

Judges

Chapter 13

The Birth of Samson

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 sterile and remained childless. ³ The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, “You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have 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 because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of 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 conceive and give birth to 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 birth until the day of his death.’ ” ⁸ Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: “O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.” ⁹ God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰ The woman hurried to tell her husband, “He’s here! The man who appeared to me the other day!” ¹¹ Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, “Are you the one who talked to my wife?” “I am,” he said. ¹² So Manoah asked him, “When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy’s life and work?” ¹³ The angel of the LORD answered, “Your wife must do all that I have told her. ¹⁴ She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her.” ¹⁵ Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you.” ¹⁶ The angel of the LORD replied, “Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.” (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.) ¹⁷ Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?” ¹⁸ He replied, “Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.” ¹⁹ Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: ²⁰ As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. ²¹ When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. ²² “We are doomed to die!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!” ²³ But his wife answered, “If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain

offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this.”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.

13:1–16:31 Samson (from the tribe of Dan), like Ehud (from the tribe of Benjamin), was a loner, whose heroic exploits involved single-handed triumphs over powerful enemies. His story therefore balances that of Ehud (3:12–30). He typifies the nation of Israel—born by special divine provision, consecrated to the Lord from birth and endowed with unique power among his fellowmen. The likeness is even more remarkable in light of his foolish chasing of foreign women, some of ill repute, until he was cleverly subdued by one of them. In this he exemplified Israel, who during the period of the judges constantly prostituted herself to Canaanite gods to her own destruction. (CSB)

13:1 *did evil in the eyes of the LORD.* See note on 3:7. (CSB)

13:2 *Zorah.* A town first assigned to Judah (Jos 15:33), but later given to Dan (Jos 19:41). It became the point of departure for the Danite migration northward (18:2, 8, 11). (CSB)

Small town 14 mi W of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Danites. See 1:34 and note. (CSB)

sterile ... childless. The same condition, before divine intervention, as that of Sarah, the mother of Isaac (Ge 11:30; 16:1); Rebekah, the mother of Jacob (Ge 25:21); Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1Sa 1:2); and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist (Lk 1:7). (CSB)

Repetition underscores her physical inability to bear children. (TLSB)

13:3 *angel of the LORD.* See note on Ge 16:7. (CSB)

you are going to ... have a son. Cf. the announcements of the births of Ishmael (Ge 16:11), Isaac (Ge 18:10), Immanuel (Isa 7:14), John the Baptist (Lk 1:13) and Jesus (Lk 1:31). (CSB)

Sarah (Gn 17:15–16), Hannah (1Sm 1:12–20), and Elizabeth (Lk 1:8–24) were other barren women in the Bible who were visited by the Lord (through an angel or a priest) and then conceived a child who became an important agent of God (Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist). (TLSB)

13:5 *No razor.* Israelite men wore their hair at different lengths, as artistic inscriptions and biblical texts attest. The head was shaved as a sign of mourning. (TLSB)

Nazirite. From the Hebrew word meaning “separated” or “dedicated.” For the stipulations of this vow see Nu 6:1–21 and notes. Samson’s vow was not voluntary, and it applied to his whole lifetime (v. 7). The same was true of Samuel (1Sa 1:11) and John the Baptist (Lk 1:15). (CSB)

From a word meaning “dedication”—by which an Israelite consecrated himself to God. (TLSB)

begin the deliverance ... from ... the Philistines. The deliverance was continued in the time of Samuel (1Sa 7:10–14) and completed under David (2Sa 5:17–25; 8:1). (CSB)

Israel’s struggle against the Philistines continued with Samuel (1Sm 7), Saul (1Sm 13–14), David (1Sm 17; 2Sm 5:17–25), and on through the kings. (TLSB)

13:6 *man of God.* An expression often used of prophets (see Dt 33:1; 1Sa 2:27; 9:6–10; 1Ki 12:22), though it is clear from vv. 3, 21 that this messenger was not a prophet but the angel of the Lord. (CSB)

She assumed he was a human prophet, but she was overwhelmed by his majestic appearance, to the point of neglecting to ask him his name and where he was from. (TLSB)

13:7 Nazirite vow was usually temporary, as that taken by St Paul (Ac 21:23–24). Only two others are recorded in Scripture as being Nazirites from birth: Samuel (1Sm 1:11) and John the Baptist (Lk 1:14–15). (TLSB)

13:8 *teach us.* Not the usual parental concern, but a special concern based on the boy’s special calling. (CSB)

Manoah may have believed his wife, but he prayed to know more about how he should raise this special child. May the Lord place such a prayer on the lips of parents today and likewise place the Scriptures in their hands. (TLSB)

13:9 *God listened.* God heard the prayer offered in such faith. (TLSB)

13:10 The woman was alone the first time the angel appeared (vv 3–5). This time, she brought her husband to see the angel so that he, too, as the father, would be involved in the revelation about their son (vv 13–14). (TLSB)

13:12–14 Manoah wanted to know more, but the angel simply repeated what he first told Manoah’s wife. God’s Word does not always tell us everything we would like to know. Our part is simply to trust what God has revealed. See note, 2Ch 35:22. (TLSB)

13:12 *When your words are fulfilled.* A declaration of faith. To Manoah it was not a matter of whether these events would occur, but of when (v. 17). (CSB)

13:15 *stay until we prepare a young goat.* Such food was considered a special delicacy. Hospitality of this kind was common in the ancient Near East (see 6:18–19; Ge 18:1–8). (CSB)

13:16 *I will not eat.* Angel rejected Manoah’s attempt to manipulate God through the obligations of hospitality and use of His name (v 17). (TLSB)

to the LORD. Angel transformed into a divine sacrifice what Manoah regarded as an ordinary meal. In a similar situation with Abraham and Sarah, the Angel of the Lord did share a human meal, in light of their faith (Gn 18:3–8), but Manoah’s motives were not as pure as Abraham’s. (TLSB)

did not know. Manoah may not have completely accepted his wife’s account. (TLSB)

13:17 *What is your name ... ?* A messenger’s identity was considered very important. (CSB)

when your word comes true. Fulfilled prophecy was a sign of the authenticity of a prophet (Dt 18:21–22; 1Sa 9:6). (CSB)

honor. Many ancient people believed that one could manipulate people and spiritual beings through their names. The Angel of the Lord rejected Manoah’s attempt to exercise power over God. (TLSB)

13:18 *beyond understanding.* See NIV text note. In Isa 9:6 the Hebrew for this phrase (translated “Wonderful”) applies to One who would come as “Mighty God.” (CSB)

Far beyond what Manoah could grasp (see title for Christ, Is 9:6). (TLSB)

13:19 *offered it on the rock.* Though sacrifices were not to be offered except at the tabernacle (cf Lv 17:8–9), here the Lord sanctified the offering by His presence and His command. Cf 1Tm 4:5. (TLSB)

13:20 *altar.* The rock became an altar when the Lord (TLSB)

13:22 *doomed to die.* See 6:23 and notes on Ge 16:13; 32:30. (CSB)

The holiness of God consumes sinners who come into His presence (Ex 33:3). (TLSB)

God. With the offering, the angel revealed His true nature, and Manoah and his wife experienced a “theophany,” a direct revelation of God. (TLSB)

13:23 Manoah’s wife showed greater faith and insight than her husband as she recognized that the Lord had accepted the sacrifice and covered their sinfulness. Also, the Lord had promised to work through them and their son. (TLSB)

13:24 *Samson*. The name is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “sun” or “brightness,” and is used here either as an expression of joy over the birth of the child or as a reference to the nearby town of Beth Shemesh, “house of the sun(-god).” (CSB)

Similar to term “sun” (Hbr *shemesh*). Some scholars see a connection with pagan solar deities, but Josephus says that the word means “the strong one” or “the daring one.” (TLSB)

He grew and the LORD blessed him. Cf. 1Sa 2:26 (Samuel) and Lk 2:52 (Jesus). (CSB)

13:25 *began to stir him.* See notes on 3:10; 11:29. (CSB)

The Holy Spirit made Samson begin his work of deliverance, equipping him with supernatural strength. (TLSB)

Mahaneh Dan. Means “Dan’s camp” (see NIV text note on 18:12). (CSB)

Lit, “the camp of Dan,” possibly a temporary settlement for displaced refugees from the tribe of Dan. The location may be less than a mile from Samson’s birthplace. (TLSB)

Ch 13 The Lord’s messenger appears to a barren woman, promising that she will bear a son who must live as a Nazirite and who will save Israel from the Philistines. This special experience anticipates the special life the woman’s son will lead. God’s Word comes to us with special purpose too. In the humble forms of the pages of the Bible; the water, bread, and wine of the Sacraments; and the preaching preaching of a pastor, the Lord strengthens us for our special mission of serving Him in a hostile world. • O Lord, we thank You for Your Word, which You have graciously communicated to us in human language. Forgive us for being blind to Your wonderful Word, and lead us to trust it. For You reveal to us that You have provided a Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)