

IT'S A BOY!

JUDGES 13

Today we begin the study of one of the strangest characters in all the Bible. His name and his exploits are well-known, but the man himself remains a mystery. Of his life it could truly be said that he had unlimited potential. No man in all the Bible started out with as much going for him; no man ended with less. Without question, he would have been voted by his classmates Most Likely to Succeed. He had it all and he let it all get away from him. His name is Samson. His story is found in the Old Testament book of Judges. In four chapters the writer tells us about his rise and fall. It is a story rich in human drama—full of love and sex and intrigue and violence and passion and strange twists of fate. The four chapters break down this way:

CHAPTER 13—HIS MIRACULOUS BIRTH
CHAPTER 14—HIS UNTIMELY WEDDING
CHAPTER 15—HIS BATTLEFIELD HEROICS
CHAPTER 16—HIS TRAGIC DEATH

As I said, almost everyone knows this story. Samson's feats are legendary—how he killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey, how he set fire to the wheat fields by putting a torch in the tails of 150 pairs of foxes, how he killed 30 men to pay off a gambling debt. Surely all of us know the story of his tragic, heroic death when he destroyed the Philistine temple by pushing apart the pillars.

If his feats are legendary, so are his flaws. His greatest flaw was a weakness for women. He could never say no to a good-looking woman, a fact that repeatedly got him into trouble and eventually cost him his life. The woman who took him down—Delilah—has become a symbol for the seductive female.

What we see in Samson is a bristling bundle of contradictions:

- He was a man of faith with a weakness for women.
- He was a man of prayer given to uncontrollable fits of anger.
- He was a leader of Israel who lusted after Philistine women.
- He was a man of God who lacked common sense.

That's Samson—a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. He is listed in Hebrews 11 as a man of faith, yet he slept with a harlot. How do you figure it?

IN THE BEGINNING

Samson's story actually begins before he was born. Judges 13:1 sets the scene: 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. The Philistines were a sea people who migrated from the Aegean area down to Egypt about 1200 B.C. Defeated by



the Egyptians, they made their way up the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea—into the area we now call the Gaza Strip. They set up a Pentapolis—an association of five cities, three on the coast (Gaza, Ashkelon and Ashdod) and two inland (Ekron and Gath).

Over time they slowly moved into the southwestern flank of the tribes of Israel. They possessed one major material advantage over the Israelites—iron. They Israelites had bronze, but iron beats bronze any day. So the squeeze was on and the Philistines eventually came to a position of total dominance. In fact, they terrorized Israel for 40 years.

But God had a plan for delivering His people—a plan that involved a most unlikely man. But to make His plan work, God needed a special couple. He found one in the little village of Zorah, right on the frontier between Israel and the Philistines. Most of the other families had moved north to safety. But one family stayed put. We pick up the story in verses 2-5:

A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. 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. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, 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.”

The concept of being a Nazirite is one that, though foreign to our thinking, was very important in those days. A Nazirite was one who had taken a special vow before the Lord. **Numbers 6 describes the commitments a Nazirite must keep during the period of his vow: 1. Not to drink wine or any intoxicating drink; 2. Not to touch a dead body; 3. Not to cut his hair.**

The whole purpose of the vow was to provide a way in which an ordinary (i.e., non-priestly) person could dedicate his life to God. The Nazirite vow was meant to be temporary and voluntary but in Samson's case it was ordained by God to last for his whole life. The Nazirite's long hair outwardly proclaimed his inner dedication to God, a fact that comes into play in the affair between Samson and Delilah in Judges 16.

With all of that as background, it's time for Samson to arrive. “The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him while he was at Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol” (Judges 13: 24-25). Note two things about this: First, the blessing of God rests on Samson even as a young child. Second, the Spirit of God began to stir him as a teenager. Mahaneh Dan was the staging area for the soldiers of the tribe of Dan. No doubt

Samson liked to watch the men get ready for battle. That the Spirit stirred him at a military staging area indicates what his life's work would be—the deliverance of his people from the hands of the hated Philistines.

THE MAN WHO HAD IT ALL

Now we can begin to see Samson in better perspective. All that we have learned in Judges 13 is meant to impress us with the fact that here is a man completely prepared to do great things for God. If ever a man should have succeeded, it was Samson. If ever a man had it all, it was Samson. If ever a man had all the advantages life can offer, it was Samson.

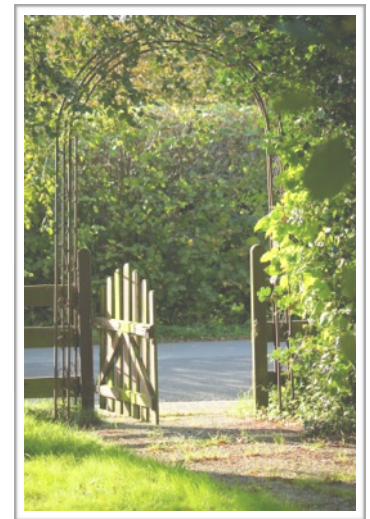
Consider what we know about him from this chapter:

- His birth was announced by an angel of the Lord who turns out to be God himself.
- He was set apart to God as a Nazirite from birth.
- His mission in life was chosen by God—to begin to deliver His people.
- He was raised in a godly home by godly parents who wanted to cooperate with God.
- He was blessed by God as a young child.
- He was empowered by the Spirit of God.

Samson had it all! You will never understand his life until you grasp that fact. Samson is not just one of the guys who got lucky. No, he was chosen by God before he was born and uniquely gifted for the work he was to do. And that's the tragedy of Samson's life. He started with everything and lost it all. The man who was Most Likely to Succeed... didn't. His story is told in such great detail in order that we might ponder it carefully and draw lessons from it.¹

Open It?

1. What do you know about your birth story? What are some of the details surrounding your arrival into this world? What were your parents thinking or doing during that time?



2. Describe a time when you were surprised by God. What was it about and how did you respond to "the curve ball" God gave you?

READ IT: JUDGES 13 – Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

EXPLORE IT

1. What was the spiritual climate during the time of Samson's birth?
2. What did Samson's parents struggle with?
3. How do Samson's parents learn that they will have a baby in verses 3-7?
4. What does Samson's dad pray in verse 8?
5. What was the calling that Samson would be given and how was God to use him for his country?

GET IT

"And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years." Judges 13:1 Into these times was born the next judge of Israel, Samson. In this sense Samson was truly a man from his times. He was a study in contrasts, a man of great strengths and great weaknesses. In this, he was a picture of Israel's history—of great highs and lows. Samson is also an important example of unfulfilled potential. Though he did great things for God, it is staggering to consider what he might have done and been for God.²

1. Read Judges 2:11-15 and Judges 21:25. Based on these passages what evil things was the nation of Israel guilty of? In what ways can some of the same things be said of the present age?



2. What would a time of captivity do to help teach the people of God lessons about their evil ways?

In what ways does God deliver us into the hands of our enemies today?

3. How do the times you live in affect your walk with God? In what ways has your walk been both positively and negatively been affected by the days around you?
4. Our text tells us that Samson's parents were barren and unable to conceive a child. What strains can be added to life when a couple struggles with infertility?

In what ways can we minister to those around us who are enduring the trials of infertility?

One can't help but be impressed with the devotion of this husband and wife to each other and to the Lord. The time of the Judges was one of apostasy and anarchy, but there were still Jewish homes that were dedicated to the Lord, that believed in prayer and through whom God was still working.³

5. In Judges 13 we learn of two encounters with the angel of the Lord who appeared to Samson's parents. While these personal visits found their culmination in the first advent of Jesus, in what ways have you experienced God's presence and direction?
6. After the first visit by the heavenly messenger Samson's mom shares her experience with her husband. Why is it so important for couples to share their spiritual lives with one another? How are couples to go about doing this?

What causes couples to not share their spiritual lives with each other?

The angel told Samson's parents that Samson was to be set apart as a Nazirite. The concept of being a Nazirite is one that, though foreign to our thinking, was very important in those days. A Nazirite was one who had taken a special vow before the Lord. Numbers 6 describes the commitments a Nazirite must keep during the period of his vow: these involved abstaining from drinking wine or any intoxicating drink, touching a dead body, and cutting his hair. The whole purpose of the vow was to provide a way in which an ordinary (i.e., non-priestly) person could dedicate his life to God. The Nazirite vow was meant to be temporary and voluntary but in Samson's case it was ordained by God to last for his whole life.⁴

7. Why does God call His people to abstain from things that He has created for our good? What would the holding back of such freedoms teach both Samson and his parents?
8. In what ways is every believer called to live a consecrated life? What things has God called us to abstain from? Why does He require this of His people?

As parents, the question we should ask ourselves is not "How can we produce a godly or successful child?" but rather "How can we be more godly parents?" The first question has to do with the end result over which we have no control; the second has to do with a process over which we do have control. Our prayer should be: "Lord, make us the kind of parents You want us to be."⁵

9. In verses 8 and 12 Manoah prays and asks for discernment and wisdom in order to raise the child in a God honoring way. How are parents to go about raising their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord?

What things must be evident in a parent's relationship with their children?

What earthly pursuits and things hinder such a pursuit?

The connection between the angel of the Lord and the pre-incarnate appearance of the Messiah cannot be denied. Manoah meets the angel of the Lord and declares that he has seen God. The angel accepts worship from Manoah and his wife as no mere angel, and refers to Himself as "Wonderful," the same term applied to the coming deliverer in Isaiah 9:6 (Judges 13:9-22). The functions of the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament prefigure the reconciling ministry of Jesus. In the New Testament, there is no mention of the angel of the Lord; the Messiah Himself is this person.⁶

10. According to verses 15-23 we see the incredible impact that the Lord's visit had on Samson's parents. What activities and emotions were involved?

In what ways can we follow their model to a deeper and more reverent engagement with the Lord?

Manoah's intense desire for the repetition of the angel's visit was prompted not by doubts or anxieties of any kind, but was the fruit of lively faith, and of his great anxiety to follow out the instructions given. Blessed was he who had not seen, yet had believed.⁷

11. What step of faith is God calling you to take in the days to come? What obedience is God demanding of you so that you might see this step of faith become a reality?

¹ Ray Pritchard, Sermon: "Most Likely To Succeed"

² David Guzik, Commentary on Judges

³ www.preceptaustin.org

⁴ Ray Pritchard, Sermon: "Most Likely To Succeed"

⁵ David Roper, Our Daily Bread

⁶ Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

⁷ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary