

Samson's Mother

Judges 13:1-25

Happy Mother's day to all of you. I hope you take the time to honor your mother today. Motherhood is certainly a gift from God and it is the work of God. Mothers are central to the success of the family. Their love, dedication, and wisdom touch countless lives every day.

But as we learn from the Bible and from experience: the world, the flesh, and the devil are out to destroy the work of God. And one major battle field in this war has always been the family. We are keenly aware that the America in which parents seek to raise children today is not the same America of years gone by. To many of us, the times in which we live and are trying to raise our families is aptly described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:

- 1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:**
- 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,**
- 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,**
- 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,**
- 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!**

It's a perilous time to live and to raise children. But perilous times are nothing new. God's people have always had to swim against the stream of the world system that seeks to destroy our families. In Judges 13, we see the perilous times in which God's people lived:

Israel's Perilous Times (13:1)

- 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.**

As we have seen, this is a common refrain in the book of the Judges -- God's people rebelling and falling into sin again and finding themselves under the domination of another nation.

What makes the Philistines especially important is the method they used. They had great military strength because they had learned how to smelt iron. With their iron weapons, they could have overrun Israel by direct attack as the other nations had. They did not. Rather than marching as an obvious enemy, the two main weapons they used were trade and intermarriage. If the Israelites wanted a plow or an ax, they had to go to the Philistines to get one. If they wanted to marry their sons or daughters, the Philistines had no objection. In both those ways, the Philistines were gaining a strangle-hold on the Israelites, slowly choking them to death by compromise and assimilation. Israel was not being enslaved by military dominance but by spiritual and cultural seduction. [Gary Inrig, Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay, p. 206]

It is against the backdrop of wholesale spiritual compromise that the Holy Spirit inspired the author of the book of Judges to introduce us to a simple couple in chapter 13. This couple is set in contrast to the culture. They weren't like everyone else. Maybe people thought they were even a little weird. But the writer tells us that this couple was given a vital assignment from God. Their assignment was to raise a child; a child who would

have a special place in the plan of God. They weren't whisked away to some secluded location in order to perform this task. They were to raise their child in the context of the culture. This is the same assignment that every Christian parent has today. According to Malachi 2:15, one of the purposes behind marriage is that God "seeks godly offspring." God wants us to raise our children to follow him.

It is in this context that Christian parents are called upon to raise their children. John 17:15 wasn't spoken about parents but it might well have been. Jesus prays to the Heavenly Father and He says: **"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."**

But the question is how are we going to do this? How are we going to be godly parents in perilous times? Here in Judges 13 in the example of Manoah and his wife we find some answers. Godly parents are parents who recognize their privilege, responsibility, dependence and limits.

Now I know that for some of you, the parenting days are over. For others, you are not a parent now, and as things look, you might not ever be a parent. But God places us all in both physical and spiritual families. And the principals of God's Word apply to all of us.

The First Angelic Visitation (13:2-7)

- 2 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."**
- 6 So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name.**
- 7 And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'** "

The writer of Judges introduces us to Manoah and his wife. He says that Mrs. Manoah was barren and had no children. For a Hebrew woman, this was a shattering and shameful condition. But God sent His messenger to tell this barren woman that she would conceive and bear a son. In doing this God was sending a message to the nation of Israel. God was showing them that deliverance would only come through Him. He has done the same thing for us in Jesus Christ. We were powerless to ever save ourselves but God sent His Son Jesus Christ to be born miraculously through a virgin. He would come and bring salvation to mankind who could never save themselves.

For Mrs. Manoah God's message of a child was a message of tremendous privilege. Their child was a gift from God. God entrusted to this couple the privilege of parenthood. Psalm 127:3-5, **"Behold children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children**

of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them." Parenting is a privilege -- a gift -- from God.

According to the angel, this boy would have a unique lifestyle. He would be a Nazarite. What does that mean? It comes from a Hebrew word that means "to separate". A Nazarite was a person who would make a special vow to God to set himself apart for a period that he might be radically and totally dedicated to God. The law of Nazarites is found in Numbers 6. Several observations about this vow are important.

-- It was a VOLUNTARY vow -- This vow was normally not a required thing. A person would decide on his own if he wanted to set himself aside for a time of total dedication.

-- It was a TEMPORARY vow -- It didn't last forever, but for a set time.

-- It was a PURPOSEFUL vow -- The purpose was so that a person could give full attention to God.

-- It was a SYMBOLIC vow -- There were restrictions on the Nazarite and these have symbolic significance. **He was to stay away from wine or any product of the vine** -- i.e. grapes. These were signs of luxurious living. By contrast the Nazarite was living a life of simplicity. His was a life of self-denial, allowing him to not be distracted from his one goal -- to build his relationship with God. The second requirement was that **he was not to cut his hair**. This served to identify him in a public way as a Nazarite. He would have been the only male around who had long hair. Since long hair was considered a sign of weakness, in Samson's case, it would be a constant reminder to him that his strength came from God not from within. The third requirement was that **he was to stay away from any dead body** (even if it was the body of a near and dear relative.) This was a sign of the preeminence of God in his life. Nothing that interrupted fellowship with God was to be tolerated. God was the giver of life, not death. Therefore, he was to stay as far away from death as possible.

Samson was to be a unique Nazarite. First, he didn't seem to have a choice about this vow. Second, it would not be temporary, but lifelong. In fact, Samson's mother would have to follow Nazarite restrictions as long as she carried him in her womb.

But the angel also told her that her son would have a special calling. Verse 5, **"he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."** **"Begin"** is a key word. Samson would not completely deliver as other judges had done but he would begin a process that would be completed through others.

As godly parents, Mr. and Mrs. Manoah were not only to enjoy the privilege of being parents but they were to undertake a great responsibility to guide and direct their child toward God's intended life and calling. It is the same with us -- Ephesians 6:4, ". . . **bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.**" In order to do that we must communicate some important messages to our children.

A family in Canada had ten children. Of these, six were serving on some foreign mission field. The other four are active in a local church -- serving the Lord. Someone asked the children what it was about their parents that had such an influence on their lives. A number of things were said but the one thing that came out in each of their answers was that their parents "lived the way they talked."

When it comes to our kids, we have a tremendous responsibility. A responsibility to them to teach them to know the Lord through our words and our actions.

The Second Angelic Visitation

Manoah and his wife were godly people living in an ungodly world, albeit an ungodly Israelite world. Manoah prayed that God would send the Angelic Messenger another time, so that he might hear from Him how this promised child was to be raised.

8 Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born."

9 And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her.

Graciously, the Angel appears to Mrs. Manoah a second time while she is out in the field. The woman hurries to find her husband, and then reports that the One who had appeared to her earlier had appeared to her once again.

10 Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the other day has just now appeared to me!"

11 So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?" And He said, "I am."

Following his wife, Manoah came upon their mysterious and majestic visitor. Manoah asked the Angel if he was the One who had spoken to his wife earlier, to which He answered, "I am."

12 Manoah said, "Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?"

Manoah begins by asking the Angel what the boy's life calling and ministry will be, and this also raises the question of how this child should be raised. The Lord's answer is to repeat and reiterate His previous instructions to Manoah's wife.

13 So the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful.

14 She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe."

Manoah doesn't exactly get the answer he is looking for. God simply tells them to obey what He has told them to do. The truth is, as parents, we cannot control what our children will become, we can only be obedient to raise them as God instructs us.

Manoah takes a different tack with his next two questions. First, he invites the Angel to stay for dinner.

15 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You."

Manoah takes a different tack with his next two questions. First, he invites the Angel to stay for dinner. There was good precedent for this. Abraham invited the Angel of the Lord to a meal, and Gideon prepared food for his angelic visitor as well. Nevertheless, the Angel declined the offer of a meal, but did encourage the offering of a sacrifice, much as Gideon had done in chapter 6.

16 And the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord." (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord.)

At this point, Manoah still does not recognize this "angel" as *the* Angel of the Lord. He is certainly curious about His identity, however, and so he asks the angel for his name, so that they can honor him once the child is born.

17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?"

18 And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?"

What happens when Manoah offers the sacrifice sets aside all of his questions and produces an appropriate sense of awe and fear.

19 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.

22 And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!"

23 But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time."

I can imagine Manoah and his wife standing there, gazing up into the sky (as the disciples did when Jesus ascended into the heavens) waiting to see if He would return to earth. When it became obvious that He would not return, Manoah concluded that this had been no ordinary angel; this was none other than the Angel of the Lord. This was God!

The Birth and Growth of Samson (13:24-25)

24 So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him.

25 And the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan) between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Manoah's wife gave birth to a son, she named him Samson. The name Samson means "sun" or "sunshine". As the rising sun speaks of the hope of a new day, the birth of Samson was one of hope -- the hope of a mother that her son would choose right in a corrupt nation and the hope for a nation that they would come back to God. The author wants us to know two things about Samson's growing years. *First*, he experienced God's blessings as he grew up.

Second, we are told that **"the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him."** Every other time the Spirit comes upon Samson in the Book of Judges, he becomes a powerful killing machine. But here we are not told that the Spirit **"came upon"** Samson; we are told instead that the Spirit of the Lord began to **"stir"** him.

I believe that God's Spirit was at work in Samson to give him a heart for the Israelites and to yearn for their deliverance from bondage to the Philistines. I believe God was prompting Samson to love and to worship Him, rather than the Philistine gods. The Spirit may well have been bearing witness to the teaching of his parents.

If I had not read chapters 14-16, I would have expected great things of Samson -- or should I say *greater* things of Samson. Here is a man whose birth was a miracle, and it was announced by a two-fold appearance of the Angel of the Lord. He was born into a

godly home and raised (so far as we can tell) in a way that honored God. During his childhood, he experienced the blessing of God and was “stirred” by the Spirit of the Lord. Who could ask for any better beginning than this?

But we know how the story ends, and we know that Samson didn’t end up like he should have. Samson squandered precious opportunities. He did have some victories but not like we would hope for.

Let me just give you some lessons we can learn about godly parenting today:

1. Godly parents recognize their privilege. (vs. 2-3)

When he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1984, Harmon Killebrew said, “My father taught me and my brother to play ball in the front yard. One day my mother came out and told him we were ruining the lawn. My father told her, “We’re raising kids, not grass.”

Successful parents recognize that their raising of children is a privilege. Maybe you need to adjust your perspective so that you treat your children as a privilege rather than as a chore. Maybe you need to ask God to send someone -- a child, a teen, an adult -- into your life that you might have the privilege of mentoring them as a surrogate parent. You could be the parent that they never had.

2. Godly parents recognize their responsibility. (vs. 4-5)

Successful parents recognize that their raising of children is a responsibility. Are you taking this responsibility seriously? When you stand before God and He asks you what kind of a parent you were, will you be able to hold your head high?

Knowing that that day of accounting is coming, it should cause us to do the exact same thing that Manoah and his wife did. It should cause us to call out: “HELP!!” That brings us to the 3rd characteristic of successful parents.

3. Godly parents recognize their dependence. (vs. 6-14)

Mr. and Mrs. Manoah were willing to leave the driving to God when it came to the raising of this child. All they wanted to know is what God wanted them to do and they would do it. Successful parents recognize their dependence on God to raise their children as they ought to be raised. This dependence is demonstrated in prayer, study of God’s word, and obedience to what they find there. God can take your family and your children where they need to go in life but we must be willing to leave the driving to Him.

Successful parents recognize that they are totally dependent on God. As you raise your children, whose guidelines are you following -- Dr. Spock’s, your pediatrician’s, your psychologist’s, your own common sense, or God’s unchanging, inerrant Word?

4. Godly parents recognize their limits.(vs. 24-25)

Unless I miss my guess, I think Mrs. Manoah probably cried a lot of tears over this child; more tears of sorrow than tears of joy. But she and her husband could not live Samson’s life for him. They could treat him like a treasure; they could lead him in the truth of God; seek God’s direction for his raising -- but there was a limit to what they could do. Samson ultimately had to choose for himself to live for God or for self.

Chuck Swindoll had this to say about the limits of parents: “Being godly parents is no absolute guarantee you’ll have godly kids. Doing a good job of training children and teens provides no airtight promise that they’re going to turn out exactly right. You and your mate might walk very close to God today. You might have begun to walk with him

soon after your child was born. You may have had the highest hopes for your child, but you're not experiencing the delight of your heart. At least, not yet. Nothing thrills us more than to know that our children are walking in the truth and nothing hurts us more than to realize they're not."

What can you do for your adult children? You can love them. Let them know that no matter what, your love for them is unconditional. You can pray for them. You are limited. God is not. The safest place to leave a child is in God's hands. And you can still be an example to them. Let them see in you those character traits and values that you wish to see in them.

A godly parent is a parent who recognizes their privilege, their responsibility, their dependence and their limitations.

The story of Samson is once again going to leave us wanting, hoping for a better savior. Ultimately, that is what Judges teaches us. It points us to Christ, and not to fallible men. Christ is the ultimate Deliverer, not Gideon or Barak or Jephthah or Samson. God used fallible men to deliver Israel from their bondage to oppressors like the Moabites, the Midianites, the Ammonites, and the Philistines. But it will take a perfect Deliverer to rescue men and women from their bondage to sin.

The imperfections of the judges in the Book of Judges point us to Him who is the perfect Deliverer – Jesus Christ. He alone could die in the sinner's place, bearing his (or her) punishment, and achieving not only the forgiveness of sins but the eternal deliverance and blessing of those who are His, by faith. Judges should not only teach us how bad the men of that day were, but how bad all men (including us) are today, and thus how badly we need God's deliverance. That deliverance has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus through His death at Calvary, resurrection, and ascension, for all who receive it.