

## Judges 13:1-25 – The Birth of Samson

The story of Samson is a tragic one. One which we've probably all heard bits and pieces of and we shake our heads and say he did it all so wrong. But do we fully understand God's intention for including such a tragic figure in His word. There is more scripture devoted to Samson than there is to any other character in the book of Judges. So in order for us to understand Samson's life and how God used it to teach the Israelites some hard truths we have to begin with the circumstances prior to Samson's birth.

Look at verse 1

"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years."

The same old story. The Israelites did evil and the Lord handed them over to oppressors. However, notice that something very significant is missing here at the beginning of chapter 13. At no time is it mentioned that the Israelites cry out for the Lord to save them. Up to this point, the rising of all the other judges has been as a result of the Israelites crying out to God to save them, which he has done by providing a judge to lead them to victory over their enemies. But not this time. Why not? Because the Israelites did not want to be saved.

The Philistines approach toward invasion was different. You see, they had learned how to smelt iron and with their iron weapons they could have marched in a destroyed Israel but they didn't. Instead the weapons they used were trade and intermarriage. You need equipment to work, we'll provide it for you. You need wives and husbands, no problem. And it was through this subtle influence that the Philistines were gaining a stranglehold on the Israelites. Israel was being enslaved by spiritual and cultural seduction.

The sad part was that the Israelites didn't notice. It was a time of affluence for them. They were apathetic toward the compromises they were making in order to reap the benefits of this relationship with the Philistines. So there was no national crying out for a deliverer, so God did not send one, instead He sent an individual to single-handedly expose the dangers of the Philistines and to hold back their complete dominance and control of Israel.

We face the same struggle in 21<sup>st</sup> century North America. We live in an affluent society and have all kinds of pressure for us to compromise that which makes us Christians in order to benefit from that affluence. It's important to note the story of Samson can be applied as a contemporary story and we need to pay close attention to it.

Chapter 13 of Judges gives us insight into who Samson was supposed to be. God's plan was for Samson to be a unique man and we see this in three ways.

### **1. His unique birth.**

From this chapter we learn that Samson's parents are a godly couple. When the angel of the Lord appears to Manoah's wife her report to her husband is that "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God." V. 6

Interestingly enough Manoah's response to this news was not "Are you sure? Have you been in the sun too long?" Instead his response in verse 8 was "Manoah prayed to the Lord: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.""

His response is of faith and acceptance of his wife's experience. He believes what she has been told will come true and he calls on God to show him how to raise the boy in a godly way.

Samson's birth was also unique in that it was announced to by the angel of the Lord that Manoah's wife who was sterile was to conceive and have a child. The Lord was going to intervene in a miraculous way so that Samson could be born. Not only was birth itself miraculous but the way in which it was announced. Scripture refers to the visitor as the "Angel of the Lord" and many scholars believe that it was God himself appearing to communicate His will. This is why when Manoah realizes that it was the angel of the Lord in verse 21 he declares "we are doomed to die, we have seen God!" Thank goodness for the common sense of his wife who says, why would God tell us we are going to have a child and then destroy us for seeing Him? Good point.

There is only one other birth in all of scripture in which the angel of the Lord announces it and God intervenes in a barren woman's life and that is the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah. There are other instances where angels announce the coming births of great people in the Bible but for it to be "The angel of the Lord" causes me to pause and recognize the significance of this birth.

## **2. Samson was to live a unique lifestyle**

Three times in this passage we are told about the unique life that Samson was to lead. Samson was to be a Nazirite which is outlined for us somewhat in this passage but is also explained in Numbers chapter 6. A Nazirite was someone who had dedicated or separated themselves to God. But there are some differences between the Nazirite vow in Numbers and the one outlined here for Samson.

First the Nazirite vow was voluntary. A person making this vow would do so by choice as a commitment to separate themselves from other things and devote themselves to God. For Samson it was involuntary. The Lord announced that he would be a Nazirite.

Secondly, a Nazirite vow was temporary. A person would make this vow for a set period of time, it was not a lifelong condition. However, for Samson it was to be lifelong. In fact, his mother was to begin the restrictions of the vow even while Samson was in the womb.

A Nazirite was to do three things as a part of their vow. They were to abstain from the fruit of the vine. Not because the fruit was sinful but rather because it was symbolic of luxurious living, so during the time of the vow, the Nazirite was to live a simple life. They were also not to cut their hair. It was the public sign of the vow they have made. And thirdly, they were to avoid contact with a dead person. This was a sign of the preeminence of God in their lives. Contact with a dead person made one unfit for the tabernacle and a Nazirite has vowed to stay in constant fellowship with God.

Samson was not given the option, he was commanded to be a Nazirite and thus would have a unique life ahead of him. You can see why the hair became such a symbol for Samson. A Nazirite who has separated himself for a time would certainly have long hair but imagine if from birth your hair had never been cut. Samson was a judge for 20 years and who knows how old he was when he took that role, you can imagine the length of his hair.

## **3. Samson had a unique purpose**

Look at verse 5 of Judges 13. There is a very small word which carries a very large meaning in that verse. The angel of the Lord has told Manoah's wife that she will conceive and have son, and that he is to maintain the Nazirite vow and the purpose is that he will "begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

Samson's purpose was not to save the people of Israel. But to begin the process. Other judges were great military leaders but throughout his life Samson was to fight alone. He would never see the conclusion of God's plan to liberate the people of Israel from the Philistines.

The Spirit of God moved in Samson and he did amazing things. Through his feats of strength and opposition he showed the Israelites what God could do to free them if only they would separate themselves from that which held them captive. In the Beth Moore book "Breaking Free" she says, "A Christian is held captive by anything that hinders the abundant and effective Spirit filled life God planned for him or her." The Israelites had become comfortable in a life without God and were not living abundantly with God.

Where does this take us? How does this apply to us here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Well I'd like to look very briefly at the 3 unique qualities of Samson's life and apply them to the Samson of today; the Church.

### **1. The Church has had a unique birth.**

God himself in the person of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit established the church. The church had supernatural beginnings and God has worked in miraculous ways to bring about change in the lives of those who have chosen to believe Jesus is the Messiah. The rock on which the church is built

### **2. The church is called to a unique life style**

The church has been called to be people who are pure and holy, set apart for God. We are called to live in such a way that we remain in constant fellowship with God through our relationship with Jesus Christ. We are to be noticed everywhere we go, not by our hair or outward appearance but by our attitudes and actions. We are to be salt and light to everyone we come in contact with pointing them to God.

It's important to note that our choice to be set apart is a positive dedication to the Lord. Not one focused on what we are separate from. Not, "we can't do this, we can't do that" but rather one that is focused on what we are separated to. We are separated to God. Our decision is not formal and legalistic rather it is freeing and full of life. Like Beth Moore said. To live an unhindered abundant, Spirit filled life.

### **3. We have a unique purpose.**

God has called us to be examples of what a life is like when given completely to Him. We are only a part of the overall plan as it will be completed when Christ returns but we have a part to play in this world to show the world what a life set apart to God is like and by doing so may in turn challenge others to cry out for their own salvation from that which holds them captive.

In the weeks ahead we will hear of the stories of Samson's successes and failures. Of how he struggled with his vow and was tempted by the culture around him.

We to are tempted by our culture around us. The issue isn't of being pressured to let go of our values but of slowly compromising, not realizing how far away from God we have gone.

You may have heard the illustration of how to boil a frog. Now I'm not sure why I'd want to boil a frog but if I did here's how to do it. What you don't do is drop the frog in a pot of boiling water. If you do the frog will jump out and escape. Instead what you do is put a frog in a pot of cold water and the frog will gladly swim around. Once you turn on the element the frog will continue to swim even as the water gets warmer. By the time the frog realizes that it is getting too hot and should get out it will have used all its energy swimming around in the now warm water and will not have the strength to get out of the pot and will be stuck in there to boil.

The culture around us is not always bad but it can tempt us to compromise the life God has called us to. It may not seem like much but just like with the frog the more we get comfortable with compromise the more we don't notice the changes around us until it's too late to get out.

So what is the church to do? Should we isolate ourselves from the world and sit safely in our little castle so the world can not influence us? Obviously not; that's not God's purpose for leaving us here on earth.

But what about the opposite, do we jump right into the world around us with reckless abandon in order to influence the world but instead find ourselves giving up the freedom to live an abundant and Spirit filled life? Again obviously not.

So here's the struggle we face. How do we live in the world but not of the world? I think what we need to do is to take the time to stop and ask ourselves why we do what we do.

There was an Anglican rector who had just taken over a church from a retiring colleague. Things were going well for him but he did sense there was something that they were uncomfortable about with his style. So one day he asked one of trusted elders about it. "You're doing a great job but there is one small thing" said the elder. "When we have communion our former rector would always walk over to the radiator and touch it as he prayed and you don't do that." Curious about what was so sacred about the motion with the register the young rector decided to call his predecessor to ask why he would touch the register. Well the old rector just laughed when asked. "The reason I would always touch the register during communion was to discharge the static from the cup so people wouldn't get a shock from the cup."

Tradition had become sacred and no one new why. The same can happen with cultural influences as well. Our church services, are they the way they are because of culture or because it's Biblical. It's a question we need to ask about all we are doing as a church and to open God's Word, to listen to the Spirit and ask. Does what we do fit with what God has called us to do through his word or is it because we just have always done it that way or because we are making concessions in order to fit with the world.

This isn't just an individual question but it is also a question that faces us as a church. Are we more concerned about fitting with the culture or are we more concerned about being filled with the Spirit of God? You may have heard it said before, do we allow culture to influence the church or does the church influence culture. Well I don't like that saying. I would rather ask this question; do we allow culture to influence the church or do we let the Spirit of God influence the church?

As we read the story of Samson over the next few weeks we will discover how in his life, one called to be separate, he struggled, as did the whole nation of Israel, with the negative influence of the culture around it. How his life symbolized their struggle with the affluence of the invading

culture and how they were apathetic to the slow death they were experiencing as they were being overtaken.

May our focus continue to be on the word of God as we allow his Spirit to weed out the things that are hindering us from experiencing all God has in store for us. May our lives as individuals and as a church not be tragic as Samson's was but may we keep our eyes focused on the one for who we are set apart.