

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Question #23

What Does God Expect of OCC?

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

June 25, 2017

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Saturday 6/24 Clean Up: Robert Domingos

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1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (TEV)

1 From Paul, Silas, and Timothy— To the people of the church in Thessalonica, who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be yours. 2 We always thank God for you all and always mention you in our prayers. 3 For we remember before our God and Father how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard, and how your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ is firm. 4 Our friends, we know that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own. 5 For we brought the Good News to you, not with words only, but also with power and the Holy Spirit, and with complete conviction of its truth. You know

how we lived when we were with you; it was for your own good. 6 You imitated us and the Lord; and even though you suffered much, you received the message with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. 7 So you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere. There is nothing, then, that we need to say. 9 All those people speak about how you received us when we visited you, and how you turned away from idols to God, to serve the true and living God 10 and to wait for his Son to come from heaven—his Son Jesus, whom he raised from death and who rescues us from God's anger that is coming.

Last Lord's Day, we took a deep look at what God wants from us as individuals.

And, yes, that was one of the questions put to me.

And, this sermon today is a question that was also asked.

So, maybe this is a good time to look at what our church is, and to look at what God wants it to be, and not just theologically, but to try to make it personal and then to try to make it very practical in terms of what God wants us to be and to do.

Now, notice that I am using the congregation in Thessalonica for our reflection this morning.

Why not look at the book of Acts?

After all, it does give us the history of God's creation of the church, and of it's spread through three continents.

Acts tells us about the congregation in Jerusalem that formed after the Pentecostal experience that equipped the Apostles to be Christ's witnesses and envoys.

Acts 2:46-47 (HCSB)

46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

So, why Thessalonians?

Well, I think in 1 Thessalonians you have the example of a church that was everything, basically, that God ever intended a church to be.

All of the basic ingredients that our Lord wanted in a church were in the Thessalonian congregation.

While the Epistle to the Ephesians provides us a sound doctrinal view of the church, the congregation in Thessalonica put doctrine into practice.

Paul doesn't tell us how big the church was.
He doesn't tell us about the constitution and by-laws.
He doesn't tell us about their music program.
He doesn't tell us about their educational program.
He doesn't tell us about their worship service.
He doesn't tell us what kind of sermons they were hearing.
It doesn't tell us about any of those things.
1 Thessalonians just lays out for us the pattern of the church that Christ really built.

And, remember, the congregation in Thessalonica was built on a foundation of prejudice and violence.

I'm sure you remember how it got started from what Dr. Luke gave us in Acts 17.

Acts 17:1-11 (TEV)

1 Paul and Silas traveled on through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue. 2 According to his usual habit Paul went to the synagogue. There during three Sabbaths he held discussions with the people, quoting 3 and explaining the Scriptures, and proving from them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from death. "This Jesus whom I announce to you," Paul said, "is the Messiah." 4 Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas; so did many of the leading women and a large group of Greeks who worshiped God. 5 But some Jews were jealous and gathered worthless loafers from the streets and formed a mob. They set the whole city in an uproar and attacked the home of a man named Jason, in an attempt to find Paul and Silas and bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city authorities and shouted, "These men have caused trouble everywhere! Now they have come to our city, 7 and Jason has kept them in his house. They are all breaking the laws of the Emperor, saying that there is another king, whose name is Jesus." 8 With these words they threw the crowd and the city authorities in

an uproar. 9 The authorities made Jason and the others pay the required amount of money to be released, and then let them go. 10 As soon as night came, the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived, they went to the synagogue. 11 The people there were more open-minded than the people in Thessalonica. They listened to the message with great eagerness, and every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true.

Paul was worried how the believers in Thessalonica had survived the brutal attack by the enemies of the gospel, and he tells us...

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (TEV)

1 Finally, we could not bear it any longer. So we decided to stay on alone in Athens 2 while we sent Timothy, our brother who works with us for God in preaching the Good News about Christ. We sent him to strengthen you and help your faith, 3 so that none of you should turn back because of these persecutions. You yourselves know that such persecutions are part of God's will for us. 4 For while we were still with you, we told you ahead of time that we were going to be persecuted; and as you well know, that is exactly what happened. 5 That is why I had to send Timothy. I could not bear it any longer, so I sent him to find out about your faith. Surely it could not be that the Devil had tempted you and all our work had been for nothing!

And, Timothy brought back great news, that was comforting to Paul.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-10 (TEV)

6 Now Timothy has come back, and he has brought us the welcome news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always think well of us and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you. 7 So, in all our trouble and suffering we have been encouraged about you, friends. It was your faith that encouraged us, 8 because now we really live if you stand firm in your life in union with the Lord. 9 Now we can give thanks to our God for you. We thank him for the joy we have in his presence because of you. 10 Day and night we ask him with all our heart to let us see you

personally and supply what is needed in your faith.

Now, keep in mind that Paul is writing this from the city of Corinth, which must undoubtedly have been cause for extra joy, because the congregation in Corinth was having some major spiritual problems. Corinth was sin city!

Whatever Corinth may not have been, Thessalonica was.

Now, I'm not saying the congregation in Thessalonica was perfect. I am saying they are a good model for us to think about as we think about what God expects of Orcutt Christian Church.

Paul helps us think about what God expects of us as individuals, and as a congregation of God's people.

How can we be what God wants us to be?

What can we learn from the Thessalonian congregation that we can apply to our congregation.

I. They Were a Learning Church

1 Thessalonians 1:5 (MSG)

5 When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions.

It's like Paul is saying "It is apparent by the kind of life you live that you really do know the Lord Jesus Christ."

To know the Lord Jesus Christ brings about an effective church.

You remember that Paul always went to the synagogue first, because there he would find the widest open door, because he himself was Jewish.

And he also realized that if he went to the Gentiles first, the Jews would never accept him after that.

Hopefully, he could win some Jews to Christ.

So, he spent three Saturdays teaching them the Scripture, teaching the congregation that Christ must suffer.

Of course, the difficulty that Jews had was accepting Jesus as the Messiah because He died.

They had not really understood the meaning of Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22, and that is of the suffering Messiah.

They couldn't understand how their Messiah would have to die.

And, consequently, they had a hard time accepting Jesus as their Messiah.

And so, Paul spent time **proving from them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from death. "This Jesus whom I announce to you," Paul said, "is the Messiah."**

And some of them believed, and worked together with Paul and Silas, to bring a lot of the devout Greeks, and even some very important women, to our Lord Jesus.

The Thessalonian church has always had a bad reputation because of the Jewish persecution, that is reported by Luke.

Acts 17:11 (NASB)

11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

But this is proof that there were some in Thessalonica who took the study of Scripture seriously.

And, that remnant took their relationship to Jesus seriously.

Notice that the TEV says **To the people of the church in Thessalonica, who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

You need to know that **belong to** is actually **in** God the father.

And verse 3 says **"in our Lord Jesus Christ,"** and verse 5 says **"and the Holy Spirit ."**

And, that word "and" in the TEV is actually the word "IN!"

You can see that Paul involves the entire Trinity in this passage.

We do not just follow the teachings of Christ.

We are in Christ.

And that is a tremendous concept.

Paul says

Romans 6:3 (NASB)

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

Paul says you died with Christ, you were buried, the old life died, and you rose to walk in newness of life in His resurrection.

You are inextricably linked in union with Jesus Christ.

Paul even went so far as to say ...

Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

The Thessalonian church learned deeply through their persecution that the Christian experience is not simply following the moral precepts of a man.

It is not simply believing in a historical figure.

It is experiencing union with the living God through Jesus Christ.

True believers are in Christ.

I'm wondering if that personal relationship with Christ is something you have?

Can you say with Paul:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

To have this personal relationship with Jesus requires some study of His life.

And, one of my burning desires for Orcutt Christian Church is that we be truly His disciples, His learners, His students.

Now, grasp this, folk, because to be a Christian is a pretty exciting reality, isn't it?

You know, all you have to do is really think about that, and you find yourself shouting, "Hallelujah."

Can you realize that the very life of God is yours?

Peter said it this way...

2 Peter 1:4 (NASB)

4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature

That is a pretty incredible concept.

He say we have become partakers of the divine nature.

This divine nature implanted within the believer by the new birth becomes the source of his new lifestyle.

Remember the sermon a few weeks ago where we learned that when we are immersed into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit who then indwells us?

The new lifestyle does not come automatically; the believer must make an effort.

Christians are able to participate in the divine nature by being holy, as God is holy.

That is, the Christian is in an important sense like God when he or she adds to faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, brotherly kindness, and love.

We do have some incredibly exciting things to learn about being in Christ Jesus, don't we?

So, I think that the first thing we can say that God expects of Orcutt Christian Church is to be a learning church.

And, I think this is one major area in which we need to grow.

They were a learning church, but ...

II. They Were a Generous Church

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 (MSG)

2 Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers 3 as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father.

Faith, love, hope.

The Thessalonians were generous in their expression of gratitude to God our Father.

And, are those not the hallmarks of Orcutt Christian Church?

Faith, love, hope.

When you compare the Thessalonian congregation with that first congregation in Jerusalem, we can see the hallmarks of generosity.

Acts 2:42 (NASB)

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The early Christian church was a generous church.

Luke tells in Acts 2:44 that they did many things "**together.**"

The early Christians gathered, not simply to worship God, but to help and encourage one another.

“The fellowship” describes believers in their life together.

Circumstances in Jerusalem at that time elicited their sense of generosity, and so they shared their resources with others.

Some of them sold property so that they had money to share with needy believers.

Now, please don't think of this as a form of Communism.

I don't want you to picture every Christian selling everything that they owned, because that was not the case.

Notice how Luke phrases it:

Acts 2:44-46 (NASB)

44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; **45** and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. **46** Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,

From this we conclude that many still had homes.

The imperfect tense of verse 45 should also lead us to conclude that the selling and giving were occasional, and in response to particular needs. Luke makes it very clear in Acts 4:32 and 5:11 that the giving was entirely voluntary.

The early Christian church was a generous church, not because they were forced to give, but because they wanted to give in response to the generosity which God had showed them.

Scripture is clear: God expects the members of His church to be generous with one another, in particular to those in "**need**" (v.45).

The words "**as anyone might have need**" is a key statement.

They did not sell property until there was a need.

This was not communism in the modern sense.

Neither was it communal living.

It was just Christian sharing.

But the fellowship, joy, love, and the example and teachings of Jesus made it easy for the believers to share what they had.

They all realized the importance of becoming established in the apostles' teaching (which today is in the written New Testament).

Some of those from outside Jerusalem soon ran out of money, so those who were able simply sold what they could to make it possible for these Christians to remain nearby.

The Christian fellowship that God expects from us is that we, like the early Christian church, would be a generous church.

Orcutt Christian Church excels in generosity.
Would you agree with that?

III. They Were a Worshiping Church

1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 (MSG)

5 When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions. You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, **6** and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit!—taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble.

If we allow Scripture, rather than culture, to shape how we worship it is difficult not to notice our shortcomings in this area.

We work hard on the sermon and on the music.

But so many don't take to heart the encouragement of Paul.

Hebrews 10:25 (TEV)

25 Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.

I have been amazed at how Christians can put any and everything ahead of worshiping God,

One Sunday morning, a wife went in to wake her husband and tell him it was time to get ready for church, to which he replied, "I'm not going."

"Why not?" she asked.

"I'll give you two good reasons," he said. "One, they don't like me, and two, I don't like them."

His wife replied, "I'll give YOU two good reasons why you SHOULD go to church. One, you're 54 years old, and two, you're the pastor!"

What about our practice of the Lord's Supper?

What so you think Luke had in mind when he said that the early church was "**continually devoted . . . to the breaking of bread**"?

Verse 46 describes how "**day by day they continued to meet in the temple courts,**" not simply on the Sabbath, but everyday the believers gathered in the temple courts for formal worship.

I don't know how successful I am, but in our Lord's Day worship, I try to include times of prayer, times of silence, times of praise, times of meditation, times of fellowship, and times focusing on God's wonderful words of life.

So, brothers and sisters, is there room for us to improve our worship of God?

IV. They Were an Evangelizing Church

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 (TEV)

6 You imitated us and the Lord; and even though you suffered much, you received the message with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. 7 So you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere.

Look at what Paul says in verses 7 and 8.

Here's the first way we give testimony, **"became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia"**

They lived exemplary lives.

You know, the rest of the people around could look over at that Thessalonian church and say, "That's the way our church ought to be."

You know how long it took them to become that?

Three Saturdays.

They were yielded, surrendered to Christ-likeness.

Once they had done that, everything happened.

What I learn here from the Thessalonians about evangelism is that it isn't the programs.

It's not Evangelism Explosion, or any of the current evangelism programs marketed for church growth.

It's the Christ-likeness.

And the Thessalonians were like Jesus Christ.

And, consequently, they set a pattern for everybody else.

You know what I'd like Orcutt Christian to be?

I'd like Orcutt Christian to be an example of what life can be with Jesus Christ for all the world to see.

Wouldn't you like that?

I'd like us even to be an example to other believers.

I'd like us to be an encouragement to Christians around us and other churches in our community.

The Thessalonians set an example, even for the believers.

When travelers from various parts of the Roman Empire met Paul in Corinth they would immediately begin to tell what they had heard in Thessalonica.

They knew that Paul had entered the city and established a church.

They told how the Thessalonians had turned to God from idols.

This was no mere switching of religious affiliation or changing of philosophies such as the heathen might do.

The Thessalonian believers had made a complete and total change in their lives and worship.

They were now serving, as love slaves, the living and true, real, genuine, God.

By this, they made it clear that the gods they once worshiped were not real.

You know, Paul didn't have to go around and tell about the conversion of the Thessalonians.

You know why?

They told it.

How?

By their life.

You first of all witness to the world by the change in your life.

Isn't that true?

Heine, the German philosopher, said, "You show me your redeemed life, and I might believe in your Redeemer."

That's fair, don't you think?

Let's pray for Orcutt Christian Church, that our lives would be so transformed, that the Word would spread all over the world, and people would say, "Have you heard what happened in Santa Maria?"

Now, look at verse 8...

8 For not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere.

If only we could catch the excitement in Paul's words when he says **go out from you.**

Because the Greek behind that phrase, **exechetai**, means “**sounded out**”

It’s the word from which we get *echo*

Paul says, “From you echoed the word of the Lord.”

You know, one good thing about Christian testimony, it should never be independent of the Word of God.

It should only be an echo, right?

When you proclaim something, it ought not to be your ideas.

It ought to be simply an echo of God’s truth.

And an echo always says the same thing, right?

You stand on a hill.

You say, “Hello.”

What do you get back?

“Hello.”

Not goodbye, hello.

That’s an echo, and an echo is always the same, because it’s the same voice bouncing.

God gives you His Holy Word to echo.

He doesn’t want you creating your own words.

He wants you to echo the truth.

And you know what happened to this Thessalonian congregation?

There was such a dramatic transformation in their character that the world couldn’t believe it, and they were shocked by it.

And they echoed it so that, “**the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere.**”

Paul says, “We don’t need to tell anybody about it. Everybody knows.”

By pointing to them as an example Paul did not mean the church was without problems.

That which made them a pattern for others was the fact that from them the Word of the Lord, the message concerning Christ, rang out and

continued to ring out, which we see expressed by the perfect tense verb *exechetai*.

The picturesque word translated "**sounded out**" is only used once in the New Testament.

From the time of Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 347-407) it has symbolize the brilliant tone and dynamic resonance of a sustained trumpet blast.

Chrysostom also makes this observation about the virtuous character of a true Christian: "As a sweet-smelling ointment keeps not its fragrance shut up in itself, but diffuses it afar,... so too illustrious and admirable men do not shut up their virtue within themselves, but by their good report benefit many and render them better."

Their message was clear and loud, like the crashing of thunder or like the continuous, clear call of a bell bring worshipers to church.

What about our message?

Does it ring out?

Can people see Christ in our lives?

I'd like to see us just kind of reach everybody in the Santa Maria Valley with the truth of Christ.

Wouldn't you like to see that?

What can you do to see it happen?

This is what God expects from His church.

We are called
to learn,
to be generous,
to worship, and
to evangelize.

If we do our part, then God will do His part.

Acts 2:47 (NASB)

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord

was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Keep in mind, also, that the 1st century church were doing these things everyday.

Not just on the Lord's day.

The result, in turn, was **“the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere.”**

So, let us be encouraged to become a learning church, a generous church, a worshiping church, and an evangelizing church.

For when we do, and only when we do, can we expect the blessing of the Lord of adding to our number daily.

Prayer and Invitation

Unit 2: Calling of Prophets

June 25 Lesson 4

Samson

Devotional Reading: Judges 13:19-23

Background Scripture: Judges 13-16

JUDGES 13:1-7, 24, 25

1 Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

2 A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. **3** The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, “You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. **4** Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. **5** You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”

6 Then the woman went to her husband and told him, “A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn’t ask him where he came from, and he didn’t tell me his name. **7** But he said to me, ‘You will become pregnant and have a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from the womb until the day of his death.’”

24 The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, **25** and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Key Verse

“You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”—Judges 13:5

Introduction

A. Childhood Memories

When you reflect on your childhood, what memories come to mind? Is it that family outing to the beach during which you were first taught to swim? Is it the aroma of your favorite meal being lovingly prepared? Is it a favorite family tradition that was always practiced during holiday times?

But maybe it is a curfew that you had to follow that was an hour earlier than the curfew of your friends. Perhaps it is your parents’ insistence that you not go to a

movie that everyone was talking about, because it celebrated ungodly behavior. Possibly it is going to church every Sunday, even when you didn't *want* to!

Good parents make a real difference in the lives of children. Some parental actions are pleasant and affirming. But some will seem unpleasant and even unreasonable in the mind of a child. Yet both are necessary to bring a youngster to maturity. Today we will conclude our look at some famous judges of Israel, not by looking at the judge himself, but at this judge's parents.

B. Lesson Background

This is the last of the studies on four delivering judges in the book of Judges, the seventh book of the Old Testament. There were two other major judges (Othniel and Ehud) and six judges who seem only to have served as magistrates in different parts of Israel.

In the previous lesson Jephthah defeated the Ammonites that had oppressed the central portions of the land for 18 years. Judges 12 gives the details on another problem that confronted Jephthah: Ephraimites from the western side of the Jordan came to complain that he had not called them when he led the battle against the Ammonites. Jephthah's reply was that he had called them and they had not come (Judges 12:2, 3). It could be surmised that after Jephthah's situation with his daughter (see last week's lesson), he did not feel like trying to appease men who wait until the battle is over before they choose sides.

The outcome was a battle between two groups of Israelites. Jephthah and his Gileadites defeated the Ephraimites from the western side of the Jordan (toward the Mediterranean Sea).

As the Ephraimites retreated, Jephthah's men gained control of the fords where the Ephraimites would cross the Jordan River. Each Ephraimite who attempted to cross the Jordan was asked to say a certain word. Anyone who pronounced the word a certain way was recognized as being an Ephraimite and therefore executed (Judges 12:6). Tribes had conquered the promised land some 300 years previously (11:26), which provided time for regional dialects to develop.

The last verses of Judges 12 give basic facts of three men who seem to have served only as magistrates in their areas: one in the south, one in the north, and one in the middle section of Israel.

I. Childless Couple

(Judges 13:1-3)

A. Dark Days (v. 1)

1. Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

Each generation of God's people seems to have been determined to make its own mistakes, especially as it involved doing evil. To do evil is defined in Judges 10:6 as serving the gods of five nations that bordered parts of Israel.

The result of this idolatry is given in Judges 10:7: *the Lord* "sold *them into the hands of the Philistines* and the Ammonites." The Ammonite oppression lasted for 18 years. It was the subject of the previous lesson. The Ammonites had come from the east, and they spread across the Jordan River into Judah and Benjamin (Judges 10:9). Jephthah was selected to crush the Ammonites, and he did so.

The Philistine oppression of *forty years* is the longest of any in the book of Judges. Both Abraham and Isaac had dealings with individuals who were Philistines (Genesis 21 and 26), but they were not a threat at that time. They are not mentioned as one of the nations that the Israelites were to drive from Canaan.

It is generally thought that they came from islands in the Mediterranean or Aegean Sea. Overpopulation may have contributed to their migrating in larger numbers and, finally, settling along the coast of Canaan about 1200 BC. One of the early judges had a conflict with them (Shamgar in Judges 3:31). Soon they became a major factor in oppressing Israel. The ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines in the days of Eli (a mentor for Samuel). Conflicts continued into the days of Samuel, Saul, and David.

The 40-year oppression has been dated as starting at approximately 1115 BC. This may be about the time that Samson is born. In the middle of that oppression, Samson will become a one-man army who regularly embarrasses the Philistines with his physical strength.

EMBRACING EVIL ... AGAIN?!

Addictions to alcohol and drugs involve millions of people. But there are addictive behaviors as well as addictive substances. For example, involvement in social media is becoming increasingly common as an obsessive-compulsive behavior. A similarly addictive behavior is computer gaming. This compulsion may take the form of competing with one's self, always trying for a higher score or lower time of completion.

The declaration of today's text that "again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord" is evidence that the nation was addicted to sin in general and idolatry in particular. But this isn't just dusty history of a bygone era! No, it is "written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come" (1

Corinthians 10:11). Psychologist Dr. Phil has said, “The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.” We prove we have learned from history when we do not repeat it. —C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What are some things we can do to resist joining the larger culture in its pursuit of evil?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of accountability practices

In terms of environments we put ourselves in

In terms of which Scripture passages to memorize for instant guidance

Other

B. Brighter Tomorrow (vv. 2, 3)

2. A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth.

There is a very special announcement for a couple in Israel who are Danites.

The tribal territory for Dan is immediately to the north of the areas where the Philistines had settled. This proximity provides us geographical context for Samson’s temptations, his feats of strength, and his death.

Manoah is the name of the husband; the name of his wife is not given. They have not been able to have children, but that is about to change. They live in the town of *Zorah*, some 14 or 15 miles west of Jerusalem, near the border between Dan and Judah. The town of Zorah is mentioned as being involved in a Danite migration to a region north of the Sea of Galilee (see Judges 18:1-29). The tribal members who moved gave the name Dan to the leading town of the region. This is a tribute to their progenitor, Dan, one of the 12 sons of Jacob.

Other couples in the Bible are described as being childless, and special announcements from the Lord promised that they would have sons. These included Abraham and Sarah, who became the parents of Isaac (Genesis 21:1-3) when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 (17:17).

Isaac married Rebekah when he was 40 years old (Genesis 25:20). The first 20 years of this marriage did not produce an heir. When Isaac was 60 (25:26), Rebekah gave birth to twins Esau and Jacob.

Another special birth involved Hannah. A priest named Eli stated his hope that the Lord grant Hannah her desire, and the Lord did so (1 Samuel 1:9-20). Angelic announcements preceded the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:8-25) and Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

3. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, “You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. *The angel of the Lord* seems to appear suddenly. He wastes no time in getting to the point, just as when he spoke to Gideon (Judges 6:12).

This unexpected event makes a vivid impression on Manoah’s wife. In verse 6 the appearance of the heavenly messenger is described as creating awe or terror. The other factor is the declaration itself. The angel of the Lord knows all about her status of being barren.

Through the years she has probably tried to be with child by using every remedy that anyone suggests. All to no avail. Now a total stranger factually announces that her hopes will be fulfilled, and she will *give birth to a son* of her own!

What Do You Think?

How should you respond if a fellow believer claims to have received an angelic visitation?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the purpose of the claimed visitation

Regarding witnesses to the claimed visitation

In light of Hebrews 1:1, 2

Other

II. Conditions Given

(Judges 13:4-7)

A. Child Set Apart (vv. 4, 5)

4, 5a. “Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb.

The next statement introduces a caution. She is to be on guard and not drink wine or other beverage that is known to cause drunkenness. The reason for this is that the one to be born is to be *a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb*. In this situation it may be that the restrictions that are on a Nazirite are also to be on the mother from the time of conception, for she is supplying the nutrition to the son.

The word *Nazirite* means “consecrated,” or “dedicated.” The guidelines for a Nazirite are given in Numbers 6:1-8. Any Israelite, male or female, can be a Nazirite for any length of time. Samson is to be a perpetual Nazirite. Such a person is to have no wine, strong drink, grape juice, fresh grapes, dried grapes, grape seeds, or grape skins—nothing from a grapevine. Grapes have sugar, and

they are highly desired. It will be a challenge for a Nazirite to watch others eat things that he or she cannot have.

Samson's mother not only receives restrictions on what she may drink but also on what she may eat. Mrs. Manoah lived during the Mosaic dispensation, so clean foods for her are to conform to the guidelines that Moses gave in the law. In Leviticus 11 (see also Deuteronomy 14) the details are provided for what an Israelite is permitted to eat. Four categories are given:

1. Quadrupeds must have a hoof that is split and must chew the cud.
2. Animals in the water must have fins and scales.
3. Birds that are carnivorous or eat carrion are forbidden; others are permitted.
4. Insects must have four jointed legs for jumping—primarily various kinds of locusts (similar to grasshoppers).

How to Say It

Aegean Uh-*jee*-un.

Ammonites *Am*-un-ites.

Canaan *Kay*-nun.

Eli *Ee*-lye.

Ephraimites *Ee*-fray-im-ites.

Esau *Ee*-saw.

Eshtaol *Esh*-tuh-oll.

Gaza *Gay*-zuh.

Gileadites Gil-ee-uhd-ites (*G* as in *get*).

Isaac *Eye*-zuk.

Jephthah *Jef*-thuh (*th* as in *thin*).

Mahanehdan *May*-hah-neh-dan.

Manoah Muh-*no*-uh.

Mediterranean *Med*-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un.

Nazirite *Naz*-ih-rite.

Othniel *Oth*-ni-el.

Philistines Fuh-*liss*-teenz or *Fill*-us-teenz.

Shamgar *Sham*-gar.

Zacharias Zack-uh-*rye*-us.

Zorah *Zo*-ruh.

The ordinary restrictions prohibit anything from grapes, cutting the hair, or going near a dead person. Samson's physical appearance to others must have been frightening with his long hair and long beard.

Samson is the only person in the Bible who is actually said to be a Nazirite. Samuel is thought to have been a Nazirite, because his mother vowed that no razor would come on his head (1 Samuel 1:11). The same conclusion is made about John the Baptist, but for a different reason. The angel who appears to Zechariah says that his son is not to drink wine or strong drink (Luke 1:15).

SELF-DENIAL OR SELF-INDULGENCE?

The Nazirite vow that God commanded for Samson’s mother—and ultimately for Samson himself—involved abstaining from things that were part of an Israelite’s normal life. Even today we may choose to give up something such as eating chocolate or watching TV as temporary self-denial. Self-denial reminds the participant that the Son of God gave up much more to make salvation possible.

The call to self-denial is a difficult one to hear in a self-indulgent culture. Missionaries report that self-denial is accepted more readily in parts of the world with lower standards of living. Perhaps the higher one’s standard of living, the more one realizes how much self-denial really costs.

But consider the one who had the highest standard of living imaginable, the one who gave it all up for us: Jesus. Philippians 2:7, 8 bears frequent reading: “He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” —C. R. B.

5b. “He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”

The final revelation of the heavenly messenger perhaps gives Manoah’s wife the idea that Samson will be like others in the past who led armies against the enemies of God’s people. That will not be the case.

Instead, Samson will act more as a free agent than a team leader of thousands. Feats of strength such as killing a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:5, 6), killing 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15), and lifting the city gates of Gaza and carrying them toward Hebron (16:3) will be done without assistance.

His task is to use his great strength to keep the Philistines off balance, to keep them concerned and confused, and to do things that cause them to realize that their gods are nothing. The judges that led organized armies against enemies include Deborah in accompanying Barak (lesson 1), Gideon (lesson 2), and Jephthah (lesson 3). Samson’s role is different.

B. Parents United (vv. 6, 7)

6. Then the woman went to her husband and told him, “A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn’t ask him where he came from, and he didn’t tell me his name.

The words in the biblical text say nothing about the manner by which the woman tells her husband what she has just experienced. But we imagine that it is with great excitement! She first describes her special visitor as *a man of God*. This was the ordinary way to refer to a special servant of the Lord (see Joshua 14:6; 1 Samuel 2:27; 9:6, 7).

She is very perceptive, however, for she continues the description by saying that the appearance of this special guest was *like an angel of God*. His *very awesome* appearance is almost beyond description. One of the first things to be done for a visitor is to ask where he is from. But she had not done so, perhaps due to being speechless. Nor did he tell her *his name* (contrast Genesis 32:29).

Each statement by the angel is that of a bold, if not shocking, promise. Manoah’s wife is overwhelmed. This is so much the case that she had not thought to attend to the common courtesies of the day.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances should we seek the input of others on spiritual matters? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Circumstances when input of family members is wise or not wise

Circumstances when input of nonfamily members is wise or not wise

7. “But he said to me, ‘You will become pregnant and have a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from the womb until the day of his death.’”

Manoah’s wife faithfully repeats the instructions that were given to her by the angel of the Lord. But she makes two changes. First, she adds *until the day of his death* as the extent of the Nazirite requirement; it is possible that the angel actually said this. Second, she does not mention that the son will begin delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines. Again, she may have relayed it to her husband, but that is not recorded.

III. Blessings Bestowed

(Judges 13:24, 25)

A. For Manoah's Wife (v. 24)

24. The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him,

In the verses between the ones designated for this lesson, Manoah prays for the Lord to let the man of God return. He wants to know what they should do for this special son. Manoah is to be commended for his faith—and perhaps his curiosity, for he believes what has been said.

The angel of the Lord returns, and Manoah asks questions about the future vocation and manner of life for the promised son. Manoah invites his visitor to remain for a meal, for he does not comprehend that this is the special angel of the Lord. Instead, Manoah is instructed to prepare a burnt offering. As the flames of the fire ascend, the angel of the Lord also ascends in the flame.

It must be an exciting nine months for Mr. and Mrs. Manoah and their friends as they await the arrival of their son. He is called Samson, which is similar to the word meaning “sun.”

The descriptions about his growth and his being blessed by the Lord are similar to the phrases that are used for future sons of promise—Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26; 3:19) and Jesus (Luke 2:40, 52).

What Do You Think?

What indicators should make us confident that a leader of a ministry project has God's approval?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding indicators established in Scripture

Regarding indicators not established in Scripture

B. For Israel (v. 25)

25. and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

The context implies that Samson is coming of age. He is no longer apathetic or passively resigned to the oppression by the Philistines, for *the Spirit of the Lord* begins to prompt him to action. The designation *Mahaneh Dan* means “Dan's camp” (see Judges 18:12).

The phrase “the Spirit of the Lord came” is used to describe the empowerment of judges Othniel (Judges 3:9, 10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and (three times) Samson (14:6, 19; 15:14). This phrase may be functionally equivalent to *the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him* that we see here; this phrase is unique to Samson.

Samson's parents have done their part in rearing Samson according to the divine mandates. Samson is ready to begin what the angel of the Lord has said: to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. Others will also have roles to play in this task at various times. They primarily include Samuel, Saul, and David. God is protecting his people as he focuses on preparing the world to receive the Messiah. He will arrive to deliver people from the ultimate enemy: sin.

What Do You Think?

What practices can help us remember the divine source of all our strength today?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering aids offered by technology

Considering interpersonal accountability

Other

Conclusion

A. Parenting Manual

In 1946, Dr. Benjamin Spock published *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. For more than half a century, this book was a consistent best seller, selling more than 50 million copies and being translated into about 40 languages. Mothers were encouraged by a basic message: *you know more than you think you do!*

Samson's parents lived well before Dr. Spock. They received direction, not from a popular author, but from God himself. Child-rearing experts have some value, but we can encourage parents to this day with the words of God, who knows more than all of us combined!

B. Prayer

Almighty God, as Samson had a way to serve, give me strength to fulfill my place in God's kingdom in the different segments of my life, and always in a way that is pleasing to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

It is never too late to offer a prayer of thanks for godly parents.

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