



GOD'S INVASION

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Judges 13:1-24
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A couple of months ago, our pastors held an all-day staff meeting and afterwards we went out to dinner together. Before we left for home, we all made a trip the men's room. One of our pastors, the prankster among us, turned out the lights, making the restroom pitch dark. We began to whoop it up. Joel Werk, our high school pastor, pretending that someone was attacking him, screamed, "My watch! My watch! Someone is stealing my watch!" After about 30 seconds the lights came back on, the noise subsided and order was restored. Then the door to one of the stalls opened and a man came out. Unknown to us he had been in there all the time. He had a surprised look on his face, to say the least. We could only imagine what he was thinking. As he exited the restroom rather quickly, quite disheveled, with shirt tails hanging out, he muttered, "Where is that guy?" Unexpected, and certainly unsolicited, we had invaded this man's privacy.

We will discover in our opening study on the life of Samson this morning that God, too, invades our lives in most unexpected ways. Our text, from chapter 13 of the book of Judges, concerns an invasion by God into the history of the nation Israel. To accomplish this, God invaded the lives of a man named Manoah and his wife. It was an invasion designed to accomplish the birth of a son for the salvation of Israel.

I. The Reason For God's Invasion

The opening verse of chapter 13 repeats the theme phrase which gives the historical context of the book of Judges:

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. (13:1, NASB)

After the death of Moses, Joshua took the nation of Israel into the land. There he defeated 31 kings, and took possession of the land. After Joshua died, according to Judges 17:6, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." The nation fell into a pattern, a cycle of behavior that is repeated six times in the book.

Verses 11-19 of chapter 2 describe how this four-step process developed. Here is the first step (verses 11-12): "*Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them.*"

The second step is illustrated in the words of verse 14: "*And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that*

they could no longer stand before their enemies."

The third step was initiated when the nation cried out to the Lord for deliverance. Verse 16: "*Then the LORD raised up Judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.*" Following this, Israel would enjoy a time of rest and peace all the days of the judge.

Then would come the fourth step, however (verse 19): "*But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.*" Thus the cycle would continue into the next generation.

Verse 1 of chapter 13 sets the stage once more, therefore, as we come now to the last reference in Judges to this cycle of sin and deliverance. First, the apostasy: "*Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD...*" And then the servitude: "*...so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.*"

This time the enemy was the Philistines. These were a seafaring people who had been forced out of their homeland in the area we now know as Greece and the islands of the Aegean Sea. Around 1200 B.C., the warriors had set out to look for a new home, and the main force of these "Sea People" attacked Egypt. They were defeated, their invasion repulsed, and so they moved up the coast to the southern coastal plain of Palestine, and there they settled down. By the time of this incident in Judges they had established themselves in five main cities: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath. Trade and intermarriage were the main weapons used by the Philistines. If the Israelites needed a plow or an axe, they had to go to the Philistines to get one. And, contrary to how God had instructed them, when the Jews wanted to marry their sons or daughters, the Philistines raised no objection. Thus it was through compromise and assimilation that the Philistines gained a stranglehold on the Israelites. Israel did not become enslaved by military dominance as much as they were slowly led astray by spiritual and cultural seduction.

It is noteworthy that there is no reference in this account to Israel's crying out to the Lord, contrary to the usual pattern that we have already seen throughout the book. The reason for this was because the cycle of sin had become so entrenched that Israel by this time was willing to remain in bondage. They were content with oppression, having become comfortable with their enslavement.

This is one of the tragic consequences of sin. When we continually fall into sin, each time we sink to a deeper level. The sin becomes more intense, the darkness darker, the duration of our bondage longer. Our hearts become hardened; our consciences dulled; our minds desensitized. We do not have the ability, even the desire to cry out to God. We become content with darkness and enslavement. No

matter how terrible our circumstances, we fear changing them. This happens because we become comfortable with our circumstances; we find them normal. This is what Jesus said, isn't it? "Men loved the darkness rather than the light" (John 3:19).

Once I went jogging with my dog at the field house on the campus of the University of Nebraska. While I was running, someone locked all the doors at the field house and I could not get out. It was the afternoon of my first wedding anniversary, and my wife was expecting me home any minute. At last I found a window that was open a little, leading to a ledge from which I could jump to freedom! The problem was in getting the dog to follow me. Try as I might I could not coach him to come out the window and join me on the ledge outside. I had to wait a long time until someone finally came along and called the campus police to open up the door.

Where sin is concerned, many instinctively act like my dog did that day. Freedom is within our grasp, yet we are imprisoned by our iniquity. God is coaching us to flee the darkness and oppression, but we demur. We are so afraid of trusting, of moving out in faith, of giving up the familiar and the comfortable, that we balk at the freedom that is beckoning to us.

This, too, was Israel's condition at the time of our story, and it was in the midst of this kind of darkness that God invaded the life of the nation.

II. The Announcement Of God's Invasion (13:2-7)

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children. Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman, and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'" (13:2-7)

Manoah was a Danite. From Judges 18 we know that by this time the majority of the tribe of Dan had moved north, to Laish. (Zorah was a border city, wedged between Israel and the Philistines.) Manoah's wife, who "was barren and had borne no children," was visited by the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ. He told her that she would "conceive and give birth to a son," and instructed her "not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing." Next, the angel of the Lord gave instructions regarding the son who would be born to her, that "no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God."

And then he stated the purpose behind the birth of the son: "he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

Manoah's wife was barren. This was a severe limitation for an Israelite woman. Every Jewish woman wanted a son to carry on the family name, and every Jewish woman hoped that she would be the one who would give birth to the Messiah. This woman's barrenness symbolized the barrenness of Israel's spiritual life. But it is in the midst of aridity that God invaded, among a people who were not even crying out for help, a nation that had become comfortable with sin and spiritual darkness.

This is the amazing story of the Bible, isn't it, of God invading dry and unfruitful lives? The barren woman is a type common throughout the Scriptures. Manoah's wife had the same limitation as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth. This theme of barrenness culminates, of course, in Mary, the mother of Jesus, a virgin who conceived and gave birth to the God-Man. The indication of all of Scripture therefore is that God keeps breaking through barrenness. God's light is made manifest in the midst of deepest darkness. The culmination of this truth was the incarnation.

This theme is repeated throughout the book of Judges. For 330 years, God raised up judges to lead Israel to salvation and redemption, freedom from bondage, slavery, and oppression. This process began with Othniel and ended with Samson (or, more technically, with Samuel). If we extrapolate this theme, again it leads us to Jesus, our Redeemer and Deliverer. Once more, the culmination was in incarnation.

God-invasion, then, is the story of the Bible. The spiritual principle is this: God is so faithful, so loyal to his commitment, his love and his covenant, that he invades our lives to deliver us and save us. And at times he does so without our asking. This is what happened with Abraham. God invaded the patriarch's life while he was living in Haran, and brought him into the land of Canaan. Consider Saul. God invaded his life on the road to Damascus, and Saul went on to become Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Consider the Ethiopian eunuch. God invaded his life on the road to Gaza, and he became the first African convert to Christianity.

God invades history and he invades hearts. Most of you here this morning are thankful that God has invaded your lives. You were in darkness, headed down a dead-end road, and God suddenly broke through and invaded your life. If, on the other hand, your life is filled with darkness, the hope that is held out by the Scriptures is that God wants to invade your life. And he can do it! You are never too far gone for the hand of God. It is because he works in barren lives.

The older I grow, the more this truth baffles my understanding. Knowing that God has come into my life, a life filled with selfishness, pride, immaturity, and sin, drives me to my knees in wonder and humility. I remember one night as a college student, more than 20 years ago, when my life was dark and depressed. Everyone and everything had let me down; there was nowhere to turn. I wasn't even looking for God, but God invaded my life.

There is another principle here. When God invades our lives, he calls us to separation and consecration. The angel

of the Lord gave instructions to Manoah's wife concerning how she was to care for herself and for the promised child. Her child was to be a Nazirite, meaning he was to be separated and set apart to God from his mother's womb. He was to drink no wine or strong drink; no razor should touch his head (his uncut hair would be a public sign of his dedication to God); and he was to have no contact with a dead person. All the days of his separation he was to be holy to the Lord.

When God invades our lives, he call us to separation, too. The way to begin to deal with barrenness is to set your life apart to God. This is the process of sanctification. Samson's strength was due not to the length of his hair, but to his being separate, his being set apart. Israel's problem was assimilation through marriage with the Philistines, of compromise in terms of their relationship with God. But when God invades our lives, he calls us to walk a different road from the highway the world travels on.

This can be a major problem for some. We know that God has invaded our lives, and yet we behave as if he had not. We do not separate ourselves in a biblical sense and live lives holy to God. Separating ourselves does not, of course, mean that we should make a list of things that we resolve not to do. The point of the Nazirite vow was not separation from, but separation *unto* something. Paralysis does not equal spirituality. God does not call us to isolationism. One writer says, "Isolation, external separation, is no more biblical separation than assimilation. We are not to be chameleons, conforming to our environment, but neither are we to be hermits, sealed off from the world of men." Like Samson, our spiritual strength is enhanced when we set ourselves apart. But, like Samson, our spiritual strength is depleted when we don't set ourselves apart and we continue living like the world lives. This was Micah's problem, as we saw last week in chapter 17. He knew God's name, yet he took from the Canaanites all their paraphernalia of worship and made his own religion. He did not set apart his life for God.

When God invades our lives, he calls us to separation.

III. The Wonder Of God's Invasion (13:8-23)

Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom Thou hast sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born." And God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came the other day has appeared to me." Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to the woman?" And he said, "I am." And Manoah said, "Now when your words come to pass, what shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?" So the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded."

Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a kid for you." And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah,

"Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD." For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD. And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?" But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. Now the angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah or his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. So Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have showed us all these things; nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time." (13:8-23)

Since he was not present when the man appeared the first time, Manoah wanted an "instant replay" of the angel's visit. God answered his request, and in response to Manoah's question, the angel repeated his instructions. Then Manoah prepared an offering for the Lord, much like Gideon did, and the Lord performed wonders while the man and his wife looked on. The Lord then ascended in the flame of the altar. Manoah and his wife recognized the angel to be the Lord, and they feared for their lives because they had seen God.

Manoah strikes me as a man of little faith. His question to the angel reveals this: "When your words come to pass, what shall be the boy's mode of life, his vocation, etc.?" He is a typical father, asking questions like, "Where will he go to college? How can I pay for it? Where will he work?"

Notice that the Lord disregards Manoah's question. He does not give any more information. What he does is reveal more of himself, performing wonders in their presence. He asks, "Why do you ask my name seeing that it is wonderful ...and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on."

"Wonder" or "incomprehensible" here is the same term used to refer to the Messiah, in Isaiah 9:6, "and his name shall be Wonderful Counselor." "Wonder" is the word used to describe the acts of God and his historical achievements on behalf of Israel. When this word is used of man, however, it speaks of things beyond man's capabilities. Ultimately, the purpose behind God's wonders is not merely to demonstrate power, but to make mercy available to the one who witnesses the demonstration. The psalmist wrote, "Blessed be the Lord, for He has made marvelous (wonderful) His lovingkindness to me in a besieged city" (Psa 31:21). God's wonders evoke astonishment and worship. This is exactly what happened to Manoah and his wife when they presented an offering to God. An ironic twist here is that in one verb form, "wonder" means to fulfill a vow. (It is actually used in Numbers 6 in the instructions for a Nazirite.) One could say that because God is committed to fulfill his word, his vow, he acts in incomprehensible, wonderful ways to demonstrate his mercy and love.

And how does this apply to us? Like Manoah and his wife, we are merely spectators. The only thing left for us is to worship God and trust him for what he will do in our lives.

Often, when God invades our lives, he does not answer our questions, but instead he reveals his wonder. We want to analyze and question, but God wants us to marvel. We want answers, but God wants us to worship. We want to know how his words will come to pass, but God wants us to trust.

God calls us to enjoy him. We have seen him and what he can do. He has invaded our lives. We know that he can accomplish anything he desires, that he can do what we cannot do. He will fulfill his vow. He will complete his covenant. We do not have to worry about it, so our response should be to enjoy his presence and his wonder.

Six years ago we wanted to change homes and move. We tried to buy a house, but could not because the sellers would not accept our contingency to sell our home. So we decided to sell our house first and then buy another. We sold it, but then we couldn't find a house that met our needs. (This was a time when prices were escalating rapidly and listings were scarce.) Anxiety and depression became daily experiences. Finally, I made a decision and forced my wife to buy a house neither one of us really wanted. I took my son over to the house the night before we were to move in. He looked around and said, "This is not the right house." What an encouraging word! We moved in anyway, but our hearts were heavy. A few months later, I told my realtor we were still not settled. If he saw anything that might suit us, I said, we might be interested. He said that he had just seen a house for sale and had actually thought of us, but he was afraid to call us. We looked at the house, and we made an offer under the asking price. The owners accepted it, and our contingency to sell our house. The only thing was that, for us to be able to afford the move, we had to sell our house by ourselves. A week later, God worked his wonder and we sold our house.

This experience showed me that God could do things that seemed impossible to me. I could never figure it all out, and he never answered all my questions. After I had thrown in the towel, admitting to myself that there was nothing I could do to accomplish this thing, God invaded. He did the incomprehensible to demonstrate his loyal

love, simply to let me know how much he loved me. He revealed himself, and all that was left for me was to marvel, like Manoah and his wife, at what he had done.

Many of us, like Manoah, try to figure everything out. We want to analyze and dissect our happiness and joy. But we can't do it. What God wants us to do is stop striving and instead look to the One whose name is Wonderful. Worship is what we will be doing for eternity, and we have the opportunity to begin to worship now. Our goal may be to achieve, to accomplish, and to know, but God's purpose is to do what we cannot fathom and in the process reveal himself in all his wonder. It might be a house, a miraculous adoption, a job offer. It might even be the greatest blessing of all — his nearness.

God invades, and his name is "Wonderful."

IV. The Form Of God's Invasion (13:24-25)

And now the epilogue to this opening chapter in the life of Samson. Verse 24:

Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. (13:24-25)

God did accomplish his word and perform his wonderful act: "The child grew up and the LORD blessed him"; "the Spirit of the LORD began to stir in him."

This phrase, "the child grew up and the LORD blessed him," is similar to the words used of Samuel, of John the Baptist, and of another remarkable Son, Jesus, who came to save (1 Sam. 2:21, 3:19; Luke 1:80, 2:40). In the postscript to this chapter we are reminded once more of God's purpose to invade our spiritually darkened world.

So here in this opening account of the birth of Samson we discern four spiritual principles:

1. *The darkness can be so severe in our lives that we cease to cry out to God for help and deliverance.*
2. *God is so faithful to his loyal love that he invades our lives often without our even asking.*
3. *When God invades our lives, he calls us to separation, not assimilation.*
4. *When God invades our lives, he does not answer all our petty questions. Instead, he reveals his wonder in order to evoke our worship.*

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