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DHW

BIBLE STUDY CLASS

LESSON 11

JUDGES 13 & 14

INTRODUCTION

Chapters 13 to 16 record the last judge of Israel in the book of Judges. All together twelve judges were presented in the book, beginning with Othniel, followed by Ehud, and then Shamgar. The fourth was Deborah, the illustrious female judge, followed by Gideon, then Tola and Jair. The eighth judge was Jephthah and after him were three judges, namely, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon. They were the eleven judges. The twelfth was Samson, the last and final judge. Many people, not just Christians only, know about the life of Samson—a man who had supernatural strength but who was cunningly betrayed by Delilah to the enemy. From the Biblical standpoint, Samson's life was a failure. But it was significant in that the failures of his life are instructive. There are many great men and women in the history of mankind who think that they are too big and important to be bound by standards of morality. Samson's life, therefore, would specially be instructive for such people.

The children of Israel had sinned against the LORD by intermarrying which was forbidden by

the Law of Moses. And although they professed allegiance to the LORD God, they turned to worship the gods of the Canaanites, thereby incurring the anger of the LORD. When they were oppressed they cried to the LORD who raised a deliverer and judge to free them from their oppressors. Then they enjoyed a period of peace but not for long because they gradually forgot God and went back to their sinful ways. This had been the cycle during the period of the eleven judges. By now the children of Israel had hardened their hearts. When we hear the Word of God, we either receive and obey God or harden our hearts in disbelief and disobedience. There is no such thing as a static or neutral response—we either obey or disobey. And each time when we disobey, the heart gets a little more hardened, until it is beyond any help. However, in this study of the life of Samson, there is one reassuring truth about the LORD God. He gives the individual freedom to make his own choices, be they right or wrong, wise or foolish. But God in His sovereign will works out to accomplish His plan and purpose despite man's wrong doings. God will always keep His covenant. This we will learn in the life of Samson.

The following is a suggested outline of the two chapters:

- 1) The Promise of the Angel of the LORD to Manoah and His Wife (13:1-14)
- 2) Samson Is Born (13:15-25)

- 3) Samson Desires to Marry a Philistine Woman (14:1-9)
- 4) Samson Loses the Wager to His Philistine Guests (14:10-20).

STUDY THE WORD

The Angel of the LORD Appears to Manoah's Wife

The previous judge mentioned in chapter 12 is Abdon, the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite who judged Israel for eight years (12:14, 15). And when the previous judge passed away, the children of Israel once again backslid and sinned before the LORD. In this general opening statement, it is mentioned that the LORD let the Philistines subjugate Israel for forty years. Then we are introduced to Manoah and his wife, who lived in the town of Zorah situated in a low-lying country of Judah which was given to the Danites. Zorah was just outside the boundary line which separated the Philistine territory and that of Israel. The couple had no children because Manoah's wife was barren. In other words they could never have children.

The Angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah's wife and promised her that although she was unable to bear a child, she would now conceive and bear a son (13:3). The Angel solemnly directed her not to drink wine and eat any unclean food. He said further that the son she would bear must not have his hair on his head shaved at all for he should be a Nazarite unto God from the womb (the

moment when she conceived). The Angel of the LORD also revealed the mission of her son: to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. The circumstance regarding the promise of this child is like that of Jesus Christ. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced to her that she would miraculously conceive and bear a son whose name would be called Jesus for He would save His people. One could imagine how happy Manoah's wife would be after hearing this wonderful news because in those days for a Hebrew woman to be barren and unable to bear children was a deplorable and disgraceful condition. Naturally, she quickly broke the wonderful news to her husband. She said that "a man of God" came to her. She was not sure whether the "man of God" was a prophet but she could remember and describe that appearance of the Angel as one who was liken to an "angel of God" and which was very fearsome. She admitted that she did not ask the Angel for His name. She also shared exactly everything that the Angel declared to her. She said that their child would be a Nazarite from the womb to the day of his death (13::7).

Manoah prayed to the LORD pleading for the reappearance of the "man of God" to them so that they could be told what to do with the child that should be born. The LORD heard his prayer and the Angel of the LORD appeared a second time to Manoah's wife. She was then sitting in the field, but her husband was not with her. She hastily ran and "shewed" her husband

that the angel of God had come again to her. It seems that Manoah could also be in another part of the field and probably within sight of the Angel of the LORD for his wife to show him. Manoah wasted no time and “went after his wife” who was probably a distant away when she was coming towards him to inform him of the presence of the Angel of the LORD. Manoah straightaway ascertained from the Angel of the LORD. He was the man who spoke to his wife previously. Then Manoah asked Him how they as parents should bring up the child (13:12). The Angel of the LORD said to him that he should do exactly what He had previously spoken to his wife. The Angel of the LORD did not add anything new to what He had spoken to his wife. However, the Angel of the LORD repeated His solemn charge to them and to faithfully do all that He had commanded them to do. We observe that Manoah and his wife were a godly couple. When the majority of the children Israel, probably also those in positions of leadership and influence, went whoring after other Canaanite gods and covetously craving for more material gains, Manoah and his wife had remained faithful to the LORD. Soon to become parents, they showed natural concern for their son whom the LORD was about to give them. They also had a hunger to obey God’s Word. They wanted to raise and nurture the child to become the way which the LORD wanted them to do. Indeed, this genuinely God-fearing couple was a fit vessel for God’s use. Their son

would be a Nazarite (Hebrew word “nazir” means “to set apart”, “to separate”), and that was the vow they had to keep. Either a man or a woman could take the vow of a Nazarite, one who was specially separated (consecrated) unto the LORD. It was only for a period of time and when he had fulfilled his vow, he would be released of the vow with the prescribed ceremony before the LORD. In the case of Samson, his Nazarite vow was for life and not for a short period of time. Besides taking the vow as a voluntary act and that its purpose was complete dedication to the LORD, there were three other visible things which he must fulfil. Firstly, he must abstain from the fruit of the vine; no wine, grapes, or raisins. Not that it was sinful but that these things were signs of luxurious living, so during this time of his vow he was to live a simple life. Secondly, he must not cut his hair. This was obviously a public sign of his vow. It was again not wrong for people to have a hair cut. But in the case of a Nazarite, this uncut hair was a clear sign of his vow to God. Thirdly, he was not allowed to come into contact with a dead person or animal. This was the sign of preeminence of God in his life, and such contacts would make him unfit for service in the tabernacle (see Numbers 6:1-21).

Samson Is Born

Manoah wanted to extend his hospitality to the Angel of the LORD, and requested Him to stay while he made ready a kid, meaning to have a feast. The Angel of the LORD replied

that if he detained Him, He would not eat a meal with him. Moreover, if he intended to offer a burnt offering, then he must offer it to the LORD. At this point, Manoah still did not know that He was the Angel of the LORD. This shows that the Angel of the LORD appeared in the likeness of man, nothing unusually special about His appearance. He was passed off as an ordinary man. Then Manoah asked for His name. A name, to the Hebrews, would indicate the character of the person. The Angel of the LORD replied that His name was “secret” which should read “wonderful” (in the original Hebrew). The Angel used the same name which was prophetically given by Isaiah 9:6 – “Wonderful, Counsellor.” He is Wonderful! Manoah then took the kid and offered it as a burnt offering on the altar of rock. When the flame of the burnt offering blew upwards to heaven, the Angel of the LORD did a amazing feat by ascending up to heaven in the midst of the flame of the altar (13:20).

As Manoah and his wife were looking at the action of the Angel of the LORD, they were overwhelmed by the majesty and awesomeness of the phenomenon. They both bowed down face downwards to the ground in worship. After this meeting with them, the Angel of the LORD did not appear to them again. The conversation between Manoah and his wife was interesting. Manoah said to his wife that they would surely die because they had seen God (13:20). But his wife responded and said that if the LORD had the desire to kill them,

He would not have received the burnt offerings, and He would not have shown them all these things, neither would He share with them everything that had been said. Manoah’s wife displayed that she was the more sensible and intelligent between the two of them.

No less than nine months later, Manoah’s wife gave birth to a son, as promised. They named the child “Samson” which means “like the sun.” He grew up and the parents made sure that the Nazarite vow was observed according to what the Angel of the LORD had ordered them. The LORD blessed Samson. The Spirit of the LORD began to stir his heart as a young man in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.¹ Samson can be considered as a very unusual child. He was born by God’s miraculous intervention; his birth was announced by the Angel of the LORD Himself,² and the purpose of his life was announced. He occupied a very special place in God’s plan and

¹ **Eshtaol** narrow pass or recess, a town (Jos 15:33) in the low country, the Shephelah of Judah. It was allotted to the tribe of Dan (Jos 19:41) and was one of their strongholds. Here Samson spent his boyhood, and first began to show his mighty strength; and here he was buried in the burying-place of Manoah his father (Jud 13:25 16:31 18:2,8,11,12) It is identified with the modern Yeshua, on a hill 2 miles east of Zorah. – (Easton Bible Dictionary, s.v. *Eshtaol*).

² The Angel of the LORD was the Second Person of the Godhead, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate appearances. The fact that He ascended and accepted the burnt offerings, which might only be made to God, revealed that He is God.

purposes. His life would be a promising one.

Samson Desires to Marry a Philistine Woman

Samson grew up to be a strong and healthy man for his parents had brought him up in the fear of the LORD. One day he went to Timnath, a town on the northern border of Judah, which was occupied by the Philistines. There he saw a Philistine woman whom he desired to marry. He told his parents to get the woman for him. Marriage in those days was done in this way. The parents of either party would approach each other to make arrangements for the marriage if everything was agreed upon. Surely this request of Samson broke the hearts of Manoah and his wife. They asked Samson: “Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take wife of the uncircumcised Philistine?” Samson ignored his parents’ counsel and insisted that they got her for him because “she pleaseth me well”—in Hebrew, “she was right in his own eyes” (v.3). The phrase “a woman in Timnath of the daughter of the Philistines” which is mentioned three times (14:1-3) is fateful. Samson wanted the woman because she was right in his own eyes. But his choice was a blatant violation of the commandment of God.³

³ Deuteronomy 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites,

The divine commentary is that the parents did not know that “that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines” 14:4). This does not mean that the LORD approve of Samson’s choice. The divine commentary must be understood that the LORD will also work out His plan and purpose even by using the ungodly desires of fallen men. Samson was responsible for his bad choice and blatant disobedience to God’s commandment. But that did not mean that he was freed from the judgment of God. He would have to face the consequences of his own sinful acts.

So, he went down, and his parents also went to Timnath. On the way, he was attacked by a lion, and he killed the lion with his bare hands tearing it in two as if it were a young goat. This supernatural strength that he exhibited came from the Spirit of the LORD. It seemed that Samson took his super strength for granted. He kept this incident secret from his parents. In Timnath he talked to the woman. What transpired is not revealed but once again it is noted that “she pleased Samson well” (14:7). The next trip to Timnath was to take the woman but he stopped to look at the carcass of the lion and found a

and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; 2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, *and* utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: 3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

swarm of bees and honey in it.⁴ He helped himself to the honey and when he came to his parents, he treated the parents with the honey but he kept from them the source of the honey. In this regard, Samson broke one of his Nazarite vows by touching a dead body—the carcass of the lion.

Samson Loses the Wager to His Philistine Guests

So, Manoah went down to meet with the woman, and obviously all marriage arrangements were made. Samson celebrated by having a “feast” which was customary with the young men there. This feast was a “drinking banquet” which could last for a week, after which he would claim his bride and consummate the union. One more time, Samson broke another Nazarite vow in which he was not to consume any alcohol. Samson was probably perceived as a dangerous man, and thirty Philistine “companions” were brought to him to guard him. However, he made a wager with these men. He gave them a riddle in which they must solve it in seven days. If they succeeded he would give them thirty “change of garments.” These garments were fine and expensive linen garments which were worn outside. But if they failed, they must give him the same number of garments. The riddle was (paraphrasing): “from the eater comes

out something to eat, and from the strong comes out something sweet.” It was not easy for these men as can be seen that after three days they could not solve the riddle. They were terribly frustrated. Right from the start, they had planned to get the answer to the riddle by coaxing Samson’s wife. When they could not find the answer themselves, they enticed Samson’s wife to get her husband to divulge the answer to the riddle. If she refused they threatened to burn her and also her father’s house. The right thing for her to do was to tell Samson the dilemma she was in. He would have protected her. Instead she tried to wheedle the answer out of Samson through continued nagging and emotional blackmail. She wept before Samson throughout the feast nagging him for the answer. Samson eventually succumbed. On the seventh day he told her the answer which she conveyed to the thirty men. They got the answer, but Samson knew that they had worked on his wife—“if ye had not plowed on my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle” (14:18). The Spirit of the LORD came upon him again and this was a clear indication of endowing him with supernatural strength. He went down to Ashkelon a town occupied by the Philistines where he slew thirty Philistine men and took their garments as payment of the wager. Samson was enraged and returned home to his father’s house. But Samson’s wife was given to the man who was his best man in the wedding.

⁴ “Apparently the lion had almost bypassed the stages of decay and being petrified and went straight to being petrified. Again, God was at work.” (Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges, Ruth, Gen. ed. Max Anders, author W. Gary Phillips, p.221).

PRACTICAL VALUE

A very comforting truth about God's dealing with His people is borne out at this juncture of Israel's history. The children of Israel had been doing evil before the LORD. When they were oppressed by their neighbours, they would cry to the LORD in repentance. The LORD then raised a judge who would deliver them and during the life of the judge there was peace and prosperity in the country. This pattern was repeated beginning with the judgeship of Othniel until that of Gideon. In the case of Jephthah, the LORD did not choose the deliverer. The people chose him to deliver them from their oppressors. The LORD condescended and gave them the victory through Jephthah. This time it was different. The children of Israel were so hardened in their sinful ways that they seemed not to care. While professing to be the chosen children of LORD God, in practice they worshipped Baalim believing that these Canaanite gods would bless their land, sheep and cattle. They were satisfied and comfortable and did not mind the oppression of the Philistines. But the LORD God would never forsake His covenant promise to Abraham, and no one, not even His chosen nation might thwart his plan for His chosen people. The children of Israel did not cry to God as before, nor did they repent of their sins. So the LORD God acted sovereignly and supernaturally intervened to deliver His people. He raised Samson. God has made a covenant with us in Christ Jesus, and

when we persistently sin against Him, He will act either to remove us so that no further damage will happen or to restore us on His terms.

Manoah and his wife were the remnant few who remained faithful to the LORD God. This is an encouraging thing because when many of His professing people go astray He will keep a faithful remnant for His glory and sake. Today much of main stream Christianity has fallen away from the faith once delivered unto the saints. Let all of us examine ourselves and remain ever faithful to God to fear and do His will.

Samson was a spiritual bum. He had great potential but he despised it. He became self-assertive and ignored the vows which his parents must have informed and educated him. At this stage he broke two things of the Nazarite vow by contacting with a dead body and by indulging in a drinking party. In addition, he disobeyed God by stubbornly demanding to marry a Philistine woman. It is therefore possible that a born-again Christian can behave likewise. God would bless him if he lives a life of obedience to His commandments and doing His will. But he may choose to despise the blessings of God and choose rather to enjoy for the moment the things of the world. The consequences of such a lifestyle would be very sad indeed. We shall see more of it in the next two chapters. AMEN