

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Secondly ... the story-cycle of Judges is interrupted by our being introduced to a childless couple from the small group of Danites ... left behind when the majority of the tribe migrated northwards

Thus, we are told (in a story which echoes the births of ... Isaac and Jacob) that a sterile woman is going to conceive and have a son (v. 3). Moreover, this son (and even his mum!) is to be a Nazirite from birth (vs. 4, 5); a fact ... repeated several times for emphasis (see 7, 13, 14). ... The Nazirite vow (Numbers 6) was voluntary and temporary. Not so with Samson. His was to be a life wholly dedicated to God: a life which would set before the people the calling of all God's people to be devoted to the Lord. By obedience to God and dependence on him Samson was, also, to show that by faith the people might call upon supernatural resources to deliver them from all their enemies. This is important. In the sequel Samson's great strength was not magically produced by his long hair. It was in faithfully obeying his vow (symbolised by the uncut hair) that he triumphed in God (as Heb. 11.32 recognises). Thus set apart, the child will begin the deliverance of Israel (v. 5).

The fact that the angel of the Lord (v. 3) reappears to make this announcement (compare 6:11) only goes to build up the sense of expectation which reaches fever-pitch when we are told that the Spirit of the Lord began to stir the child when he had grown up (verse 25). Thus Samson is introduced to us (v. 24).

In the meanwhile we are introduced to the hesitant steps to faith of Manoah, the robust trust of his wife, and the strange incident in which the angel of the Lord 'goes up in smoke', in the flame arising from the burnt offering. The burnt offering (verse 16) was the offering made to remove sin (see Leviticus 1:4). Thus the angel of the Lord who, as Manoah recognises, is none other than the Lord himself (verse 22), ascends in the very flame.

All this suggests that this chapter is intended to show us that God appears and takes his own gracious initiative to deliver his sinful, undeserving people. Perhaps the last paragraph hints at the cost that God himself expends in saving them; a fact which may give this story typological significance (i.e., it offers a picture of the more wonderful sacrifice of the Son of God for the sins of the world which is revealed in the New Testament).

Moreover, the sequel does, of course, present Samson to us as a 'tarnished hero'. In the context of the Book of Judges this causes the author to long for a king (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). But at length the failure of the monarchy will lead the Old Testament writers to look for the Great King and Judge who, alone, will be able to accomplish all the purposes of God - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus ... Among all men, sacred history shows that the promises of God can have no other fulfilment than in Jesus.

Stephen Dray, *Judges and Ruth*, pp. 93-95.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

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Sermon: "Samson – a saviour pointing to the Saviour" (text: Judges 13:1-25)

Scripture: Judges 13:1-25

Sermon Notes

Introduction: The last and the best known of the Judges is Samson—but between Jephthah and Samson there are three other Judges who judged Israel twenty-five years, of peace and prosperity, the fruit of Jephthah's victories over their enemies.

From this we learn that: 1. We shouldn't judge what we do for the Lord by its short term results. 2. In Bible times the people of God lived by faith in the ordinary round of life, as we are called to do; 3. Peace and prosperity have dangers; the people *again* did evil, and they served the Philistines forty years.

But this time they didn't cry out to the Lord for help; they seemed unaware that the Philistines were the enemy, like much of the church in the West until recently.

In past times 'the world' (unbelievers) adopted a veneer of Christian morality; many Christians forgot that the world is an enemy—and so they allowed the world to educate them and their children without correcting this teaching by the Bible.

Christians read the world's books and watched the world's films and listened to its messages and allowed their children to do likewise, so that instead of being transformed by the renewing of their minds they became conformed to the world.

Too many Christians, forgetting that Christian marriage is to be 'only in the Lord' (1 Cor 7:39) married unbelievers, or failed to teach their children that Christian marriage is 'only in the Lord', so that they have married unbelievers.

The world is now casting off its Christian veneer; evolution must be taught, but creation is banned; sex-education is without morality; homosexuality is now being normalised in the name of protecting students from bullying and discrimination.

Many are outraged—but they have forgotten that the world is always the enemy of the Faith; its just that its enmity to Christianity is becoming more open.

1. Samson—a leader provided by God

The good news is that when we co-exist with the world the Lord intervenes to protect us by stirring up hostility between us, as he is doing in our days, and as he did in the days of the Judges by giving his people Samson, a saviour.

His story is marked with tragedy; betrayed, blinded, he died with the Philistines; he also fraternised with the enemy, married a Philistine and went in to a prostitute. How do we interpret his life aright, to get from it what the Lord has for us?

Scripture is its own interpreter—and so the first thing that guides us in understanding Samson is that he 'triumphed through faith' (Heb 11:33). So for all his faults, he is one of us, a believer. The second is the kingship context of Judges.

So ‘what does he teach us about the kingdom of God, and how we may receive and enjoy its benefits?’ Samson brought the benefits of the kingdom to Israel by beginning to save them from their enemies; in this he was a type of Jesus.

2. Samson—a type of the Leader provided by God

Israel did not ask for a saviour, but the Lord sent him, as he did Jesus. Our first parents did not seek God; he sought them, and promised them a saviour (Gen 3:15) and with it gave them forgiveness of sins, life and coats of skins, representing the righteousness by which God justifies us and which we receive by faith in Jesus.

By nature we don’t seek God either; we are like lost sheep. Jesus comes looking for us (Jn 10:3); ‘no one seeks God’ (Rom 3:11) - but while we were sinners Christ died for us; when we were dead in our transgressions and sins God made us alive together with Christ; we did not choose Jesus—he chose us (Jn 15:16, cf. Rej. 97).

Of the judges, only Samson has a nativity story—and it reminds us of Jesus. It was a supernatural birth; Manoah’s wife was barren, a picture of the inability of the people to save themselves, and the angel of the Lord told her she would bear a son. An angel also told Mary she would give birth to a miraculously conceived son.

Both Manoah and his wife and Mary responded with faith; how wonderful, that in the dark days of the judges there were still some who kept the faith and trusted God—as it was when Jesus was born, and as it is today. Let us resolve to be among them, no matter how dark it might become, or how much it might cost!

Samson has to be holy, a Nazirite (Num 6:1-8), his separation to the Lord signified by letting his hair grow uncut. Samson was to be a Nazirite from his mother’s womb—and so she was not to drink wine, or eat anything unclean.

3. Samson—certain that God has spoken

This must be important, for it is repeated three times (vs. 4-5, 7, 13-14). Also, it was announced by the Angel of the Lord; when he went up in the flame of the sacrifice Manoah and his wife knew he was the Lord.

Samson was holy, a Nazirite, because he was a type of the Saviour to come, who would really be holy (Lk 1:35). Samson was holy because he was to serve the Lord, as Israel was, and as we are (1 Pet 2:9). Israel’s faults and our faults are seen in him.

Clearly, the way they were told was to deeply impress Manoah and his wife; not drinking wine would be a nuisance, as would raising Samson without cutting his hair—think of the teasing from the other children! They needed to be certain that God had spoken, for this, and to teach Samson, so he could triumph by faith.

To have faith we must know that God has spoken; we do, for the ‘angel’ who spoke to them has spoke to us (Heb 1:2). We know this by the testimony of the scriptures to his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit; so we confidently believe the Bible against the unbelief of our age.

My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. What encouragement and warning might we draw from the judgeships between Jephthah and Samson and what happened afterwards? (Jdgs 12:8-15)
2. In the wider context of the book of Judges what do we expect in the way Samson’s story begins that is missing? What does this tell us about the attitude of the Israelites to the Philistines? How has much of Christian life in the West been like this? How did it change in Judges? How is it changing for us?
3. Read and compare Judges chapter 13 and Luke 1:26-37; what similarities do you find? What differences do you see? What do you think these might mean?
4. Reflect on Israel in Judges; how are Manoah and his wife an encouragement? Who else are like them? (cf. Ruth 1:1). How might we be like them?
5. What did it mean for Samson to be a Nazirite? (cf. Numbers 6:1-8). Why was it necessary? (cf. 1 Peter 2:9).
6. Why did the angel of the Lord tell Manoah and his wife about the child they were to have, and how she was not to drink wine or eat unclean food, and how his hair was not to be cut? How is this relevant to us? (see Heb 1:2)