

Little Known People 3: MANOAH

Judges 13:1-7 [MW20-28]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 26 July 2020

Faithfulness, unfaithfulness, oppression, crying out, deliverance

- faithfulness, unfaithfulness, oppression, crying out, deliverance
- faithfulness, unfaithfulness, oppression, crying out, deliverance ...
- the cycle just goes on and on and on ...

The people were, surprise, surprise! disobeying the Lord

- so the Lord let the Philistines take control of Israel for forty years and the people were just putting up with it, enduring grinding along as best they could
- they'd strayed so far, they didn't know enough to cry out to the Lord sure they'd sinned and forgotten God that was bad enough
- even worse though, this time ... this time they'd forgotten the story

When the great rabbi Baal Shem-Tov felt that his people were threatened, he would go to a secret part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a special fire, say a special prayer and the disaster would be averted.

When his successor faced similar circumstances, he would go to the same place in the forest and pray: "Great Master of the Universe, I do not know how to light the special fire, but I am able to say the special prayer and this must be sufficient." It was and disaster was averted.

When his successor faced difficult times, he would go to the special place in the forest on behalf of his Jewish people and pray: "Great Master of the Universe, I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know how to say the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the disaster was averted.

When it fell to his successor to deal with the misfortune of his people, he sat in his armchair with palms uplifted. "Great Master of the Universe," he prayed, "I am unable to light the special fire, I do not know the prayer, I cannot even find the place in the forest, but I can tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was.

However all is not lost, because God had not forgotten the people he loved

- God takes the initiative
- God looks around and finds a couple who have not lost the plot and we heard the beginning of their story
- this story is important, which is why it was remembered and told and later written down, included in our Holy Scriptures and told again ...
- this story of a seemingly ordinary couple one of whom we know by name and one whose name is not even mentioned
- has something important to tell us

So who'd heard of Manoah before today?

- who knew about his wife?
- do you know what their main claim to fame is???

God intervenes in the life of his people in way that he has never done before

- in a way that the Lord God had never had to do before and it starts with Manoah's wife

An angel of the Lord appears to her

- the Bible does not record an angel of the Lord appearing to a woman very often can you think of any other instances?
- there's Hagar, mother of Abraham's son Ishmael and of course Mary, the mother of Jesus?

So this is something pretty momentous!

- then of course there's the fact that Manoah and his wife can't have children this was the case with several famous women in Israel's history Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah
- then there were those special conditions given to Manoah's wife dietary restrictions for herself
- and the boy being set apart from birth, that thing about no haircuts as a 'Nazirite' - dedicated to God with special rules to follow)
- not even Mary received instructions like this!

With a special vow made to a childless woman

- we know to look for God to be doing something extraordinary!

We don't know how old Manoah and his wife are, or how long they've been married

- we do know that having children was important couples with no children were looked down on, frowned upon it meant God had not blessed them
- so this was great news, not just a baby, but a son! sorry, but sons were number one in those days!!!

So Manoah's wife rushes off to tell her husband the momentous, stupendous, wonderful news

- however there is one thing that she doesn't tell him
- she leaves out one rather important detail

Did you pick it up?

- the son they are promised is not just a son but the one who *will begin to set Israel free from the Philistines*
- did she forget?
- why did she not mention this? why did she leave it out?

Then consider Manoah

- after all these years, he's going to be a father!
- not just a father, but the father of a son!!

So what does he do when he gets the news???

- does he throw a party? Jump for joy? Take his wife out for dinner? no ... nothing like that
- Judges tells us that right after Manoah gets this great news he, he this is just after our reading, 13:8
- he, he prays that's good right?

Except that Manoah's prayer

- seems to come from the need to have some kind of sign or confirmation that what his wife has just told him is indeed a word from the Lord

Manoah's wife simply trusts what the angel tells her

- in spite of the obstacle of not being able to have children she is willing to trust that God will find a way to make the promise come true she shows faith and trust, like Mary after her visit from the angel
- Manoah on the other hand needs some assurance

And here we see that God takes seriously and accepts

- those who express their doubts and their struggle to believe to those who doubt God often offers very visible signs and assurances
- God answers Manoah's prayer

His prayer itself seems pretty good too

*Our Lord, please send that angel again
and let him teach us what we are to do for the son we are to have*

A couple of things to note though

- when the angel appears, it is again initially to Manoah's wife why not to Manoah? He was the one who prayed
- then when Manoah is taken to the angel, he seems to forget what he prayed for Manoah says nothing about teaching
- he asks what rules must the boy obey and what will be his work? he asks about the future, what's going to happen with this boy?
- the angel does not answer this

Why did Manoah's wife not tell her husband what the angel said their son was going to do?

- why did the angel not appear to Manoah himself why did Manoah ask about the future and the angel not answer?
- was Manoah fixated on the future, was it a character flaw? whatever the reason, Manoah missed a golden opportunity!

God heard Manoah's prayer asking to be taught and sent the angel

- however because Manoah's initial response upon meeting the angel was not in line with his prayer and he learnt nothing new
- in fact the angel may even have been a little miffed when Manoah offered hospitality, a very big deal in this culture the angel refused

Later Manoah's wife proves to be more practical in her thinking than her husband

- when they make a burnt offering and the angel ascends the flame into heaven Manoah is afraid they will die because they have 'seen God'
- his wife says don't be stupid God came not to destroy but to give life in the form of a son besides, and this is the clincher, God said I'm going to have a son
- I can't have a son if I'm dead!

Well, wouldn't you know it, the angel's words came true

- Manoah's wife gave birth to the promised son there's still one more curious thing though
- Manoah did not name his son - it was the father's prerogative was the fact that the son was specially dedicated to God off-putting?
- did it mean he was a loss to the family business? did Manoah just lose interest because he didn't know the future?

Or maybe it was because his wife was an exceptionally strong and wise woman

- another instance of an unnamed woman we can learn much from (like Jephthah's daughter)
- this unnamed woman names her son 'Samson' 'Samson' which means "like the sun" or "sunlight"
- recalling perhaps the bright countenance of the angel who brought the glad news?

After the debacle of Jephthah

- God is now intervening in a dramatic and unprecedented way to save Israel and it all begins with Manoah and his wife
- an ordinary couple who had remained faithful to the story and to God and who are called to pass on that story and that faithfulness through this new son

From Manoah and his wife

- we learn that there are different responses to a word from God and God honours these responses
- we also learn about missed opportunities recall Manoah's prayer for help in teaching the boy
- and we learn from two people who just got on with the task at hand knowing God would be with them

All through the book of Judges we see a faithful generation

- being followed by a rebellious and disobedient generation the challenge of passing on the faith is huge: then and now!
- perhaps if Manoah hadn't been so interested in the future the angel would have taught them how to do this!

Yes, it was a big call - a huge ask

- the Lord God recognised this, as recorded in Judges 13:5, saying the boy would only **begin** to set Israel free from the Philistines
- Manoah and his wife would do their best to pass it on they were faithful parents ... would Samson be a faithful son?

Edward T. Sullivan writes:

When God wants an important thing done in this world, or a wrong righted, He goes about it in a very singular way. He does not release His thunderbolts or stir up His earthquake. He simply has a tiny, helpless baby born, perhaps in an obscure home, perhaps of a very humble mother. Then He puts the idea or purpose into the mother's heart, she puts it into the baby's mind and then--God waits.

For now all we can say is

- *The Lord blesses the boy as he grows and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir in him*

As we listen to a piece of music titled *Manoah*

- the composer is G. Rossini, 1792-1868 it first appeared in a collection in 1851 as the tune for the Isaac Watt's hymn: *Begin, My Tongue, Some Heavenly Theme*
- let us reflect on Manoah and his wife, and their efforts to pass on the story and also on our call to tell the story and pass it on that the lives of those who come after us may be blessed too [Power Point Slide]