

Finer Grounds

Judges and Ruth

Lesson 8: The Angel of the Lord (Judges 12 & 13)

Throughout the book of Judges, we have seen the nation plunging into darkness and being rescued time after time. As we draw near to the end of this book, we will see more and more corruption and depravity creep into the lives of the Israelites. While there will be a few lights that break through this thick darkness, the vast majority of the events that will unfold will leave us with a very bleak picture of the state of affairs in Israel.

Read Judges 12:1-7

Why were the men of Ephraim upset with Jephthah?

What trait of Ephraim does this encounter highlight?

Ephraim confronted Jephthah in almost exactly the same way they had Gideon in Judges 8. They were not interested in cooperation, only the glory that would come from these altercations. This pride would soon infect the entire nation and cause a rift between the people and God.

Read Hosea 10:13-15. Where does this prideful attitude eventually lead?

How did Jephthah initially respond to this threat from Ephraim?

Describe the battle that took place between Jephthah and Ephraim.

Once again, we see the ever diplomatic Jephthah trying to reach a solution through verbal discourse. Just like with the Ammonites, his negotiations failed and a battle with the Ephraimites ensued. Israel was in such a prideful and destructive place that in the absence of an outside enemy they would continue to destroy themselves, this time from within.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22. How is the church described?

It seems as if one of Satan's favorite tricks is to see how he can tempt God's people to destroy themselves from the inside. We allow petty squabbles and prideful power struggles to fracture our relationships within the church. When we participate in these conflicts (or even turn a blind eye to them), we are cracking the very walls of God's church.

What are some practical ways that you can encourage harmony in your local congregation this week?

Read Judges 12:8-15

List the three Judges mentioned in the last part of this chapter.

Read Judges 13:1-7

If you have not been familiar with any of the other judges until this point, you probably have at least a general awareness of our final hero of the book: Samson.

What two aspects of the cycle of the judges do you see present in Judges 13:1?

This time, as if to highlight their descent into godlessness, the Israelites don't even cry out to God for a deliverer. Even so, He still shows extreme love and compassion by sending one.

What makes Samson's calling different than any of the other judges?

Samson was called to be a judge from the womb. Not only this, but he was to be a Nazarite from the womb as well. This vow was generally taken for a short period of time in a man's life;

however, for Samson it would be a permanent vow taken on initially by his mother.

Read Numbers 6:1-21 and list the requirements for someone taking the Nazarite vow.

Keep these in mind for the coming weeks. We will see that one of Samson's prevailing characteristics is his rebellious attitude and he will be guilty of breaking many of these laws.

Read Judges 13:8-14

In Judges 13:8, what does Manoah ask the Lord?

Upon finding out that they were to have a child, the first thing Manoah does is to ask the Lord what they should do for their son. This attitude of seeking God's will first was relatively rare for this time period and would pay off. Even though Samson would grow up with some pretty severe spiritual struggles, he would ultimately prevail and be listed in the Hebrew "hall of faith" (Hebrews 11:32-34).

Seeking God's will first in everything we do is such an important habit to develop. It seems natural to call our friends and parents when we are faced with a significant decision or a life change; however, the most important guidance we can receive comes from our Heavenly Father. Are we dropping to our knees in prayer? Are we searching the scriptures to seek Biblical direction?

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What is your first instinct when faced with a major life change or decision?

What can you do to remind yourself to seek God's will first?

Read Judges 13:15-25

While we do not have time to examine the angel of the Lord in detail, we learn some interesting things about him in this section. There are many different opinions on who the angel of the Lord is and I encourage you to do your homework and read more about him. I will share briefly some of the theories of who he may be.

1. Some think he is simply a prophet and the term "angel" is a generic term for messenger.
2. Some think this is referring to a specific angel that was sent to relay messages on behalf of God.
3. Some think that this phrase actually refers to Jesus' existence in the Old Testament, before he became human.

Let's take some time and look at some of the characteristics of the angel of the Lord based on the text.

What does the angel of the Lord request of Manoah instead of a meal in Judges 13:16?

According to Judges 13:18, how did the angel of the Lord respond when asked for his name?

The word used for "wonderful" right here can also be translated secret or incomprehensible. In Isaiah 9:6, it is used to describe the coming Messiah.

What interesting event happened in Judges 13:19-20?

How did Manoah respond to this event (Judges 13:22)?

When people received prophets or angels, they often displayed reverent behavior and sometimes fear; however, in this case, Manoah fears that they will die because they have seen God. To me, some of these things are compelling evidence that the angel of the Lord could be the pre-incarnate Jesus. For further study read the encounters in Genesis with the angel of the Lord. There is enough information on this topic to fill several books so we will not explore it any further here; however, I encourage you to do your homework and look at this fascinating subject.