

June 25
Lesson 4

SAMSON

DEVOTIONAL READING: Judges 13:19-23

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Judges 13-16

JUDGES 13:1-7, 24, 25

¹ 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 childless, unable to give birth. ³ The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, “You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to 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 You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering 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 become pregnant and have 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 the womb until the day of his death.’”

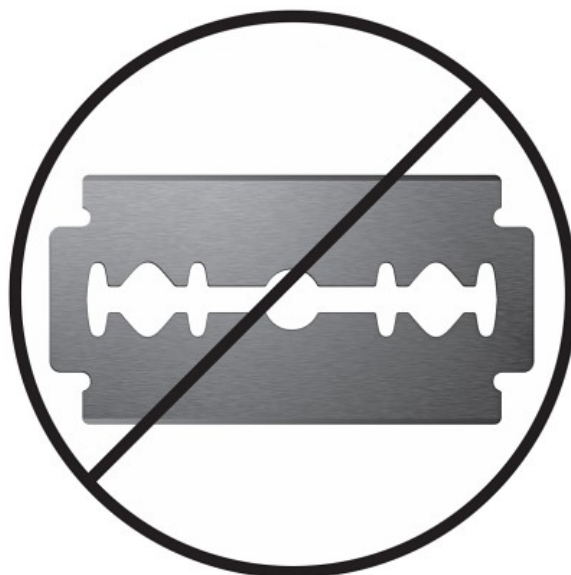


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²⁴ The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, ²⁵ and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

KEY VERSE

“You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”—Judges 13:5

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List factors and conditions intended to shape Samson’s spiritual development.
2. Evaluate how expectations may have shaped Samson’s attitudes and actions as he grew up.

3. Describe a parental or community expectation that has shaped his or her life in a positive way.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Childhood Memories
- B. Lesson Background

I. Childless Couple ([Judges 13:1-3](#))

- A. Dark Days ([v. 1](#))
Embracing Evil ... Again?!
- B. Brighter Tomorrow ([vv. 2, 3](#))

II. Conditions Given ([Judges 13:4-7](#))

- A. Child Set Apart ([vv. 4, 5](#))
Self-Denial or Self-Indulgence?
- B. Parents United ([vv. 6, 7](#))

III. Blessings Bestowed ([Judges 13:24, 25](#))

- A. For Manoah's Wife ([v. 24](#))
- B. For Israel ([v. 25](#))

Conclusion

- A. Parenting Manual
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Childhood Memories

When you reflect on your childhood, what memories come to mind? Is it that family outing to the beach during which you were first taught to swim? Is it the aroma of your favorite meal being lovingly prepared? Is it a favorite family tradition that was always practiced during holiday times?

But maybe it is a curfew that you had to follow that was an hour earlier than the curfew of your friends. Perhaps it is your parents' insistence that you not go to a movie that everyone was talking about, because it celebrated ungodly behavior. Possibly it is going to church every Sunday, even when you didn't *want* to!

Good parents make a real difference in the lives of children. Some parental actions are pleasant and affirming. But some will seem unpleasant and even unreasonable in the mind of a child. Yet both are necessary to bring a youngster to maturity. Today we will conclude our look at some famous judges of Israel, not by looking at the judge himself, but at this judge's parents.

B. Lesson Background

This is the last of the studies on four delivering judges in the book of Judges, the seventh book of the Old Testament. There were two other major judges (Othniel and Ehud) and six judges who seem only to have served as magistrates in different parts of Israel.

In the [previous lesson](#) Jephthah defeated the Ammonites that had oppressed the central portions of the land for 18 years. [Judges 12](#) gives the details on another problem that confronted Jephthah: Ephraimites from the western side of the Jordan came to complain that he had not called them when he led the battle against the Ammonites. Jephthah's reply was that he had called them and they had not come ([Judges 12:2, 3](#)). It could be surmised that after Jephthah's situation with his daughter (see last week's lesson), he did not feel like trying to appease men who wait until the battle is over before they choose sides.

The outcome was a battle between two groups of Israelites. Jephthah and his Gileadites defeated the Ephraimites from the western side of the Jordan (toward the Mediterranean Sea).

As the Ephraimites retreated, Jephthah's men gained control of the fords where the Ephraimites would cross the Jordan River. Each Ephraimite who attempted to cross the Jordan was asked to say a certain word. Anyone who pronounced the word a certain way was recognized as being an Ephraimite and therefore executed ([Judges 12:6](#)). Tribes had conquered the promised land some 300 years previously ([11:26](#)), which provided time for regional dialects to develop.

The last verses of [Judges 12](#) give basic facts of three men who seem to have served only as magistrates in their areas: one in the south, one in the north, and one in the middle section of Israel.

I. Childless Couple

(JUDGES 13:1-3)

A. Dark Days (v. 1)

¹ 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.

Each generation of God's people seems to have been determined to make its own mistakes, especially as it involved doing evil. To do evil is defined in [Judges 10:6](#) as serving the gods of five nations that bordered parts of Israel.

The result of this idolatry is given in [Judges 10:7](#): *the Lord "sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites."* The Ammonite oppression lasted for 18 years. It was the subject of the [previous lesson](#). The Ammonites had come from the east, and they spread across the Jordan River into Judah and Benjamin ([Judges 10:9](#)). Jephthah was selected to crush the Ammonites, and he did so.

The Philistine oppression of *forty years* is the longest of any in the book of Judges. Both Abraham and Isaac had dealings with individuals who were Philistines ([Genesis 21](#) and [26](#)), but they were not a threat at that time. They are not mentioned as one of the nations that the Israelites were to drive from Canaan.

It is generally thought that they came from islands in the Mediterranean or Aegean Sea. Overpopulation may have contributed to their migrating in larger numbers and, finally, settling along the coast of Canaan about 1200 BC. One of the early judges had a conflict with them (Shamgar in [Judges 3:31](#)). Soon they became a major factor in oppressing Israel. The ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines in the days of Eli (a mentor for Samuel). Conflicts continued into the days of Samuel, Saul, and David.

The 40-year oppression has been dated as starting at approximately 1115 BC. This may be about the time that Samson is born. In the middle of that oppression, Samson will become a one-man army who regularly embarrasses the Philistines with his physical strength.

EMBRACING EVIL ... AGAIN?!

Addictions to alcohol and drugs involve millions of people. But there are addictive behaviors as well as addictive substances. For example, involvement in social media is becoming increasingly common as an obsessive-compulsive behavior. A similarly addictive behavior is computer gaming. This compulsion may take the form of competing with one's self, always trying for a higher score or lower time of completion.

The declaration of today's text that "again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord" is evidence that the nation was addicted to sin in general and idolatry in particular. But this isn't just dusty history of a bygone era! No, it is "written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come" ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)). Psychologist Dr. Phil has said, "The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior." We prove we have learned from history when we do not repeat it. —C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What are some things we can do to resist joining the larger culture in its pursuit of evil?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of accountability practices

In terms of environments we put ourselves in

In terms of which Scripture passages to memorize for instant guidance

Other

B. Brighter Tomorrow (vv. 2, 3)

² A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth.

There is a very special announcement for a couple in Israel who are Danites. The tribal territory for Dan is immediately to the north of the areas where the Philistines had settled. This proximity provides us geographical context for Samson's temptations, his feats of strength, and his death.

Manoah is the name of the husband; the name of his wife is not given. They have not been able to have children, but that is about to change. They live in the town of *Zorah*, some 14 or 15 miles west of Jerusalem, near the border between Dan and Judah. The town of *Zorah* is mentioned as being involved in a Danite migration to a region north of the Sea of Galilee (see [Judges 18:1-29](#)). The tribal members who moved gave the name Dan to the leading town of the region. This is a tribute to their progenitor, Dan, one of the 12 sons of Jacob.

Other couples in the Bible are described as being childless, and special announcements from the Lord promised that they would have sons. These included Abraham and Sarah, who became the parents of Isaac ([Genesis 21:1-3](#)) when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 ([17:17](#)).

Isaac married Rebekah when he was 40 years old ([Genesis 25:20](#)). The first 20 years of this marriage did not produce an heir. When Isaac

was 60 (25:26), Rebekah gave birth to twins Esau and Jacob.

Another special birth involved Hannah. A priest named Eli stated his hope that the Lord grant Hannah her desire, and the Lord did so (1 Samuel 1:9-20). Angelic announcements preceded the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:8-25) and Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

3. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, “You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son.

The angel of the Lord seems to appear suddenly. He wastes no time in getting to the point, just as when he spoke to Gideon (Judges 6:12).

This unexpected event makes a vivid impression on Manoah’s wife. In verse 6 the appearance of the heavenly messenger is described as creating awe or terror. The other factor is the declaration itself. The angel of the Lord knows all about her status of being barren.

Through the years she has probably tried to be with child by using every remedy that anyone suggests. All to no avail. Now a total stranger factually announces that her hopes will be fulfilled, and she will *give birth to a son* of her own!

What Do You Think?

How should you respond if a fellow believer claims to have received an angelic visitation?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the purpose of the claimed visitation

Regarding witnesses to the claimed visitation

In light of Hebrews 1:1, 2

Other

II. Conditions Given

(JUDGES 13:4-7)

A. Child Set Apart (vv. 4, 5)

4. 5a. “Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb.

The next statement introduces a caution. She is to be on guard and not drink wine or other beverage that is known to cause drunkenness. The reason for this is that the one to be born is to be *a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb*. In this situation it may be that the restrictions that are on a Nazirite are also to be on the mother from the time of conception, for she is supplying the nutrition to the son.

The word *Nazirite* means “consecrated,” or “dedicated.” The guidelines for a Nazirite are given in Numbers 6:1-8. Any Israelite, male or female, can be a Nazirite for any length of time. Samson is to be a perpetual Nazirite. Such a person is to have no wine, strong drink, grape juice, fresh grapes, dried grapes, grape seeds, or grape skins—nothing from a grapevine. Grapes have sugar, and they are highly desired. It will be a challenge for a Nazirite to watch others eat things that he or she cannot have.

Samson’s mother not only receives restrictions on what she may drink but also on what she may eat. Mrs. Manoah lived during the Mosaic dispensation, so clean foods for her are to conform to the guidelines that Moses gave in the law. In Leviticus 11 (see also Deuteronomy 14) the details are provided for what an Israelite is permitted to eat. Four categories are given:

1. Quadrupeds must have a hoof that is split and must chew the cud.
2. Animals in the water must have fins and scales.
3. Birds that are carnivorous or eat carrion are forbidden; others are permitted.
4. Insects must have four jointed legs for jumping—primarily various kinds of locusts (similar to grasshoppers).

HOW TO SAY IT

Aegean Uh-jee-un.

Ammonites Am-un-ites.

Canaan Kay-nun.

Eli Ee-lye.

Ephraimites Ee-fray-im-ites.

Esau Ee-saw.

Eshtaol Esh-tuh-oll.

Gaza *Gay-zuh*.

Gileadites *Gil-ee-uhd-ites* (*G* as in *get*).

Isaac *Eye-zuk*.

Jephthah *Jef-thuh* (*th* as in *thin*).

Mahanehdan *May-hah-neh-dan*.

Manoah *Muh-no-uh*.

Mediterranean *Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un*.

Nazirite *Naz-ih-rite*.

Othniel *Oth-ni-el*.

Philistines *Fuh-liss-teenz* or *Fill-us-teenz*.

Shamgar *Sham-gar*.

Zacharias *Zack-uh-rye-us*.

Zorah *Zo-ruh*.

The ordinary restrictions prohibit anything from grapes, cutting the hair, or going near a dead person. Samson's physical appearance to others must have been frightening with his long hair and long beard.

Samson is the only person in the Bible who is actually said to be a Nazirite. Samuel is thought to have been a Nazirite, because his mother vowed that no razor would come on his head ([1 Samuel 1:11](#)). The same conclusion is made about John the Baptist, but for a different reason. The angel who appears to Zechariah says that his son is not to drink wine or strong drink ([Luke 1:15](#)).

SELF-DENIAL OR SELF-INDULGENCE?

The Nazirite vow that God commanded for Samson's mother—and ultimately for Samson himself—involved abstaining from things that were part of an Israelite's normal life. Even today we may choose to give up something such as eating chocolate or watching TV as temporary self-denial. Self-denial reminds the participant that the Son of God gave up much more to make salvation possible.

The call to self-denial is a difficult one to hear in a self-indulgent culture. Missionaries report that self-denial is accepted more readily in parts of the world with lower standards of living. Perhaps the higher one's standard of living, the more one realizes how much self-denial really costs.

But consider the one who had the highest standard of living imaginable, the one who gave it all up for us: Jesus. [Philippians 2:7, 8](#) bears frequent reading: "He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" —C. R. B.

^{5b}. **"He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines."**

The final revelation of the heavenly messenger perhaps gives Manoah's wife the idea that Samson will be like others in the past who led armies against the enemies of God's people. That will not be the case.



Visual for Lesson 4. Point to this visual as you ask, “In what ways does God make his faithfulness known to our generation today?”

Instead, Samson will act more as a free agent than a team leader of thousands. Feats of strength such as killing a lion with his bare hands ([Judges 14:5, 6](#)), killing 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey ([15:15](#)), and lifting the city gates of Gaza and carrying them toward Hebron ([16:3](#)) will be done without assistance.

His task is to use his great strength to keep the Philistines off balance, to keep them concerned and confused, and to do things that cause them to realize that their gods are nothing. The judges that led organized armies against enemies include Deborah in accompanying Barak ([lesson 1](#)), Gideon ([lesson 2](#)), and Jephthah ([lesson 3](#)). Samson’s role is different.

B. Parents United ([vv. 6, 7](#))

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.

The words in the biblical text say nothing about the manner by which the woman tells her husband what she has just experienced. But we imagine that it is with great excitement! She first describes her special visitor as *a man of God*. This was the ordinary way to refer to a special servant of the Lord (see [Joshua 14:6](#); [1 Samuel 2:27](#); [9:6, 7](#)).

She is very perceptive, however, for she continues the description by saying that the appearance of this special guest was *like an angel of God*. His *very awesome* appearance is almost beyond description. One of the first things to be done for a visitor is to ask where he is from. But she had not done so, perhaps due to being speechless. Nor did he tell her *his name* (contrast [Genesis 32:29](#)).

Each statement by the angel is that of a bold, if not shocking, promise. Manoah’s wife is overwhelmed. This is so much the case that she had not thought to attend to the common courtesies of the day.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances should we seek the input of others on spiritual matters? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Circumstances when input of family members is wise or not wise

Circumstances when input of nonfamily members is wise or not wise

7- “But he said to me, ‘You will become pregnant and have 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 the womb until the day of his death.’”

Manoah’s wife faithfully repeats the instructions that were given to her by the angel of the Lord. But she makes two changes. First, she adds *until the day of his death* as the extent of the Nazirite requirement; it is possible that the angel actually said this. Second, she does not mention that the son will begin delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines. Again, she may have relayed it to her husband, but that is not recorded.

III. Blessings Bestowed

(JUDGES 13:24, 25)

A. For Manoah’s Wife (v. 24)

24- The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him,

In the verses between the ones designated for this lesson, Manoah prays for the Lord to let the man of God return. He wants to know what they should do for this special son. Manoah is to be commended for his faith—and perhaps his curiosity, for he believes what has been said.

The angel of the Lord returns, and Manoah asks questions about the future vocation and manner of life for the promised son. Manoah invites his visitor to remain for a meal, for he does not comprehend that this is the special angel of the Lord. Instead, Manoah is instructed to prepare a burnt offering. As the flames of the fire ascend, the angel of the Lord also ascends in the flame.

It must be an exciting nine months for Mr. and Mrs. Manoah and their friends as they await the arrival of their son. He is called Samson, which is similar to the word meaning “sun.”

The descriptions about his growth and his being blessed by the Lord are similar to the phrases that are used for future sons of promise—Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26; 3:19) and Jesus (Luke 2:40, 52).

What Do You Think?

What indicators should make us confident that a leader of a ministry project has God’s approval?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding indicators established in Scripture

Regarding indicators not established in Scripture

B. For Israel (v. 25)

25- and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

The context implies that Samson is coming of age. He is no longer apathetic or passively resigned to the oppression by the Philistines, for *the Spirit of the Lord* begins to prompt him to action. The designation *Mahaneh Dan* means “Dan’s camp” (see Judges 18:12).

The phrase “the Spirit of the Lord came” is used to describe the empowerment of judges Othniel (Judges 3:9, 10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and (three times) Samson (14:6, 19; 15:14). This phrase may be functionally equivalent to *the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him* that we see here; this phrase is unique to Samson.

Samson’s parents have done their part in rearing Samson according to the divine mandates. Samson is ready to begin what the angel of the Lord has said: to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. Others will also have roles to play in this task at various times. They primarily include Samuel, Saul, and David. God is protecting his people as he focuses on preparing the world to receive the Messiah. He will arrive to deliver people from the ultimate enemy: sin.

What Do You Think?

What practices can help us remember the divine source of all our strength today?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering aids offered by technology
 Considering interpersonal accountability
 Other

Conclusion

A. Parenting Manual

In 1946, Dr. Benjamin Spock published *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. For more than half a century, this book was a consistent best seller, selling more than 50 million copies and being translated into about 40 languages. Mothers were encouraged by a basic message: *you know more than you think you do!*

Samson's parents lived well before Dr. Spock. They received direction, not from a popular author, but from God himself. Child-rearing experts have some value, but we can encourage parents to this day with the words of God, who knows more than all of us combined!

B. Prayer

Almighty God, as Samson had a way to serve, give me strength to fulfill my place in God's kingdom in the different segments of my life, and always in a way that is pleasing to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

It is never too late to offer a prayer of thanks for godly parents.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Divide the class into groups of three to five students. Give each group a pen and paper and ask them to list characteristics of good parents.

After a few minutes of group discussion, ask one group to read its list, one item at a time. As the characteristics are read, ask the other groups if that characteristic appeared on their list. If half or more of the groups had the same characteristic, write it on the board. Allow time for all groups to share, and continue to create a master list of characteristics of good parents.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Childhood Memories" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually for a minute or two and then share a response with the entire class.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "Good parents make a real difference in the lives of children. No parent is perfect; nor does every child of a good parent live a trouble-free life. Today we will conclude our study on judges of Israel, not by looking at a judge himself, but at his parents."

Into the Word

Dialogical reading of a narrative is a good way to focus a class on the facts in a text. Assign readers for these four parts:

Part 1—The words of Manoah's wife

Part 2—The words of Manoah

Part 3—The words of the angel of the Lord

Part 4—All other words

Instruct your readers to read all of [Judges 13](#), each reading his or her own part. When a character quotes another character (see [v. 7](#)), the character who originally spoke the words should speak.

Then reinforce the facts of this chapter by reading the following questions aloud, asking class members to fill in the blanks correctly.

Distribute a handout for students to complete as a closed book test, or divide the class into two teams and alternate the statements between them. If there is a tie, use the seventh question as a tiebreaker for the first team to call out the answer.

1. The oppression by the Philistines had lasted _____ years. (*40*)
2. Manoah and his wife had no children because she was _____. (*barren*)
3. The angel _____ appeared to the woman and told her that she would have a son. (*of the Lord*)
4. She was told not to drink wine or _____ and to avoid eating anything unclean. (*strong drink*)
5. No razor was to be used to cut the child's hair, since he would be a _____ from birth. (*Nazarite*)
6. The woman told her husband that _____ had appeared to her and told her she would have a son. (*a man of God*)

7. During the years when Samson was growing up, the Lord _____ him. (*blessed*)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Childhood Rules” activity from the reproducible page. Students may complete it individually, or you may decide to use it as a take-home exercise.

Into Life

Write this question on the board: *On which of the following areas did your parents place the most emphasis as you were growing up?* Underneath it list these categories:

1. Personal appearance
2. Academic achievement
3. Sports or other physical activities
4. Morality and behavior
5. Spiritual growth and church involvement

After a time of discussion, ask for volunteers to share how their parents’ expectations affected them. For those on whom expectation had a negative effect, ask if they did things differently with their children in the area of expectations as a result.