

Samson, I

Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Judges 13:1-24

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“Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, it might have been.”

You, perhaps have heard that phrase maybe said slightly differently, but expressing the same thought. Oh, my what could have been? And when we look back over our lives and we see occasion after occasion when we made choices or life brought circumstances that we couldn't control, and we think, oh, if I hadn't have done that or if this hadn't have happened or if these events hadn't occurred like they did, what might have been? And we think back over family and we think back over the loss of loved ones and we think even of our successes, sometimes shorter than we had hoped and planned. And the writer of that phrase, John Greenleaf Whittier spoke a great deal of truth when he said those are sad words, what might have been.

That phrase not only describes us in many respects, but it describes very clearly the children of Israel. The children of Israel had great promise, had a great future ahead of them that they could have enjoyed. But as we know from our studies over the last few weeks, this describes them, what could have been, what might have been except for the unbelief.

We began our study in Judges by looking at chapters one and chapter two and in those first chapters it told us what would come. It told us ahead of time what would describe the history of Israel over the coming years. “They will turn from me,” God said. “They will worship the gods of the nations that they should have destroyed. I will raise up judges for them who will grant them freedom and relief from their oppressors as long as the judge lives. But when that judge dies, they will go right back into sin even worse than the previous type.”

We have looked at a number of the judges thus far. And that pattern has held true with everyone of them. The judges brought them relief in victory from oppression only to have Israel fall back into the same old cycle again. Each time worse than the previous.

I would like us to look this morning at Judges chapter 13, because it gives us kind of a summary, the beginning of another cycle. And it summarizes it very succinctly in one verse. Judges 13 chapter one. Jephthah had just brought great victory followed by three

other judges who also brought victory and relief for the children of Israel. But then we read in verse 13, verse one it says:

“And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.”¹

A succinct summary of what has occurred many times previous to this one. But this one stands out because it comes before the last judge. No other judge will appear after the next one. So this really kind of sets the stage for Israel and what will come for many years of their history.

The sad part of it is that we today repeat the same error. We have not learned from history. We repeat the same sin and error and pattern that the children of Israel did. They had a great future ahead of them. God had promised the land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

“I will bring you into this land. I will give it to you. You will drive out the enemies and you will possess it and live in freedom.”

They spent 400 years as slaves in Egypt and God brought them out of them Egypt with a strong arm, it says. He brought them across the Red Sea. He brought them to Mount Sinai where he gave them his law and they promised to obey his law forever. He brought them through the wilderness providing food and protection for them time and time again. And he brought them to the Jordan River. Moses died and he provided another leader for them, Joshua. Joshua led them across the River Jordan into the Promised Land and they had victory upon victory upon victory upon victory because they trusted the Lord and they obeyed him. And as long as they trusted God and obeyed him, they lived in victory and they cast out the enemies before them. And they lived in the land as God had promised them.

Sadly the book of Judges describes the immediate time after the death of Joshua. Now immediately at his death they continued to follow God. When Joshua died they didn't have a leader. They went to God and they said, “What shall we do?” God gave them direction. The people of Judah will lead you against your enemies and you will have victory. And they did. They ran off a string of 10 victories in a row. But in the midst of those 20 victories, one stands out as only a partial victory, because they refused to fully believe God. They saw the enemies down in the valley that had chariots of iron and they refused to drive them out in faith and confidence upon God. That seemingly simple decision marked a turning point in the history of Israel. For after those 20 victories they immediately began to walk the way of the nations that occupied Israel.

They doubted God. They didn't trust him. They didn't believe him when he said, “When you see the chariots of iron I will drive them out.” He had promised that to Joshua. They didn't believe him. They doubted him, questioned him. And as their doubt developed in their lives they then began to believe a lie. And they began to believe that the gods of the

¹ Judges 13:1.

nations about them had greater strength and power than the God that they worshipped and they abandoned their God and adopted the gods of the land, the nations inhabiting the Promised Land. And as they began to intermingle and intermarry with the nations about them, they soon adopted their ways, worshipping their gods, abandoning the God who had brought them out of Egypt through the wilderness into the Promised Land.

This verse describes another occasion when they turned from God and pursued after the gods of the nations about them. It also describes for us what God said he would do if they would do that. He said, "If you fail to believe me and trust me and you intermarry and intermingle with the nations in the land, I will leave you and go to the side of your enemies and they will overtake you and they will oppress you and you will become their slaves and their servants."

They did evil in the sight of the Lord and he gave them over to the Philistines, exactly what he said he would do. He gave them over in judgment to the nations about them.

God wrote this record, inspired the writer, I believe Samuel, to write this record and to record it of the children of Israel. And he did so because he wanted the children of Israel to understand some things. He wanted them to understand the consequences of sin and disobedience and unbelief. God had told them what would happen. God had warned them ahead of time many times and in spite of all of the warnings, they rejected the warnings of God and followed after their own lusts, their own desires, their own wants and chose them above what God had planned for them. As a consequence they deteriorated. They declined. They became oppressed people just as God said, suffering in this instance under the hand of the Philistines.

The Philistines were a cruel people. And they suppressed them sorely for 40 years, because of their sin.

Not only did the nation decline, but you will notice, if you think back over as we have examined the judges, the first judge Othniel was a great judge. He had experienced God's victory in the Promised Land, experienced victory in conquering and driving out the enemies to secure the land for his family. He followed God as a judge. But with each successive judge the judges declined in character. And they declined along with the decline the nation and paralleled each other. Not only did the nation continue to decline worse and worse, but the judges declined worse and worse. God wanted the children of Israel to see graphically the depravity of the human heart. We don't like to think of ourselves that way, do we? We like to think of ourselves as pretty good and we come to that conclusion by comparing ourselves with someone else. I am not as bad as them. I am not as bad as my neighbor. Oh, you should see my neighbor. And, thus, we elevate ourselves in comparison and contrast to our neighbors, our family, our friends, those heathens that we read about in foreign lands. Oh, I am not that bad.

Oh, yes you are. Oh, yes you are, because the seeds that indwell those lives and cause them to walk in sin they reside in me and in you as well. And this description that we

have read and discussed here briefly about the children of Israel, it describes you and me as well. It describes us.

He wanted to point out to the children of Israel not only their depravity and their sin, but their desperate need of a Savior. They needed someone. They needed someone to come in and to help them, to protect them, to bring them victory and relief from the oppressors and suppression from sin. And God in his grace and mercy would bring up saviors. He would bring up judges to help them. He would elevate them sometimes even without their crying and asking for help. Sometimes he would just do it himself.

God proved himself faithful to the children of Israel even though they proved themselves unfaithful. God remained faithful to his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He promised them the land. And he brought along men to lead them so that they might enjoy the land that he promised.

God also proved in the process his great grace and mercy, because he didn't have to do that. He could have left them at the hands of the oppressors. He could have said, "You are getting what you deserve." Yeah, they were. They were getting what they deserved. They had disobeyed God. They had doubted him. They had left him for the gods of the nations and they got what they deserved. Yes, and God could have just left them that way. But that doesn't describe God. God is a God of grace and a God of mercy and he provided for them Saviors to come along and bring them, relief from their oppressors. He brought justice, not only to the nations in the land for their sin, but he also brought justice upon the children of Israel for their sin. God is a God of justice. He doesn't waive his justice at the hand of his mercy.

God also proved to them his great sovereignty. He controls all things. A few moments ago as we considered some of our family and friends that we wanted to remember in prayer, we remembered about God's sovereignty. Yes, God is in charge and God showed himself sovereign over all things, events, enemies, the nation of Israel, individuals. He showed himself sovereignly in control of all things.

He brought his record for them to read and to understand because it also describes God's plan of redemption. When you go back to the beginning and you go back to creation when God created all things he created it perfect, without fault, beautiful. And when he created man, Adam and Eve, when he created them he created them in his own image, in the image of God he created them, it says, morally upright, holy, righteous, able to understand and to know God, able to obey him. Able to fellowship with him, wanting to fellowship with him, enjoying their lives in God's perfect creation in the garden, in Eden.

That describes the norm. In our day and age we tend to think of what we experience as the norm. It is not. It is the abnormal. It is the irregular. The norm came when God created it, placed it into existence without fault. That is the norm. We live in the abnormal. And it came because of Adam and Eve, Adam and Eve who lived in the norm, yielded to the temptations placed upon their own lusts and desires and it describes Eve as looking at the fruit and saying, "Oh, it is beautiful. I will bet it tastes good." And you

know the serpent said that if I eat that fruit, I will become like God. I am going to eat that fruit.” And she ate of the fruit. When she did that, a seemingly simple thing, expressed in all of those actions and behind all of those actions you see doubt. You see unbelief. She didn't believe God. God said, “You can eat everything in the garden except that one fruit. Everything else you can eat and enjoy. I will fellowship with you. You will know me. I will know you.” She set it all aside, yielding to the lust of her own desires.

God had said, “If you do that, dying you will die.” As soon as she ate that fruit and Adam joined her, it says their eyes were opened. Immediately sin invaded their lives, which they had never known previously. Dying they died. The abilities that they enjoyed with God they lost. They no longer could understand God. They no longer desired to be with him. In fact, they ran and hid when they heard his voice in the garden. They couldn't fix it. They tried to cover themselves up with a mishmash of leaves from trees and that didn't even work when God came to them and said, “You know,” this is the Tom Hill paraphrase, “You look pathetic. You have tried to cover yourself up with fig leaves and it didn't work.”

Helpless, without hope.

Do you see the same pattern, the pattern that we describe Israel as following? It began in the garden with Adam and Eve. Underneath doubt, believing a lie, disobeying God, falling into sin, exact same pattern.

Well, it speaks to us today, too, because we follow that same pattern. We see it in the world and we quickly see that. We say, “Well, yes. You know, I can see that out in the world.” And we observe it and say, “Boy, you know, they question God. And they don't believe God. And look at how they worship idols and look how they curse God and they don't obey him.” And we can very quickly spot that and we very quickly identify it as sin against God. But, my dear friends, the sad fact remains that same pattern has invaded the lives of many people who call themselves Christians. Many people who call themselves believers follow the same pattern as described in that verse, number one of Judges 13. They do evil in the sight of God. They question him. They doubt him. They disobey him. They don't follow his law and his Word.

It has even come within the fellowship of what we would call the Church. And we find many people, true believers in Christ, within the Church following the same pattern. And you say, “Well, how can that be? How is that true?”

A few examples, perhaps, might help you to see what I want you to understand. In the children of Israel and their experience, what they did is they took a little of this god and a little of that god and a little of this one and a few parts of their own thoughts and desires and they manufactured a God that they worshipped. This is our God. The technical term for that is called syncretism. Syncretism simply means taking parts from other religions and putting them together to make a religion different from all of these others, but having parts from all of the others contributing to it.

Yesterday, last night, while sitting in my chair in the living room relaxing I went on the internet and read some articles. One article in particular was listing—supposedly a Christian article, headlined as a Christian article—listing the 29 to 30 myths about Jesus. I went to another article. This article wrote about how the Christian Church is failing. And I thought, well, in many respects I can see that. That describes my fears and my analysis as well. But as I read through the article very quickly we went in different directions, because the writer of this article began to say, “What we need to do in order to fix the Church is to begin to draw parts from other existing religions. We need to bring truth from this religion and truth from this religion and truth from this religion and bring them together to form a new Christian Church.”

My friends, it is here. I don't speak radically when I describe that to you. It is here. And it is here in a very... that is an overt example, but it is here in subtle ways as well, subtly like this. Have you heard this phrase?

“The God that I worship...”

“I like to think of God as...”

“You know, I have been thinking and the God that we read about in the Bible, you know, I just really have a hard time with that God.”

Have you heard those? Sadly very common in the professing Christian Church today, just like the children of Israel centuries ago recorded in Judges chapter 13. Nothing new under the sun, Solomon said, nothing new under the sun.

Just like in that day when the children of Israel needed a Savior we need a Savior. We need a Savior. We can't do it on our own. And God in his descriptions and in his progressive revelation of his plan of redemption, he showed not only their depravity and their sinfulness and their wickedness, he showed them their need of a Savior. He provided Saviors for them, but the Saviors that he provided for them were temporary. Not only were they temporary, they were flawed. Not only were they flawed, they were incapable of fixing the root problem. All they could deal with was the symptoms. They could deal with the nations. They could bring them victory over their oppressors, but that only covered the symptoms. And we see it because they reverted back to the same pattern time and time and time again. They couldn't fix the root underlying problem. What Israel really needed was a new heart. What they really needed was a new nature. They lived in accordance with their nature.

Diane and I have a phrase that we like to use when we describe people and we observe their life patterns and their styles and how they live contrary to God's Word. We say, “Well, they are living like a sinner.” That is how sinners live. Israel lived like sinners. We live like sinners. We need a new nature. We need a Savior who will come and change the nature. We can't do that on our own. Furthermore, truth be told, we don't want to change our nature. We kind of like it, thank you. I kind of like doing what I want

to do when I want to do it, how I want to do it. I kind of like that, until it has a bitter end. Then we blame God.

God, it is your fault that I am suffering the consequences of my own sinful behavior. It doesn't make sense, does it? But that is what we do.

Well, the rest of chapter 13 describes God's providing and making preparation for the last judge, Samson. You have heard of Samson. And on a future occasion we will look at Samson, but just for now the rest of chapter 13 describes God coming down to a man's wife—I will call her Mrs. Manoah because we don't know her name. It is not in there. All it says is the wife of Manoah. So we know her husband's name, but not her name. Came to her first and said, "You are barren. You have not had children. You don't have the ability to have children, but I am going to give you a son. And that son will begin to be the savior of Israel. He will begin to save Israel from the Philistines."

She brought her husband, "Husband, Mr. Manoah, dear husband, you will not believe what just happened." She told him of her encounter with the angel of the Lord. Manoah her husband said, "I want to hear it first hand." And he petitioned God.

"The angel of the Lord who came to my wife, come to me. I want to hear first hand your promise. It sounds to good to be true."

God came to him, spoke to the both of them together. Yes, it is true. You are going to have a son and he will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And he will be a Nazarite.

Now we haven't examined what that means previously. God made provision within his law that he gave on Mount Sinai what he called the vow of a Nazarite, a vow of a Nazarite, a man, a woman could take and it basically meant I choose to separate myself unto God solely and completely. And these signs will identify me as one who has done that. I will not cut my hair. My hair will grow and I will not cut my hair. Furthermore, I will not touch any unclean thing. And God spelled out and described unclean things so that they could know to avoid those unclean things. Furthermore, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, meaning they would not drink wine. I will separate myself unto God.

The angel of the Lord came to Manoah and his wife and said, "That will mark your son. Your son will be a Nazarite from before birth, because I want you to live that way before the son is born. And when the son is born, he will be a Nazarite to me from his birth."

God prepared for them a special man to come and to be their savior. But, as we will see in a future study, he was very flawed. In many ways the strongest man who ever lived but at the same time the weakest man whoever lived. And we will see those characteristics in his life.

But for the present it shows to us God's grace and mercy and how he ultimately provided that Savior that Israel that so desperately needed. He provided for them a Savior who

could overcome the oppressor and the ultimate oppressor was not the Philistines nor the Sardinians nor the Moabites, nor the Amorites, nor the {?} nor any of the others inhabiting Israel, but behind it all was the serpent from the Garden of Eden, the evil one. That was the one that needed to be destroyed. And the old saying is if you cut off the head of the serpent it kills the life of the serpent. That is what Jesus came to do. God sent a Savior who could deal with the serpent and crush his head. God promised it to Adam and Eve in the garden.

“I will send a Savior. I will send a champion. He will come. He will crush the head of the serpent.”

None of these judges could do that. None of the succeeding kings who ruled over Israel for hundreds of years, they couldn't either, until finally the Judge, the Savior, the King whom God designed to fulfill that role came. God sent his own Son who came to live in human flesh just like you and me so that he could suffer and endure the things that you and I live and face every day. He came and faced the same things. And he lived in victory over them. And ultimately in his death on the cross, he crushed the head of the serpent.

Now what does that mean for people like you and like me? Jesus told us very simply that God so loved the world that he created that he sent his only Son. I am that Son. And he sent me so that whoever believes in me will not perish, but have everlasting life.

Do you see the promise there of the new nature? The new heart? The change that this one could bring to people who need the change? And Jesus said it will come simply by faith. Turn to me in faith. Trust me. I will bring to you that new nature. And I will begin to work in you by the Holy Spirit to conform you to that new nature so that you will be able to walk in your life according to the original, back to the norm, back to the ideal, only better than the norm, better than the ideal, because now we have God himself residing within us, not just making us, but residing within us, enabling us to fulfill the abilities that he gave to Adam and Eve when he created them. The ability to know God, the ability to understand him, the ability to obey him and to follow his commands, the ability to fellowship with him and to enjoy him. Again, restored back into the lives of not everybody, but of those who believe, those who come to Christ and trust him. They will experience that renewal, that reformation, that change, that new life.

And along the way Jesus, by example, on the night in which he was betrayed gave an example of when he washed the feet of his disciples, reminding us of how we need our feet washed. That doesn't mean he wants me to come with a basin and wash your feet and you wash the feet of the one next to you. No, that is not what it means. It is a picture. But we walk and live in an evil world, don't we? And although God has come to live within us, we haven't attained perfection yet. That will come.

But while we still inhabit these earthly, frail bodies we fail. We have times when we walk with the Lord and we love him and we serve him and obey him and we experience that fellowship and that joy and then those lusts begin to stir us up again and for a time

we will walk according to our own desires. We need a Savior who not only saves us in the beginning, but restores us and revives us along the way, constantly conforming us to his own image. And we need that renewing work constantly in our lives, a savior who not only can defeat the enemy, but can change the heart.

What do you think? Sounds amazing doesn't it? That God can love somebody like me and like you. It is amazing, isn't it, to contemplate the thought that he would send his own Son to become a Savior for people like you and me. And that whoever would believe upon him would experience that new life. Have you ever done that? If you have, you know the joy of what I have described. If you haven't you have yet to taste it. And I encourage you to trust him today. Believe him today and begin that renewal work that he has promised to all who believe him. He will give to them everlasting life and that life would begin to express itself and show itself.

Well, I pray that you will trust Jesus. Continually as one who has trusted Christ at one point in your life and trust him today, perhaps for the first time and begin that new walk with him.

Let's close in prayer, shall we?