

DOWNWARD SPIRAL, PART 11: “HIGH HOPES”
JUDGES 13:1-25

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 11 of our sermon series called “Downward Spiral,” where we're going through the book of Judges together.

And today's sermon is titled: “High Hopes.”

So let's get right into it.

Sermon Introduction

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

In the midst of terrible injustices that black Americans faced, these words were spoken by the well-known pastor and civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., in February 1968, just two months before he was assassinated.

Those were extremely dark days, filled with much frustration and disappointment, but to King, those days were still just *finite*. They *would* come to an end.

In a sense, those specific days *are* over, but in another sense, such darks days unfortunately just keep resurfacing in different ways, different degrees, and different places.

Still, King trusted in a *greater* day to come—a *final* day which even the best of our days here can only glimpse—where the brightness of *infinite* hope reigns.

True hope is never found in what is *finite*—not finite *circumstances*, not finite *people*; but true hope is only found in what is *infinite*—in *God* himself.

And that's what we'll look more at in today's passage.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Judges 13:1-25.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon. It will help you follow along more easily.

I'd highly recommend using a physical Bible, but if you don't have one, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

By way of reminder, “judges” here doesn't refer to judicial or court judges, but these judges were military leaders that God raised up to deliver his people from an oppressor. They were not kings over all of Israel, but they were more like clan or tribal leaders.

We're in the main body of the book, which tells the narratives of 12 judges (6 major judges and 6 minor judges), where the people of Israel and the *judges* themselves go through this *downward spiral*, where they get worse and worse as the book progresses.

And today, we are beginning the account of the sixth major judge and the last of the 12 judges—Samson. He has the longest account of them all, spanning four chapters, so we'll be covering his narrative over several sermons, starting with his birth narrative.

So that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Judges 13:1-25.

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.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in three parts, where we'll see that...

God gives hope in the midst of...

- I. Barrenness (vv. 1-7)
- II. Uncertainty (vv. 8-21)
- III. Fear (vv. 22-25)

So first, God gives hope in the midst of...

I. Barrenness (vv. 1-7)

Look at verse 1.

[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.]

This is the beginning of *another* downward spiral that we've become accustomed to throughout this book.

- "The people of Israel *again* did what was evil in the sight of the LORD [by turning to idolatry],
- So the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years [as an act of discipline]."

Forty years is the *longest* oppression period in the entire book; it's the length of an entire generation.

And after introducing the downward spiral of the people of Israel, the camera zooms in (so to speak) to look at *one* married couple.

Look at verses 2-7.

[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.'"]

In verse 2, we're introduced to a man named Manoah and his wife, who was *barren*.

And, in verse 3, the angel of the LORD appears to the woman and calls attention to it by saying "*Behold*, you are barren and have not borne children."

But in the same sentence, he pronounces the LORD's solution: "but you shall conceive and bear a son."

But this won't just be *any* son; verse 5 says that "the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb."

To be clear, being a Nazirite had nothing to do with being from Nazareth, like Jesus was.

Rather, to be a "Nazirite" meant to be "devoted" or "set apart," and it referred to a special vow described in Numbers 6:1-21, where *any* Israelite—male or female, no matter what tribe they were from—could set themselves apart for a period of time as "holy to the LORD" (Num. 6:8).

During that time, there were *three* restrictions that they vowed to keep:

- no grapes (Num. 6:3-4)—as in no drinking wine or eating any grapes at all,
- no razor (Num. 6:5)—as in they couldn't cut their hair,

- and no death (Num. 6:6-7)—as in they couldn't go near a corpse.

So what's the *significance* of these three restrictions?

Wine represented joy and plenty, so no grapes declared that true joy and satisfaction is found in the LORD (Ps. 4:7; 104:15).

Uncut hair *visibly* showed their ongoing dedication to the LORD. And at the end of the vow, the Nazirite would shave his head and burn his hair underneath his peace (or fellowship) offering to the LORD (Num. 6:18), symbolically giving himself to God.

Death was a source of severe uncleanness and embodied the curse of sin, so avoiding corpses symbolized purity and avoidance of sin.

These three restrictions were also what the *priests* observed (Ezek. 44:20, 21, 25), but those who took the Nazirite vow were *not* priests.¹

Still, for whatever reason, they wanted to dedicate themselves to the LORD in a *priest-like* way—at least for a certain period of time.

This next point is pretty important. The Nazirite vow was undertaken by individuals, but it was not *just* for the individual.

In a sense, these Nazirites *symbolized* what *all* of Israel was to be—"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6).

They served as a *witness* to *all* the people of Israel that they are to be holy just as the LORD is holy (Lev. 11:44).

<pause>

This probably sounds a bit strange or foreign to us, but as Christians, there's a somewhat *similar* practice that we may be more familiar with.

Christians may willingly choose to *fast* from food (or other good things) for a limited amount of time, as a way to intensify our hunger and desire for God.

It is a tangible way to express that true joy and satisfaction is found not in good things that God gives us but in him alone; that we are utterly dependent on him for everything; and that our desire to please him is greater than our desire to please ourselves.²

<pause>

So whether the Nazirite vow or Christian fasting, it *embodied* a life of self-denial, visible witness, and single-minded devotion to the LORD.

And so, that's how this child who was to be born to Manoah and his wife was to live.

And in verse 4, *because* he was to be a Nazirite from the *womb*, Manoah's wife *even now* must not eat or drink anything that might compromise his Nazirite vow as he's being formed inside her.

¹ And they could *never* become priests because they weren't from the tribe of Levi, or more specifically, they weren't from the lineage of Aaron.

² Christians may also willingly choose to remain *single*, for a limited amount of time or for life, as a way to express that earthly marriage is not ultimate but our heavenly marriage to Christ is (Rev. 19:7-9). It is a tangible way to express that true joy and satisfaction is not found in temporary marriage and family, but in the eternal marriage and family of Christ. Though the apostle Paul was single, he had many brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters in Christ. He was not isolated or without intimacy, but he enjoyed the intimacy of Christ and his spiritual family. He understood singleness as a gift for undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:7, 35), and he lived that out in such a way that continues to point *all* of us to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord.

Later, only two others in the Bible would be Nazirites from the womb—Samuel and John the Baptist—both of whom would also come from barren women (Hannah in 1 Sam. 1, and Elizabeth in Luke 1). Samuel would prepare the way for the great King *David*, and John the Baptist would prepare the way for the greatest King *Jesus*.

And this theme of a son being born to a barren woman should also be familiar to us. That was the case with Sarah (Gen. 11:20-21:1), Rebekah (Gen. 25:19-26), and Rachel (Gen 29:31-30:24). And they gave birth to Isaac, Jacob (otherwise known as Israel), and Joseph, respectively. These were the great patriarchs whose life narratives take up more than half the book of Genesis.

And at the end of verse 5, the angel of the LORD also tells Manoah's wife what her son will *do*: "and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

So we have high hopes for this child.

And then, in verses 6-7, Manoah's wife goes and tells her husband what the angel of the LORD said to her.

<pause>

Now, in all this, we should notice that there's a *huge* omission in this entire first section that is rather unsettling.

Remember the general pattern of the downward spiral.

Israel rebels against the Lord by turning to idolatry, the Lord hands them over to their enemies as an act of discipline, and then *before* the Lord responds by raising up a judge to deliver them, the people are *supposed* to cry out to God for mercy—but there's no mention of that this time.

Forty years of oppression seems to have made the people of Israel complacent (or apathetic) with their current state. In fact, later in chapter 15, when Samson is fighting against the Philistines, the men of Judah say to him, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?" (15:11). They've all just accepted their oppression and get upset when Samson disturbs the status quo.

<pause>

Here, the barrenness of Manoah's wife is meant to be a mini *picture* of the barrenness of all Israel.

Just as she could not be fruitful and multiply children, the people of Israel were also fruitless (so to speak). They were not bearing fruits in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8), but they were again doing what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

And just as there's no record of either Manoah or his wife crying out to God, there's no record of the people of Israel crying out either.

This couple had also become *complacent* with childlessness. Perhaps they cried out in the past, but now, they've just accepted the fact.

They've lost all hope.

<pause>

So how about us?

Ask yourself: How have I been complacent with my current state?

Is there any sin in my life where I've just come to accept and feel at home with? Perhaps pride, sexual sin, anger, love of money, unforgiveness, addiction, or something else.

Perhaps you once cried out to God for help, but after a while, having returned to it again and again, you've just become complacent with your sin; it's something you've just accepted as part of your life—"it is what it is"—so you no longer cry out to God.

<pause>

But even when the barren couple is *not* asking for a child, the Lord comes and gives them one.

And even when the people of Israel are *not* asking God for a judge-deliver, the Lord comes and gives them one.

This is entirely God's *grace*. God initiates salvation for his people even when they're *not* crying out to him—even when they're barren and hopeless.

This is the nature of salvation. All of us were once spiritually *dead*, and we *would* never (and we *could* never) cry out to God in repentance and faith on our own. But through his Word and his Spirit, he gives us new spiritual *life*, so that we can see God for who he is and respond to him with genuine repentance and faith.

Without God's initiative, we would be left dead, captive, barren, and hopeless in our sins. There could be no salvation for us apart from God graciously coming to us, even when we weren't calling out to him.

<pause>

So first, barrenness; and second, God gives hope in the midst of...

II. Uncertainty (vv. 8-21)

Look at verse 8.

[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."]

After Manoah's wife told him that they're going to have a child, like any new parent-to-be, he responds with feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty.

And so, he prays to the LORD to send the same person again to *teach* them what they are to do with the child who will be born.

There are a few things that are noteworthy here.

First, notice that Manoah prays to the *LORD*.

Given that the people of Israel have *again* turned to idolatry, it's almost surprising to find that Manoah is *not* praying to an idol but to the one true God, the LORD.

Second, Manoah *believes* what the angel of the LORD has declared to his wife.

He *really* believes that a child will be born to them; otherwise, he wouldn't have prayed this prayer.

Third, Manoah genuinely wants to raise his son properly.

That's the whole reason he's praying to the LORD. He's admitting that he doesn't know what to do, and he needs help. He knows he can't trust himself, he can't trust the worldly wisdom of the idolatrous people around him, but he needs divine revelation—he needs the word of God to guide him in his parenting.

All these are good indications that Manoah truly believed and truly wanted to obey the LORD.

<pause>

Parents, Manoah here is a model for all of us. We should feel a proper weight of responsibility in raising our kids in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

And when we inevitably find ourselves in situations where we don't know what to do as a parent, we should not first look to other things like social media or our friends to figure it out, but we ought to first pray to the Lord and look to his word to teach us wisdom for parenting—and wisdom for every other area of life.

Fathers, as the head of your household, it'd be good to regularly ask yourself: What prayers am I praying for my family?

Am I praying just for good health, physical protection, and academic or career success? Or am I praying for wisdom to raise my children in the ways of the Lord?

Ask the Lord regularly for his help; he'll give it.

Look now at verses 9-14.

[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.]"

Notice that first phrase in verse 9—"And God *listened* to the voice of Manoah"—and just let that sink in for a moment.

- The God who created and sustains the universe and everything in it,
- the God who is completely self-sufficient and satisfied in himself, who needs absolutely nothing from his creation,
- He *listens* to his people, and as we'll soon see, he *acts* in response to our prayers.

In verse 12, when the angel of the LORD comes again, Manoah asks him, "what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?"

But in verses 13-14, the angel of the LORD *doesn't* answer *any* part of Manoah's two-part question.

- He doesn't say that the boy should be raised as a Nazirite from the womb, ensuring that he has contact with no grapes, no razor, and no death.
- He doesn't say that they boy's mission is to begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

All of that, he has *already* said to Manoah's wife, and so he doesn't reiterate it here.

Instead, he focuses entirely on what Manoah's *wife* is to be careful to do *right now*—"She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing."

So what is going on here? Why does the angel of the LORD respond like that?

<pause>

Before I was about to marry Tina, I met with an older husband that I had a lot of respect for, and I asked him, "What advice would you have for me in my marriage for the next five years?"

And his response was something like, “Five years? Just focus on loving your wife today and then tomorrow and the next day.”

And that’s the impression I’m getting from the angel of the LORD here.

In a sense, Manoah wants to know the A through Z of parenting their child to come, but the angel of LORD responds by saying, “Just focus on A for now.”³

<pause>

I know that kind of answer can be frustrating for many of us. We want to know the A through Z for almost everything our lives.

- How will my kids turn out?
- Will this relationship work out?
- Will I ever get married?
- What’s the next step in my career?
- Will we have enough money to cover our kids’ schooling?
- Will this person ever turn to Christ?
- Will our church be ok?

We want to know *more* than what God, in his wise and kind providence, has yet to reveal.

And we tend to be dissatisfied with what he has *already* revealed to us for *right now*.

Of course, that doesn’t mean we don’t plan; we’d be wise to plan for the future (Prov. 21:5), but we’d be foolish to try to control it (James 4:13-17).

Do what you *know* God’s word prescribes for you—whether that’s...

- loving your wife as Christ does the church,
- instructing and disciplining your kids,
- working diligently,
- resting in God’s sovereignty,
- enjoying his good gifts,
- or considering how to stir up the faith of your brothers and sisters in the church.

Be faithful to live that out today. And then do that again tomorrow, and the next day.

Put your hope in God and his revealed word—and let *him* take care of the fruit and the future.

Look now at verses 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.)]

Like a good host, Manoah asks the angel of the LORD to stay a bit longer and offers to prepare a meal for him.⁴

The angel of the LORD *declines* the meal, but says that he’ll stay if they make a burnt offering to the LORD instead.

And then, in verse 16, the narrator tells us what we’ve suspected all along: “Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.”

Earlier, both Manoah and his wife refer to the angel of the LORD as a “man of God” (vv. 6, 8), which was another way of referring to a *prophet* (e.g., Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; 1 Sam. 2:27; 9:6–8, 10).

³ That sounds a lot like what the Lord Jesus said later on the issue of anxiety in his Sermon on the Mount: “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt. 6:34).

⁴ Perhaps he hopes to ask more parenting questions over the meal.

At the same time, Manoah's wife seems to know that he's *more* than a prophet because, in verse 6, she said that he had "the appearance of the *angel of God*, very awesome [or terrifying]." But she doesn't know where he's from or what his name is.

So they're both *uncertain* about who exactly this man is.

So Manoah tries to find out more about him.

Look at verses 17-18.

[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?"]

Manoah asks for the *name* of the angel of the LORD, so that when their child is born, they may honor him.⁵

But in verse 18, the angel of the LORD *declines* to disclose his name to him because "it is wonderful."⁶

That seems like a very odd answer. None of us would say that to someone who asked us, "What's your name?" So what does he mean by it?

The only other time that this Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament is in Psalm 139:6, which says, "Such knowledge is too *wonderful* for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."

So the angel of LORD is saying, "My name is too wonderful for you to fully comprehend," meaning "*I* am too wonderful for you to fully comprehend."

Manoah is *uncertain* how to respond to that, so he just continues what he was doing.

Look at verses 19-21.

[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.]

Manoah makes his offering to the LORD.⁷ And when the flame of the offering went up toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended the flame into heaven—and then he was gone.

Twice, the text emphasizes that "Manoah and his wife were watching" (vv. 19, 20), meaning this *really* happened; they both saw it with their physical eyes.

And, in verse 21, it says that "*Then* Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD."

⁵ Perhaps by naming their son after him.

⁶ In the ancient near east, the *name* of a person was important because it suggested the *nature* or *character* of the person. For example, "Abraham" means "father of a multitude" (Gen. 17:5)—and that is who he was; and "Jacob" means "he takes the heel" or "he cheats" (Gen. 25:26)—and that is what he did.

⁷ In verse 19, the narrator *adds* this phrase to describe the LORD—"the one who works wonders." The angel of the LORD has a name that is *wonderful*, and the LORD is the one who works *wonders*. Throughout Scripture, the *LORD* is described as "wonderful" and "working wonders" (Exod. 15:11; Ps. 77:11, 14; Isa. 25:1; 29:14; cf. Isa. 9:6). So here, the narrator is making *implicit* what he will make *explicit* to Manoah and his wife very soon.

If Manoah and his wife were *uncertain* about who this man was before, it is now crystal clear to both of them.⁸

And so, Manoah and his wife “fell on their faces to the ground” (v. 20), just as Moses had done earlier when he was in the presence of *God* (Exod. 34:8).

<pause>

All throughout this section, we see that, in the midst of *uncertainty*, we need to look to God.

- Manoah is uncertain about parenting, and so he prays to the LORD for wisdom.
- Manoah is uncertain about who exactly is speaking to him, so the LORD graciously reveals himself to him.

Without God’s revelation of himself and his wisdom, we would be completely lost. He alone is our hope in the midst of uncertainty.

Now, one important truth we need to understand in regard to our knowledge of God is this: we cannot know God *fully*, but we can know God *truly*.⁹

The angel of the LORD alluded to this earlier when he declined to reveal his name because it was too wonderful for them to fully comprehend.

The reality is that we cannot even understand *ourselves* fully—how much less *God*.

And if that’s the case, then a god that we can understand *fully* is a god of our own making—an imaginary god who is *not* the God of the Bible nor worthy of worship.

At the same time, that doesn’t mean that we cannot know *anything* about God. We know what he has *revealed* to us in his *works* and in his *Word*.

We can learn much *about* God—his power and wisdom and love—through all his *works* in creation (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1)

But the clearest and surest source of knowledge of God is found in his *Word*.

Think of it this way.

You can learn immensely more from 30 minutes of talking with the artist over coffee than traveling all around the world looking at his paintings.

You can know *about* someone through their *works*, but you only really *know* someone through their *words*.

So we even though we can never have *complete* knowledge of God, we *can* have true, meaningful, life-changing knowledge of God through his *works* and especially through his *Word*.

And knowledge of God is *exactly* what we need in the midst of uncertainty. When all seems uncertain around us, you don’t find true comfort in saying, “Oh, but things will get better eventually,” or “Oh, I

⁸ Throughout the Old Testament, the angel of the LORD *speaks* as God, *acts* as God, and receives *worship* as God (Gen. 16:10-13; 22:11-18; Exod. 3:2-6; 23:20-21; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 2:1-4; Zech. 3:1-5). So this was a *theophany*, or a visible manifestation of God.

⁹ This has been said in different ways by Christians throughout history. Augustine in the 4th century said: “We are speaking of God. Is it any wonder if you do not comprehend? For if you comprehend, it is not God you comprehend. Let it be a pious confession of ignorance rather than a rash profession of knowledge. To attain some slight knowledge of God is a great blessing; to comprehend him, however, is totally impossible.” Charles Spurgeon in the 19th century said: “As well might a gnat seek to drink in the ocean, as a finite creature to comprehend the Eternal God. A God whom we could understand would be no God. If we could grasp Him, He could not be infinite. If we could understand Him, He could not be divine.” J. I. Packer in the 20th century said: “A God whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of Himself confronted us with no mysteries whatsoever, would be a God in man’s image, and therefore an imaginary God, not the God of the Bible at all.” R. C. Sproul in the 21st century said: “Theologically speaking, incomprehensible does not mean that we cannot know anything about God but rather that our knowledge of Him will always be limited. We can have an apprehensive, meaningful knowledge of God, but we can never, not even in heaven, have an exhaustive knowledge of Him; we cannot totally comprehend all that He is.”

know that person will pull through.” No, your truest hope and comfort is being able to say, “I know who my God is, and I can trust him even in the midst of this uncertainty.”

So no matter who you are, it will serve you well in life’s uncertainty to get to know who God is. He is where you’ll find true hope.

<pause>

So first, barrenness; second, uncertainty; and third, God gives hope in the midst of...

III. Fear (vv. 22-25)

Look at verses 22-23.

[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.”]

In verse 22, having *seen* God, Manoah now *fears* that he and his wife will die.¹⁰

And this was an understandable response because God himself said to Moses, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Exod. 33:20; cf. Gen. 32:30).

But in verse 23, Manoah’s wife *assures* him that they won’t die; otherwise, the LORD wouldn’t have accepted their offerings and told them about the birth of their son.

In this *particular* instance, what Manoah’s wife said was right.

But in a *general* sense, *both* of them were right in a way. Let me explain.

God is holy and he is to be rightly feared. We see that in both the Old and New Testaments.

- God judged sinful people through the flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah,
- and he struck dead Aaron’s sons for offering strange fire, Ananias and Sapphira for lying, and some who took the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner.

God’s Word is clear that he is *not* to be treated lightly. So in that sense, Manoah was right.

At the same time, God is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, and he is to be rightly loved. We also see that in both the Old and New Testaments.

- God came to cowards like Abraham, deceivers like Jacob, prostitutes like Rahab, murderers like Moses, adulterers like David, traitors like Peter, persecutors like Paul, and sinners like all of us—and he forgives, befriends, sanctifies, and glorifies such ungodly people *in Christ*.

God’s Word is clear that he *invites* us into the most intimate relationship with him. So in that sense, Manoah’s wife was right.

The gospel—or the good news—of Jesus Christ explains to us *both* sides.

- On the one hand, God created us and we are accountable to him, but because we have sinned, our holy God should rightly punish us of our sins in hell.
- On the other hand, because of his great love for us, he came in the person of Jesus Christ to be our substitute—to live the sinless life we could not live, to die on the cross to take the punishment we deserved, and to resurrect three days later to confirm who he is and what he is.
- So now, whoever repents of their sins and believes in Jesus Christ alone as the Lord and Savior is forgiven of their sins and has everlasting life in him.

¹⁰ This is how Gideon responded in an earlier situation (Judg. 6:22-23) and this is how Isaiah will respond later on in the presence of God (Isa. 6:5).

- We cannot earn this salvation, and we cannot lose this salvation based on our works, but it is freely given and forever secured by grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

If you're here today and you haven't put your faith in Christ yet, I urge you to respond to him today. Stop looking to yourself or other gods of your own making for hope, but repent of your sins and trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior today.

<pause>

As we look at these verses, let me offer two takeaways for us here.

First, we need to approach God with both *reverence* and *assurance*—or with proper fear and deep comfort.

We approach him with *reverence* because he is the *Creator* and we are the *creatures*—he is the *holy* God and we are *sinful* people.

But we also approach him with *assurance* because, if we are in Christ, then he is the *Redeemer* and we are the *redeemed*—he is our heavenly *Father* and we are his beloved *children*.

Some of us may tend to downplay our *creatureliness* and our *sinfulness*, and we approach God without much *reverence*. We come to him on our own terms—with much casualness and disregard for how his Word *prescribes* how we are to come and worship him.

Some of us may tend to downplay our *forgiveness* and our *adoption*, and we approach God without much *assurance*. We come to him on our own terms in a different way—with much reservation and disregard for what he has done for us in Christ.

But *both* reverence and assurance must be held together. Or as Psalm 2 puts it, we are to “rejoice with trembling” (2:11).

<pause>

Second, we need one another to help us better understand and apply God's Word.

Manoah's wife was able to help her husband to better understand and apply God's Word in context.

Note here that Manoah's wife was able to correct her husband in a way that didn't undermine him.¹¹ Wives *should* be able to talk to their husbands in this manner.

A godly marriage, where the husband leads and the wife submits, does not negate the need for *wives* to speak up, for *husbands* to listen, and for *humility* to learn, be corrected, and do what is most faithful to God's Word.

Husbands, a *wrong* understanding of male headship in the home is for you to try to figure out everything yourself and be left unchallenged and uncorrectable by your wife. That is to *despise* the gift of your wife that God has given to *help* you. And that kind of thinking can unfortunately lead to *misuse* and even *abuse* of authority in a way that greatly *distorts* the gospel in your marriage.

So have the humility to ask for your wife's insights. Listen and discern carefully. And then lead your family to do what is most faithful to God's Word.

Regardless of being married though, this principle is applicable to *all* believers. No Christian was meant to be in a vacuum. God has graciously given us brothers and sisters in the church to come alongside us to *help* us better understand and apply God's Word in our lives.

So don't deprive one another of that.

¹¹ We see something similar with Deborah speaking to Barak (Judg. 4:4-9) and Abigail speaking to David (1 Sam. 25:23-31).

As others share what they're going through and how they're processing it, ask them what in God's Word might apply to their situation.

Or, more immediately, when the service ends today, ask one another what stood out from God's Word that was preached.

Kids, ask your parents what they learned and share what you learned with your parents.

That'd be a great discussion to have later today.

When we *don't* know God's Word well, we'll either fear what we *shouldn't* fear, or we won't fear what we *should* fear.

But in the midst of fear, God gives us *hope* through his Word

<pause>

Going back, look at verses 24-25.

[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.]

Just like the angel of the LORD said, Manoah's wife bears a son, whose name is Samson, and the LORD *blessed* him as he grew up.

And in verse 25, the Spirit of the LORD is clearly upon him as the next divinely appointed and empowered judge-deliverer for the people of Israel (2:18; 3:10; 6:34; 11:29). He is the one who will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines (13:5)—and the Spirit of the LORD begins to stir him to that end.

And that's how this passage ends.

Conclusion

Now, as we close, we need to understand that all of this is really just a *setup* to the rest of the Samson narrative.

By the end of chapter 13, we have high hopes for Samson.¹²

Samson has *every* spiritual advantage that we could imagine. But if you know the rest of the narrative, Samson constantly just does whatever is right in his *own* eyes—just like the people of Israel have been doing all throughout this downward spiral in the book of Judges.

Samson, as the *last* judge, *embodies* the people of Israel.

We *also* had high hopes for *them*.

- The LORD referred to the people of Israel as his "firstborn son" (Exod. 4:22).
- He had miraculously delivered them out of slavery in Egypt.
- He had entered into a covenant with them and gave them his Law.
- He had set them apart to be a "holy nation" (Exod. 19:6).
- He had declared that he was giving them the promised land.
- And the generation that entered the promised land was known to be a *faithful* generation (Josh. 24:31; Judg. 2:7).

¹² The angel of the LORD comes to announce his birth. He's set apart as a Nazirite from the womb, like Samuel and John the Baptist later were. He's born from a barren woman, like Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were. He's got godly parents who trust and desire to obey the LORD. He has the LORD's blessing upon him in his childhood. He has the Spirit of the LORD stirring him. And he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

They had every spiritual advantage that we could imagine. But as we've been reading through the book of Judges, the constant refrain is "And the people of Israel *again* did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1; cf. 3:7; 6:1).

By the end, we realize that, even with every spiritual advantage, the people of Israel and Samson (who *embodies* them) *continue* to go astray—and so, our hope cannot ultimately be in *them*.

In the midst of *barrenness*, in the midst of *uncertainty*, in the midst of *fear*, *God* is the one who gives hope.

Samson's birth narrative ultimately points to the greater birth narrative of *Jesus* that was to come.

- Whereas Samson was *created*, Jesus was the eternal God *incarnated* (John 1:1-18).
- Whereas Samson was born of a *barren* woman, Jesus was even more miraculously born of a *virgin* (Luke 1:26-38).
- Whereas Samson was a *Nazirite* from the womb, Jesus was *sinless* from the womb (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15)
- Whereas Samson only *began* salvation from the *Philistines*, Jesus *accomplished* salvation from sin, death, and Satan, declaring definitively on the cross, "It is *finished*" (John 19:30).

So look *through* Samson to see the true and better Savior, Jesus Christ.

He *alone* is our only hope in life and death. In Christ *alone* our hope is found.

Let's pray.