

JUDGES SESSION #16

SAMSON

Welcome back to Judges and our study of *faith, failure and a phenomenal God!*

We've already seen many interesting characters in this Old Testament book but now we come to one of the most famous of all: the legendary strongman, Samson

But first, let's see what Israel's **situation** is by this time

Judg 13:1

Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

- our 3rd judge, **Shamgar**, had won a great victory over the Philistines some years before, but now these warlike, powerful people began the longest oppression of the Israelites recorded in this Book: **40 years**
- the Philistines used two main weapons:
 - one was **trade**
 - the other was **intermarriage**
...Israel is now enslaved, not by military dominance, but by *spiritual & cultural seduction*
- with growing **affluence** came growing **apathy**
 - they did not even seem to realize their danger
...and so, they did **not cry to God** in repentance
- David Jackman reminds us that *"Every time we hear God's Word, we either make ourselves more open and responsive by receiving and obeying it, or we harden our hearts in unbelief and disobedience."*¹
- Israel's **hearts were hardening** and now there is no repentance; consequently, **no national deliverer** is sent by God
- yes, God sends another judge but this one is very different from the others, unique in many significant ways
 - Samson was **not a national liberator**, but an individualist, fighting personal battles on his own

Let's examine 3 aspects of Samson's uniqueness:

A) we begin with his Unique **BIRTH**

Judg 13:2-5

Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name *was* Manoah; and his wife *was* barren and had no children. ³ And the Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. ⁴ Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or *similar* drink, and not to eat anything unclean. ⁵ For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

- Samson was born by God's **miraculous** intervention
 - his birth was **announced** by God Himself ("*the Angel of the LORD*")
 - there is only 1 other child in Scripture whose birth was announced by God Himself and that was Isaac

¹ Jackman, D., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1991). *Vol. 7: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 7 : Judges, Ruth*. The Preacher's Commentary series (202). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.

- and only 3 men in Bible were life-long **Nazirites**: Samson, Samuel (who was probably born about the same time as Samson) and John the Baptist in the NT – all 3 were born to barren mothers – God’s people have hit such a low point that a ‘miracle’ is needed now
 - furthermore, they point toward the Ultimate Nazirite, Jesus, who is born of the ultimately barren womb – that of a virgin
- chapter 13 basically records the announcement of Samson’s birth, in a series of appearances by the Angel of the LORD
- here, Samson’s mother seems to be much more spiritually alert than her husband
 - it is clear that Manoah’s wife caught on to the heavenly messenger’s identity much faster than the husband did!

In vs. 6 she reports to her husband that the messenger’s “countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome”

But vs. 16 tells us: “(For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord.)”

And it was only “When the Angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, *then* Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the Lord.” (vs. 21)

- perhaps his spiritual slowness is a sign of the **failure of Israel as a whole** to recognize God

- an additional flashback occurs when Mr & Mrs Manoah offer a sacrifice to the Lord

Judg 13:19-21

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Lord. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on – ²⁰ it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar – the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell on their faces to the ground. ²¹ When the Angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He *was* the Angel of the Lord.

- notice the **similarities & differences** between the story here of **food & the Angel**, and the same incident with **Gideon**
 - in Gideon’s case the Angel burned up the sacrificial meal and pronounced **peace** to Gideon
- ...but in the case of Samson’s parents, however, the Angel does not pronounce ‘peace’ after the sacrifices; God is not at peace with Israel, He is **at war** with His sinful people
- ...and the Angel Himself (whose only name given is “wonderful”) steps into the altar’s flame and ascends up to heaven in it! – perhaps a picture that God Himself will **give Himself in sacrifice** for the sins of His people; they cannot save themselves ...even when the strongest man who ever lived shows up to help them, it is simply not enough

B) Samson’s Unique **LIFESTYLE**

- God declared before he was born that Samson would be a **Nazirite** (this has nothing to do with the town of ‘*Nazareth*’ by the way –Numbers 6, which provides a listing of the regulations governing the lifestyle of a Nazirite, shows us that this term applies to someone who is particularly separated unto God
 - normally this meant a special vow to become a temporary priest
 - ...but for Samson, this would not be temporary – he was to be a Nazirite all his life
- being a Nazirite involved...
 - (a) **abstaining** from the fruit of the **vine** (wine, grapes, raisins)
 - (b) **not cutting his hair** (fruit of the vine was a symbol of the blessing of God on the consecrated **land**; the long hair of a Nazirite was a sign of a consecrated **head** until the end of the vow; then his hair would be cut and sacrificed to God)
 - (c) **avoiding** contact with anything or anyone who was **dead**

Being a “Nazirite” was crucial to the meaning of Samson’s life & ministry, so let’s pause here and note **3 important lessons** arising out of this aspect of his life:

1. **Strength** comes from separation

- no one else tried to fight the Philistines during this time; only this man who was a Nazirite, a man specially dedicated to God
 - only the 'separated' Samson had strength to fight
 - ...and when he lost the last symbol of his separation (his long hair), he lost his strength

2. Separation is always accompanied by **enablement**

- Samson was empowered by God’s Spirit

Judg 14:6

And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him

Judg 14:19

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily

Judg 15:14

Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him

- our equipping by the indwelling Spirit of God produces spiritual power in our lives too when we walk with God
- in fact, we are **more blessed** than Samson because God’s Spirit takes up residence **within** us, not just resting **upon** us from time to time, like Samson’s anointing

3. The pattern for Christian separation is the Lord **Jesus**

- in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17:15–17 Jesus say, (LB version) “I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from Satan’s power. They are **not part of this world any more than I am**. Make them pure and holy through teaching them your words of truth.”

- an ancient letter probably written in the 2nd century days of the Roman Empire described Christians in ways that challenge our modern Christian lifestyles:

“Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect, or have some peculiar lifestyle... They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food and the other aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us the wonderful and certainly unusual form of their own citizenship... They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven... They love every one, but are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things. They are dishonored and yet gain glory through dishonor... They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others...

To put it simply -- the soul is to the body as Christians are to the world. The soul is spread through all parts of the body and Christians through all the cities of the world. The soul is **in** the body but is not **of** the body; Christians are **in** the world but not **of** the world.”

- I wonder if this description could still be said of us today!

...back to Samson's uniqueness:

C) Samson's Unique **MINISTRY**

- he *begins* to deliver Israel, as the Angel of the Lord declared to his mother back in chap. **13:5** "he shall **begin** to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines"
- his entry on the scene marks a new beginning, but only a beginning – it will take the coming of David to finish the fight against the Philistines
- Samson was raised up by God to *begin* this liberation, and God endowed him uniquely with the Holy Spirit so that he had legendary physical strength to fight great personal battles
- **Israel** by this time is in something of a **coma** (brought about by affluence & apathy) and needs to be shaken awake to realize their condition and the true nature of the Philistines' domination – so Samson, as a lone champion, makes every effort to wake them up
- but even Samson could not accomplish the liberation of Israel because of weaknesses *in his own character*
 - he was perhaps the one man who realized that a person or nation could not **compromise** with sin & remain free to serve God; but the **tragedy** was that he did **not live out** these beliefs
 - instead, he became a **living illustration** of the **nation's** problems by this time: they had compromised their loyalty to God and consequently had little spiritual strength
- spiritual compromise is not a problem unique to Samson, of course; compromise with sin weakens **our** spiritual lives so that **we** are not able to serve God as we should

- in our next session we will see some of the **roots** of Samson's compromise, and the **results**