

Oh the value God places upon the lives of faith of His people. Despite the many twists, turns and low points of our lives which grieve the heart of God, He has one goal which He will surely meet: to produce that precious work of Spirit-wrought faith in us which will, in the end, “overcome the world” (1 John 5:4). “Nothing else matters but faith working by love” (Gal. 5:6), and God is sure to produce such faith in each one of His covenant children, even - as we shall see this week – in the wayward sons of Jacob, as exemplified in this week’s notes by the tribe of Dan and their great hero, Samson.

**Monday/Tuesday: Read Genesis 49:16-17 and Judges 13:11-25 If the Lord had wanted to Kill Us....**

We begin again with Samson, the most famous descendant of Jacob’s slave-wives, whom we introduced as that “serpent” raised up by God to unseat the mighty “rider” from his horse. This language predicts how God would use Samson to overthrow 40 years of Philistine domination. But how unpromising were the events surrounding his birth! For example, it is hard to see strong faith in Manoah, Samson’s father, who panics at the messenger sent from God and blurts out, “we are doomed to die!” (Judges 13:22). In fact, the Angel of the Lord refuses to appear to him, instead appearing twice to Samson’s more godly mother. Yet, God is patient in drawing out the weak faith of both parents of Samson, hearing Manoah’s doubting prayer requesting a second appearance (Judges 13:8-9) and accepting their sacrificial worship (Judges 13:18-21). No wonder Samson’s mother in faith reassures her doubting husband of God’s grace in Judges 13:23: “If the Lord had meant to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering... from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this.”

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank God for keeping His promise to Jacob in raising up the great judge Samson, who would fulfill the words of Gen. 49:16 to provide “justice for his people.” More specifically, aren’t you glad that God, in providing a “savior” named Samson, didn’t wait for Samson’s parents to have sufficient faith to receive what was promised? The initiative lies with God. *He* will send salvation even when His own people’s faith is too weak to look for it! Think of it! All Samson’s mother was doing when the announcement of her son’s birth came to her was working in the field (Judges 13:9), just trying to gather the harvest in order to make ends meet. Yet God came to her then... and met her right where she was in her daily life. Rejoice that you have such a God, who is willing to come down to us where we are with the good news of salvation from our enemies! Use this poem by George Herbert to help you:

*Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things thee to see,  
And what I do in anything,  
To do it as for thee:*

*A man that looks on glass,  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heav’n espy.*

*All may of thee partake:  
Nothing can be so mean,  
Which with his tincture ‘For Thy sake,’  
Will not grow bright and clean.*

*A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine:  
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,  
Makes that and th’ action fine.*

*This is the famous stone  
That turneth all to gold:  
For that which God doth touch and own  
Cannot for less be told.*

**Wednesday/Thursday: Read Genesis 49:16 and Judges 13:19-25****Sacrificial Preparation**

How would God provide justice for His people in the birth of Samson? One way is through the work of the mighty Spirit of God who comes on Samson beginning in Judges 13:25. In preparation, God's accepted the sacrifice of Manoah (Judges 13:19-23) as His pledge to save them through Samson. How was Samson's mother so sure of God's acceptance of their worship and His ongoing favor towards them in raising up a deliverer (Judges 13:23)? It was because the pleasing savor of sacrificial smoke (always at the heart of real sacrificial worship, Leviticus 1:9; 1:13 etc.) was accepted by God's Angel in Judges 13:20. In fact, the Angel of the Lord (who in the Old Testament always stands for God) was willing to ascend back into Heaven *with* the smoke of Manoah's sacrifice. Why? Because it was this Angel who would present the sacrifice from the hands of these sinners before the throne of God. What an amazing advance in the revelation of God's plan of salvation! Earlier, the Angel of the Lord touched the sacrifice of Gideon and caused it to be consumed (Judges 6:21-22), causing Gideon to exclaim, "Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face!" Well – how much more amazing to see that same mighty Angel of the Lord *Himself* consumed on the altar in Manoah's burnt offering! Can there be any more proof that God's promise to bring "justice" to His people, the Danites, would come ultimately through someone much greater than Samson, who would offer Himself as "an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Leviticus 3:5)?

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank Jesus Christ for His willingness to provide us with real evidence that there is forgiveness with God through the sacrifice of Himself, offered up as a burnt offering for sin. The smoke of sacrifice into which the Angel entered provided Samson's parents peace in place of fear, so we also may by faith behold "the smoke" of Jesus' sacrifice of Himself, and know that we have been accepted in Heaven by the savor of His Holy life offered in our place. As that great hymn by Isaac Watts reminds us (# 306 in our hymnals):

*Jesus, my great High Priest,  
Offered his blood and died;  
My guilty conscience seeks  
No sacrifice beside.  
His pow'rful blood did once atone,  
And now it pleads before the Throne.*

*My Advocate appears  
For my defense on high;  
The Father bows his ears  
And lays his thunder by.  
Not all that hell or sin can say  
Shall turn his heart, his love, away.*

*To this dear Surety's hand  
Will I commit my cause;  
He answers and fulfills  
His Father's broken laws.  
Behold my soul at freedom set;  
My Surety paid the dreadful debt.*

*Should all the hosts of death  
And pow'rs of hell unknown  
Put their most dreadful forms  
Of rage and mischief on,  
I shall be safe, for Christ displays  
His conqu'ring pow'r and guardian grace.*

**Friday/Saturday: Read Ge 49:16-18, Jdg 13:25-14:6 & Heb 11:32-34****Sinful yet Called**

Clearly there are compromised motives on the part of Samson, *a mere sinful man*, as he seeks a wife from among the Philistines (Judges 14:1-4). The very nation whose dominion Samson has been sent to destroy are the people with whom he wants to make a marriage alliance - against God's law! Yet this marriage is in line with God's over-ruling purpose in Judges 14:4 - not because Samson is *right* to desire such a marriage, but simply because God is sovereign, and able to overrule and use even a weak, crooked, cracked vessel such as Samson in the office of judge. Though Samson ignored the holy Nazirite call on his life (see Judges 13:3-5), he nevertheless held the *office of judge*, called by God! Therefore, we may be sure that God the Holy Spirit, so clearly at work "stirring Samson up" (13:25), was able with perfect holy power to sinlessly use Samson for the exact purposes which God had planned. How condescending God is by His Spirit to inhabit and even sinlessly use the lives of His people in all their compromise and sin.

**Mediate and Pray:** As you think of the elders and officers whom God has called to be over God's people in your church, shepherding you as part of God's flock, thank God for His ability to use sinful men – and still, in the end, enable them to work for His glory "by faith," even as Samson's faith is the "last word" of his life in Hebrews 11:32-34. Reaffirm your commitment to Christ's church – in which He alone is the sinless Leader, Judge and Savior with the words of hymn # 353 by Timothy Dwight:

*I love Thy kingdom, Lord,  
The house of Thine abode,  
The church our blessed Redeemer saved  
With His own precious blood.*

*I love Thy church, O God.  
Her walls before Thee stand,  
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,  
And written on Thy hand.*

*For her my tears shall fall  
For her my prayers ascend,  
To her my cares and toils be given  
Till toils and cares shall end.*

*Sure as Thy truth shall last,  
To Zion shall be given  
The brightest glories earth can yield  
And brighter bliss of Heaven.*