**The Birth of Samson**

In my morning prayer time, I have been praying that in our upcoming elections our country will elect leaders who will do God’s will. Martin Luther wrote that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. The Old Testament records numerous kings who did evil yet God enabled them to accomplish His purposes. King Cyrus was thought to be a pagan but God used him to return exiles to Israel to begin rebuilding the temple (see book of Ezra). God may send leaders who are not believers yet will carry out His will. As we continue our study of the book of Judges, the last judge mentioned is Samson to whom 4 chapters are dedicated. As we will see, he was a man of faith, chosen by God to lead Israel but her was very flawed.

Chapter 13 describes the miraculous birth of Samson, the son of a sterile mother. At the beginning of the chapter, it is noted that God had delivered Israel into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years. The angel of the Lord (preincarnate Jesus) appeared to the wife of a Danite man living in Zorah named Manoah and told her that she would have a son. Her son was to be set apart as a Nazarite (see Num. 6:1-21). While she would not be under a Nazarite vow herself, she was to refrain from drinking wine or eating anything unclean. Her son would be set apart and would later begin the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines. Note that the Nazarite vow for Samson was not his choice but was directed by God prior to his birth. 1st Samuel chapter one tells how Samuel was born under a vow made by his mother that he would be consecrated to serve God all the days of his life. This is one of several times in the Bible when an angel delivers news of the coming birth of a child. Genesis records predictions of the births of Ishmael (16:11) and Isaac (18:10). God also used prophets to announce future births (see 1st Kings 13:2, 2nd Kings 4:16). Prophecy of the birth of Jesus was given to Abraham and later to prophets such as Isaiah (Is. 7:14) and Jeremiah (Jer. 23:5-6).

The woman went to her husband and told him that a man who looked like an angel had appeared to her. He did not tell her his name but told her that she would have a child who would be a Nazarite. Later Manoah asked the man what his name was prompting the response “Why do you as my name?” Jacob asked the same question and got the same answer (see Gen. 32:29). It is odd that the woman who was to give birth to Samson was not mentioned by her name. When the angel of the Lord returned, He spoke with both Manoah and his wife together, confirming what He had told her earlier. Manoah asked Him to remain with them so that he could prepare a meal. He declined but told Manoah that he could offer the goat as a burnt offering. When the offering was made, the angel of the Lord ascended in the midst of the flame. Manoah, realizing that they had seen the Lord, assumed they were doomed to die. His wife offered a very practical reason that it would not be so. She said that He would not have revealed the things He told them and would not have accepted the offering. Also, she would not be alive to fulfill the prophecy of Samson’s birth. The chapter ends with the birth of Samson and it is noted that the spirit of the Lord began to stir in him.

In the next few chapters, we will learn more about the flawed character of Samson. He pursued a Philistine woman for a wife and later a prostitute and his fleshly desires led him to confide in both women who betrayed him. Despite that, he was given strength through the Holy Spirit and is honored for his faith in chapter 11 of Hebrews. Matthew Henry wrote that Samson was a type of Christ due to his miraculous birth and the promise that he would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. God used this very flawed man to lead Israel for 20 years and to inflict punishment on the Philistines.