

### The Book of Judges

#### Lesson 20 - Chapter 13

We just got started on studying the next judge cycle in the Book of Judges, the story of the immature and petulant strongman Samson. I gave you a bit of an overview of what to expect and drew a parallel between Paul's lament in Romans 7 that even with the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in him, his old nature at times still triumphed over the new one made available to him by his trust in Yeshua as Savior.

While Paul, it seems, succeeded to be obedient to the Ruach HaKodesh in larger proportion to his failures (after submitting to Christ) the opposite was true for Samson. Samson seemed to have only brief moments of spiritual triumphs interspersed among long periods fleshly failures.

We'll read Judges 13 in a moment, but first I'd like to remind you of the time frame we're dealing with during Samson's escapades. Samson judged from around 1070 B.C. to 1050 B.C. This is a virtual overlap with the time that Samuel lived and Eli was the High Priest during some of that time (or perhaps a couple of years earlier). Another judge by the name of Abdon also judged during that period. This is good example of how the Shophetim, the Judges of the Lord, operated in different parts of Canaan, affecting only a few (or even a single) tribe at any given time. In other words while Samson was operating within the tribe of Dan, Samuel tended to operate within the southern tribal coalition with Judah at it's head, and Abdon tended to operate within the northern Israelite tribes and to a degree the tribes on the east side of the Jordan River. So even though the book of Samuel follows the book of Judges in the bible, in reality Samson and Samuel operated generally concurrently.

Let's read Judges 13.

#### **READ JUDGES CHAPTER 13 all**

Although we get the typical announcement that precedes each new judge cycle (that the people of Israel AGAIN did what was evil in Yehoveh's eyes), and we are told (as usual) that the Lord punished his errant people by turning them over to an oppressor (in this case the Philistines), what we do NOT get is any record of the people crying out to the Lord for deliverance. I covered that issue lightly last week when I explained that the so-called oppression of the Philistines was rather easily accepted by Israel, at least by the tribe of Dan. The Philistines were a technologically and culturally advanced society; even though it was their military might that allowed them to conquer so many areas all along the Mediterranean Sea coast.

Even so the Philistines were not barbarians and their culture was generally attractive to those

who they ruled over. Thus the Israelite tribe of Dan seemed to be somewhat apathetic about their condition; it apparently bothered God more than it did them because He raised up Samson to deal with the Philistines on their behalf.

But we also need to understand the condition of the tribe of Dan at this time. Dan never firmly held any of the territory it was allotted. Rather, in fairly short order after their arrival in Canaan, families within Dan started moving out into the more secure territories of some of the other Israelite tribes. A large contingent of Dan also pulled up stakes and migrated north to the Lebanon border region and established a new center of residence up there in what they considered better conditions. Up north they established the cult city of Dan, went far astray in their worship, and in time were also forced out of that area and scattered (large remnants of Dan have been discovered in Africa and many have made aliyah to Israel). You can visit the ruins of the northern city of Dan today, and it is quite a beautiful and fascinating place.

Obviously not everyone from Dan wanted to take such drastic action as to migrate northward, and so they stayed behind in a number of small enclaves in the central part of Canaan. It is self-evident that people who chose to stay were more willing than those who moved north to submit to the governance of the Philistines and (to varying degrees) were willing to assimilate into Philistine society. This is the case with Samson and the Danites who he lived among.

While each judge was different from the others in their personal natures and duties, Samson was perhaps the most unique. For one thing his birth was foretold and announced by the Angel of the Lord and that is what the first few verses of Judges 13 details. Why was Samson singled out for such an honor? We don't really ever learn why; however the Rabbis reckoned that such a thing must have meant that Samson was on a very high spiritual plane. This leads to the second unique aspect of Samson; he never raised an army nor led his tribe in an uprising against their oppressors. Instead we see Samson generally operate as a one-man gang in a manner that could never possibly topple the Philistines from power; rather he was just a constant royal pain in the neck for God's enemy. And even this, on the surface, stemmed from Samson's utter lack of self-control and warped moral compass.

This would be a good time to mention that Samson is seen very differently in Rabbinical Judaism than in Christian academic circles. And in this case it's the Rabbis that are really out there in their viewpoint of Samson. As we proceed we're going to see Samson do outrageous things, far from anything we could even remotely label as godly, and although gentiles know of Samson mostly from the exciting children's stories about him, Christians have always recognized Samson's faults.. Yet the Rabbis manufactured amazing and fanciful excuses for each one of these dastardly behaviors, even taking it so far as to glorify them. The reason for their unwavering praise of Samson is the exceptional circumstance of his birth that reminds one of Isaac (his mother, Sarah, was barren and beyond child bearing years and a divine presence came to announce Isaac's birth). So the Rabbis simply couldn't accept at face value that Samson could be the product of a miraculous birth and still be a self-centered incorrigible lout. It's a lot like the way Christian leaders took the plain case of Jephthah, his rash vow and his daughter who was killed because of it, and decided that since Jephthah was called a bible hero in the book of Hebrews that he just couldn't have done what the bible plainly says he did, and what the witnesses said he did, and thus they came up with a creative way around the

problem.

Verse 2 explains that there was a man named **Manoach** of the tribe of Dan, who had a wife who was barren. When the bible says a woman was barren it means that she was biologically incapable of bearing children or she had married so late in life that she had passed her child-bearing years. Generally the fault always fell on the woman, even though in some cases it was bound to be that her husband was biologically unable to impregnate her.

One day, says verse 3, the Angel of the Lord appeared to **Manoach's** wife and told her that from her dead womb she would birth a son. We need to brush up on our Hebrew a bit because the identity of this being that appeared to the woman is at issue for a while in this part of the story. The narrator says that it was the **Malach YHWH** that appeared to this unnamed woman; **malach** means "angel" (or more correctly it means "messenger") and **YHWH** is the formal name of God. So as readers we are told immediately that the Angel of God came to her. But as we'll see she didn't know WHO this person or being was.

Yet the being was sufficiently awesome in appearance that **Manoach's** wife knew immediately that this was a person of importance, so she paid fearfully close attention to the instructions that followed. And the being says that beginning immediately the woman is not drink wine or any kind of alcohol and she's not to eat anything unclean. And this is because the son she will bear will be a **nazir**, a Nazarite, right from the day of his birth. Further his hair is never to be cut (another requirement of one who takes on the vow of a Nazarite). Thus we have the rare biblical occurrence of what is called a Nazarite for Life. That is Samson would be born a Nazarite and remain so until he died. A **nazir** usually took a temporary vow, and once the terms of the vow were fulfilled he or she was no longer a Nazarite nor had to operate under the law of the Nazarite as found in the Torah (Numbers 6). In general all **nazirim** had 3 negative commandments they had to follow: 1) they were not to eat or drink any grape product (this includes wine, or old wine meaning much stronger drink or even fresh grapes or grape juice), 2) they were never to touch a dead body, and 3) they were not to cut their hair.

However Tradition tended (as it always does) to expand upon these general requirements. For instance, while only grape based products are intended as a prohibition to a **nazir**, Tradition made it that all alcohol was prohibited. Thus the standard grain based alcoholic beverages were also banned for a Nazarite. While the words of Numbers 6 say that a **nazir** it not to touch a dead **nephesh** (a human corpse) Tradition expanded it to include dead animals (usually the unclean kind otherwise eating meat would not have been possible).

Then the mysterious visitor says something else of great importance: this son will BEGIN to rescue Israel from the Philistines. Remember, the "Israel" that this being was referring to specifically was the tribe of Dan (even though the Philistines also were troubling the southern tribes led by Judah), not all of Israel in general. But the key word is "begin". In other words Samson would be the catalyst to start the process of removing the Philistine influence from Israel but he wouldn't finish the job. And some of that had to do with the fact that we discussed earlier that the tribe of Dan wasn't particularly concerned with their condition, so it's not like Samson would have much support in his efforts.

The woman turns and runs home to her husband and breathlessly tells him what just transpired. And she says to him that “a man of God” came to her and that his face was fearsome like an angel of God.

When she said “a man of God” that is exactly what she meant; to her this being was a human male for she said in Hebrew **ish elohim** (**ish** means man, and **elohim** is a general name for a god, any god). The term **ish elohim** is how a prophet was called in those days, thus she saw this being as but a human prophet, not a spirit being. Even so this man was very unusual because his face, she says, was fearsome like an angel of God. Actually what she said was that his **mar’eh** was like a **malach elohim**. **Mar’eh** is referring to his overall appearance, not just his facial features, and **malach elohim** means messenger of a god, therefore in our modern thinking it means a regular heavenly angel. She’s saying that although he was a human he had the aura of a heavenly angel. She was confused and unsure just what or who had spoken to her.

As a good Hebrew wife ought to do, she repeated to her husband what this man said to her. And she explains that she didn’t think to ask where he was from nor did she inquire of his name. Now we’ve talked about this word “name” before, but it’s a real issue for gentiles especially because we tend to get the wrong idea of what “name” indicated in bible times (Old and New Testament times). The Hebrew word is **shem**, and the term has little to do with a mere means of an individual’s identification like it does to us today. Rather in those days a **shem** told of that person’s reputation and characteristics. Often times it spoke of their physical and/or spiritual heritage. A name helped to explain the essence of that person, his or her attributes, what they stood for and even what their providential purpose in life was. If the bearer of a particular **shem**, name, was a god that meant that the name assigned to this particular god or goddess indicated what particular sphere of influence (like fertility or weather or war) that they ruled over. If you were a believer in the gods, that was a VERY important issue because it was essential to know which god to pray to depending on your current pertinent need or want. If the name, **shem**, belonged to a human it spoke of his or her innate nature, abilities, and divinely ordained destiny or even some important linkage to the past.

Thus when in the New Testament we are instructed to act in Jesus’ name, or pray in Yeshua’s name, it isn’t really meaning to “say” His name. In other words, if Jesus had been given the name Steve, we aren’t actually being instructed to say out loud or under our breath, “in the name of Steve” I pray. Rather we are to behave in Yeshua’s attributes and character; we are to pray to the Father in Yeshua’s manner, in his attitude, and in realization of the status that Yeshua has bought for us, and the unity we now have with Him, with all credit given to Him. I’m not at all saying it is wrong for us to end our prayers and supplications with the phrase, “ In Jesus’ name, Amen”. I’m saying that this phrase is NOT what was at all intended; rather ancient gentiles who (rather innocently) didn’t understand Hebrew culture took the word “name”, and therefore the instruction to pray in Messiah’s name, as Greek culture and now modern culture takes it: simply as a means of identifying one person from another.

So the woman says that she didn’t find out this man’s characteristics and essence; this, **Manoach** knew, was an important omission of information that needed to be remedied.

Thus in verse 8 we find **Manoach** praying to Yehoveh to send this prophet back to them so they could be taught what was to be done with the child (who would be Samson).

Some commentators say that **Manoach** lacked faith or was being impertinent to ask God such a thing. I'm not so sure about that. In his mind **Manoach** needed to know what the prophet's attributes (**shem**) were, in addition to getting some direct teaching on just what they ought to do with this coming boy-child. Certainly what was in **Manoach's** thoughts was hardly pure as he, too, was caught up in some aspects of Philistine spiritual beliefs; but his motive was to be obedient to the will of the God of Israel.

Let's back up a minute. Why was **Manoach's** wife, Samson's mother, to abstain from grapes, alcohol, and any unclean food simply because her child was to be a **nazir**? The mother was NOT going to be a **nazir**, only Samson (and, by the way, it was completely allowable that women became Nazarites). The answer is as elegant as it is simple: the unborn baby is fully united with its mother. Truly a mother and the babe within her womb are of one flesh. Whatever that mother drinks, the baby drinks; whatever she eats also sustains the child. Whatever that mother does affects the new life within her. Many of the mother's characteristics will pass along to her child. Some balk at the idea that spiritual characteristics or personality traits will pass as well, but I have no problem with that notion. In fact we have here a good case to show that even as an embryo the baby was a Nazarite and thus the mother was expected to behave as a Nazarite so that the **nazir** characteristics would pass through.

It is no wonder that women usually feel as they do about the new life that grows within them; something a man will never be able to experience. The protective instinct, the often greater importance that unborn child carries in her mind even over her own well being. It's also no wonder that when some misguided woman makes the terrible mistake of aborting her child that usually soon after, and sometimes for the rest of her life, there will be an emptiness in her soul that she cannot escape. For indeed a part of her has been cut-off.

Well God (recognizing, I think, **Manoach's** good and proper motives for wanting to speak with this being again) obliges and the mysterious man shows up a second time. Again he came to the unnamed wife of **Manoach** and so she races to fetch her husband. **Manoach** comes and greets him and asks if he is the same person who came to his wife earlier; the man answers in the affirmative. So Manoach asks the question that was foremost in his mind: what are we to do with this child? Is there a special way we are to raise him? And the man answers by basically repeating what he told the woman in his first visit; emphasizing that they should do everything that was ordered be done.

Essentially the man of God (who was actually the Angel of the Lord) didn't answer **Manoach's** question. The primary concern for the moment was that the mother obeys all the rules he had given to her. But also contained within the non-answer is a pattern that we probably all recognize in our experiences with God, but aren't particularly thrilled about: we'll often get the divine assignment, and at times be told the ultimate purpose, but what happens in between is left a mystery. We have no idea what the next step is, how some of the steps will come about, whether it will be a smooth or bumpy road, whether it will be full of pain or full of joy, or if the journey from assignment to completion of the task will be of short or long duration. We don't

even know if we'll live to see the culmination of it all. Rather we are to walk in faith, relying on the Lord in every step. We move forward, or backward, or pause on a need-to-know basis. And my personal experience has been that rarely does God think that I need to know!

Manoach realizing that he's received the full oracle from the prophet offers standard Middle Eastern hospitality and requests that the man stay with them for a while and be honored with a special meal. Of course this spirit being that only appears to be a human being says that even if he does stay, he won't eat the food. Rather if **Manoach** insists on giving this gift of food it should be offered to the one deserving of praise, and as a burnt offering. Right about now **Manoach** was beginning to sense that something unusual was happening here and things weren't really as they appeared. In fact the being says that the food offering must be offered to YHWH. Now THIS is really starting to concern **Manoach** so he asks the question that his wife had failed to ask earlier: what is your name (what is your **shem**)? Why did he want to know this being's name? So that when everything comes to pass he can honor him; but the honor that **Manoach** had in mind was to honor a human prophet, not the God of Israel.

So God says: "Why are you asking my name, it is...." and then most bibles will say "it is wonderful". Now I'm going to quibble with that translation a little bit. The word that is often translated as "wonderful" is **pille**. And remember that the context to the answer of "wonderful" is "what is your **shem**, what is your name". What is your character, your attributes, your essence and the answer to that is **pille**. **Pille** more means incomprehensible, extraordinary, beyond one's ability to understand. Thus the KJV says his name is "secret", which gets closer to the idea. Another version says it is "unknowable", which kind of heads us off in yet another direction but is better than "wonderful". **Pille** is a Hebrew word understood by the sages to define a DIVINE attribute. In our modern common way of speaking, to say "wonderful" about something is rather usual and can be applied to just about anything. For us the word "wonderful" more means, really nice, or way above average, or it's a statement of joy or even a compliment. It is usual for a man to say to his date or his wife, "you look wonderful". And we certainly don't mean that the woman looks incomprehensible. Or we'll say that the newest model of BMW is a wonderful car; and we certainly don't mean that it is beyond our ability to understand.

Therefore the whole intention of this short conversation between **Manoach** and the Angel of the Lord is that the **Malach YHVH** is essentially saying, what good will it do you to know my characteristics and attributes because they are utterly incomprehensible to a mere mortal. God is saying that I could tell you, but you have no ability to grasp it. Therefore, think of My attributes as being beyond your ability to even understand them. And when in the New Testament we see Yeshua being called "wonderful" we need to take it in the same vein. We should not think that we're being told that He is just a peach of a guy, one of the best and greatest men ever to walk this planet. Rather it is that His true attributes are divine and thus are barely, if at all, within the realm of human ability to even imagine.

So **Manoach** offers the food he provided "on the rock" as a sacrifice to YHWH. Now interestingly, back up in verse 16 the Angel of the Lord told **Manoach** that he should offer the food as a burnt offering, and in Hebrew the word used is '**Olah**. I don't want to go off on a tangent but some things need to be said several times, in several different ways in order for it

to penetrate. Even though the Hebrew word 'Olah is invariably translated as "burnt offering", that's really just an attempt to translate a word that really has no direct English (or any other language for that matter) translation. EVERY kind of sacrifice offered to God on an altar is a burnt offering (an altar is where whatever is put on it is burned up); but not all burnt offerings are an '**Olah**. There are several very specific types of burnt offerings, designed for different purposes, to be used on different occasions, and employing animals at times and plants at other times. An '**Olah** is really just one of several kinds of burnt offerings. The best phrase we currently have to translate '**Olah** is probably "near offering", with the idea being that the purpose of an '**Olah** is to assuage God such that we can come near to Him.

One of the things we learned back in Leviticus was that invariably when an '**Olah** was offered on the altar it was to be accompanied by a **Minchah**. An '**Olah** was always to be a clean animal of some kind, and a **Minchah** was to be produce of some kind. So as this story unravels we see that by divine providence the two things **Manoach** brought as food for the being that he thought was but a human prophet was a goat (a clean and acceptable animal for sacrifice) and some produce (likely grain). Thus the food was completely suitable (as defined by The Law) for use in the '**Olah** and **Minchah** sacrificial offerings.

The '**Olah** and **Minchah** were laid on a rock, upon which a fire had been started, and some brief ritual occurred as the offerings burned. Now a question that ought to enter our minds is: how is this act proper and legal? God had long ago decreed that there was to be but one place for sacrificing, that it had to be officiated by a Levite Priest, and it had to happen on the Bronze Altar that was ordained by the Lord. People were NOT to build their own private altars and themselves officiate over the sacrifice as the pagans often did. But the reality is that the Priesthood was practically defunct by now. The Priests in Samson's time held only limited power and operated only by the leave of the various Israelite tribes. The people paid little attention to them, and even less to the regulations of the Torah. At the end of the book of Judges and then on into Samuel we're going to get a pretty good picture of how fallen and foreign the Priesthood of Israel had become since those golden days of Joshua.

Yet somehow **Manoach's** offering was acceptable to the Lord. With **Manoach** and his wife standing there looking on, suddenly this being melded into the flames coming from the burning sacrifice and shot upwards into the sky and vanished. Well that did it: they both fell on their faces in fear and awe. They both finally grasped just who this being was, and it was neither a man nor an angel; it was YHWH. How do we know that this being was actually God? Because it directly says so in verse 22. How do we know that God was appearing as the Angel of the Lord, because it says that directly as well.

So brethren we don't have to wonder or debate who or what the Angel of the Lord is, do we? He is YHVH. He is God the Father in one particular manifestation. And while I know it riles up many of my listeners I maintain that absolutely nothing in Holy Scripture, New or Old Testaments, makes the Angel of the Lord out to be a pre-incarnate Yeshua. The ONLY reason that this supposition has gained such popularity is because of the doctrine of the Trinity that presupposes that God consists of 3 and only 3 possible manifestations, and this is because of one verse in the New Testament located in the Book of Matthew:

***CJB Matthew 28:19 Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age."***

Thus the effect of the establishment of this doctrine is that any and all possible manifestations of God MUST be one the 3; so then the only possible question for any divine manifestation under any circumstance or any description is: "which one of the 3 is it?" While I absolutely accept the underlying concept of the Trinity, that God is a compound unity; that He is one, echad, yet He manifests Himself in more than one way (among which is Yeshua of Nazareth, Our Savior) I think we have several examples in the Bible of divine appearances that don't easily fit the mold of Son, or Holy Spirit, or Father.

The Angel of the Lord is one of some unknown number of manifestations of God, as ***Manoach*** found out. And the thought of God appearing before him in any form made ***Manoach*** determine that his life was over. After all it was a Torah principle that no man can see God and live. But fortunately his wife was able to retain some sense of calm and reassured her trembling husband that the Lord would not have CHOSEN to appear to them, told them what He was going to do, resurrected her dead womb and prepared it for life, came back at ***Manoach's*** sincere request, showed His acceptance of their altar and their '***Olah*** and ***Minchah*** sacrifices by literally inhabiting the flames of the altar fire, only to turn around and kill them.

Well, about nine months later the woman had her son and they named him ***Shimshon***. There is a lot of disagreement over what the name means, and frankly it varies so much it's not worth going into because it all lies in the realm of speculation and opinion.

The child grew up, and YHWH kept His word and blessed the child. The writer of Judges is saying that the child developed physically (grew up) and spiritually (YHWH blessed him).

Then in verse 25 Samson (***Shimshon's***) calling came. The initiative began with God, and of course the vehicle was the Holy Spirit. As we'll see more and more as we study the Samson saga, if left up to Samson he probably would have never picked up on God's agenda and purposes, which was to war against the Philistines. And this falls in line with what we discussed at the beginning in that neither would the Israelites have risen up against the Philistines but rather simply sought to co-exist and live as comfortably as possible under the circumstances

So because of both Israel's and Shimshon's passivity it became necessary for God to act and shake-up the situation.

I don't know how after almost 6 months of our study in the Book of Judges that anyone could fail to see the parallel between that era and our present era. The increasing spiritual blindness and darkness; the steady slide of God's people (gentile and Jew) into tolerance of \*and desire for) the secular; the setting aside of God's Word in favor of popular religious doctrines; the mixing (syncretism) of the pure and holy ways as instructed by the Lord with the impure and



common ways of the world to create an easier life for ourselves; and the denial that it is even happening. All of this and more is common to both eras.

One of the things that is often said is that while Samson was to BEGIN the end of the influence of the Philistines, it was King David who finally accomplished it. I believe we need to rethink that in that recent events have given us new information. In reality it now appears that King David only put the oppression of the Philistines on hold; because today the revival of the Philistines, at least in name, has once again begun to harass and influence Israel. Palestinians is but a Greek word meaning Philistines. The Philistines are back in basically the same area they were (Gaza) at the time of Samson, even if they aren't necessary direct descendants. They have made themselves into a new Philistine nation, are creating havoc, and Israel is responding essentially the same way they did in the time of the Judges: through appeasement and seeking a means to co-exist with them.

If the current executive administration of Israel had it's way, it would quickly bow to the Bush Administration plan of dividing Israel into two nations: Palestine (Philistia) and Israel. Jerusalem would be split and the east side becomes the capital city of the Philistines. But there are many Israeli government officials and citizens of Israel (especially those who live in the settlement areas of Judea and Samaria) who are the Samson's of today. They cannot organize an army and fight a winning battle over the Palestinians and their allies. Yet by means of their constant and unauthorized disruption of the official peace process, their intractable insistence that they will NOT leave their homes to the Palestinians, and all other manner of civil disobedience derails what years ago could have become a capitulation to the enemy and division of the Holy Lands in exchange for a short termed and false peace. In the days of the Judges Samson's actions was only a stall tactic until God anointed his king. As we'll soon see it was God that led Samson to disrupt the cozy relationship between the Philistines and the Israelites, and if we are indeed living in a replay of the era of the Judges, then we can expect the same thing. Meaning that it is the Lord who is keeping things riled up between the modern Philistines and Israel.

Just as it would take God's king (David) to eventually subdue the Philistines for a time, it will also take God's next king to subdue them completely and finally in our era: King Yeshua, Jesus Christ. We'll start Judges 14 next week.