



15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15)

16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. (Jeremiah 6:16)

Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (Matthew 4:10)

Life offers an abundance of choices to the young (and old) soul. Unfortunately, most choices offered by the world are unhealthy to the spirit and detrimental to the soul, and lead to an eternal death. At bottom line, the only choice that truly counts is that offered by Joshua and accentuated by Jeremiah – the LORD! In spite of the best breeding of the parents, a child must grow to an age of accountability and make the FATEFUL CHOICE that will determine his, or her, eternal destiny. It should be made plain at the beginning that a Godly upbringing will have the most favorable effect upon the character and disposition of the child; but, unfortunately, it is the final choice of the individual as to whether he follows in the old paths which his godly fathers tread, or the winding paths of worldly destruction.

In today's devotion, we observe the diverging paths of two young men who were the sons of godly parents and whose conception was granted by the special mercies and prescience of God in ordering His will for Israel – Samuel and Samson.

Both of these sons came by miracle of God. Their mothers were barren, but God gave conception (as conception is ALWAYS given by God) to the barren mothers. Both of these boys were Nazarites neither drinking alcoholic beverages nor cutting the hair. God blessed BOTH sons as they grew into manhood. Both had great beginnings in life. One, Samuel, died a lamented prophet by the host of Israel while the other, Samson, died alone in the hands of the enemy. So what was the overriding difference in these two? The difference in their endings was a result of the choices they made. The same is true of our blessed young people today. Though they may be recipients of every good advantage as they grow into adulthood, the day comes when they must make a FATEFUL CHOICE between right and wrong; and their entire destinies rest upon the decision they make.

Many of us made a choice early in life to follow the Lord. We may have made some less wise decision in life after that resolution, but God brought all things to work for our good – even our mistakes. Others made choices to set their hearts upon the carnal concerns of the world, and every choice since has led to further degradation and decadence in life. But with God, hope is never forlorn – it is never too late to turn to God in repentance to have our sins remitted by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The answer to the demise of man is not what he DOES, but who he KNOWS and follows. Knowing the Lord is not enough – we must believe unto salvation. That means that we imitate His character and righteousness in our life and actions. We may draw a contrast in the lives of Samuel and Samson by observing the different approaches of both men to the Almighty God.

Samuel

In some way, like Isaac, Samuel was a child of promise; but the promise of Samuel came through the humble and silent petitions to God of his dear mother. Hannah was the barren first wife of Elkanah. His second wife, Pinninah, had children and often chided poor Hannah for being childless. In those days, a child was treasured as a gift from heaven – and should be so treasured in our day. So Hannah prayed to the Lord for a child. *9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. 10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. 11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. 12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. 13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. 14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. 15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. 16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. 17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.* (1 Samuel 1:9-17)

Our attention is drawn to the manner in which Hannah's effectual prayers were offered – with silent lips. She did not pound the altar and shout out, irreverently, her petitions, but spoke them with silent lips. God is neither distant nor deaf. He reads the words in our hearts before they are pronounced by the tongue. So God granted the desire of her heart: *19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. 20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel (meaning, His Name is God), saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.* (1 Sam 1:19-20) Now, Hannah did not take this gift of conception lightly, but returned promise for promise: *"21 And the*

man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. 22 But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever. (1 Samuel 1:21-22) Hannah made the vow to give her child back to the Lord – the only means by which a child can be kept forever by the parent. The account is worth reading in its entirety in 1 Samuel 1. An early version of the MAGNIFICAT can be found at 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

Samuel had an attentive ear to the Voice of the Lord, and responded without reservation or quibble. He became one of the greatest prophets in Israel as a result of his soul being attuned to the Voice of the Lord. He anointed the first two kings of Israel – Saul and David. Samuel was not a servant of the Lord out of greed, but love. He accepted no bribes or offerings to taint his judgement. When he was old, he called Israel together. *I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. 3 Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. 4 And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. 5 And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness.* (1 Sam 12:2-5) When Samuel died, he was lamented by all of Israel. (1 Samuel 25:1) The reason for Samuel's greatness - Samuel chose God! He abode in the House of the Lord.

Samson

The conception of Samson resulted from the promise of God. *2 And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. 3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. 4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: 5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on 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.* (Judges 13:2-5) Israel was subject to their enemies, the Philistines. God would use Samson, whom He blessed with wondrous strength, to throw off the yoke of the Philistines, interestingly, whether Samson remained faithful to God or not. Samson fell into compromise with the enemies of his people.

Samson was a man of wandering eye. He fell in love with a woman of the enemy camp named Delilah. Many a good man has suffered ruin at the hands of such a woman, and Samson was no exception. Delilah betrayed Samson into the hands of the enemy by sharing the secret of his strength. When his hair was shaved, he lost his former strength and became slave to the Philistines and a laughing stock among them as they blinded him and had him work as an ox in grinding out the wheat. Though many have averred that the secret of Samson's strength was his hair, it was not – it was the favor of God which he lost when he consorted with an unvirtuous woman of the enemy camp. His hair was only testimony of his standing of a man of God as a Nazarite. After the betrayal when Samson awoke: *19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. 20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him. 21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.* (Judges 16:19-21) Yet, God would still use Samson to do great damage to the Philistines.

There remains the faded garments of gallantry even in the heart of the repentant back-slider: 22 *Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.* 23 *Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.* 24 *And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.* 25 *And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.* 26 *And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.* 27 *Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.* 28 *And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.* 29 *And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.* 30 *And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that weretherein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.* 31 *Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.* (Judges 16:22-31)

It may be that Samson died in the good graces of the Lord for that final act of courage; however, observe the wasted years between. Samson died an ignominious death, while Samuel died a hero to Israel. It was all a result of the choices they made in life. I conclude with the words of the poet Lydia Sigourney:

The Camel's Nose

*To evil habits' earliest wile
Lend neither ear, nor glance, nor smile.
Choke the dark fountain ere it flows,
Nor e'en admit the camel's nose.*