our own will and choice, we will always be full of the Spirit of God. We will never lack (be hungry or thirsty for spiritual things). In this state, being full of the Spirit of God, we will be prepared to enter eternity and receive the gift of eternal life.

Final Thoughts

The Lord has always wanted his children to come to the temple and receive his highest blessings. Only our own unworthiness and stubbornness prevents our receiving those blessings. When we seek the bread and water of life offered us by the Savior, the gospel of Christ, and wholly take it into our lives - consuming it, if you will - we will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and receive the knowledge and guidance we need to make it successfully through mortality and receive eternal life in the kingdom of our Father.

The text for this lesson is full of valid examples we can use to compare their behavior with our own. When we humbly study the lessons the Lord was trying to get them to learn, we will see that we need to learn the same lessons. God loves us. He is faithful to us, but are we faithful to Him? Do we complain about what is inconvenient in this life

or do we take our troubles to God and exercise our faith in his faithfulness to us? And finally, do we support His chosen mouthpiece on earth? Are we willing to pray for him and sustain him in any way that we can? The lessons in the scriptures for these chapters are clear. Are we going to accept those lessons and apply them in our own lives? Our eternal happiness depends on it.

Click the link below to

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A Peculiar Treasure unto Me

OT Week 14