

The Book of Judges

Lesson 10: The Birth of Samson -- Judges 13:1-25

You can almost feel the weariness in the way the chapter opens. "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD." Again. You have read that word so many times in Judges that it has begun to lose its sting, and maybe that is exactly the danger. Sin had become a habit, a rhythm, a thing the nation did so often that nobody even flinched anymore. So God hands them over to the Philistines for forty years, a generation long enough to forget what freedom felt like. And here is what should stop you cold: this time, nobody cries out. Earlier in the book, when the oppression grew unbearable, Israel groaned and pleaded and the LORD raised up a deliverer in answer. Not now. The silence is deafening. They have sunk so low they have stopped even wanting to be rescued. And it is into that silence, that spiritual coma, that God moves first.

The scene shifts to a small house in the town of Zorah, to a man named Manoah of the tribe of Dan and to his wife, whose name we are never told. She is barren. In that world, barrenness was a private grief carried in public, a quiet ache that followed a woman everywhere. And one ordinary day, going about whatever ordinary thing filled her hours, she looks up and a stranger is standing there. "The angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman." No fanfare, no summons to the temple, no parade of the great and powerful. God comes to a childless woman in a forgotten town, and He comes with news that turns her whole world over: "thou shalt conceive, and bear a son." You and I should pay attention to where God shows up. He keeps showing up exactly where the world is not looking.

But the message is more than a cure for her sorrow. This child is to be set apart from the very first moment, a Nazirite to God from the womb. No wine, no strong drink, no unclean food, and no razor is ever to touch his head. Even the mother, while she carries him, is to live under the same consecration. Before the boy can walk or talk or choose anything for himself, he belongs wholly to the LORD. And his life is given a direction: "he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Notice the word begin. God is honest about what this child will and will not finish. But a beginning is enough, because God Himself is the one starting it, in a nation that did not even ask.

What follows is so human you can see yourself in it. Manoah, hearing the news secondhand, prays for the messenger to come back and teach them how to raise this boy. He wants instructions; he wants to do this right. The angel returns, and when Manoah asks his name, the answer is a wonder all its own: "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" or, as the word means, wonderful. Then the flame goes up from the altar, and the messenger goes up in the flame, and Manoah falls on his face certain they are about to die for having seen God. It is his wife, the quiet one, who steadies him with plain good sense and steadier faith. By the end of the chapter a son is born, the LORD blesses him, and the Spirit begins to stir. Watch this chapter

closely, because it is a portrait of grace that begins long before we deserve it and reaches all the way to a manger and a cross.

Group Discussion: Israel had stopped crying out, yet God still moved first to raise up a deliverer. What does this chapter teach us about the kind of God we serve, and where do you see that same gracious initiative running all the way through Scripture to Christ?

Personal Reflection: Samson was set apart to God from the womb, before he could choose anything. Where in your own life, your habits, your appetites, your use of time, do you sense the Lord asking you to live as one consecrated, genuinely set apart to Him rather than blending in with the world around you?

Read Judges 13:1-25

Study Questions

1. The chapter opens, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years" (13:1), yet unlike earlier cycles Israel does not cry out for help. What does it reveal about God's character that He raises up a deliverer when His people have not even asked, and how does this display His gracious initiative rather than mere reward for repentance?
2. Israel had grown so used to doing evil "again" that no one seems to flinch or grieve over it. Where have you let a particular sin become so familiar that it no longer troubles your conscience, and what would it take to feel again how serious it really is?
3. The angel of the LORD appears to a barren, unnamed woman in the small town of Zorah rather than to a king or priest in a place of power (13:2-3). What pattern do you see in how God chooses to work, and how does this prepare us to understand the way He later comes in Christ?

4. The angel came to a woman the world had overlooked and entrusted her with something of great purpose. In what overlooked or hidden corner of your life might God be wanting to work, and are you watching for Him there, or only looking where the world tells you to look?
5. The child is to be a Nazirite to God from the womb, set apart by abstaining from wine, from anything unclean, and from cutting his hair (13:4–5, 7; compare Numbers 6:1–8). What is the heart of consecration in Scripture, and why does God call certain people and ultimately all His people to be deliberately set apart to Him?
6. Samson's mother shared in his consecration while she carried him, ordering her own appetites for the sake of what God was doing through her. What appetite or freedom might the Lord be asking you to surrender right now, not because it is sinful in itself, but for the sake of being wholly His?
7. When Manoah asks the messenger his name, the answer is that it is "secret," or wonderful (13:18), and the angel ascends in the flame of the altar (13:20). What does this reverent mystery teach us about who was truly appearing to Manoah, and how should an encounter with the holy God shape the way we approach Him?
8. Manoah was gripped with fear that they would die for having seen God, while his wife reasoned calmly that the LORD would not have received their offering if He meant to kill them (13:22–23). When fear and faith pull against each other in you, which voice tends to win, and how can you grow in the steadying, reasoning faith she showed?

9. Trace the whole movement of this chapter: God acts before Israel asks, sets apart a deliverer from the womb, blesses the child, and stirs him by His Spirit (13:1–5, 24–25). What does this teach about God’s sovereign and gracious initiative in salvation and about the meaning of being consecrated wholly to Him, and how does it call Christians today to be holy and set apart (1 Peter 1:15–16; Romans 12:1–2) without binding the Nazirite vow?

10. The chapter ends with a quiet word of hope: “and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him: and the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times” (13:24–25). Name one specific way you sense the Lord Jesus setting you apart for Himself through this passage, and what is the next concrete step of obedience He is stirring you toward?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Numbers 6:1–21, the law of the Nazirite vow that stands behind Samson’s consecration; 1 Samuel 1:9–20, another barren wife given a son set apart to the LORD; Luke 1:5–17, the angel announcing John the Baptist, set apart from the womb to prepare the way; 1 Peter 1:15–16, the call for all God’s people to be holy as He is holy; Romans 12:1–2, presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice, set apart and not conformed to this world

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