

Series: God is the Hero of this Story: A Study Through Judges
Judges 13 – How the Hero Delivers / Patrick Murphy / 6.25.23

Reading: Judges 13:15-18 ¹⁵ “Please stay here,” Manoah told him, “and we will prepare a young goat for you.” ¹⁶ The Angel of the LORD said to him, “If I stay, I won’t eat your food. But if you want to prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.” (Manoah did not know he was the Angel of the LORD.) ¹⁷ Then Manoah said to him, “What is your name, so that we may honor you when your words come true?” ¹⁸ “Why do you ask my name,” the Angel of the LORD asked him, “since it is beyond understanding?”

Introduce Richard and Jayne Spencer for a missionary spotlight.

Introduction: I am weary of Judges. Staring this book is easy; continuing to drudge through it is hard. Every time we encounter encouraging signs of deliverance, they are quickly followed by wickedness, compromise, and death. Judges are like a stain on a nice white shirt.

Our story today is not discouraging but sets the stage for discouragement later. We are looking at Samson’s nativity story and his calling as a judge of Israel. Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah were called in adulthood. Samson is called before conception. This story, primarily focusing on Samson’s parents, supremely displays God is the hero who saves. He uses human instruments, sure, but he is the hero who saves. How does he do that?

Main Point: God works on his people’s behalf even if they don’t ask for it, want it, or recognize it.

I want to give you 4 questions before we open the text. These are the application questions that we will return to later.

- Is God delivering me from sin’s oppression that I have grown comfortable with?
- Do I pray without worrying if God will listen?
- Do I recognize God and his work?
- Are the fear of God and the amazement of God present in me?

Consider these questions as we progress through the passage. The work of God’s salvation then still happens today. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

1. God delivers his people from comfortable oppression.

Judges 13:1 The Israelites again did what was evil in the LORD's sight, so the LORD handed them over to the Philistines forty years.

We have reached the anti-climax for the People of God. At the same time, we have the most straightforward depiction of God's heroic acts. The cycles in Judges are more of a downward spiral. Apostasy begets judgment, judgment leads to a cry for deliverance and cries lead to a delivering Judge. Samson's cycle is different. We are 200 years removed from the time of Joshua. The people of God are pagan, or what we have been calling the Caananization of Israel. Yet until this point, the oppression of foreign people always led Israel to cry out for deliverance. The Samson cycle has no such cries, only acceptance.

Israel is comfortable with their oppressors. The phrase "did what was evil" is the proclamation they worshiped the Baals and Asherahs. They engage in self-serving idol worship because they want to. The righteousness of God has truly been abandoned. Despite the lack of any cries for deliverance, God still delivers them from oppression because he is faithful. So, God's primary motivation to rescue his people does not come from their actions or desires but from his character and nature. He is a God who saves.

What are his means of deliverance? Brining a child into the world! Let's keep reading:

² There was a certain man from Zorah, from the family of Dan, whose name was Manoah; his wife was unable to conceive and had no children. ³ The Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Although you are unable to conceive and have no children, you will conceive and give birth to a son. ⁴ Now please be careful not to drink wine or beer, or to eat anything unclean; ⁵ for indeed, you will conceive and give birth to a son. You must never cut his hair, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth, and he will begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines."

⁶ Then the woman went and told her husband, "A man of God came to me. He looked like the awe-inspiring Angel of God. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. ⁷ He said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Therefore, do not drink wine or beer, and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth until the day of his death.' "

This week, I brought my bias to the text, which needed the commenter's correction. My simple reading made me perceive Manoah as a genuinely stand-up guy because I want to believe in the best of people. The author has another intention based on his construction of Verse 2. It is apparent in the Hebrew, so let me add the inflection to help. There was a *CERTAIN* man... Manoah is being compared to his nameless wife and the Angel of the Lord in this story. His name means resting place, but as we will see, his disposition is anything but at rest.

The family has a significant trial. The wife is barren, unable to conceive and give birth to children. Barrenness was believed to be a judgment from God concerning sin. Yet God intervenes in this family's pain by delivering a promise. You will have a son, and he will begin delivering God's people from Philistine oppression. Compare this to the nation as a whole. They are under judgement because of their sin, and God is stepping in to rescue them.

You will have a son who will be a Nazarite to God the angel says. Nazarites have taken a "nazir" or vow to be "one set apart and consecrated to God." We can read about the Nazarite vow in Numbers 6:1-8. Let me give you the three stipulations of the vow. 1) Abstain from any fermented drink (wine, beer, spirits) 2) Hair was to be uncut during the period of the vow 3) Can not encounter a dead body. The Nazarite vow does not stipulate any condition for abstaining from unclean food. The Angel stating this requirement reveals the people's abandonment of the basic dietary laws. The people of God were no longer practicing or familiar with God's ways.

We have a nation accepting the rule of their foreign oppressors. A couple without children and a knowledge of the Lord. No one is asking for God to deliver them from national or personal trials. God begins rescuing his people from a situation they cannot perceive as oppression.

Is God any different today? No, we don't have philistine oppressors and we have been set free in Christ from the oppression of sin and death. If we continue in sin we are oppressed by the consequences of sin. God is delivering us from sin's oppression, even if we are comfortable with our sin.

As Manoah's wife experienced, God will break into our life through one way or another to rescue us. How else does the Lord save.

2. God listens to prayer.

⁸ Manoah prayed to the LORD and said, “Please, Lord, let the man of God you sent come again to us and teach us what we should do for the boy who will be born.”

⁹ God listened to Manoah, and the Angel of God came again to the woman. She was sitting in the field, and her husband, Manoah, was not with her. ¹⁰ The woman ran quickly to her husband and told him, “The man who came to me the other day has just come back!”

Prayer is good, but Manoah’s prayer is convoluted. The author’s introduction of him already sets the stage for an intended interpretation of his actions. His prayer is more self-serving than genuine. Why? The Angel of God visited his wife and not him. He asks for another visitation to be taught what to do. Notice the word “us” in his prayer. As if his wife needs it too. But his wife does not require the instruction, nor does he. He wants the honor of being visited and instructed the way his wife was. Therefore, it is a miraculous wonder that we read, “God listened.”

God listened to self-serving prayer. God is not beholden to Manoah, but his grace abounds to give him what he does not deserve. I want to warn us not to harbor new testament snobbery towards Manoah. We know and believe God hears our prayers, but that certainly was uncommon during the time of the judges. We probably take the miracle verse 9 conveys for granted, saying, “of course,” he hears his prayer. Remember, Manoah is not righteous, he does not have a regenerate heart, and his prayer is more self-serving than humble. That fact that he prayed at all is encouraging. It is a miracle God listened.

If we cut him some slack. He is unsure of the message his wife gave him. So he seeks confirmation of what he has heard. Similar to a previous Judge we’ve studied, Gideon. Asking God a couple of time for confirmation. Do you see the majesty of God in this interaction? God’s ear is towards his people even when his people’s heart is not aligned with his. That is a miracle.

Before Jesus gave his disciples the “Lord’s Prayer,” the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Prayer was a mystery to them and it may still be today. God allows prayer to influence him. (We can debate how much or in what way he is influenced, but God depicts prayer in the bible as a way to influence him.) You and I have little to no influence over the circumstance that surround our life but God does. And he directed us to influence him through prayer concerning the needs of our life. It is a miracle that we probably take for granted that God hears our prayers.

God’s next activity is to

3. God patiently removes blindness.

Our author repetitiously conveys Manoah and his wife's attempts to grasp the messenger's identity. We are informed that the messenger is the Angel of the Lord. A title is given to any human-like appearance of God in the Old Testament. We call these instances Theophanies or Christophanies. Let's read

¹¹ So Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he asked, "Are you the man who spoke to my wife?" "I am," he said.

¹² Then Manoah asked, "When your words come true, what will be the boy's responsibilities and work?"

¹³ The Angel of the LORD answered Manoah, "Your wife needs to do everything I told her. ¹⁴ She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine or drink wine or beer. And she must not eat anything unclean. Your wife must do everything I have commanded her."

¹⁵ "Please stay here," Manoah told him, "and we will prepare a young goat for you."

¹⁶ The Angel of the LORD said to him, "If I stay, I won't eat your food. But if you want to prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD." (Manoah did not know he was the Angel of the LORD.)

¹⁷ Then Manoah said to him, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your words come true?"

¹⁸ "Why do you ask my name," the Angel of the LORD asked him, "since it is beyond understanding?"

Annoyingly to Manoah, the messenger appears to his wife again instead of him. Still, the ensuing dialog conveys a bit of a power struggle. Manoah tries to ascertain favor and manipulate the visitor. First, he offers the messenger a meal. The messenger, whose identity we know to be God, always has the upper hand over Manoah. God will not dine with them. Why? Offering a meal was a sign of hospitality and honor and an attempt at fellowship and benefit. For God, a sacrifice must precede fellowship. Manoah misses the point of God's direction. The second attempt is the most blatant attempt by Manoah for power. He requests the messenger's name. To know a name was to know about the person and how to persuade them. No so genuine is he? God's retort is piercing. Seeing through his ploy, God confronts his request, "Why do you want to know my name." "It is beyond understanding."

Manoah and his wife are blind to whom they are with. In verse 6, they say he is a Man of God, possibly a prophet. An awe-inspiring angel, maybe, but not God. Why is God continuing to remain around such ignorance? He is a patient God who draws his people out of blind ignorance to recognize the glory that surrounds them. Let me repeat it, he is a patient God. Amen

Are we any different? How often do we ask, "Where is God?" Pondering whether he is close or far away from us. What leads a mind to consider such thoughts? Like Manoah and his wife, inexperience with God leads to unfamiliarity when his presence or work breaks into our life.

When God says his name is beyond understanding, he uses the same Hebrew word (אֵלֵּי pel-ee) that David uses in Psalm 139. Describing God's knowledge and presence. Psalm 139:5-8

⁵ You have encircled me;
you have placed your hand on me.
⁶ This wondrous knowledge is beyond me.
It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.

⁷ Where can I go to escape your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

Our recognition of God must be illuminated by God. David is gawping with righteous frustration. He wishes to know God but can not ascend to God's level. What is his comfort? He knows God's presence and is familiar with God because he has been seeking God most of his life. Look how the apostle James describes a disciple's recognition of God. James 4:7-8 "7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Pursue God and his righteousness, and our blindness will turn to sight. God is patiently undertaking this process with us as he did with Manoah and his wife. He is patiently removing our blindness.

Gideon recognized the Angel of the Lord but Manoah and his wife did not. This may indicate how far the people of God have slipped into idolatry and apostasy. They can no longer recognize God; therefore, they do not cry out for him because they do not know him. (Maybe add this?)

What happens with the blindness is removed?

4. God instills fear and amazement.

¹⁹ Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered them on a rock to the LORD, who did something miraculous while Manoah and his wife were watching. ²⁰ When the flame went up from the altar to the sky, the Angel of the LORD went up in its flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell facedown on the ground. ²¹ The Angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the Angel of the LORD.

²² “We’re certainly going to die,” he said to his wife, “because we have seen God!”

²³ But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had intended to kill us, he wouldn’t have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering from us, and he would not have shown us all these things or spoken to us like this.”

Once a person recognizes the Lord, every reaction is similar. Fear and amazement. The Angel of the Lord is caught up in the fire and sacrifice and ascends to heaven. Add that to the list of biblical events I would love to witness. At that moment, their blindness is removed, and they fall prostrate on the ground in worship. Manoah and his wife each interpret the events differently. We are to admire and emulate the faith of the nameless woman and learn from the ignorance of the named man.

The husband has an ignorant or irrational fear. He believes death will come swiftly for seeing God. He is guilty of seeing but not beholding the significance of their visitation. Like Jephthah, his pride continues to cloud his reason. Blinded by selfish concern, he only expects death. Thank God for his wife. She delivers good news leading to assurance and peace. Remember, Manoah’s name means resting place, but his wife is the one who finds rest. Her meditation on the wonderful event has led to rational fear. She falls down in worship but also knows they are God’s instruments to deliver his people out of Philistine oppression by giving birth to a son.

The fear God instills in us is not irrational but rational. We fear the mighty hand of the king of all creation. The rightful ruler whose creation has rebelled and rightfully deserves judgment. This is what Isaiah saw when he was ushered before the Glory of God in Isaiah chapter 6. “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, from a people of unclean lips.” And just like Isaiah 6, God enters our world to amaze us with his mercy and grace. His great love for us has provided a way for rational fear and astonishing wonder to produce faith, hope, and love in us toward him.

The prophet Zephaniah writes 3:17, “The LORD your God is among you, a warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in his love. He will delight in you with singing.” This both terrifies me and excites me. God is in our midst, and his loving compassion leads him to celebrate us. It lead us to worship him. The psalmist states the tension accurately, “we rejoice with trembling.” Why would this hero care for us, or even the people of Israel who have turned their back on him?

5. God is faithful.

²⁴ So the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the LORD blessed him. ²⁵ Then the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in the Camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

God chose to bring a judge to Israel in the form of a child. Samson's calling is unlike the other judges because he has no life other than his devotion to liberating Israel from the Philistines. He was blessed, and the Spirit of the Lord was on him. This is where the good things really end. Samson is a tragedy of opportunity. All the ideal circumstances are set for him, but they are squandered. Even his name, Samson, which means "little sun" or "sun boy," is probably a connection to the local sun temple just miles from where they live. Despite all the faults and failures, God begins delivering his people.

God is faithful to his covenant promises to be Israel's God and deliverer. Just like Israel's current apostasy didn't stop God from acting, so too Samson's failures won't dissuade God from saving. Today's chapter is an ideal picture of the Old Testament deliverance by God's grace alone and received by faith alone. He saves us because he is faithful even when we are not.

He was not just the hero then; he remains the hero today.

Gospel invitation

- Is God delivering me from sin's oppression that I have grown comfortable with?
- Do I pray without worrying if God will listen?
- Do I recognize God and his work?
- Are the fear of God and the amazement of God present in me?

Transition to Communion

COMMUNION

Brothers and sisters, we come now to the holy table of the Lord as Jesus instructed in saying, “do this in remembrance of me.”

Coming to this table, we are to remember Christ and all he has done for us:

- He was sent into the world miraculously
- He was sent to deliver his people from sin’s oppression and death
- He would die to bring about that deliverance.
- He patiently removed the blindness of his disciples so they could carry on his message to the ends of the world.

Though the invitation of this meal is to all who believe, we cannot approach this table frivolously. Jesus, Himself dismissed Judas from the table before instituting the ordinance. The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians that some in their community were sick and had died because they partook in an unworthy manner. It is good and right to self-reflect and see if we have, by our sin and selfishness, divided the body of Christ. If we have, let us turn to confession, repentance, and reconciliation with our brothers and sisters before we partake in the meal.

As the symbol of our unity as the family of God, we hold on to the communion elements until all have received them, and then we take them together. If you need a gluten-free option, please hold your hand up, and an usher will bring one around to you.

Let’s pray.