

Title: Chosen by God
Text: Judges 13
Theme: God's choices and our responses
Series: Judges
Prop Stmtnt: God chooses people for purposes that are way beyond us.

During W.W.II England cracked the German Enigma code and was able to decipher the German plans. However, this created a dilemma. How do you use that information in a way that doesn't make it obvious to your enemy that you have broken their code? Imagine that you are a high ranking officer in the Military Intelligence Department and your son is in a division of the army that is about to be surprise attacked by the enemy. Do you let them know and risk making it obvious that you know the plans of the enemy potentially crippling you from knowing even greater things? How do you weigh that with the greater good? Trying to figure out the relationship between what is personal and what is national and global is too much for us to handle, but not for God. God never has to choose between his universal plan and our personal plan. They all work in harmony with each other. However, there is no way that we can grasp that fully in the moment.

Two of the questions that every human being asks are "Why?" and "Why me?" We ask those questions, because intuitively we believe that there is a reason why things happen and we believe that purpose has personal significance and meaning for us. There is an ultimate purpose that gives meaning to our personal circumstances.

All of that is set forth for us in this chapter.

Read Text:

This chapter begins with despair and ends with hope. "*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.*"... "*And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him....*" What changed? What made the difference? What happened is that God, in his mercy (MERCY) came again in order to rescue his people from completely destroying themselves.

The setting is established in the first 2 verses. Forty years is a long time. Forty years is probably longer than this couple, in this account has been alive. Think of this. For all of their life, most of the people around them have rebelled against God and have served the Baals. Now, this couple were in the tribe of Dan, which means that they lived next to the Philistines who served Dagon. Dagon was thought to be the father of Baal. Dagon and Baal and Asherah were all part of the fertility cult, which believed that if you worshiped them that you would in turn have children, great harvests and large herds. If you had a large field, you needed a lot of kids, especially boys to help you farm and if you had large herds, you needed a lot of kids to help you tend them. Large families meant prosperity, Dagon, and Baal promised them. If you did not have children and you did not have wealth, it was very tempting to go to the gods who promised them.

Today is Mother's Day and for those women who were never able to have children, this is a hard day. If someone promised you that you could get pregnant, you would be very tempted to listen,

even if meant doing something that was wrong. In the Old Testament days, it felt as if every day was Mother's Day. The only single girls were widows and those married, but barren, were considered to be cursed. It was not only a personal grief; it was magnified and compounded by the assumptions and beliefs of others. You felt the stares and questions in the marketplace. Your own parents were disappointed in you. You were disappointed in you and of course, why wouldn't you question God, or if there was a God, or who was really in charge.

This is personal stuff. On a related note, there's some families in our church who only have boys, and some who only have girls and keep having boys and keep having girls. Years ago, I said to the mom of a family who only had boys that I knew how she could have a girl. Mind you, this family was hardcore U of M people. I told the mom that if would rub her belly with a buckeye that she would have a girl. I gave her one and she did and she had a girl. A couple of months ago, I said to that girl who is now in high school, "do you know why you are here?" And with great joy I told her the story. But, of course, that is not why she was a girl. That was a joke. But, for this couple and many others, this stuff is no joke. It is a grief.

Here is where we are expected to connect the dots. The people again are doing what is evil. They are worshipping the fertility gods and thinking that they will get children and prosperity as a result. However, not all of the people are doing what is evil. In the midst of the evil around them is at least one couple. The man's name is Manoah. They do not have children. This fact is stated in v.2 and then repeated for emphasis in v.3.

In our setting when men and women sacrifice their children for their careers, or when women who choose to raise their children as their primary passion are viewed as an oddity, we cannot appreciate the cultural weight that this couple felt. They had no children. Children were a means of blessing in the eyes of the culture, because children were not only a source of income in your good years, they were your social security, Medicaid and Medicare in your old ones. If you did not have children, you did not have anyone to take care of you. And who was to blame? It would have been easy for her to blame him and for him to blame her. I'm just saying that the pressure for them to curse God and trust in the Baals would have been enormous. And yet, there is nothing in this text that presents this couple in that light. What we see in them, though not perfectly, we see faith in the midst of faithlessness and hope in the midst of hopelessness, but this faith and hope come at a cost.

Your circumstances will provide you many opportunities to question God and even reject him. We would probably do that if we fail to understand and give ourselves to his bigger plan. For Israel, life is hard for the nation and almost hopeless for the people. And then...

I. **God chose a girl.** (2-5)

Look at how v.2 begins. "There was a certain man." Immediately we are drawn into the story because this little phrase tells us that something important is about to happen. One of the things I have enjoyed in studying and preaching through Judges is seeing how skilled and nuanced and effective as a storyteller the writer of this book is and this is just another example. But, in spite of naming him, and not naming his wife, the focus stays primarily upon his wife who at the end of

the chapter is not only the one who bears the son, she names him. The scene takes us from the Jordan and eastern portion of Israel to the west and northern portion of the country.

Bam! No one saw this coming. The set-up for this is chapter 10, when God tells the children of Israel to stop asking him for help because he is basically done with them. But, God is going to keep his promise and God is going to have a people, even though we cannot figure out how this is going to happen. When I read the first 2 verses, I cannot anticipate or guess that v.3 is going to happen. But, v.3 changes everything for this couple. And what is important to note is that even though the text states on two occasions that she was barren and had no children, the text also states on three occasions that she will conceive and have a son. The problem of her barrenness is big, but the promise that God makes to her is bigger.

Another thing to note is that the angel of the LORD appears to this unnamed woman when she is by herself. And the angel of the LORD does not say, “Oh sorry, I’ll come back when your husband is home.” But rather entrusts her with everything. And this encounter with God changes everything for her and for them. God has chosen her. God sovereignly elected her to be a mother, to keep a vow because she is to be the mother of a savior. The announcement is stunning. The first part of the announcement (v.3) “*Behold you are barren*” is not news that she is not aware of. She is painfully aware of this. She is viewed by her world as being cursed. God is not telling her this because she needs to know this but is telling her this because she needs to know that he knows this. Did she ever cry out to God and ask him if he knew or cared about her barrenness? Did she wonder in her heart if her plight mattered to him? Obviously, God knew.

A. To be a mother

She, who did not have children, was now going to have a son. It sounds like the promise to Abraham and Sarah. There was no way that this was not going to happen because God had just made her a promise. His girl, rather than laughing like Sarah is steadfast in her acceptance of this news. In that moment, she probably began to understand there had been a divine purpose for her barrenness, because there was. Barrenness is a private sorrow that is repeatedly exposed in public. Why me? We all ask that question for different reasons, don’t we? Why me? Why them? If we could decipher all of the plans and the ways of God, we would be God.

However, her calling to be a mom brought with it a responsibility because she was not only chosen by God to be a mom; her son was chosen by God to be a Nazirite. Therefore, the angel of the LORD informs her, that since her son is not to eat anything that comes from grapes, or come in contact with anything dead, neither should she. In choosing her to be a mother, he chose her

B. To keep a vow

A Nazirite is not to be confused with a Nazarene (meaning someone from Nazareth). A Nazirite was the name of a person in OT Israel who took a vow to be a Nazirite (Numbers 6). If a person did this, he or she would do this for a specific period of time, a week, a month, etc., during which time the person would not cut their hair, would not eat anything that came from grapes and could not come in contact with anything that was dead. The purpose was to provide people with a means to consecrate themselves to God for a particular reason in such a way that would fulfill

that desire without being harmful to themselves or the community. The history of religion is full of examples of people who come up with really bizarre ways of consecrating themselves. One guy, Simeon Stylites lived on top of a pillar for 37 years near Aleppo, Syria in “devotion” to God. That’s the problem. People will come up with ways, perhaps well-meaning even, of devoting themselves to God, that are not helpful. So, God made provision for this, but most of the time, the provisions were for a specific period of time. However, there are 3 examples in the Bible of men who were Nazarites from birth: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist.

Now, we just have to stop the movie for a minute and catch our breath. This is stunning! If you are reading this for the first time, there are a lot more questions than there are answers. Why does God pick her? Why does God appear just to her? Why does God tell her that her son is going to be a Nazarite? What is that all about? At this point, we don’t know. But if you keep reading you find out that in just a few years, probably 10 or so, is when Samuel is born to Hannah under similar circumstances. Hannah could not have children and she is given a promise from God that she will have a son and she consecrates him to God. Samuel is the one who anoints David who starts the dynasty of kings from which Christ comes (1,000 years later), but before Christ comes, an angel of the LORD appears to Zechariah and tells him that he and his wife, who were barren would have a son and that their son would be a Nazarite, and of course that was John the Baptist who would prepare the way for the Christ, who was born to Mary, who like this woman in Judges 13 was minding her own business one day, when an angel of the LORD appeared to her and told her that she was going to have a son and that her son was going to save his people from their sins. So, if you keep on reading, then you would come back to this moment in Judges 13 and go – “AHHHH, now I get it!” And the pieces start to fall into place.

Here in the midst of spiritual and physical barrenness, in the midst of darkness, in the midst of a time when the number of the faithful were few and their faith looked foolish, God was on the move and here in Judges 13, of all places God was preparing the way for the rescue of his people, and God chose a girl who is not even named to be a mom, and to keep a vow. She is more than a carrier for this child, she is to participate in his vow because God has chosen her to a mom, and to keep a view because she is ...

C. To be the mother of a savior

he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines (5b)

The author of Judges, who is, possibly Samuel, but we don’t know, had no way of knowing how all of this would point to Christ. But it does so clearly, even 1,000 years before. You can’t make this stuff up (as Jim Price would say). And I needed this reminder this week. Cathi and I were driving back from Ross Steven’s funeral service in Iowa when I talked with Vince Gonino who told me that Kathryn had been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. This is hard to hear, hard to bear, hard to carry and almost impossible to process. And yet, in days that were much darker, here in Judges 13, God was doing what God alone can do, and he is still doing that day after day after day, carrying out his plan. Making promises and keeping them to ensure that his people will be rescued from their sins and brought home safe to glory and he will do it. He will do it in the midst of heart attacks, cancer, and barrenness. We do not know how it will all happen, but it will. God chose a girl. Now the lens gets a little wider.

II. God chose a couple (6-23)

So, this wife goes to find her husband (Manoah) and she tells him what has just happened and in verses 6-7 she recounts the details of the conversation and anticipates questions that her husband would have by telling him that she didn't ask him where he was from and that he did not even tell her what his name was. This news was stunning to her and she was the one who had the encounter with the angel of the LORD, how would Manoah react? His response is one of faith and I think frustration. He believes his wife and in believing his wife, he demonstrates belief in God. When he hears the news, he prays and he prays in faith. He prays believing the promises of God. I love the end of v.8. "*teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born.*" But he wants to hear from the angel himself, not just through his wife. It's like he wants to get in charge of the situation. We will see this demonstrated a bit more later on.

And God graciously listened! (v.9) Now, again remember that the set-up for this is back in chapter 10, when the nation as a whole had exhausted the patience of God and he was done with them. He was about to turn the whole lot of them over to the consequences of their sin. But, just as Noah, in a similar setting found grace in the eyes of the LORD, so, Manoah is chosen to be a vessel that will help bring about a rescue. God listened to Manoah who sounds like a first-time dad, right? Honestly, in contrast to his wife who always appears calm and reasonable, Manoah reacts like a hot mess. What do I do? So, God sent the angel of the LORD again who appeared again to Manoah's wife as she "sat in the field." There is a lot packed into that tiny little phrase. Manoah and his wife were not wealthy people. They lived under the oppression and taxation of the Philistines. She was out laboring in the field to help make ends meet. She was not at home like the other women raising children. She had to help in the field. Their life was a hard life. Once again, the angel of the LORD appears, but not to Manoah, but to his wife. A woman of faith is instrumental in the birth of Samson. A woman of unbelief will be instrumental in his death. But for now, there is hope for a savior.

Manoah followed his wife and found the messenger of the LORD and asked him about the boy's manner of life (which he was already told), and his mission (which was also eluded to). The angel patiently answered him, but not as completely, but said, "All that I commanded her let her observe." In other words, your wife knows. She knows what to do. Manoah, you are not in control of this situation and you cannot get control of it. God has chosen your wife and you to bring this boy into the world. Go with it. God tells him all that he needs to know, but not all that he wants to know. Manoah responds by wanting to provide a meal. This was a fitting response of honor and customary to do for guests. But I suspect that it may have also been an attempt to try to squeeze a little more information out of the angel. Now, I keep saying angel, because it will soon become apparent to Manoah and his wife that this "man" from God was actually an angel or a divine messenger. The angel tells Manoah that he would not eat a meal, but if he offered a burnt offering, then offer that to the LORD. At this point, Manoah asks him for his name, because he wants to honor him when the boy is born, but the angel does not tell him, but in fact tells him that his name is wonderful. In other words, Manoah, stay in your lane. You are asking for information that you cannot handle. I have given you what you need.

So, at this point, Manoah has asked God to resend the messenger, which God graciously does, but the messenger appears to his wife who goes and gets him who follows her to where the messenger is. Manoah wants to make him a meal and the angel says no. Manoah wants to know his name and the messenger says no. The message is clear. God is the One who is in charge.

Read v.19-20.

Manoah thinks they are going to die, but his wife assures him that they will not die because that would make no sense. And this opening account concludes with God having chosen a girl and a couple because

III. **God chose a boy.** (24-25)

The LORD blessed him and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him, which we can only assume means that Israel is about to experience deliverance, at least the beginning of one. At this point, we have some hope. Will the cycle of sin, slavery, remorse and deliverance finally be broken? For them, not yet.

But for us, we live in a day when the one whom all of this pointed to, would come. And he would not simply begin to save his people, he would finish it. This is the story of the world. God created us to be in relationship with him, but we rebelled and deserve the wrath of God. But instead of condemning us, God, sent his own Son Christ to be condemned in our place. Christ came to live the life we could not live and die the death we could not die and in so doing paid in full the penalty of sin for every single person who would ever believe on him. Over and over we are learning in Judges that our saviors do not save completely, but Christ saves to the uttermost. And your life, your salvation is all part of his plan and it is a good plan.