**A Surprise Visit: The Prophecy of Samson's Rise**

**Judges 13:1-25**

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I’m excited and thankful for the opportunity to take another brief detour away from the deep theological sea of Romans. This time we journey into the barbaric desert of Judges to learn some graphic lessons about life from Samson in Judges 13. The book of Judges seems appropriate for us to study because it’s a word that fits our times. It was written when the memory and mission of God had drifted far away from His people. Stories of a nation who only did what was right in their own eyes. Lessons for when God’s children face days of darkness, to grant clarity, humility, sobriety, and hope.

***1*** *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.*

***2*** *There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children.* ***3****And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.* ***4****Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean,* ***5*** *for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”* ***6*** *Then the woman came and told her husband, “A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name,* ***7****but he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”*

***8*** *Then Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born.”* ***9****And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah her husband was not with her.* ***10****So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me.”* ***11****And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to this woman?” And he said, “I am.”* ***12****And Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?”* ***13****And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful.* ***14****She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe.”*

***15****Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you.”* ***16*** *And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “If you detain me, I will not eat of 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.)* ***17*** *And Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?”* ***18*** *And the angel of the Lord said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”* ***19****So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the Lord, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching.* ***20*** *And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground.*

***21*** *The angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord.* ***22*** *And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.”* ***23*** *But his wife said to him, “If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these.”* ***24*** *And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him.* ***25*** *And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.*

His name was Achilles. He was a mythical warrior who was legendary for his skills in combat. His mother was beautiful. His father was a violent king. The story goes that his mom tried to make him invulnerable like the gods, and so she dipped him in the magical river Styx. But in the process, the back corner of his foot by which she held him when she lowered him into the water was never fully submerged. It was left unwashed. Achilles grew to be a mighty hero. In the Trojan war, he even defeated the powerful soldier, Hector. But in his arrogance, Achilles became flippant about his weakness and charged the city with a reckless abandon. All of a sudden, Hector’s brother named, Paris, released a poison-tipped arrow which found its way right into Achilles heel. He’d taken his protection, his security too lightly, and his weakness, his fatal defect, was exposed.

The book of Judges can be summarized by two simple words: Epic Fail. Within, we find a collection of true stories arranged in a plummeting sequence of downward spiral into depravity. After the stunning victories in the book of Joshua, you might expect something more positive, but Judges is just a major disappointment. The words Joshua left them with in challenge ring in our ears. “Choose this day whom you will serve, these idols or those, but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh, the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15) Judges is the story of how Israel chose the idols. They ignored that warning as they entered into Canaan.

Remember that God had originally created Adam and Eve in a garden to rule. They rebelled and rejected Him. They were sent into exile, and the entire earth was cursed, awaiting a promised Savior, a chosen one of God. Over time, man got worse but God never forgot His promise. He chose this man named Abraham. He promised him a land and gave him a family. They were a people through whom this land would be inherited and this savior born. But the family was a mess and God had to protect them. He rescued them from famine, from slavery, from annihilation. And then even commissioned them to return and claim this land to be a sort of new dwelling place for God, where His people could enjoy His presence again. And Israel was sent as a light to shine into the darkness of this land that has utterly rejected God. It was a place of child sacrifice and idolatry. And as Israel comes in, instead of converting any who would come to Yahweh and conquering the land of His enemies, they are corrupted by them and become the very thing they were sent to destroy. In a short time, they are polluted with rampant idolatry, gross immorality, and graphic brutality. This is the wild, wild east.

If it sounds bleak, you don’t even know the half of it. Let’s just catch up in the book of Judges. It’s shocking! It opens with the funeral of a national hero, Joshua. And there is deep tragedy of unfinished business as they fail to drive out God’s enemies and they settle among them. To get Israel’s attention, God follows through on promised threats and allows enemy nations to come discipline them. After a time, they cry out, so God raises up judges, kind of like barbaric sheriffs who deliver the nation with law and order for a season. But then they go back. And this cycle continues, only it’s not just a repeat. It’s a downward spiral getting worse each time. Epic failures go from bad to worse.

The first judge, Othniel, the young brother of a war hero leads the nation into battle, but they need another deliverer. So Ehud, a left-handed assassin, stabs an overweight king in the belly. And then a solitary warrior decimates 600 men with a board and nail. They need more help, though. So Deborah rules and she has to spur the men into battle. The only person bold enough to take a risk for God is a stealthy woman named Jael who lulls a king to sleep with a soothing cup of milk and then hammers his head into the ground with a stake. They wrote a song about her in chapter 5.

But they need more help. So a nervous coward named Gideon somehow gains courage through a supernatural fleece and a fateful tent-side nightmare about barley cakes, to defeat a huge force with pottery and torches. But he eventually falls prey to the same idolatry he was commissioned to destroy. And again, they sin and they need more help. Gideon has all these sons, one of which becomes treacherous and murders the entire family, save one who curses him. And the curse comes true when he tries to burn a tower of people alive and suffers a mortal wound to the head by a skull-crushing stone nudged off a high wall by a woman.

But they need more help. So a mafia-like barbarian named Jephthah makes a disturbing pagan vow. He leads the nation to a stunning victory, but then tragically has to sacrifice his own daughter in a sort of twisted devotion to God. Child sacrifice is how bad it’s gotten. Instead of becoming holy, Israel has become just like the Canaanites, always right in their own eyes. And their epic failure continues to prove that they need God now more than ever. Israel began as invulnerable. Protected by God. Saved by His angel. Enabled by His power. Commissioned to possess the land, to eradicate the enemies. But they took that relationship with Him too lightly. Israel abandoned His care and began to flirt with the enemy, supposing she could summon God whenever she felt the need.

Aren’t we the same? We’re protected by God, commissioned by God. And yet all too often we take our relationship lightly. We’re unimpressed with Him. We settle in with the enemy, flirt with sin, making small compromises. We’re complacent, assuming we can summon His strength whenever we have the need. We don’t show up to church hungry oftentimes, because our appetites are satisfied elsewhere. Our culture feeds us the words we want to hear. “Follow your heart. Trust your feelings. Do what’s right in your own eyes. If it makes someone happy, who are we to get in the way?” We need help. We are epic failures and we need hope. And that’s exactly why the book of Judges is written. It is to give us hope. To show us our need and give us hope, hope in God because of who He is and what He does.

What is the work of God? His work is being awesome. That’s what He does. He works wonders. He wants people to say, “Wow! Glory!” He evokes reverence.God is in the marvel business. He’s not promoting comic heroes, but performing cosmic wonders. Except in this rare occasion, when the two seem to combine for the fascinating story of a true man with super-human strength named Samson. It’s a story about flirting with the enemy and getting burned.

Over the next couple of weeks, we’re going to take a look at his life and learn that no one takes God’s salvation lightly without consequence. God is a big deal. And no one gets in the way of His salvation, or His judgment. There are three lessons from the life of Samson, and today we start with number one. Reverence: Beholding God’s Wonder. God thrives with odds against His favor because He wants you to see the “Wow!” So in chapter 13, we’re going to look at five wonders of God to behold. They all arise from this surprising visit from a stranger, a secret messenger.

**I. Behold His persevering grace—God’s Favor: A Visit Undeserved (13:1)**

Behold the wonder of God’s persevering grace through this visit which is completely undeserved. An undeserved visit. That’s what grace is. It is undeserved goodness, unmerited kindness. It is the kind of free favor that arouses true wonder.

Timothy Jones was planning to take his family on a vacation to Disney World. His middle-child, an eight-year old daughter, was adopted. Before she had been a part of their family, she had lived in another home. And in that home, when the parents vacationed to Disney World, they took their biological children, but left this girl with a nearby friend. And the situation was very complicated. But the girl’s conclusion was that she didn’t get to go because her bad behaviors had cost her the right to come along. After the Jones family had adopted this girl, they began to plan a trip to Disney World. And the closer they got, the more disobedient their daughter became. There was stealing, lying, insults. Until one day after a rough day she said, “I know what you’re going to do. You’re not going to take me to Disney World, are you?” And the dad said, “Is this trip something we’re doing as a family?” She nodded. “Are you part of the family?” Another nod. “Then you’re going with us. Sure, there are some consequences to help you remember right and wrong, but you are part of our family, and we’re not leaving you behind.” Well, he said her behavior got worse and more difficult. They still headed to Disney World on the day they’d promised. And in their hotel room that evening, she settled in and snuggled next to her stuffed unicorn, and she said, “Daddy, I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn’t because I was good. It’s because I’m yours.”

Because I’m yours! This is the only explanation for God’s grace to His people. It’s not because they’re good. It’s because they’re His. He has chosen them. And He does this to prove His power. He chooses the most unlikely people in the most desperate situations because He wants us to step back in awe and with reverence at the wonder of His persevering grace. So take a look at this opening act in verse 1, this undeserved visit. It shouldn’t have happened. It proves that God overcomes the most intense challenges and employs the most long-suffering means. His grace perseveres. There are two contrasting qualities that kind of heighten our wonder for this grace. First, look at the challenge that God’s grace overcomes.

Quality #1: The persistence of Israel’s sin. (13:1a)

The ongoing stubborn rebellion of His people can’t stop God’s favor.

***1*** *And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord….*

They were persistent in sin. There are a couple of observations here that highlight their audacity. The sovereign victim that their sin offends is Yahweh, God. And the determined resolve their sin entertains. They sin again. They’re sinning against God. He’s the victim. Unlike so many today who wonder, “If it’s not hurting anyone, what the big deal?” Well the problem is that it offends a sovereign victim, God. And the determined resolve is so audacious. The evil that they’re doing in the sight of the Lord is “again.” How many times in the book of Judges will they reject His call and His commission? Round and round the carousel we go. Idolatry again. Rebellion again. We’re feeling a little sick. And yet, God’s grace continues. This is the challenge God’s persevering grace overcomes: the persistence of Israel’s sin. And His grace is revealed and is heightened by this second quality. You see on the flipside a divine quality in direct contrast.

Quality #2: The patience of God’s discipline.

This is the gentle means God employs in verse 1.

***1****…so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.*

That’s the sovereign tool He summons. The Philistines are enemies who come in and who discipline them. If it were God coming in, He would just destroy them. But, He’s patient. He waits 40 years. And what’s shocking is 40 years of not returning to God. 40 years of discipline, of rebellion. Talk about kids disobeying over and over and not getting the message. 40 years! And yet, it’s more shocking on the other side when you think of it like this.

For the first time in the book of Judges, Israel doesn’t cry out for help. Before in the cycles, they have finally cried out. But now 40 years from the Philistines, and there is silence from Israel. They don’t cry out to God. And yet, even though they’re blind to their need, complacent, He doesn’t just abandon them. He decides to intercede Himself. That is persistent grace! Even though things have gotten that bad, after 40 years, they’re not crying out. They’re settled and defeated and God won’t let it continue. He’s patient and persistent in His discipline and grace.

And we ask, why. Why doesn’t He just give up on these people? More grace? More grace to the sinners? They don’t deserve it. Why? Because it’s what God does. He works wonders. He wants to blow you away with His persistent grace. You might say, “That’s too much.” He wants you to say “Wow!” He gives grace to people who are undeserving because He thrives when the odds are against His favor. When you think “He can’t work His way out of this one,” He’s going to showcase His wonder! One of the clearest Biblical recipients of this kind of undeserved favor is Paul. He recognizes what it is that Jesus came. In 1 Timothy 1 he says

**1 Timothy 1:13–17** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

He’s saying “Wow!” Paul gets it! And he says to us in Ephesians 2

**Ephesians 2:1–9** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

He wants you to show that it’s so awesome! Salvation is about reclaiming that wonder. We come as a church and celebrate the wonder. Satan hates that! He says, “There’s nothing to see there.” Or he says, “It’s too good to be true. It’s not for you. Not something that good.” Or “You’re good enough on your own. You don’t need that. You don’t need a crutch. You’re okay.” Or “The world has better wonders to offer. That’s boring stuff.” These are all lies that say Jesus isn’t a big deal. And we need to reclaim the wonder of what grace really is. Seeing the depth of our guilt, and the utter emptiness of what we have to offer, and the ultimate greatness of God’s holiness, finally exposes the true grace that is revealed as the cross spans that gap and we find a safe place to think about God’s awesomeness and our own weakness. We can be epic failures and not be afraid because God’s grace persists. Step back in awe and behold the wonder of it.

**II. Behold His perplexing choice—God’s Wisdom: A Visit Unexpected (13:2-7)**

It’s God’s confounding wisdom that comes into view and we witness this unexpected visit to a woman. Perplexing means “strange, hard to understand, confusing, puzzling.” It’s how God’s wisdom looks here. It doesn’t make sense. It’s not what we would expect. Why did it happen?

Eric Weisz was born in 1874. And from the beginning, he was a showman. He grew up to be an illusionist, a stuntman, and eventually one of the world’s most renowned escape artists. People started to call him Harry ‘handcuff’ Houdini. And he was good! He loved to dazzle people and make audiences wonder at his skill. He would raise the stakes to defy the odds. Not just escaping from a pair of handcuffs, but behind the back, blindfolded, upside-down, underwater. His feats kept getting more impossible. He escaped from the belly of a whale, from a crate nailed shut and thrown overboard into a river with 200 lbs of lead. Why would he do this. This is crazy! Why did he make it so hard? Because he wanted people to get the awe, the wow! He wanted to do the impossible. He wanted them to marvel.

But God is more wonderful than Houdini. He does the impossible without any trickery, for real. And he constantly raises the stakes. And He wants us to see the wonder of it. And to prove it, in His wisdom, He makes perplexing choices that seem to us like He’s tying His hands behind His back. Why would God do that? The surprise visit we see is like that. It’s unexpected. His choice draws us in at His wisdom and wonder. Look at the perplexing nature of His choice here. There are at least three drawbacks to what He does and it shows that His wisdom is greater than ours.

Drawback #1: His choice remains nameless (13:2a)

She is anonymous. She’s a no-name.

***2*** *There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah…*

He comes to this man of Zorah, but all we learn about this woman is that it’s his wife. That’s all we’re given. We expect God to choose “somebodies.” We want to be somebody. Except here, God’s choice goes nameless. She’s a nobody. It’s kind of surprising. But not only does she remain nameless throughout the story, this woman is childless.

Drawback #2: His choice was childless (13:2b-3a)

She’s barren. She can’t have kids.

***2****…And his wife was barren and had no children.*

That doesn’t stop God’s choice. In fact, it seems pivotal to why the choice was made. It’s what he goes at.

***3****And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children…*

Whoa! What a greeting! He comes right to the point. It seems almost why he came. This is significant because God had promised the nation that if Israel obeyed, not one of their women would be barren or miscarry. Not one! This was a special promise to them in this covenant relationship. So we don’t consider barrenness in our day and age in the same way. We recognize it’s a part of the curse. But in this point, it was a special recognition, a mark of national disobedience, of being cursed. And it makes this angel’s choice to visit this woman more perplexing, even. A childless, nameless woman.

Drawback #3: His choice seems to have been heedless (13:3b-7)

This isn’t entirely clear, but it seems to be that she may be a little bit heedless. She was a bit neglectful or careless. And I’ll show you what I mean. It’s understandable, but I think it might be there.

*3…but you shall conceive and bear a son.* ***4****Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean,* ***5*** *for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”*

So he gives some commands with a promise. You’re going to have a son. Now be careful! Stay away from wine and anything unclean. No haircuts! And he’ll start to save the country from the Philistines. It’s a good thing he only gives a couple of commands because the boy is going to try to end up breaking every single one of them.

But why does he give these commands? Fortunately for some of us, there’s nothing magical about lots of hair. The boy was a Nazarite. What is a Nazarite? It was a term from the law that had already been given. It just designated someone to be set apart or given to God. And this idea of no hair was somewhat new, but there weren’t special requirements that were making him magical. It was a special relationship that had been in God’s Word the entire time, there for Israel to look at. But it seems almost as if Israel has forgotten what is in that book. Well, in verse 6 she shares some surprising news.

***6*** *Then the woman came and told her husband, “A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name,* ***7****but he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”*

She recognized something special, but there’s something missing in her report. Did you see what was missing? Ominously, she didn’t say anything about not cutting the hair. That could be a problem. But even more than that, it’s imprecise because she forgot to say this: She leaves out the part of his mission being to begin saving them from the Philistines. His mission! It almost seems like it’s not quite a big enough deal in her mind. Now, it’s tough to say. We hardly blame her with what she just experienced. But it kind of pervades the national sentiment at the time. They weren’t listening carefully. They weren’t crying out to God, and they weren’t necessarily concerned about being saved from the enemies. And we’ll see that more as we go forward.

But you might be thinking, “Who is this angel of the Lord?” Well, that’s what we’re supposed to ask. But since you can’t wait, here’s a hint. Exodus 23. The people of Israel had just been delivered out of Egypt and God commissions them to conquer the land. And here’s this promise. It’s very interesting!

**Exodus 23:20–33** “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. You shall serve the Lord your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

All of this should be rolling through their minds. The connection is there. The visit is a reminder of the mission. If God comes and says there’s a boy coming, we already know what the mission is. And yet it seems like the couple is a bit clueless. And some would say, “Of all the families, what a perplexing choice! I mean, really? Exodus 23? The Bible only had five books back then and it seems like they hadn’t read any of them. God, you made a mistake! What a perplexing choice.” But listen! God loves to choose nobodies, because He thrives when the odds are against His favor. It’s how He showcases His wonder.

In fact, He loves it so much, that the centerpiece of His plan was to condescend as a baby in the womb of a nobody married to a nobody. He announced it to shepherds who were nobodies, was raised in Nazareth, a town of nobodies, and in His wisdom, He would showcase His power through death as a criminal on the cross and considered by all the “somebodies” of His day to be a “nobody.” This is the good news of the Gospel. Look at yourselves in this room. We’re not a room full of somebodies. We’re a room full of nobodies.

**1 Corinthians 1:26–31** For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

When people come to our church, they don’t say, “Wow! This is a bunch of somebodies!” They say, “Wow! This is a bunch of nobodies. God must be doing something!” Have we forgotten that it’s by God’s design? You might be frustrated and saying, “This church is like people who don’t get it. It’s like, this is hard.” It’s how God made it. The church is full of people in which the world thinks, “God’s handcuffed Himself and He’s locked Himself in a box. Now He really can’t get out of this one. That church over there…Whoa!” That’s the kind of predicament God loves. He loves things that only make sense if God is doing it.

When things make sense and all our plans are working it brings us glory. “Wow, Bethany! It’s an amazing church! Those people…Wow!” God won’t allow it. So He chooses people like us. So that when we make mistakes, people go “Whoa…God! He’s amazing!” And when things get tough and we start to worry, I do this and it’s so silly. I say, “Oh no! I’m out of ideas here. I think I actually might need God.” Maybe He’s waiting for us to hit that point before He starts to work, so that we don’t photo-bomb His glory. He wants it all! So we behold His wisdom and we reclaim the wonder. We don’t write people off as if they don’t belong here, because none of us belongs here. I certainly don’t belong here. Not the dirtiest sinner, and not the saint who has been here for 85 years. We don’t belong! So we step back in awe and behold the wonder of His perplexing choice.

**III. Behold His compassionate ear for our voice—God’s Patience: A Visit Extended (8-14)**

His patience through this visit is very kindly extended. Patience is hearing beyond what is expected.

There are many ways that having children changes you. It changes your schedule, when you go to bed, when you get up. It changes how you handle Spring Forward Sunday. It changes how often you work out, how you spend your money, what you talk about. It changes your diet and how much peanut butter and jelly you eat. It changes how many pink sparkles you have in your house. It changes moms and dads in different ways. Dad’s start entertaining themselves with these cheesy puns, desperately grasping for jokes to stay engaged in tiny tea party chats about Cinderella. And Mom’s develop superpowers.

The kids are in bed, and we’re downstairs eating a late dinner and talking about the day. And suddenly my wife says, “Shh! Did you hear that?” No. Nothing! “No, listen!” We walk up and of course, one of the kids is sneaking out of bed. How did she hear that? We’re fast asleep. It’s been a long day and we’re tired. All of a sudden, “Did you hear that?” What? No. “Listen!” I don’t hear anything. “One of the kids is coughing!” How does she do that? Well, it’s because mom’s have superpowers. They’re superhuman! Because moms have super hearts, don’t they? When you’re in the church nursery, you hear all these babies crying. When you hear your own, your heart leaps. You love your children. You hear their voice and you have a tender ear. My wife has such a tender ear beyond what I do. Do you think God has a tender ear for His children like that? Do you think He understands and hears our cry? Isn’t it a wonder to behold the kind of compassion that God has? This surprise visit is so undeserved, so unexpected. It’s extended shockingly in verse 8. We see the wonder of God’s patience here. And this is a very curious part of this chapter.

Curiosity#1: The return was unnecessary. (13:8-11)

Look at the willingness of God to listen and the discernment of His response, here. His willingness to listen through the extension of this visit, because it’s unnecessary. He had already told them everything He needed to say, but when Manoah prays and asks God, God listens and responds.

***8*** *Then Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born.”* ***9****And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah her husband was not with her.* ***10****So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me.”* ***11****And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to this woman?” And he said, “I am.”*

That’s an interesting question because it seems like that’s exactly why the angel came around the first time. And yet, Manoah asks again. It seems complex. We don’t know everything that is going on in his heart and his intentions here, but there’s kind of a strange dynamic where the angel was coming to the woman in the field. And we don’t know exactly what is going on. But what we do know is that God listened to this couple with communication problems. And He extends His visit. He comes and returns.

Curiosity #2: The mission is unrepeated. (13:12-14)

So that important detail about Samson saving them from the Philistines goes unrepeated even though it seems like it’s even being asked for. There is a specific question Manoah asks in verse 12.

***12****And Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?”* ***13****And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful.* ***14****She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe.”*

Why didn’t he repeat this boy’s mission? It seems like God has already told them what they need to know. He doesn’t need to repeat Himself. He’s there with some compassion and He clarifies what He said. But the message and the mission were clear. And if they knew what had been given to Israel and their commission, they would understand. This was about taking the land for God. And yet, Israel wasn’t listening as a whole. They were not fighting, not crying out, not interested in their mission. And we’ll even see this boy intermarry with the enemy. And Judah, who at the beginning of the book was the first go out against the enemy, they are actually the first to give up. We recognize this lack of understanding about God’s desire to save them from their enemies and their nonchalance about living with them. And yet, God is still listening. He is still listening even in the midst of this curiosity of this couple. He’s still listening to the simplest prayers. He loves to listen and showcase His wonder and even His patience to those who aren’t listening. He thrives when the odds are against His favor. And we serve this God who always hears. Always!

I think of David when he was seized by none other than his enemy, the Philistines. And in Psalm 56 he writes these words that are so sweet in crying out to God.

**Psalm 56:8–11** You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

He stores our tears. They matter to Him. When I call out, God hears. He is ready! He desires that His people call out. He’s listening. We just step back and behold His patience. He’s listening and caring. What a wonder that we would embrace the mission He’s already given and ask not for new words, but for the ones He’s already spoken. What a wonder!

**IV. Behold His profound disguise—God’s Splendor: A Visit Undetected (13:15-20)**

His splendor goes strangely undetected. Disguises are sometimes really elaborate as a way of hiding. And sometimes the best disguises are just in plain sight.

I worked in a tax office near my old college and had a boss who loved to tell this story. He was trying to get on a flight, and some things got twisted up. The airline helped him out. They got him ahead and he was sitting with the priority passengers. He struck up a conversation with the gentlemen next to him.

“What business are you in?”

“I’m in the Movie industry.”

“Interesting.”

They started talking. They talked about life, about God, the world. When the plane landed, the man left the aircraft before anyone else and he said goodbye to my boss with an amused grin. He’d never actually shared his name. My boss realized that everyone around him was staring with gaping jaws. “Do you know who that was?! That was Tom Cruise!”

And he said, “Who’s that?”

Only Number 1 on Premier magazine’s list of Hollywood’s’ most powerful actors! I mean, the last movie alone he had like $25 million. This guy! And you didn’t even notice. It was a dramatic irony that Cruise had gone undetected beneath the unintentional disguise of total ignorance. And this is what we see in our story right here. The angel of the Lord goes undetected, sheltered beneath the profound disguise of human ignorance. God seems to enjoy being understated and artful in the way He highlights the irony here. Look at the irony of Manoah’s ignorance and the subtlety of the angel of the Lord’s disguise.

Irony #1: Manoah’s ignorance (13:15-16

***15****Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you.”* ***16*** *And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “If you detain me, I will not eat of 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.)*

Manoah offers food. That angel says, “No thanks.”

He says, “Who turns down food? This is weird. Okay!” He’s ignorant of who stands before him.

Irony #2: The angel of the Lord’s finesse (13:17-18)

The angel of the Lord has finesse regarding the splendor of His disguise. This is very interesting! Who is this angel of the Lord?

***17*** *And Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?”* ***18*** *And the angel of the Lord said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”*

What do you say when someone says that? “What’s your name?” “Why do you ask my name seeing it is wonderful?” Manoah is silent. I mean, this is not a normal conversation. “My name is too much for you. It’s too awesome! It’s marvelous! There’s a limit to what you can know. I’m too awesome!” And Manoah doesn’t have a response. He’s shut down. “Good Point! Okay, moving on!” The man has finesse, only He’s not a man.

Irony #3: The angel of the Lord’s elegance (13:19-20)

The angel of the Lord’s elegance through the shedding of His disguise. As magicians like to say, the couple is watching closely. And the stage is set here for a sighting of wonder.

***19****So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the Lord, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching.* ***20*** *And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground.*

There are no more communication issues here. They are in unison! They drop and are on their face. Manoah stops asking questions and he finally gets his answer. Who was that man in the fire? Not Tom Cruise. That was God! The second person of the trinity. The Son who would one day come as a baby, a boy named Jesus, to Himself be sacrificed for the sins of the world. And the timing and manner of His reveal is flawless. Talk about a vanishing act. Up in smoke. What was that?

God loves to veil the full power that He has until the perfect moment, because He thrives when the odds are against His favor. He’s going to showcase His wonder and wait until you least expect it to reveal Jesus as a God of splendor and majesty. He is a God of glory and mystery. A God who walks unnoticed with His friends until they break bread. When they realize it, He’s gone! (Luke 24) He’s a God who comforts a weeping woman who supposes He’s a gardener. (John 20) He is a God of the slow reveal, of perfect timing.

This isn’t the first time this has happened. One occasion comes to mind in Genesis 32, when Jacob was all alone. He sent his family ahead, having nightmares about what’s going to happen as he meets his twin brother who he has cheated and betrayed. What happens in verse 24?

**Genesis 32:24–32** And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip on the sinew of the thigh.

In the middle of the night, he’s wrestling with this stranger in the darkness. And he says, “Please tell me your name,” as they interact. And He says, “Why is it that you ask my name?” Jacob recognizes that he’s seeing God face to face and yet, he doesn’t die. God’s not afraid of the mystique. He’s not afraid of showing you a bit of wonder. It’s almost as if it’s in a smile to say, “Buckle up! Something amazing is about to happen!” We just behold the splendor of how God works.

Can you look back in your life? Just take a look at what Christ has done at a time when you think, “I couldn’t see Him there at the time. I couldn’t see what God was doing.” But He was setting you up for something more amazing! We step back in awe at the wonder of His profound disguise and how He works and timing.

**V. Behold His acceptance of sacrifice—God’s Mercy: A Visit Approved (13:21-25)**

His mercy is unveiled as it becomes clear the visit was divinely approved by God. Mercy means to be released from a debt. It is not getting punished for what you deserve. It is freedom that is approved.

Just to kind of capture the feeling, imagine one day that you’re late for church. It’s not hard to do on a day like today, Spring Forward Sunday. You miss your alarm and rush out of bed. There’s no time for breakfast. You have Nursery duty in first service, so you skip the bagel and grab an orange and jump on your way. Your mind is racing. You’re already late. You’re trying to get through the lights. You pass a few people from church and hope they don’t recognize you. Then all of a sudden you see a flash of red and blue. Terror! You pull over, and the officer approaches. You’re guilty and you’re about to plead. But the officer says, “Be careful next time. I have authority under the law to release you. You won’t be held to pay. You’re free to go.” Then terror turns to relief. That’s how mercy kind of feels. Except with Jesus, He doesn’t just write off our ticket. He takes the hit on His own account by paying it, and He gives His clean record to us. No guilt! This is a wonder, the kind of mercy that we receive from God! There are a couple of observations that just showcase the wonder of this acceptance we see.

Observation #1: The angel’s ascension (13:21a)

***21*** *The angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife.*

The acceptance is demonstrated through the angel’s ascension. He goes up and doesn’t return. He doesn’t need to come back. He doesn’t need to come and judge. The sacrifice had been approved.

Observation #2: Manoah’s recognition (13:21b)

***21****…Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord.*

God’s acceptance was evaluated by Manoah and he comes to a recognition of who this was. He gets it now! And it is questioned by him. He comes to an understandable but wrong conclusion.

Observation #3: Manoah’s wrong conclusion (13:22)

***22*** *And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.”*

He’s right about seeing God. He realized he just was on the show “Undercover God” and he’s terrified! But he’s not right about the death.

Observation #4: Manoah’s wife’s ongoing clarification (13:23)

***23*** *But his wife said to him, “If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these.”*

His wife explains. She defends and gives an encouraging clarification to what he says. He wouldn’t have done all this awesome stuff! She speaks some sense. “This was for a reason, but not to kill us. It was for something more.” God is different than we think He is. And in the end, we see her words come true in the realization of this prophecy through the birth of Samson.

Observation #5: Practical realization. (13:24)

***24*** *And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him.*

It’s an amazing gift! Although, it’s possible that there’s kind of a minor note here. The name “Samson” comes from the word “sun.” It’s not like a child son, but like the solar light in the sky. And from the sound, there’s a possibility that he’s named after a local pagan sun god, Shemesh. It’s not surprising because the town of sun-worship named, Beth-Shemesh was in that valley, just a few miles away from Zorah and Eshtaol, the two towns you see in verse 25. And that’s interesting. It’s a possibility that Israel’s miracle child, their golden boy, is named after a pagan idol. We don’t know for sure. But we do know that he is going to be drawn into that evil culture in more ways than one. He was blind to his purpose to save. His is going to be a story of epic failure. It’s no wonder God will take great pains to emphasize the name of His future chosen one, so that there would be no mistake about His mission, Jesus (“Yahweh saves”). But long before that time, Samson’s relationship with God’s enemies is about to get a lot more complicated.

***25*** *And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.*

Amazing things are about to happen! God loves to offer mercy through acceptable sacrifice. He thrives when the odds are against His favor, to showcase His wonder and for people to see how awesome He is. In mercy, God visits this nation who doesn’t deserve it. Two thoughts strike Manoah at the same time. “Why did God come to us? How are we not dead?” How does this happen? God isn’t like what we thought! What a God! What a wonder! An acceptable sacrifice? This must be a God who saves. This is a God of good news, a God of the Gospel, a God named Jesus. Behold His mercy and reclaim the wonder!

According to Lou Harris, the very first movie trailer appeared in 1912 at the end of a series called *The Adventures of Kathlyn*. They were originally called trailers because the advertisements were usually played after the films to get viewers to come back and see more. But over the years, they eventually were played before the movies and began to be called previews. And they even developed what we now know as a teaser. Here is the definition from the dictionary. A teaser is “A short introductory advertisement for a product, especially one that doesn’t mention the name of the thing being advertised.”

We just saw the perfect teaser. It’s a preview for what’s to come. The surprising visit of a mysterious messenger prophesying about a chosen one and then disappearing in a cloud of smoke. And then phft! The screen goes dark. And the words appear, “A savior is born this day…” Only, who is this a preview for? The story of Samson? Certainly. But is it not a teaser for something more spectacular? A name not mentioned? Another Chosen One? A better Savior? A child to be announced by an angel and empowered by God’s Spirit. One who conquers not by force of strength, but through self-limitingweakness.One who won’t merely begin to save a nation, but will deliver mankind and claim, “It is finished.” A man in whom no defect was found, yet He died for the sins of the world. I hope we are left wanting more! God saves whoever He wants and so often, those He saves are nobodies.

Lesson # 1: Reverence at the mystery of God’s nature.

Next week, lesson # 2: Confidence in the supremacy of God’s power.

God is about to use this nobody to start defeating everybody! We’ve witnessed the prophecy of Samson’s rise, but we’re about to experience the intensity of his rage. And if you listen closely, you can hear the bass beat begin to drop and the music lyrics ring, “Let’s get ready to rumble!” in chapters 14 and 15: *The Wedding Fight*.