

Samson's Call

Bible Background • [JUDGES 13–16](#)
Printed Text • [JUDGES 13:1–7, 24–25](#)
Devotional Reading • [JUDGES 13:19–23](#)

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: RECOUNT the details of Samson's birth and calling; EMPATHIZE with the emotions Samson probably experienced regarding lifestyle restrictions imposed on him by others; and LIST some ways that unforeseen circumstances prepare people for leadership roles today.



Jasmin and Philip were married for seven years. They tried and tried to have a baby, but each time Jasmin thought she was pregnant, she was not. After the first year of trying, the doctor told them there was a strong possibility that they were experiencing infertility issues. After many months of being poked and prodded for tests, Jasmin and Philip faced the reality that they were, indeed, infertile.

They were a young couple with no money, and in vitro fertilization treatment was too expensive. However, they were a God-fearing couple who believed that God was sovereign. So, they chose to leave their infertility in His hands and trust Him to give them the grace to bear the grief of not having children.

Two years after all the testing, Jasmin was at work one day and began to feel sick. She thought she may have eaten something bad or had a stomach bug. The following day, she started feeling sick again and went to the doctor. The doctor ran tests and shared the good news with Jasmin: she was pregnant! Jasmin ran out of the doctor's office and called Philip as soon as she got in the car. They agreed that this baby was a miracle and that God had a plan for this child.

In today's lesson, we will meet a couple who received a son from God, Samson, whom He set apart for Himself to become one of Israel's judges. Have you ever felt set apart for a specific task?

Keep in Mind

“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 13:5](#)).

KJV

Judges 13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

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.

6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:

7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

NLT

Judges 13:1 Again the Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight, so the LORD handed them over to the Philistines, who oppressed them for forty years.

2 In those days a man named Manoah from the tribe of Dan lived in the town of Zorah. His wife was unable to become pregnant, and they had no children.

3 The angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah's wife and said, "Even though you have been unable to have children, you will soon become pregnant and give birth to a son.

4 So be careful; you must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink nor eat any forbidden food.

5 You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines."

6 The woman ran and told her husband, “A man of God appeared to me! He looked like one of God’s angels, terrifying to see. I didn’t ask where he was from, and he didn’t tell me his name.

7 But he told me, ‘You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink nor eat any forbidden food. For your son will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from the moment of his birth until the day of his death.’”

24 When her son was born, she named him Samson. And the LORD blessed him as he grew up.

25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he lived in Mahaneh-dan, which is located between the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol.

The People, Places, and Times

Philistines. One of the Aegean “Sea Peoples,” the Philistines migrated to Palestine in approximately the twelfth century BC and established themselves in five city states called the Philistine Pentapolis: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. The Philistines’ military superiority, economic strength, and administrative capabilities enabled them to be dominant over the Israelites ([Judges 13:1](#)). The Philistine threat to Judah is first seen in the stories of Samson (Judges 13–16).

Nazirite. A Nazirite or Nazarite (KJV) was an Israelite who voluntarily vowed to be consecrated to the Lord ([Numbers 6:1–21](#)). In some instances, parents made the Nazirite vow on behalf of their child and promised to set apart their child for God’s service ([Judges 13:1–7](#); [1 Samuel 1:1–11](#)). To demonstrate their commitment and devotion to the Lord, the Nazirites abstained from wine and strong drink (an alcoholic drink made from barley), avoided any contact with the dead, and allowed their hair to grow long. These outward signs showed their commitment and devotion to the Lord.

Background

The book of Judges describes a period in Israelite history characterized by idolatry, debauchery, sin, rebellion, and oppression on one hand, and repentance, mercy, grace, and peace on the other. The book spans the period between the death of the Israelite leader Joshua and the chaotic infighting of Israelite tribes before the rise of the monarchy. The Children of Israel did not heed God’s instruction and failed to remove the inhabitants completely from the land ([Judges 1:19–36](#), [2:1–2](#)). So, God allowed the Canaanites, Sidonians, Hivites, and Philistines to remain in the land and become snares to the Israelites ([Judges 2:3](#), [3:1–7](#)).

By mixing with the inhabitants of the land, the Israelites assimilated, accommodated, and tolerated the Canaanite lifestyle and worship—idolatry, inter-marriage, rejection of God’s Word—that were contrary to the ways and Word of God. So in Israel arose a generation who did not know the Lord ([Judges 2:10–13](#), [3:5–7](#)).

Their apostasy came with a great price because God gave them over to their enemies in the land, and they were oppressed for a time ([Judges 2:14–15](#)). The weight and pain of oppression caused the people to cry out in repentance to God; He responded in mercy and delivered them.

The book of Judges contains six periods of oppression that begin with the phrase “Again Israel did evil...” During those times, God raised up people whom He anointed, appointed, and empowered to deliver His people from their oppressors ([Judges 2:16–18](#)). When a judge subdued the enemy, the land experienced peace. As soon as the judge died, however, Israel would fall back into sin. They were caught in a cycle of sin ([Judges 2:18–23](#)).

In Depth

1. Problem of Sin and Oppression ([Judges 13:1](#))

[Judges 13:1](#) begins another cycle of oppression as God hands Israel over to the Philistines, who would rule over them for forty years. This is the sixth time the phrase “And the children of Israel did evil again ...” is used in the book of Judges (3:7, 12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6). While the judge-deliverer was alive, the Children of Israel had relative peace. With the judge’s death, the Israelites reverted back to their rebellion and rejection of God’s commandments. Because of their disobedience and rejection, they were given over to Philistine oppression ([Judges 10:6–7](#), [13:1](#)). In this cycle of oppression, the pattern of repentance was broken: there was no indication that the Children of Israel cried out to God in repentance, as they had done in the past (3:15, 4:3, 6:6, 10:10).

2. God’s Promise of Deliverance (vv. 2–7)

The Israelites did not cry out in repentance under the weight of oppression, and God made no announcement that He would raise up a judge-deliverer (2:16, 18, 3:9, 15). [Judges 13:2–7](#) functions as a birth and calling narrative for the final judge, Samson. In [Judges 13:2](#), Manoah is introduced, and his tribal affiliation and geographical location are given. In contrast, his wife is introduced as the unnamed and barren woman. In verse 3, the angel of the Lord appears to the woman and announces to her that she will become pregnant and give birth to a child. Like Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah before her, this woman would bear a son because of the Lord. There is no context for where Manoah’s wife was when the angel came to her or whether she had been pleading to God regarding her infertility. However, her barrenness was not unnoticed by God, who is not bound by impossible circumstances. He can and does work in and through what seems impossible in man’s eyes to accomplish His purposes.

The boy’s conception and birth were God’s doing and came with special restrictions ([Judges 13:4](#)). The mother was to maintain a strict diet—no wine, no strong alcoholic beverages, and no unclean food—during the time of her pregnancy. The restriction of unclean food was not a new restriction for an Israelite, but given the spiritual state of the people and their rejection of God, this mother had to be reminded about what He required (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). In verse 5, the restrictions expanded to include postnatal care of the baby: his hair was never to be cut. The reason for the restrictions became evident, as the boy was to be dedicated to God as a Nazirite. He would begin to deliver his people from the Philistines. [Numbers 6:1–21](#) outlines the provisions of the Nazirite vow. Normally, a person would make this vow voluntarily to show his dedication to God for a period of time. In this case, God divinely imposed the vow upon the boy for the duration of his life. The boy had been called by God and was appointed for a specific task.

In response to the angel's announcement, the wife ran to her husband to tell him what had happened ([Judges 13:6](#)). Her report first described the angel as a man of God who looked like an angel of God. Only after describing this heavenly visitor did she recount the message she received. She told her husband that they would have a son, and told him about the dietary restrictions. Their son would be dedicated to God as a Nazarite from birth.

3. Fulfillment of the Promise (vv. 24–25)

At the end of chapter 13, the author reiterates that the promise given to the woman was not just a figment of her imagination; it was fulfilled. Manoah's wife did bear a son and she named him Samson. God's call was evident in the boy's life because he grew up and was blessed by the Lord, and the Lord's Spirit began to impel him. God, in His mercy, did not leave His people without deliverance. They did not cry out to Him in repentance nor turn from their wicked ways. Still, God raised up someone whom He would use to begin to deliver His people.

Search the Scriptures

1. Samson was called to be a Nazirite ([Judges 13:5](#), [Numbers 6:1–21](#)). Is this particular calling applicable to Christians living in the twenty-first century?
2. The text says that the Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson (v. 25). How do we know when the Spirit of the Lord is moving us?

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what ways should your life as a believer demonstrate that you have been set apart to Christ? List two ways your life might not demonstrate a vibrant relationship with Christ. What steps can you make to change that? Commit to praying and asking the Lord to reveal to you the changes you must make.

Lesson in Our Society

Parents have a huge responsibility as the ones who must teach and lead their children in a growing relationship with Christ. In a culture becoming increasingly non-Christian, parenting has become a huge challenge for those seeking a godly family. Parents must find creative ways to teach their children about who God is and model for them how to have a relationship with Him. Parents are not perfect; neither are kids. We are all flawed. But, God can and will use us when we surrender to Him.

Make It Happen

God uses a variety of things in our lives—our childhood, family situations, personalities, strengths, weaknesses, talents, environments, experiences—for His glory. Nothing that we go through in our lives is wasted, but we must be open to allow the Lord to use these situations to mold and shape us. Prayerfully reflect on your life this week. List three things the Lord might have been doing in your life that you may have overlooked. What are some circumstances He has used to shape you that have influenced your life today?

More Light on the Text

Judges 13:1–7, 24–25

1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

Since the Israelites continued to do evil in the sight of God, He punished them—they experienced His wrath, and God used the Philistines to carry out His punishment on His own people. Judges 13:1 tells us that the Israelites chose sin—“evil” (Heb. *ra’*, **RAH**), meaning “wickedness, wrong”—in the sight of the omnipresent (all-present) holy (set apart from sin) Lord. He deemed that their actions were sinful. He “delivered” them (Heb. *natan*, **nah-TAHN**), which means He “gave” them into the hands of their enemies for forty years.

According to biblical scholars, the Philistines were a Gentile people from the area of the Aegean Sea. Eventually they occupied southwest Palestine from about 1200 to 600 BC. The Philistines worshiped many gods, were deeply rooted in pagan cultures of the eastern Mediterranean (especially Greek and Palestinian), and used soothsayers, astrologers, fortune-tellers, and clairvoyants.

In the eleventh century BC, when the Philistines began to attack the Israelites, these enemies possessed superior weapons of iron and were a very formidable adversary. However, the Lord Himself was using these people to punish the Israelites, His own children who were hardheaded, stiff-necked, and disobedient. For forty long years, the Israelites were under the bondage of their foes.

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.

Just as the all-powerful, true, and living God was in charge by allowing the Philistines to take the Children of Israel into bondage, He was in charge in delivering them out. God raised up their deliverer through a barren (Heb. *’akar*, **ah-KAR**, sterile, childless, fruitless) woman. This is a clear case of God doing the impossible. The woman’s husband whose name was Manoah lived in Zorah, which was a town in Dan. The phrase “a certain man” should also remind us that God uses ordinary—often totally inadequate—people to do His work. Through these people, God can get all the glory and due Him for the outcomes He has caused.

The angel (Heb. *mal’ak*, **mah-LOCK**), which means “messenger,” of God brought Manoah and his wife good news of great joy. In spite of her barrenness, Manoah’s wife was going to conceive and, not only that, bear Manoah a son—an heir to carry on his name and carry out the will of God.

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.

God's plan to deliver the Israelites from Philistine bondage required Manoah and his wife to obey Him fully. Because of who Samson was to be to God and His people—the role he would play as the last judge who would rule over the Israelites for twenty years—God issued three mandates. Manoah's wife must abstain from alcohol. She is to participate in the Nazirite dietary restrictions while pregnant with the son they are to consecrate. The couple was also to make sure that Samson's hair was not cut because he was going to be a Nazirite (Heb. *nazir*, **nah-ZEER**), which means “consecrated or devoted one.” These specifications were essential to set apart this child for service to God. Samson's parents made a vow for him to be a Nazirite for his entire life. This lifelong dedication began even in the womb, as indicated by his mother's observance of a special diet.

6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: 7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

Manoah's wife brought the good news to her husband and shared the details of what the messenger of God had told her. The word “countenance” is King James English for “appearance.” She described the one she recognized as an angel as looking “terrible” (Heb. *yare'*, **yah-RAY**), which means “inspiring fear.” At first sight, the messenger probably appeared to be someone she should be afraid of. Indeed, she did not ask him where he came from, and he did not give his name. In the ancient Near East was a widespread belief that to give someone your name was to inform him or her of your character and how to control you. The angel is not allowing them access to his name to avoid being controlled or manipulated. Manoah's wife relays the news simply: A man told her that she would conceive and bear a son, how she must carry him during her pregnancy, and that he “shall be a Nazarite to God” (13:7). In essence, this part of the passage tells us that God can call, consecrate, and anoint us to do His will even before we are born!

24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

There is a song that says, “All God's promises are true.” This part of the text demonstrates that God fulfills His promises. Yes, His promises are indeed true! The woman who was barren for so many years gave birth to a son “and called his name Samson” (v. 24). In Hebrew, “Samson” is *Shimshon* (**sheem-SHONE**) and means “like the sun” Samson was also blessed (Heb. *barak*, **bah-ROCK**), which means “saluted, adored”; Samson's blessings flowed from God. In other words, when Samson obeyed God and did His will, his life was blessed.

25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

God's Spirit denotes His presence with His people. The word "Spirit" (Heb. *ruakh*, **ROO-akh**) means "wind, breath, mind, spirit," but here it refers to God's presence and power at work in Samson. Ultimately, this is the third Person of the Trinity carrying out the will of God. The one true God was preparing Samson to deliver His people from the hands of their enemies. So God began to prepare Samson for his role as judge of Israel, where he would reign for twenty years. After forty years, the Israelites were going to be set free from the Philistines' bondage, and all that they could do was yield to the power of Almighty God.

Samson's tenure as judge was marked by moments of foolishness and tragedy. Even though Samson sinned terribly and often used poor judgment, God still accomplished much through him. Frail humanity cannot hinder His plans. Whatever He decrees will certainly come to fruition. The bigger picture is that in spite of Samson's behavior—God wanted to free His chosen people from bondage, and He did just that. The destiny of the Children of Israel and God's purpose for their lives were always in His hands. In comparison, Samson was like the nation of Israel: he was called by God to be a judge, and just like how the nation thrived when they obeyed God, Samson thrived as long as he obeyed God. We, too, will thrive as long as we obey God and follow His inerrant Word.

From the book of Judges and this lesson, we should learn that a holy God hates sin and punishes it as well. Sin has dire consequences. The ultimate penalty for sin is death, and God sets before us the way of life and the way of death ([Jeremiah 21:8](#)). At the other end of the spectrum is the fact that He also works out miraculous redemption plans and forgives sin; those who repent (turn from sin and toward God) can be restored to a right relationship with Him.

Say It Correctly

Manoah. ma-**NO**-uh.

Ashkelon. **ASH**-ku-lon.

Ekron. ek-**RAHN**.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Announcement of Samson's Birth to Manoah
([Judges 13:8-18](#))

TUESDAY

The Angel Accepts Manoah's Sacrifice
([Judges 13:19-23](#))

WEDNESDAY

Vow of Separation to the Lord
([Numbers 6:1-8, 13-17](#))

THURSDAY

Samson Marries a Woman of Timnah
([Judges 14:1-9](#))

FRIDAY

Samson Conquers the Philistines
([Judges 15:1-8](#))

SATURDAY

In Death, Samson Defeats the Philistines
([Judges 16:23-31](#))

SUNDAY

Samson's Call
([Judges 13:1-7, 24-25](#))