Lectures on the Book of Judges

Judges 13 — The Birth of Samson

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In the next chapter (Judges 13) we begin a new kind of instrument God raised up for His purpose; and in this case the state of the people was such that God severs him to Himself as a Nazarite. A stronger proof there could not be desired, that the people, as a whole, were far from God. In all ordinary cases a Nazarite was one who had taken a peculiar vow of separation to God, but lasting only for a short time. In the instance before us it was an extraordinary Nazariteship, stretching through the whole life. But what a Nazarite was Samson! Outwardly indeed he was separate. We have here one of the strangest and most humbling of histories recorded in Scripture, and withal singularly marking that very truth that we have so often ere this referred to: how little moral strength keeps pace with physical power as it wrought in and by Samson. Of all the deliverers that grace ever raised up, there was not one who for personal prowess was to be compared with Samson; but of all those, where was the man who fell so habitually below even that which would have disgraced an ordinary Israelite? Yet was he a Nazarite from his mother's womb! It seems therefore that the two extremes of moral weakness and of outward strength find each its height in this extraordinary character. But we must look a little into the great principles of divine truth that meet us in weighing the history of Samson. His very birth was peculiar, and the circumstances too before it; for there never had been as yet a time when Israel had been so enslaved; and undoubtedly the deliverer, as we have traced regularly hitherto, so here again to the last, is seen to be according to the estate of the people, with whatever might or success God might be pleased to clothe him. "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of Jehovah; and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." It was a long time, we might have justly thought, in the days of Gideon, to have known seven years' subjection; but we hear of a far longer period in the case of the Philistines, the hottest and most pertinacious of the hostile neighbours of Israel, and so much the more galling as being within their border. For forty years the people groaned under their hard mastery. We shall find too that Samson's feats of power, great as they were, in no way broke the neck of Philistine oppression. For on the contrary after Samson's days, the sufferings of the children of Israel reached even a higher degree than they had ever attained under Samson or before. However this may have been, we may notice first the quarter whence

deliverance was to come: "There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites." It was ordered of God that it should spring from that tribe, which was more than any other marked, not merely by a weakness that portended danger to themselves, as we shall see, but by a moral laxity which would finally afford a suited subject, as indeed from the beginning it had been intimated prophetically in the last words of their father Jacob adying, for the fatal result of departure and apostasy from God. Of this tribe Samson was born. The circumstances also were highly remarkable. "His wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto the woman" with the promise that a child should be born, at the same time enjoining that she was to drink no wine nor strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; and that, when the child was born, no razor was to come upon his head. "For the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." There was another whom God would employ at a later date to destroy the power of the Philistines, a man of another spirit, and of a hand very different from Samson's. I speak of course of David, the son of Jesse. Whatever might be wrought now was but the beginning of deliverance for Israel. God would magnify His power, but only as a witness now and then; nothing more. Anything like full deliverance must await that day, itself a type of the day of Jehovah. The woman then tells her husband of the angel's visit, and they both entreat Jehovah, Manoah particularly, that the man of God might be sent again. Jehovah listens, and His angel appears to the woman, who summons her husband, when both see the angel as he repeats his message with its solemn injunction. Separateness from what was allowed to an Israelite was not only commanded but made life-long in Samson's case, as I cannot but believe it significant of what was due to God in consequence of the state in which the people of God then lay. In due time the child was born, "and the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol." His