

### Immediate Context

Eleven judges have provided leadership in Israel throughout the first twelve chapters of Judges. This chapter begins the longest narrative surrounding one judge, spanning chapters 13 through 16. He is also the last judge identified in the book of Judges. He is none other than Samson. Our first judge was Othniel, a godly man with a wise wife who was the daughter of Caleb. Our last judge is an ungodly man entangled with a series of ungodly women (with the exception of his mother). The only thing they have in common is the empowerment of the Spirit of God for their task. We have traced a downward spiritual spiral through these chapters and have found that the character and quality of the leaders raised upon by God are often a reflection of the spiritual state of the people.

### Judges 13:1-7 – The Birth Announcement

We read a familiar refrain in verse one, but as we read the surrounding text something is missing. What is it? Israel was in bondage to the Philistines but we do not see them crying out to God for deliverance. We will learn more about this later, but perhaps they are content in their captivity.

Who were the Philistines? They lived primarily along the coast of Israel against the Mediterranean Sea. They are generally thought to be from the area surrounding the Aegean Sea, which is above the Mediterranean Sea and borders Greece and Turkey. They gained a foothold on Israel's coastline and grew their presence and power, expanding their reach and dominion over parts of Israel. They were a major antagonist of God's people for several generations.



Zorah was a city of the tribe of Dan, located near the border of Philistia and major Philistine strongholds. It was originally allotted to both the tribes of Judah and Dan (Joshua 15:33 and 19:41) but was settled by the Danites until they took the northern land, which we will reach about in Judges 18.

Manoah would be the father of Samson and he is first identified in verse two. His name means "rest." His wife is not introduced by name but by her circumstances. Not only was she barren, but the text indicates that this was a permanent condition and they were likely without hope of having a child. How should this be understood in the context of the Hebrew culture? They would likely be seen as cursed, having done something evil that resulted in being barren.

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What was the name of Manoah's wife? We are not given her name, but that is not an indication that she isn't important in this narrative. Samson's life will be dominated by women, but his mother is the only godly woman among them. In fact, she is favored by the Angel of the Lord on both visits and demonstrates wisdom beyond that of her husband.

Who is the Angel of the Lord? This messenger has appeared throughout Judges and we have repeatedly recognized Him as a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. He had led Israel into the Promised Land and gave them victory but departed from them in Judges 2 because of the rampant wickedness of the people. He has appeared periodically (most recently to Gideon in Judges 6) to provide a visible manifestation of God's presence and to deliver a prophetic pronouncement or calling.

The prophetic message delivered by the Angel of the Lord promised a miracle (birth from a barren woman), pronounced a vow, and prophesied a purpose upon the baby's life. Regarding the vow, what is a Nazirite? Read Numbers 6:1-21 and describe the major principles of the vow. This was a voluntary vow for a man or woman. Nazirite means "one separated." They would not eat or drink anything from grapes; they would let their hair grow long (especially unusual for a man); and cannot go near a dead body regardless of whether it is a near relative. The Nazirite was to remain in this state until the end of the period for which they vowed to be separated. The food restrictions would keep this vow in the forefront of their mind daily; the long hair would make their vow apparent to others; and the separation from death represents a separation from the ultimate damage caused by sin. Commentator Michael Wilcock expressed the concept of the Nazirite this way, "*The Nazirite would say a definite no to certain perfectly natural things in order to show how definite was the yes he was saying to something more important, his dedication of himself to God.*"<sup>1</sup>

What distinguishes Samson's Nazirite vow from the typical Nazirite vow? Also, does something strike you as odd regarding the typical Nazirite restrictions and Samson's purpose in life? Regarding his vow, it was not voluntary and it would last his entire life, not just for a defined period. Regarding Samson's purpose, he was to be a fighter of the Philistines. He would be creating dead bodies, one of the very things a typical Nazirite was to avoid.

When would Samson's Nazirite vow begin and what is the significance of this timing? His vow actually began with restrictions placed upon his mother while he was in the womb. The significance is that yet again, the scriptures place value upon life in the womb. Rather than being a collection of cells, Samson was a living child in her womb. Her actions during her pregnancy were considered part of the life vow the Lord placed upon Samson.

What would Samson's role be in regard to the Philistines? He would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. It would not be a task he would live to complete. We know that this task would ultimately be completed by David.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilcock, Michael, [The Message of Judges](#). Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. 1992. Page 86.

Is there any difference between the words of the Angel of the Lord related in verses 3 through 5 and the recitation she gave to her husband in verses 6 through 7? As she rehearsed the message from The Angel of the Lord to her husband, she added that Samson's Nazirite vow would last until the day of his death.

Who did Manoah's wife believe the visitor to be? She believed he was a "man of God" who looked like an angel of God. This means that she thought he was a prophet given a heavenly disposition by God.

Why do you think Manoah's wife believed what was told to her? Besides having an awesome appearance, this man knew her intimately. He saw the shame of her infertility and the burden that lay upon her heart. Such knowledge likely convinced her that the rest of His word was true as well.

### Judges 13:8-14 – Manoah's Request

Why did Manoah ask for another appearance of the "man of God"? He wanted more revelation about what they should do as parents of this child of promise. He may have also wanted personal revelation rather than relying on the revelation given to his wife. He clearly believed her though because he made his desire a matter of prayer.

Consider the instruction the Angel of the Lord provided to Manoah and his wife and compare it with the revelation given to his wife earlier in this chapter. What was odd about the way the Lord answered his request? What lesson is the Lord teaching us from this situation? Rather than appear directly to Manoah, He appeared to Manoah's wife. She was the chosen vessel for God's revelation of this announcement and Manoah would not be able to circumvent her involvement. The Angel of the Lord also explicitly said, *"Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful.... All that I commanded her let her observe."* No new revelation was provided to Manoah, nor were his direct questions answered (*"what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?"*). **The Lord already provided sufficient revelation for their role. They didn't need more answers but rather faith to obey what they already knew.** The same principle should speak to us today. **Do I really need more revelation or just more faith to obey what is already revealed?**

### Judges 13:15-20 – No Meal, No Name

Manoah's first request was to detain the Angel of the Lord for a generous meal. This was a common Near East courtesy and symbol of respect for a guest. Hospitality was of paramount importance in that culture. What does Manoah's request reveal about his belief concerning the identity of this visitor? He believes Him to be a prophet and does not suspect that He is more than that.

Such a meal could also be an opportunity to gain favor with a visitor and try and pry more information from them. See Genesis 18 regarding the holy visitors Abraham received in his tent and with whom he shared a meal. It was after this meal that Abraham had great boldness to intercede on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why did the Angel of the Lord refuse to eat with Manoah and his wife in contrast with Abraham's meal with the Lord and the angels? It is likely a statement about the spiritual state of Manoah and Israel in general. They were not in a position of spiritual closeness to God and so such a

meal was out of the question. Even today, one who is living in unrepentant sin should not partake in the Lord's Table (see *1 Corinthians 11:27-29*).

Rather than share a meal, Manoah was instructed to offer the goat as an offering to the Lord. Manoah acquiesces but then asks another question. He wants to know the name of this visitor to properly honor Him when the prophecy is fulfilled. The answer he receives is an enigma... literally. The Angel of the Lord refuses to provide His name, seeing it is "wonderful." The King James renders the response as "secret." This is not a proper rendering of the Hebrew word, which means "*wonderful, of an extraordinary nature making it mysterious or difficult to comprehend.*" The same word is used in Psalm 139:6 and a related word is used in Isaiah 9:6, both of which use the word "wonderful" to describe the Lord. What is the Angel of the Lord conveying to Manoah and his wife about His identity? The very name of this heavenly visitor was beyond Manoah's comprehension. **It wasn't a "secret." It was beyond his capacity to grasp.** That in itself is a sufficient answer; it was meant to leave Manoah in awe.

Consider everything Manoah has experienced during this visit from the Angel of the Lord. What is the overarching message? The theme of this visit is the holiness (otherness) of God. Manoah was not provided answers to his questions, only told to believe and obey what was already revealed. This visitor was not one that he could share a meal with. His name was also beyond Manoah's comprehension. All of these facts set the stage for the final revelation of the identity of this visitor.

Why did Manoah and his wife fall to their faces on the ground when the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar? **It is hard to tell whether it was a voluntary or involuntary response, but either way it was fitting.** They suddenly realized they had been in the presence of God and all they could do was reverence Him and worship. **This was truly what Manoah and his wife needed to best raise Samson: an awe of God. In this sense, Manoah received instruction on how to raise Samson.**

### Judges 13:21-25 – The Wisdom of Manoah's Wife

Why did Manoah believe they would die? Read Genesis 32:30, Exodus 33:20, Judges 6:22-23, Isaiah 6:5, and John 1:18 and reconcile these passages with Manoah's experience and fears. We are not currently spiritually or naturally capable of enduring in the full presence of God. The Lord Himself stated this in Exodus 33:20 and John 1:18 is categorically clear that no man has ever seen God. Yet Jacob wrestled with the Lord, Gideon spoke with the Angel of the Lord, and Isaiah had a vision of God's throne. Each of these experiences made these men fear for their lives. The only way to harmonize these passages is to recognize that God did not reveal His fullness. Just as He hid himself behind a cleft of the rock and allowed Moses to see His "backside," He has periodically manifested Himself in shielded or hidden ways so that He could dwell and interact with men. The prime example of this is Christ Himself. Even these partial manifestations were enough to leave a man in awe and brokenness before God.

What was the basis of Manoah's wife confidence that they would not die? What does this teach us? She stuck to the facts rather than their fears. They experienced an extraordinary encounter with God. They both fell on their faces. Yet, they both received clear instruction and promises about the future. **The clear revelation of God MUST take priority over our speculations about God.**