

Judges 13A

- Our study of Judges is moving into the story of the final Judge
 - Even as you hear me say that, you might glance at your Bible and notice that the book of Judges still has 9 chapters
 - And no, the account of the final judge doesn't require nine chapters to cover
 - In fact, Samson's story will take up four chapters, still a significant part of the book
 - But then the book ends with an account of two episodes in the tribe of Dan
 - In fact, the story of Samson begins our study of the Danites, since Samson is from the tribe of Dan
 - The story of the Danite Samson and the rest of the tribe of Dan will be a case study in the apostasy of Israel overall
 - For us, it will be a reminder that God is always at work through ordinary people giving us opportunity to serve Him
 - And how our response will determine where that opportunity takes us
- But first, we need to meet our next judge...

Judg. 13:1 Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.

- At the end of chapter 12, we witnessed several minor judges come and go in rapid succession
 - They were not notable leaders because, it seemed, they were prone to the same failings as past men
 - They concerned themselves with building a family and acquiring wealth
 - They seemed to rule as monarchs, serving themselves rather than God and His people

- Meanwhile, the people of Israel are adrift again, and their hearts ran back to the culture living around them
 - In v.1 we read the telltale phrase we've come to know so well
 - Israel doing evil in the Lord's sight, because they did what was right in their own eyes
 - We remember that this phrase is a marker for idol worship
 - Israel is once again worshipping the false gods of those around them
- Each time we see Israel return to this behavior, we've stopped to note it
 - Sometimes, we wondered how the people could return so quickly after seeing the Lord grant rescue from His judgment
 - Other times we wonder why they didn't learn from their ancestors
 - This time I think we need to recognize the reality of spiritual warfare: it never stops
- The enemy never tires, he never stops working to corrupt God's people
 - The Lord by His grace may push Satan and his forces back from time to time
 - Inevitably, the enemy comes back again
 - He is tireless
 - He exists for one purpose, which is to destroy the work of God and substitute His own authority
 - He knows he's fighting time and a death sentence, so he has a sense of urgency and purpose that will never change
 - And he doesn't need to invent new trick either
 - He just dusts off the same idols
 - He introduces them in the same way, under similar circumstances, using the allure of wealth or sexual pleasure
 - And in short order, the people have fallen again

- Therefore, God's people can't rest on past successes
 - Our only defense from the enemy's schemes is to practice the disciplines of the faith consistently and fervently
 - Know your Bible, seek the Lord's intercession in prayer
 - Spend time in worship with the body of Christ
 - Serve the people of God out of your love for the Lord
 - As the Lord convicts, confess your sins to one another
 - And as the Spirit directs, walk in His counsel doing what you know to be pleasing to Him
 - If these practices aren't a part of your regular routine, then as your spiritual battle waxes and wanes, so will your steadfastness
 - When the enemy is going easy on you, you'll get comfortable
 - But then when the enemy turns up the heat, you'll get knocked flat like Israel did
 - It's like the old "rope-a-dope" routine from boxing
 - The enemy distracts us long enough with ease and success so he can't land the hard punch when we don't expect it
 - And if the enemy weren't enough of an adversary, there's our flesh too
 - We are all tempted by something, and when our flesh is undisciplined, it tends to get its way
 - Only by living in the Spirit and denying our flesh will we move away from that pattern in time
- And even when we practice the disciplines of our walk with the Lord earnestly and consistently, we still won't be perfect and we may still fall from time to time
 - But we'll be equipped for the battle, a battle that never ends this side of Heaven
 - Over time, you'll win more battles than you lose
 - Because you've prepared yourself by asking the Lord to fight them for you

- First, to fight inside us to discipline our flesh
- And secondly, to prepare us to withstand the enemy's attacks
- Persevering in confidence, hope and peace
- But this was not the Israel of the time of Judges
 - Israel's chief sin in this time of judges is living in the flesh without a knowledge of or obedience to the word God
 - That left the people constantly susceptible to the schemes of the enemy
 - So that even if a judge might inspire good behavior in Israel for a time
 - His influence was limited in scope and time
 - So in short order, the people returned to their old ways
- So now again the people have fallen into even deeper sin, so the Lord has disciplined them again
 - But in light of the serious decline in the nation, the Lord must act in a more dramatic way than He has in the past few Judges
 - He is going to raise up a man with unique powers to address the growing independence of the tribes
 - And to unify the people
 - But first, the Lord places the people of Israel under the oppression of the Philistines
 - These warring people came from ancient Greek origins
 - Since they were Hellenistic, they were tall, skilled in warfare and intensely religious pagans
 - They settled on the costal plains of Israel in five cities
 - They were highly effective against the splintered Israelites because they maintain a strong political alliance among themselves
 - They had mastered smelting iron, which the Jews had not yet learned to do

- So they had distinct advantages in warfare and made significant incursions into Jewish territory
- Now the Lord has brought these people up against the nation of Israel to pressure them into repentance for their idol worship
- Interestingly, the Philistines were also an attractive culture to the Jews
 - The Jews traded with them, bought their iron tools
 - And eventually adopted their pagan gods and culture at times
 - So both their warring ways and culture acted upon Israel to bring it into apostasy
 - As they say, it was complicated
- Based on the pattern of Judges, we would expect that at this point the Lord would raise up a man who rallies the people into obedience and to defeat the enemy
 - But this time the pattern will be different
 - The Lord will raise up a judge to battle the Philistines
 - But Samson won't defeat them
 - He does win some victories, but in the end he dies before the Philistines are defeated
 - It waits for Samuel, another judge and contemporary of Samson, and later David to win decisive battles against the Philistines
 - Even then, the Philistines continued to be a threat against Israel until Nebuchadnezzar removed them entirely when he conquered all Canaan
 - More importantly, Samson's time as judge will leave the nation in worse shape than when he begins to rule
 - Civil war will become a bigger problem, not less
 - And the people's hearts will move farther from the Lord, not closer
 - Samson serves as our final proof that human leaders, even divinely chosen leaders, can't produce a lasting solution
 - It will require God bring a divine ruler to guard men's hearts

- This pattern will differ in another way as well...the people won't demonstrate repentance
 - In the past, the Lord acted to raise up a deliverer only after the people cried out to Him
 - The nation eventually tired of their oppressors
 - And in their misery, they came to their senses and repented of their idolatry
 - Only this time, we don't see that cry
 - Either the people are so far from the Lord now that they don't seek Him even after 40 years of oppression
 - Or else they are too comfortable with their oppressors
 - Accepting their harsh treatment as the price for access to their attractive culture
 - Either way, Israel is failing God's test
 - The number 40 means testing and for 40 years they have been tested by the Philistines' oppression and culture
 - Yet they fail to seek the Lord or call out for Him
 - Nevertheless, the Lord will remain faithful to His people
 - So He raises up a man to contend with the Philistines

John Davis remarked:

"What does he [the Lord] do when he has a people who refuse to forsake Baal and have no desire to forsake Philistia? A people grown so used to bondage they don't even have sense to call out for relief? At least here the very God who judges them (v. 1b) begins to work their deliverance anyway (vv. 2-5). That is grace – grace greater than all our sin, than all our stupidity, than all our density."

- So in grace, the Lord begins to bring an unique deliverer, one who can address the extreme sin and growing independence of these tribes
 - And the start of Samson's story follows a very familiar storyline in the Bible

[Judg. 13:2](#) There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children.

[Judg. 13:3](#) Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son.

[Judg. 13:4](#) "Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing.

[Judg. 13:5](#) "For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

[Judg. 13:6](#) Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name.

[Judg. 13:7](#) "But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

- Samson's arrival is almost exactly the same as Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, John the Baptist and even like Christ Himself
 - Samson's mother was barren
 - Just as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth
 - And like those women, a messenger gave them good news
 - In this case, it's the Angel of the Lord who appears, Who we know to be the Second Person of the Godhead
 - Anytime the Angel of the Lord takes time to announce your birth in advance, we can be sure you are a very important part of God's plan
 - In fact, there is only one other time in all scripture when the Angel of the Lord personally announced a birth in advance
 - That person was Isaac, the one born to Abraham
 - Certainly, we should take a close look at Samson's life
 - The Lord tells the woman that though she is barren, the Lord will deliver her a son
 - This child will be marked from birth for the Lord

- A similar words was given to Samuel's mother, Hanna
- And to John's mother, Elizabeth
- But in this case, the Lord adds that this child would live under a Nazarite vow his entire life
 - A Nazarite vow was a form of consecrated living that God outlined in the Law
 - The rules for Nazarite living focused on three requirements
 - The person couldn't consume anything that came from a grapevine
 - Secondly, they couldn't cut their hair during the time of the vow
 - Finally, they couldn't come into contact with a dead body
 - What was the purpose in these rules?
 - First, the word nazarite means to keep separated
 - And if someone is going to be kept separate, then need to stand out
 - So the Nazarite vows kept a person distinct from the rest of the people
 - Not cutting one's hair, for example, made a person stand out
 - This is one way can know that Jesus didn't wear His hair long as He is often portrayed
 - Men normally kept their hair short, as Paul taught in 1Cor
 - Only someone under a Nazarite vow kept their hair long
 - Likewise, abstaining from wine or grapes in general would have been at odds with the culture as well
 - People drank wine like we drink water
 - So to avoid that drink forced a person to act very differently during meals, festivals, and religious observances
 - Finally, these rules emphasized a close walk with the Lord that wouldn't be interrupted

- Drinking wine can have the effect of placing someone under the influence of the alcohol rather than under the influence of the Spirit
- And under the law, coming into contact with a dead body barred a person from worshipping at the central sanctuary
- But a Nazarite wouldn't allow these things to interrupt fellowship with the Lord even for a short time
- Such would be the call on Samson's life even before he was born
 - His mother was called to observe these restrictions even before the baby was born
 - This was not normally a part of the Nazarite vow
 - Nevertheless, in this case the Lord required this additional step
 - I think the Lord gave these instructions to the mother to emphasize the importance of Samson's consecration
 - To say nothing of the benefits for a child that a pregnant mother abstain from alcohol
 - More importantly, the child's commitment to the vow would have to be learned, so the parents had to train him as the Lord commanded
 - The Lord is leaving a strong impression with the mother and father so they will follow through
 - John the Baptist was raised in a similar way
 - Lastly, the Lord tells the family why these things are so important
 - Their son will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines
 - Notice He says Samson will "begin" that delivery
 - As we said, it will require Samuel and David to complete the work
 - But Samson will be the start
- The restrictions of a Nazarite vow were arbitrary, in the sense that there was nothing inherently good in abstaining from wine or growing hair long, etc.
 - Still, they set someone apart and became tests of a man's will to serve the Lord

- A person accepted these restrictions as an act of devotion, making sacrifice to ensure full obedience
- To remind himself that the Lord's will took priority over his own
- And that's not a small thing
 - We all need reminders that obedience is a difficult journey
 - One we can easily stray from
 - And sometimes these markers we set for ourself make the difference between staying on the straight and narrow or leaping off into oblivion
- Christians aren't expected to take a Nazarite vow, and we are not under the Law given to Israel in any case
 - Nevertheless, it's probably a smart thing to set limits, rules and other practices for ourselves that we undertake as a means of setting ourselves apart
 - We don't need to be set apart in appearance
 - But we are called to be set apart from sin
 - So whatever we need to do to keep ourselves from temptations or simply forgetfulness, we should make those vows a part of our walk as well
- It's worth asking yourself are there things standing in the way of your obedience to the Lord
 - Things that compete with following the Lord's will
 - The writer of Hebrews tells the church that if there is anything that holds us back from running at full speed with the Lord, then we should cast it aside

Heb. 12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every **encumbrance** and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

- Furthermore, the call on Christian parents is equally clear

- Parents are expected to prepare the hearts of our children from an early age to be set apart for the Lord
 - We train them up in the way they should go spiritually and otherwise in the hope that the Lord will bless our obedience
 - Their obedience will be their own in the end, but we have a command of our own
 - We must create the patterns early in their lives that will establish and separate them from the world
 - We do so in the hope that the Lord, by His grace, will unite our obedience and their habits with faith in their hearts
- We pause here in our study of Samson, because we will consider the rest of the Lord's instructions to Samson's parents as part of our Christmas Eve study
 - It may surprise you to know that the second half of this chapter is a perfect place to spend Christmas Eve, but so the Lord planned it for us
 - Meanwhile, our annual celebration of the Lord's arrival as a Child is a great time to inventory our own life of obedience to the King
 - Let's live set apart to His glory
 - Let's guard ourselves against the deceit of sin and the traps of our flesh and the enemy
 - Let's honor the Him with gifts of sacrifice, putting His will above our own
 - And let's teach our children that the best gift they could give us or anyone is a testimony of obedience to the Lord
 - Not perfection, for demanding perfection where it can't be found only leads to guilt and discouragement
 - But commitments to never allow anything to come between them and their fellowship with the Lord