

Judges 13

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[0 : 00] It's always interesting, isn't it, to see how people are remembered after they die. The first paragraph of any obituary is very revealing, isn't it? Sometimes they are incredibly thrilling.

This is the first paragraph of a biographical entry about someone I came across in the last couple of weeks. So Adrian de Biante was a British soldier of Belgian and Irish descent.

He served in the Boer War, the First World War and the Second World War. He was shot in the face, head, stomach, ankle, leg, hip and ear. He survived the plane crash, tunneled out of a prisoner of war camp, bit off his own fingers when a doctor refused to amputate them.

He later wrote that, frankly, I enjoyed the war when describing his service in the First World War. Quite an amazing first paragraph of your biography is next.

Sometimes, though, the first thing that you think about someone in their biography or in their obituary are very tragic. If you know anything about British politics in the 20th century, you'll know the name John Profumer.

[1 : 08] He's a cabinet minister who got involved in a scandal involving an affair in Soviet skies, Soviet spies, pretty sordid event, really. Had to resign it in disgrace.

It robbed the government of the time. It's the one thing that, I guess, comes into anyone's mind when you hear his name. And when he died seven years ago, there were discussions all over, news programmes again, about that particular scandal involving him.

However, the interesting thing about John Profumo is that after the scandal, he worked as a volunteer, cleaning toilets, finally working as a fundraiser for a poverty and welfare charity in the East End of London for 40 years of his life, he did that.

Yet actually, that's not what anyone thinks of when you hear his name. Well, I guess, for most of us, when we hear the name Samson, we tend to either think of him the way people think of Sir Adrian, or the way people normally think of John Profumo.

Either we think of his story as being one of exciting successes, we think of his superhuman strength, we think of him killing lions, destroying Philistines, all we think of is tragic moral failure.

[2 : 19] Samson and, how would you fill in that line? You'd fill it in with Delilah, wouldn't you? Yet although there's truth in both of those summaries of Samson's life, he's both a hero, and there's also aspects of great failure in his life, God, in his word, actually provides us with the lens through which we should see Samson's life.

And it's here, right at the start of his life. In fact, before his birth, the writer of Judges tells us of the significance of Samson. So just look down at verse 5 of Judges 13, what does the angel say about Samson before even he is born?

The razor will come on his head, the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. Can't be clearer.

Samson's life purpose is to be used by God as a saviour figure, to begin to rescue God's people from their enemies. In all that we see in the story of Samson, we cannot miss this.

God is at work in and through Samson. And if you like, the Lord is the key player in the story of Samson. And it's important to remember that as we look at this chapter, which is really the story of his birth.

[3 : 38] It's quite an unusual chapter in the book of Judges. We don't usually get the account of the birth of Judges in this book. But we don't just have it because Samson is kind of an important figure.

It's not just there like the opening few chapters of a biography of a very famous person are there in that book. As you read that book, you're told, aren't you, about that famous person's parents and their upbringing.

No. But what we've got here in chapter 13 is we are told more, I think, about what the Lord is doing than Samson himself. We learn the beginnings of what the Lord is doing as he begins to rescue Israel from their enemies through this man, Samson.

So what do we learn about the Lord? What do we learn about his salvation in this chapter? Well, there are three things I just want us to point out, and I just want to point out to us as we look through this chapter. Firstly, I want us to notice that the birth of Samson, the story of Samson, is part of God's sovereign salvation.

It's part of God's sovereign salvation. Samson's birth is recorded, I think, in such a way as to highlight the fact that the Lord is in control.

[4 : 52] He is reigning. He is ruling. He is in charge. He is the one doing the rescuing. No one else can rescue in Judges. No one else can rescue in the whole of the Bible.

In fact, no one else even wants to be rescued. That's what we see in this chapter. We need to remember, don't we, where we are in the Bible as we begin the life of Samson.

The people of God have entered the promised land. You remember the story of Exodus and Joshua, the Lord now allows them out of the wilderness into the promised land. But the beginning of Judges X starts on a bit of a downer.

The people of God aren't obedient. They don't get rid of all the enemies who are still in the promised land as the Lord told them to. And throughout the book of the Judges, which is actually an incredibly fascinating book as you read it, there is a cycle of events which occurs throughout this book.

Israel's sin. God's people sin. They forget the Lord. They move, you know, they totally forget who they are and they start worshipping other gods.

[5 : 59] And as a result, the Lord disciplines them. They are oppressed by other people. They are oppressed by the nations they were commanded to get rid of from the promised land. And then they cry out to the Lord.

And the Lord wonderfully sends a judge to come and deliver them. And it seems at the start of Judges 13, we have that cycle beginning again. So just look down at the first verse.

People again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years. It's a familiar story, isn't it? They are oppressed.

They are oppressed now by the Philistines. There are people similar to the Israelites. They've just arrived in Canaan. They want to conquer it as well as God's people do. We've heard about the Philistines briefly so far in Judges.

But it's really from Judges 13 on that they take centre stage as the great enemies of God's people. But what's missing in this first verse?

[6 : 58] You've got this cycle. What's missing from the cycle? Notice no one's crying out for deliverance at this point, are they? There's no prayer. There's no agony. There's no running to the Lord.

And that says something about the state of God's people. That says something about how far Israel have fallen at this point. Well, we can perhaps make some assumptions about why this is.

Might be that initially life was not too hard under the Philistines. But even so, it's quite an omission, isn't it? This was not how it should be. No one cared that they were God's people, but they were under a kind of yoke of slavery.

In fact, we'll see through Judges that quite the reverse was true. When we get to chapter 15, we see Samson facing opposition from the Israelites when he wants to fight against the Philistines. Israelites turn to him and say, do you understand? It's just that. It's just how it is. We serve the Philistines. In Stockholm, in Sweden in 1973, there was a large bank robbery.

[8 : 09] Several bank employees there were held hostage at a bank vault for five days. And during that robbery, something strange seemed to happen. It was noticed that the victims were becoming emotionally attached to their captains.

They rejected assistance from the outside world. And once they were released, they even defended those who'd taken them hostage after they were freed.

And that was where the term Stockholm Syndrome was first used. It was first used in the news broadcasts about the case by criminologists and psychiatrists. And it's been used ever since, really, to describe this strange state of emotional attachment of a victim to those who are holding them captive.

And you kind of see Israel in this kind of state at this point of judgment. And perhaps we look at it and we think we're just surprised. We kind of think, what are you doing?

You are God's people. And yet you're oppressed by the Philistines and you don't care. You don't cry out. In fact, you just think that's how life is. That's actually quite revealing, isn't it?

[9 : 19] Actually, here, Israel, at their lowest point, are really just a picture of humanity. What are we as human beings? We're created, aren't we, to have a loving relationship with our Creator.

Created to rule the world under Him. And yet, in rebellion against God, taken captive, in bondage, to that rebellion, in bondage now, to our own desires, in bondage to Satan even.

And more than that, we're actually left to ourselves we're not bothered. We just think, left to ourselves, well that's just how things are. That's just human nature. Jesus, in John's Gospel, makes that very clear to the crowds as it is around.

The crowds kind of take offence at what Jesus is saying to them about sin. And they cry out, we've never been slaves of anyone. But Jesus says, truly I say to you, everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin.

Israel here is just a picture of the human race. In bondage, but don't recognise the bondage. It's recognised the bondage as just normality. It's just how life is. But you see, the wonderful thing about the opening of this chapter is it is not true to say that no one cares about this bondage.

[10 : 37] Actually, what we see, and why I wanted to look at these chapters, which are incredibly encouraging, even though they appear to be initially very negative, is that the Lord cares. That's why this chapter is such a wonderful one.

The Lord is acting to bring a deliverer into the world. The Lord is bringing his sovereign salvation to his people, even though no one is asking for it.

And that explains why he acts the way he does. We're introduced, aren't we, in verses 2 and 3, to a man, to Manoah, from Zorah, a small little like town. We're introduced to his wife.

His wife even appears to be so insignificant that she's not named. She's lived with the pain and shame of infertility all her life.

She's far worse than even today. Far worse in a culture where children were seen as a sign of God's blessing. You can only imagine, can't you, the monthly anticipation and disappointment they went through.

[11 : 38] They can't have kids. And yet what happens? The angel of the Lord comes and promises a child to them. And not just any child. A child is going to be a saviour. Not just to her shame and pain, but a saviour for Israel.

Now this is an incredibly unusual moment in Judges. So far the Lord has taken a judge from people who are already around. He's grown up men and women to rescue Israel. Now what does he do at this point where no one is crying out for a saviour?

Well he creates the saviour from scratch. From even the most difficult circumstance. It has underlined so many times, isn't it? You think it's cruel, don't you, that the angel of the Lord says to this woman, you can't have children.

You want to think, yeah I know, it's the pain of my life. And yet it has underlined the difficulty of this situation. I think we see something clearly of how God works when we see this.

Israel are at our lowest point. The point that most clearly parallels us at human race. Our lowest point as we are dead in sin. What does God do?

[12 : 50] Well he brings his saviour here into the world. To prove, to show that he is the one who can deal with this in a way that no one else can. It's no accident that this story so clearly parallels the way the true saviour, the real saviour, the saviour that Samson is pointing to.

How he comes into the world. Jesus Christ doesn't, he comes into the world in a way that can only be explained by God. Not just born of someone who can't have children, but born of someone who has never done anything to produce children.

Born of a virgin. Underlines, doesn't it, that our salvation is all of God's sovereign action. This is wonderfully humbling, isn't it, when we think about it.

Our saviour comes, not because we asked him to, but because the Lord sovereignly chooses to say, out of his love, and out of his will.

It should raise praise and joy in us as we just stop and think about that. Of course it says something about the way the Lord still acts. It should encourage us.

[14:01] Now, don't misunderstand me here as we think about this. We should pray, the Lord chooses to answer our prayers. But the wonderful thing we see in Judges 13 is that he is not dependent on our prayers.

One writer, as I read on this chapter, said, if the Lord's help were given only when we pray for it, only when we ask for it, only when we have sense enough to seek it, what paupers and orphans we would be.

For all's help were given only when we pray for it, only when we ask for it, only when we have sense enough to seek it, what paupers and orphans would we be. As we think, what hope is there for those who have never heard the gospel?

What hope is there for our friends and family? Well, ultimately the hope is in the Lord himself. He's a saving God, a sovereign saving God. Now, we should pray, prayer is vitally important for us, but actually God is sovereign, and God works above and beyond.

And the story of Samson is part of God's sovereign salvation, underlining that in just a wonderful way. The story of Samson is part of God's sovereign salvation.

[15:15] Secondly, and this is a terrible title for a point, but I couldn't really think of how better to express it, but hopefully as I explain it, it will become clear. The story of Samson is part of God's representative salvation.

The story of Samson is part of God's representative salvation. What's God's answer to the problem? Well, the angel of the Lord doesn't he come to this woman in Zorah and promises her that she shall bear a son.

But actually, this woman's role doesn't end there. She's given some very important commands as to how to raise this son, aren't we? She says, therefore, verse 4, be careful, drink no wine or strong drink, eat nothing unclean, for behold, you'll conceive and bear a son, though raise will come upon his head, for the child will be a Nazarite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the Philistines.

Now, what is the point of Samson being a Nazarite? Well, all the points have these come up. They're repeated three times in this chapter. They're important, but it'd be a mistake to think this is just advice about health.

No alcohol, no eating soft cheeses for the pregnant woman. No, that's not the point. This saviour, Samson, is to be a Nazarite to God from the womb and beyond into the whole of his life.

[16:36] Who are the Nazarites? Well, we're told, actually, back in number 6, we're told that any Israelite can make a vow and separate himself to the Lord for a period of time. If you make that vow, there are special rules about how you should live.

You're to live kind of visibly, wholly, visibly set-apart lives. Now, in a way, you could say, actually, the Nazarites were no different to the rest of Israel.

Perhaps the rules were a little bit stricter. But the presence of people who'd made those kind of vows amongst Israel were actually to be a picture for everyone else of the people the whole of God's people were meant to be.

If you were in Israelite and you'd wandered about and you saw people who were Nazarites, and they'd be easy to spot because they had long hair, you would say, well, they are people who belong to God. And actually, that's just a picture of who I am as one of God's people.

But in a sense, a far deeper way, obeying him and trusting him. Perhaps for a period of time. Just picturing, representing who they should be.

[17:45] One from among them, but one being who they are meant to be as a constant reminder of the fact that the people have gone. God's saviour here, Samson, is to be that all that Israel were meant to be.

He's set apart for the Lord. Not in a sense, dramatically different. He is one of them. He is an Israelite. But he's to be holy, perfectly, as much as he can.

Still, obviously, a sinful human being. Reflecting the character of the Lord. In a way, showing up the sin of those around. Living the life that others should live.

How important this is, particularly in the life of the time of Judges, you can imagine in Judges 13, there's hardly anyone making this Nazarite van at this point. But through that, he is this one who's kind of representing to Israel who they should be.

He's going to be a kind of saviour. He is a saviour who is representative. When I was growing up, the most famous English footballer was Gary Lineker. He was great.

[18:50] He scored the most goals in the 1986 World Cup. The first World Cup I particularly remember. He scored hat-tricks in important matches. He played fairly. Never getting booked.

In a way, you could say, he embodied everything a footballer should be. And for England fans, that was particularly great. Because he was on our team. He represented us. He represented all the footballers should be.

He won victories. For us. And that's kind of like what Samson was to be like. And that's important for two reasons as we read through the story of Samson.

Firstly, I mean, it gives us a very clicky for understanding Samson and understanding these chapters. These chapters are a little bit strange as you read through them. They're strange because actually they are quite personal.

The victories Samson has aren't actually enormous national victories. They are quite relatively small personal victories.

[19:52] For all Samson's greatness, as the angel says in verse 4, he's only going to begin to save Israel. He's not going to complete the job. The Philistines are going to be on the scene until David totally has success over them.

Many years to come. But you see, as we watch Samson, we should see something else. Samson is meant to personify God's people.

He is meant to represent Israel. He is meant to be all that they were meant to be. That's the point of the Nazarites. And I think that's part of the point of Samson himself.

Now there's obviously a big question about Samson and his birth. Will he do this perfectly? Will he do this in a good way? Will we be able to watch Samson and say, this is what God's people are meant to be like?

Or will perhaps he fail? And actually, rather than being what Israel were meant to be like, will he become what Israel actually were like? Set apart for the Lord, but totally disregarding that.

[20:58] And if that's the case, is there any hope? Is there any hope for Israel? Is there any hope for Samson? I wonder if you're going to be here over the summer, keep that question in your mind as you read these chapters.

The second thing you'll see, again here, Samson points beyond himself. Just think about it. A saviour who is like those he saves. A saviour who is representing all that they should be.

A saviour who represents and wins the victory. Well, Jesus Christ is here, isn't he? A holy man, the true Israel who obeyed his father's will perfectly.

We need a saviour. We've got a saviour who is like us, who has done what we fail to do, who has done what we can't do. Jesus God has given us a holy saviour who's perfectly obeyed where we failed.

A saviour who represents us. So the story of Samson is part of God's sovereign salvation and part of God's representative salvation. I know it's very hot in here, but I've got one point left, so do stick with me just for this last point.

[22:07] Thirdly and finally, notice, and this is really important, I just want us to go away with this ringing in our heads, the story of Samson is part of God's wonderful salvation.

part of God's wonderful salvation. Now you could just jump from the end of verse 7 to verse 24 and verse 25 and you would have the story of the birth of Samson.

The woman bore a son and his name is Samson and the spirit of the Lord comes on him. That's what we're told at the end of the chapter. It is a thrilling start to his life. There are 17 verses in between when we are told about Manoah and his wife and another visit from the angel of the Lord. And they seem to be a little bit disconnected to the birth. But actually they're not. In what happens here, the Lord is graciously showing who he is and his character to Manoah and his wife.

So they understand that the birth of their son is part of a far bigger picture. Now remember all of this is happening in the time of the judges. People aren't following the Lord. There's no reason to think that his family are any different to those around them.

[23:14] They haven't been crying out to the Lord either. Manoah's wife actually is painted very sympathetically in this chapter. She seems to be more faithful. She accepts what the angel has said to her.

She speaks wisely at the end of the chapter. She rushes, doesn't she, to tell her husband when she's had this amazing news. But notice what Manoah does. He asks the Lord for the angel to come again, doesn't he?

Verse 8. Why doesn't he trust that his wife has got the details right? Perhaps he's put out that the angel that hasn't come to him has headed the household.

God hears, verse 9, wonderfully, mercifully. The angel returns, but notice it's interesting, the angel returns to his wife. He doesn't return to Manoah. She has to go and get him.

And maybe all the angel does is repeat what he has already said. And once the angel has spoken, Manoah asks two things of the angel, doesn't he? And I think these two things show that Manoah has not got the enormity of all that's happened.

[24 : 21] He offers to cook the angel a meal and he asks for the angel's name. We think, well, what's so wrong with that? Surely that's just hospitality. Surely that's just politeness, particularly in that culture.

But you see, those questions reveal that this man has just not grasped the enormity of what has just happened. His gratitude just doesn't match the gift.

When someone pops around to do you a favour, it's right to invite them in for some food. When someone does you a favour, it's right to write a card back to them addressing their first name and thanking them.

But when the Lord turns up on your doorstep and brings salvation to you and your nation, well, a thank you and a hot meal just shows that you have not grasped what is going on when you stop and think about it.

You see, I think Manoah shows all that's wrong with God's people at this point. They've forgotten how awesome it is, how wonderful it is to know the Lord and to be his people.

[25 : 22] They've forgotten how wonderful it is to be rescued and saved, to not bear the punishment for their own sin, to have the Lord amongst them. And that's why the angel of the Lord does what he does next.

They are incredible verses, which I kind of feel preaching on, it's not going to do them justice. The angel of the Lord refuses a meal, doesn't he? But then, kind of verse, kind of 15, 16, he asks, doesn't he, for a burnt offering to be given.

That offering, which as you read the start of Leviticus, is foundational for Israel, this animal which is burnt up for the Lord, kind of representing their sins which are dealt with.

And he refuses, doesn't he, to give his name. But he says, it is wonderful. And then look at what happens next, verse 19. Try and, kind of get this in your head as we read it.

So Manoah takes the young goat with the grain offering, to the burnt offering and the grain offering, offers it on the rock to the Lord, to the one who works wonders. And Manoah and his wife were watching.

[26 : 34] Now notice there how the Lord is described. He's offering, this offering to the Lord, that's the only person, that's the only one that you offer this offering to, is to the Lord. And the Lord is described as the one who works wonders.

Now how's the angel just described himself? This angel of the Lord, he has described himself as the one whose name is wonderful. We're meant to put those two things together. This angel is the Lord himself who has visited Manoah and his wife.

And then to underline this, Manoah and his wife see the most incredible sight. When the flame went up towards heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar.

You see what's going on? It's difficult to picture. It's been amazing to have been there. The angel of the Lord himself joins in with the flame. Do you see the symbolism?

This angel is no ordinary angel. This is the Lord himself. The Lord who can only have a relationship with his people through sacrifice.

[27 : 43] Manoah and his wife are part of God's people at a time when they have utterly taken this for granted. But now vividly they are reminded of this. This announcement of this baby to be born, well it's part of a greater picture isn't it?

It's part of this one great rescue, this wonderful salvation. That word is used a number of times in this passage and it's the word that's used in Exodus 15 as the people have just come through the Red Sea.

It's a word that's used in the Psalms as the Psalmist speaks of the incredible salvation that God's people experience in knowing God as their Saviour and Lord.

This announcement of this baby is part of this wonderful rescue. Manoah's wife Noah was part of God's people. Manoah should have tweaked who this angel was. He should have realised when the

angel of the Lord declared this great rescue in verse 4.

When the angel said who his name was, when his name was wonderful. And finally when he sees this amazing sight that part of this great sacrifice Manoah twigs doesn't he?

[28 : 51] But even then he doesn't get it quite right. He knows who he's been speaking to in verse 22. He says we shall surely die for we have seen God. And in a way that's kind of right.

When you see God you should die. It was right to him to fear. But it's his wife who needs to put it right theologically in terms of what has gone on. Look at verse 23.

Hear the wisdom. Hear how she understands what they have just seen. The Lord are meant to kill us. He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering in our hands.

Or shown us and announced to us these things. Manoah is terrified. He thinks he's under judgement because he's seen the Lord. And his wife says no Manoah you don't get it.

The Lord is wonderful. He is the one who we should fear. He is the one who if we see we will die in our sin. But actually the Lord has provided a wonderful salvation.

[29 : 52] We can stand before him in wonder and safety and security and confidence because he has provided this amazing salvation. And we are part of God's people and we are part of this.

This salvation which comes through sacrifice. this salvation that stamps the story of the birth of our child is going to fit into as the Lord protects and rescues our people.

That's the right response to the Lord's salvation. Manoah's wife has this right feeling of wonder doesn't she? That word that comes through again and again.

What is wonder? Well wonder I think is that kind of feeling of safe fear if you could put it like that. It is knowing that you are part of experiencing something great and awesome something completely out of your control but knowing actually that you are safe there.

Manoah was terrified. Manoah's wife has this feeling of wonder this feeling of kind of safe fear. It's that kind of feeling you get when you're practically on a safe building watching a thunderstorm.

[31 : 01] It's that feeling you get when you're practically with your mum and dad in the middle of a cloud in a new face. Things are utterly out of your control but you are safe. You are secure. Manoah wanted to bring the angel of the Lord under his control by providing food and being the head of the household and getting his name and all those kind of things but actually no he should have stepped back and be filled with wonder and all at what had happened.

And there's a hint isn't there in what Manoah and his wife sees which is even more wonderful and which should fill us with this wonder tonight. What happens when they see the offering?

The angel of the Lord goes up in the flame of the altar. In a sense the Lord himself becomes part of the burnt offering. The great rescue to come which the burnt offering itself was pointing forward to and which Samson himself is going to point forward to is the great rescue which happens when the Lord himself comes to earth and is the sacrifice for us.

When the Lord himself does become the sacrifice as he dies on the cross that is our way to know God. That is our way to know the security of knowing God.

That should fill us with wonder. That right mix of fear and confidence. That is what salvation should make us feel. Yes we should understand it. We should listen to how God explains to us what he has done in his word.

[32 : 30] But actually like Mano and his wife as they see this wonderful vision we should feel it. The Lord is a wonderful thing for us and all these mini rescues on the way as we will see in the story of Samson are leading to this great rescue.

The Lord is wonderful. I want to ask you tonight do you recognise that? Have you trusted the Lord? Have you recognised that your only hope before God is through the means that he has provided through himself through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ?

We looked at Psalm 91 as we began the service we sang of the security that comes in knowing the Lord. I wonder whether you've tasted that I wonder whether you've come to the Lord Jesus Christ tonight and if you have are you still filled with this incredible wonder of what the Lord has done for us?

Bow our heads. heads. go to the network! go to the network network