

Judges 08-06-27a

This is Friday, the 27th of June, 2008. We're in the Book of Judges and we begin an intensive study in Chapter 13, the story of Samson. It's been a couple of weeks since we have been able to meet, so we'll kind of give ourselves a brief overview of where we are, very brief, and then dive into the material.

But let's begin, as we always do, by going to the Lord in prayer. Father, we are grateful and we thank you for all of the ways that you have blessed us and provided for us, especially for your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have a relationship with you. We have life eternal.

We have the potential for having lives that are meaningful and purposeful by partaking of eternal things, even while we are still in this life. We thank you for the portion of your Word that is before us this evening and we ask your blessing on us as we study it together. May God the Holy Spirit illuminate it and enlighten our souls as we partake of this truth together.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as I said, Judges Chapter 13 begins after summarizing the Judges Ebron, Elon, and Abdon.

If you step back for just a second, just to give us a little refresher on where we are in the Book of Judges, Joshua came into the land. There was the Great Conquest, the Southern Campaign, the Northern Campaign, and then there was fairly stable peace. There was a division of the land and the pockets of resistance that still existed were supposed to be mopped up by the individual tribes.

It was no longer going to be a national army effort. Each tribe would have its militias who would go in and take, seize, lay hold of, and possess their assigned portion. They did this with varying degrees of failure.

Almost none of the tribes went in and completely cleaned out the Canaanites, which was their commission. It reminds me of what happens when you move. You put all your stuff in boxes and you move to a new house and you get about 85% unpacked.

Then for the next many years, you've got boxes that just never got unpacked. You think, well, I'm functional, I've got 85% of my stuff, and you've just got all these taped up boxes that you just never finish. Israel moved about 80% into the land and there was about 20% of it that they just never seized and laid hold of.

They just didn't push through. By the way, this can also happen with construction projects. You go in, you build a room, you finish it out, you get it functional, but maybe there's a baseboard here and a piece of trim there.

I'm speaking completely in the abstract, of course, no reference to my own house. It's important when we start a thing to finish it. How would you like it if the Lord Jesus came down

to accomplish the work of salvation and got it about 85% done, but just didn't quite get the last piece of redemption accomplished or the propitiation wasn't quite, didn't work His way all the way through the list of sins or all the way through the list of sinners, didn't quite get everything, just got most of it done.

This is sloppy and reflects a lack of self-discipline. We start a thing, we want to finish it, we want to push through. Most importantly, our Christian life in this earth.

I've mentioned it many times, one of the most important verses in the book of Ecclesiastes is the one that says, it is not the tall spirit, it is the long spirit that counts. It's not how tall you stand at the beginning of the race or how great you look leaving the starting line, it's who runs well, who finishes the race, like the Apostle Paul describes himself. It's not how you start, it's how you finish, and we want to finish well.

Israel didn't finish well. They started great under Joshua, they did not finish well. It takes discipline, it takes perseverance, and it takes some spiritual horsepower to finish well.

So, as you look at the book of Judges, this is the account of what happens after the initial conquest, after the division of the land. How do they finish? How do they complete the mission that God gave them when he delivered them out of bondage in Egypt, sustained them for 40 years in the wilderness, took them across the Jordan, brought them into the land, drove out the nations before them with a mighty hand, the sun stood still, hail fell from heaven, walls of cities fell down. It's theirs for the taking.

So, what did they do? That's what the book of Judges is about. So, we saw in the first few chapters that there was a failure that's documented. The first two chapters of Judges talk about that failure.

In chapter 3, it describes the areas of Israel and what happened in those areas. So, we have the Judges Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar described in chapter 3. This was in the southern part. Remember Othniel and Caleb were down in that southernmost part.

And Othniel does a good job. Ehud, less so. He's sneaky.

He does it by subterfuge and then blows the trumpet, but not bad. Shamgar, then in chapter 4 and 5, we had Deborah and Barak. And this was in the north section with Sisera and Jabin and so on.

So, the southern area is taken care of. The northern area is described. Then in chapters 6 and following, all the way through chapter 10, the beginning of chapter 10, 6 through 10, this is the central area.

This is where we had Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, and Jair all described. So, we started in the south, we moved to the north, then we looked at the center. And most recently, in the rest of chapter 10 through chapter 12, we had the eastern campaign with Jephthah.

Remember he's over there on the far side of the Jordan in Gilead. And then we wrapped up with these last few verses of chapter 12 with Ebzon, Elon, and Abdon. And they are also located back up in the north, where not much has happened since the days of Deborah and Barak.

And they don't really perform any military conquest. It's more a description of their peacetime accomplishments. They live in cities, their sons ride donkeys, and so on.

There's no great movement of God, there's no great deliverance. It's more about how they live and what they look like than any particular accomplishment. Well, now the one area that we've not talked about, what cardinal direction has not yet been discussed? We were in the south, we were in the north, we were in the east, we were in the center.

We haven't looked at the west. And the west is the land of the Philistines. And this is where we pick up now in chapter 13, and this is going to extend through chapter 16.

13, 14, 15, and 16. We're going to have four entire chapters talking about this conflict with the Philistines. Chapter 13 begins by telling us that the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

This is a reference back to chapter 10, the beginning of chapter 10. Remember, God was unhappy with Israel, and He talks about turning them over. And then we went over and looked at the east.

Well, now we're going to pick up and look at the west. So, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines. This is 10.7 of Judges.

We've already seen it for 40 years. This overlaps, this is coterminous, this is concurrent with the Jephthah years. So, it tells us, there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah.

And his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, Indeed, now you are barren and have born no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, not to eat anything unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son.

And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. So the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came to me. His countenance was like the countenance of the angel of God.

Very awesome. But I did not ask him where he was from. He did not tell me his name.

He said to me, Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Drink no wine or similar drink, or eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his

death. So Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, O my Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born.

God listened to the voice of Manoah. The angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah, her husband, was not with her. The woman ran in haste and told her husband and said to him, Look, the man who came to me the other day has just now appeared to me.

So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said to him, Are you the man who spoke to this woman? And he said, I am. Manoah said, Now let your words come to pass.

What will be the boy's rule of life and his work? So the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, Of all that I said to the woman, let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her, let her observe.

Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, Please let us detain you, and we will prepare a young goat for you. The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, Though you detain me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord.

For Manoah did not know he was the angel of the Lord. Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, What is your name, that when your words come to pass, we may honor you? The angel of the Lord said, Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful? So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, offered it upon the rock to the Lord. He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on.

It happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. When the angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord.

Manoah says to his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said, If the Lord had desired to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would he have shown us all these things, nor would he have told us such things as these at this time. So the woman bore a son, called his name Samson.

The child grew. The Lord blessed him. The spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahanadan, between Zorah and Eshtoel.

That is the entire chapter. That is the introductory section. Now, in the entire previous book of Judges, have we had any such introduction to a judge? This is just unprecedented, isn't it? And so we ask ourselves, Well, why this marvelous, yea, miraculous introduction of a judge who is declared to be a judge even before he is born? He is going to be a deliverer.

This appearance of the angel of the Lord and so on. Well, the first thing we need to do is establish a little bit of background. Who are the Philistines causing this crisis? Because the deliverer is here specifically to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

So if we're going to understand the deliverer and the nature of the deliverer being delivered to Israel, if you will, she's going to deliver a son and he's going to deliver them, it would be important to figure out, Well, why does he have to come on the scene at all? If there's no Philistines, there's no Samson. So we want to understand a little bit about them, first of all. The Bible tells us actually where the Philistines come from.

If you go back to the book of Genesis, you find that the descendants of Ham are the progenitors of a number of Israel's antagonists in later life. Take a look at Genesis chapter 10. This is the genealogy of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth.

It gives the sons of Japheth. Then in verse 6, the sons of Ham are Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan. Now, which individual got the curse? You know, the whole thing with Noah, his vineyard, he's drunk and walking backwards and so on.

You think, well, they call it the Hamitic curse or the curse of Ham. It's not the curse of Ham at all. Who got cursed? Canaan.

What is his order of birth in the sons of Ham? See, Ham's firstborn. Is the house of Ham cursed from the firstborn on down? No. Canaan is son number four.

The firstborn son of Ham was Cush. The second was Mizraim. The third was Put.

And the fourth is Canaan. It's actually Foot, P-H-U-T. But we'll just go with what the New King James has here.

So, then it gives you the sons of Cush, Sheba, Havilah, Sabta, Rahama and Sabtecha. The sons of Rahama, Sheba and Dedan. And, of course, it details these because you have Sheba and Dedan and some of these things showing up later.

Cush begot Nimrod, who was a mighty hunter in the earth, a mighty hunter before the Lord. At the beginning of his kingdom, you have Babel, Eric, Akkad, which is where the Akkadians come from, and Qalna in the land of Shinar. This is going to be the land of Babylon, ultimately.

From that land, he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth, Ir, Qalaa and Rezin between Nineveh and Qalaa. This is the principal city. Then you get to verse 13.

Mitsrayim. This is the second-born son. The name of Egypt in Hebrew is Mitsrayim.

Every time in the Old Testament you see the word Egypt, in Hebrew it is Mitsrayim. The Egyptians are descended from the second son of Ham. Mitsrayim has the Ludin, the Anamin, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim, the Patrushim and the Qasluhim, from whom came the Philistines and the Kaphtarim.

Kaphtor is thought to be up there around Cyprus, or the Kaphtorites, you might say. Actually, they are the Cretans from Crete. When the Egyptians talk about the Kaphtarim, they just say whoever is on the other side of the Mediterranean.

It's just kind of over there, opposite them, across the Med. So it could be Crete, it could be Cyprus, it could be Greece, it could be Italy, it could be almost anything. Kaphtor is just over the horizon north from them.

But Mitsrayim is actually a progenitor of the Qasluhim, or the Qasluhites, from whom the Philistines came. These are the guys in Crete. This is ostensibly where the Philistines came from.

So, there are some mysteries surrounding where the Philistines actually originated. There is scholarly debate about it, but most of the scholars think that they came from the Aegean area, up north. Some of them came by sea and some of them came by land.

The best way to think of the Philistines is to think of the Vikings. One by land and two by sea. The Vikings came down in their big boats and wreaked all kinds of havoc.

But some of them also either colonized or came over land. These guys are just like the Vikings. When they came down through this area, the area of what would ultimately be the Holy Land and so on, some of them came across the sea and some of them came marching over land.

The ones who came over land, just like the Vikings, left a path of destruction in their wake. This is like Sherman's march to the sea. They just laid waste.

Just remember those guys with the big horns coming out of their helmets. This is what the land-based Philistines were like. Well, some of them took the easy way and sailed across.

But you end up with Philistia. If you look at a map of the assignment of land to Israel under Joshua, the tribal area immediately north of where the Philistines live is the tribe of Dan. If you go north from the five cities of the Philistines, you will be in the land of Dan.

That's where they are. So it kind of makes sense that if you're going to have a deliverer do something to the Philistines, he's going to be a neighbor. So that's where they are.

This is where the conflict is going to take place. Of course, it wasn't that long before the Israelites and the Philistines all kind of came into the land at the same time. There was a little bit of a vacuum there because the Canaanites had gotten kind of sloppy and depraved and didn't have a lot of defense.

God timed it in such a way that the Israelites came in from the east and the Philistines came in from the north and from the sea and carved out their thing. So it was kind of inevitable that there was going to be a conflict sooner or later. There was going to be a tussle over that western area and the central part of Israel.

For some centuries prior to the time of David, you have this back and forth. The Philistines are

trying to push east, the Israelites are sort of trying to push west, and you're going to have this conflict. It becomes clear when you look at 1 Samuel 8, give us a king, Samuel is old, and the elders of Israel come to him and they say, appoint us a king to lead us like the nations.

Well, the immediate cause of that is they were having more trouble with the Philistines and they basically wanted Saul to get busy and end this trouble. Of course, they had some other difficulties as well. That was one of the catalysts was this ongoing problem.

Of course, that didn't work out too well. They got a king. Who is it that killed Saul and the other sons of Saul? Who killed Saul and Jonathan at Mount Gilboa? Who was he fighting? It was the Philistines.

So, that didn't turn out too well. And, of course, they're still in play until David eventually wipes them out. You remember while Saul was still alive, David actually lived with the Philistines for a time.

Achish king of Gath, Gath, Gittites, Goliath is from where? Gath. So, this is all going on. But this is the beginning of the end for the Philistines.

God is going to begin a deliverance with Samson. He's going to finish it with David. So, that's important.

And if you didn't take note of it, I'm going to say it again. Deliverance from the Philistines is going to begin with Samson. It is going to end with David.

It's kind of a two-phased thing. The angel of the Lord specifically announced, if you recall, he will begin to deliver Israel. Well, one of the things that we've seen as these accounts begin is that Israel gets sick of being oppressed by the Midianites or Jabin or whoever, and they cry out to God.

They say, we've messed up. We're going to put away our idols. Please help us.

And there's a cry for deliverance, and then God responds. We don't have that in this chapter, do we? There is no indication that Israel is feeling so bad that they just can't stand it and they've returned to God. They've been oppressed for 40 years, and they've just kind of reached an accommodation.

Remember the tribe of Judah back at the beginning of this book, back in chapter 1? It came to pass after the death of Joshua, the sons of Israel inquired of the Lord, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? The Lord said, Judah shall go up. And Judah went up and fought. They had this activist, okay, we're going to go get this thing done.

Well, you get down here a few hundred years later, and nobody wants to tackle the Philistines. They just accommodate. And if you turn a page forward, look at chapter 15.

We'll be here shortly. But look at these same Judahites that we saw in chapter 1, all full of spit

and vinegar going up there. Look at chapter 15, verse 9 and following.

The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, just plopped themselves down in the middle of Judah's territory, and they spread out in Lehi. The men of Judah said, Why have you come up against us? They said, Well, we've come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us. There's three elephs of men in Judah who go down to Samson, and they say, Look, don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us? They don't join with Samson and say, Let's throw off this Philistine oppression.

They go to Samson and say, Look, the status quo is the Philistines are the lords of this land. So you've got to comply. We've got to turn you over, because we don't want the Philistines getting down our neck.

So there's a real apathy. There's a real lack of commitment by this time. Nobody's fighting the battle.

Nobody's fulfilling the mission anymore. They're very passive. They're just accepting the status quo.

So chapter 13 begins, and there is no cry for deliverance. The Israelites don't even have the energy to cry out to God anymore. They just accept their plight.

They accept the oppression. This negative discipline from God doesn't even rouse a response, a cry that says, Okay, I get it. I repent.

Let's get rid of this problem. They're just resigned. It's pathetic.

It's terrible. So the children of Israel did evil inside the Lord. The Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years, and there is no cry.

But God sends a deliverer anyway, and this brings us to one of the major points about these next few chapters. Think about this now. There are times when God expects us to think, to draw a conclusion, to cry out to Him, and that's when He brings deliverance.

I'm going to wait. We do this with our kids. Parents do this with children, especially little children.

Give me a drink. You sit there and look at them. Give me a drink.

I just look at them. Because this lesson has been taught many times, and they're thinking, Why isn't Dad talking to me? Why isn't he answering me? Why isn't he giving me a drink? Then they say, Oh, I remember. Dad, may I please have a drink? Why, of course.

And here you go. Here's your juicy juice or whatever. But you wait until the proper application of knowledge has been made and until the request is framed in the right way, and you respond.

It's a teaching opportunity. I don't care how thirsty you get. I'm not giving you your thing until you ask in the way that you have been told time and again to ask.

And I'm forcing you to think. I am waiting, making you think. That's how God often does it.

But not always. Other times, God has a plan, and God has a purpose, and it is not an instructional opportunity. There are other times when, look, we're going to be shopping the mall for the next three hours.

Drink your juicy juice, and then don't ask me anything until we get home. You're going to drink this now, and we're going to go do this thing. I'm not even waiting for you to ask.

If you do ask, I'm busy with something else. I've got a whole different agenda here. This is not a training opportunity.

This is an execution time. I'm going to get some things done. Because there is no call, because there is no response to this discipline, we can see that God is going to produce deliverance, and He is the initiator.

He brings it about. How does He bring it about? Well, there is a pattern that we've seen up to this point that is clearly broken, and it stands out because we're expecting this next footfall, just like we saw. They cried out, and here's Jephthah.

They cried out, and here's Gideon. They cried out, and here's one or another. There is no cry here.

Instead, we get this description of a certain man from Zorah of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. Well, Zorah is an interesting place name because it is practically identical to the Hebrew name for leprosy. Basically, there was a certain man from the town of Leprous, Leprousville, Montana or something.

There is no other word that's even close to this. And we sort of scratch our heads about that, but Zorah, with a maim in front of it, this is the idea of leprosy. And it says he's from the tribe of the Danites, actually the family of the Danites, and that's a good translation here because the word for tribe that's normally used is not used.

This is really the word for clan, and by this time, this is sort of an insult. It would be like saying the village of Dallas or the town of Dallas instead of the metroplex. It's a diminishment of the status of the tribe of Dan.

And if you look at their little carved out place, Dan moves around, started in the south, ends up in the north, but it's just sort of an insult. So he's from the town of Leprous and the clan of Dan. It's not a clan, it's supposedly a tribe.

But we get already the idea that this is not going to reflect a lot of human strength, a lot of human potential, a lot of human faith. This is kind of an offscouring sort of a thing, a leftovers

kind of a thing. Dan is not one of the premier tribes, far from it.

It's one of the concubine tribes, if you remember. It's not a Leah tribe, it's not a Rachel tribe. It's from Bilhah, more about that later.

So here's this man, and it kind of delays even giving us his name. And this is kind of a slight. It doesn't say there was a man named Manoa who was from this town and from this clan or tribe.

It says there was this one man, there was this certain man. And it gives us all the details and kind of throws his name in incidentally at the end. His name is Manoa.

Immediately you might recognize a similarity to an earlier biblical name, and rightfully so. It is from the same root. You remember what the ark builder Noah's name came from? Remember who his father was? Before chapter 6, right at the end of Genesis chapter 5, you have a little line of Seth coming down.

And at the end, you have Lamech. And Lamech lived so long, and he has a son. And he calls him Noah, and he gives a little description of the name.

Remember that? It's very fascinating. You wonder why Lamech thought that his son was going to have some impact on the curse. But Lamech lived 182 years.

This is Genesis 5, 28. He had a son. He called his name Noah.

This is actually Noah, N-O-A-C-H. And in Hebrew, it's just two letters, N and the H or the C-H. And it's got two vowel points to kind of string the name out a little bit, but it's Noah.

He called his name Noah, saying, this one will comfort us concerning our work. And this is from Nacham, the verb Nacham, which means to cease or to rest or to stop doing a thing. This one will give us rest concerning our work and the toil of our hands because of the ground which the Lord has cursed.

Now why Lamech thought that his son would somehow be able to accomplish a reversal of God's curse, who knows? Because God has said, you will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow. You're going to toil. The ground is cursed, and you're going to have to work it to get any bread out of it.

But he says, well, this one is going to relieve us. He's going to stop. He's going to give us rest from this curse.

And it's eerily prophetic because, of course, the ground does kind of get wiped out and you start over afterward. After he begot Noah, Lamech lived 595 years, had sons and daughters all the days of Lamech, were 777 years, and he died. Noah was 500 years old, begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

All right, back to judges. This man's name is Manoah. It's from the very same root.

By this time in Hebrew, however, they weren't comfortable leaving the vowels as points where it was just N and CH. And so they threw in, this is called a *matris lectiones*. It's where you use the letter waw or vav, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, to stand in for a vowel.

And so they threw it in. And so when you have Manoah here, this is maim, M, and then NWCH. Manoah.

But it's actually the very same name. And it means the guy who doesn't do anything. From rest.

Noah means rest, cessation, ceasing from labor. Well, you put a maim in front of a thing, it's from that. It's kind of a participial sort of a thing.

So he's Mr. Do-Nothing. He's Joe Couch Potato. He's the sitter around.

He's the rest. He's non-busy. He's resting boy, resting man.

If you were going to create an English name from it, his name might be Restman. Workless or something along that line. Manoah.

He's the man from the land of doing nothing. From the town of Leprosy in the clan of Dan. And of course Dan means judge or judgment.

So you're kind of getting a little bit of warning music playing under the scene from the very beginning. So it's no surprise his wife is barren and has no children. Well, he's the man of minimal effort.

It might have been his fault. But his wife is barren and has no children. Now, out of nowhere, as if by magic, nobody has prayed, nobody has appealed, no one has raised hands to heaven, no one has cried out in any way, shape or form, completely out of the blue, literally out of the blue, the angel of the Lord shows up to this guy, actually not the guy, to the woman.

Well, we've read this, so think about it. How many times do you have the barren woman motif in Scripture? A little trivia question here. Let's see if we can enumerate them from memory.

When's the first time in history you can think of a barren woman? And this is a problem. You've got Sarah. God's made all these promises to Abraham.

All the nations of the earth are going to be stars in the sky, sand in the sea. Well, I've got no kids. How's this going to happen? And I'm 100 years old and my wife is 90.

And so she's barren. So she's the first. And there is an appeal made about that.

Abraham says, Lord, what's up with this? Does it need to be my servant? And Sarah says, well, I can solve it. Let's do the Hagar thing. It'll be Ishmael.

Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. God says, no. He didn't wait long enough.

There is a time to rest. There is a time to be still and know that I am God. There is a time when a man ceases from his own labor and rests in the Sabbath of the Lord, in the work that he's got underway.

And this is one of the big issues in this section. You've got to know when to hold him and when to fold him. You've got to know when to sit still and wait for God.

And you've got to know when you're supposed to get up and do something. God is at work in this situation and nobody has done anything. Abraham got busy when he shouldn't have and ended up with a lot of grief to persist down to the present day.

Where do you think we'd be if there had been no Ishmael? Well, of course, you might still have Keturah and the 17 sons. We'll have to ask about that later. What's the second barren woman? And this is a harder one to remember.

I bet some of you are liable to miss this one. Who's the second barren woman? Rebecca. If you go back and read the story, Rebecca was childless.

Isaac prayed to the Lord. And she suddenly conceived. And there's where you get the twins.

But Rebecca was barren. Now this is kind of an inauspicious start for the multitude, sand of the sea, star of the sky people, isn't it? The first woman is barren. The second woman is barren, Rebecca, until Isaac prays on her behalf.

Then the third woman who's barren is who? Rachel. So the great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all three had barren wives at the beginning. And all of them were ultimately enabled to have children in something of a supernatural way.

Well, so this establishes sort of a motif in the scripture of the barren woman. And we can learn things by comparing these situations. We first saw this, of course, in Genesis 11.

In verse 30, Sarah was barren and had no child. You go to Genesis 25-21, Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren. And the Lord answered him, and Rebecca, his wife, conceived.

You have Hannah who is barren. She cries out on her own behalf. God answers that prayer.

Eli speaks to her. And you have Samuel. Skip forward a little bit to the New Testament.

And then Luke. Who's the barren woman? It's Elizabeth. She and Zacharias.

She's old. This harks all the way back to the days of Abraham and Sarah. Zacharias and Elizabeth are a couple of old, creaky types.

And she ends up getting pregnant and having John the Baptist. It doesn't say anything about Mary being barren because she wasn't. She wasn't even married yet.

How would we know? She's just betrothed. But you have that thing with Elizabeth. Now, this is what I find interesting.

If you think about the bracketing there of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their wives, the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise is with Sarah. And through Sarah you have Isaac. Isaac marries Rebecca.

Rebecca is barren. But through the prayer of Isaac, you have the twins, Esau and Jacob. Esau should have been the guy, but no.

The firstborn ricochets off high and right and doesn't inherit. Instead, it is the elder shall serve the younger. God declares this before either one of them are even born.

And Isaac shall thy seed be called and ultimately in Jacob shall thy seed be called. And yet, Jacob's preferred wife, the Rachel that he loved and worked 14 years to get, is barren. And when she does have children, she's not the mother of the tribe of Judah or the tribe of Reuben or Levi or any of those.

By the time she has her two sons, who are the Rachelite tribes? It's Joseph and Benjamin. The last true, number 11 and number 12. But number 11 winds up getting the double portion.

And so you end up with 12. Well, the idea here, if I lost you in rehearsing all of that, is there is a beginning of deliverance that is not complete. The promise to Abraham is not fulfilled when Sarah conceives and has Isaac.

That's the beginning of the fulfillment. But God has to act in response to the prayer of Isaac and in the life of Jacob before the full-orbed fulfillment of that promise comes about. So part of it depends on God's response to human request, human prayer, human appeal.

And some of it is sovereign on the part of God. God looks at Abraham and declares him righteous by faith and says, I'm going to make of you a great nation. Abraham said, oh Lord, wouldn't it be great if I could be a great nation? That was God's idea.

Through you shall all nations of the earth be blessed. Abraham didn't say, oh Lord, I'm your friend, I love you, I want to go to a land, and I want to be the means by which everybody is blessed. That wasn't Abraham's idea.

God said, look, you get out of Ur and go to the place I'm going to show you. I'm going to do some stuff with you. That was all God.

God initiated that. God created Abraham's destiny, didn't He? God determined that. God had a plan that went back to the prehistoric times that Abraham would be the means through whom, the man through whom, all the earth would be blessed.

And Abraham didn't really have a choice. That was God's plan for him. That was his destiny.

He was predestined to be the man. Didn't relieve him of the responsibility for having faith. God didn't implant the faith.

God didn't cause the faith. God didn't efficaciously move him to faith. But God used him as a man of faith in a particular predetermined way.

Same with Isaac. Same with Jacob. And God made it clear, especially with Isaac and Jacob, that Ishmael wasn't going to be the guy and Esau wasn't going to be the guy because the issue is faith.

Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. Well, now we're down to the book of Judges and we have a clear harking back. There is a deliverance that is going to begin with this man and this woman and their son.

And God initiated it. God comes to them and says, they didn't ask. Nobody was saying anything.

It's much like God decided to do for the world through Abraham. God is going to do for Israel through Manoah and his wife and their son, Samson. So the point that I'll leave you with at the conclusion of this first lesson tonight is there are times when God sovereignly decides that certain things are going to take place through certain people.

And we as believers will find ourselves assigned a task. We don't pick our spiritual gift. God assigns it.

We don't pick our family, our nation, our time in history. God sovereignly assigns those things. That's a part of His plan.

And He's righteous and just. And we, in faith, fulfill the potential and bear the fruit that is a part of that sovereignly determined assignment. And it is kind of a waste of time to wonder about having a different one.

Or, well, couldn't I have been that guy over there? Or why is he doing that and I'm doing this? Look, if you're a person of faith, whatever God has assigned you is your perfect spot in history. Your perfect assignment. Your perfect fruit to bear.

Nobody is better qualified than you for the destined assignment that God has given in this life. It's really something to think about. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we'll continue. And we're going to see several very enlightening things as we move forward in this account.