

Deeper Discoveries

Judges



Lesson 7: Judges 13–14

Judges 13: The Birth of Sampson

In Judges 13:2–3, we are introduced to Manoah, a Danite, and his wife (who remains nameless, yet is the real heroine of this chapter). And “the angel of the LORD appeared to her” (v. 3)—God has begun to act to save his people. Samson is the only judge chosen before he is born, or even conceived. Manoah’s wife is “sterile and remained childless” (v. 2). “But,” says the angel of LORD, “you are going to conceive and have a son” (v. 3). She must not drink alcohol, or eat anything unclean (v. 4), or cut his hair, because this son “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” (v. 5).

The Nazirite vow to which the angel refers is found in Numbers 6:1–21, and contained three basic stipulations: A Nazirite was not to cut hair during the period of the vow; was not to drink any produce from vines, alcoholic or non-alcoholic; and was not to have contact with any dead body.

The purpose of the Nazirite vow was to ask for God’s special help during a crucial time. It was a sign that you were looking to God with great intensity and focus. Keeping one’s hair uncut and refraining from the fruit of the vine were ways of showing that you were “in training” toward a goal. By refraining from touching a dead body, you were adopting the stringent rules of ceremonial cleanliness for priests, who were not allowed to touch anything dead because they worked in God’s house (the tabernacle, at this point in history) every day. So the Nazirite was living before the presence of God every day.

As is clear from Numbers 6, the Nazirite vow was made voluntarily and for a definite period of time. But Samson was being born into the Nazirite state involuntarily (his parents were taking the vows for him), and he was to stay a Nazirite all his life. His mother was not to drink wine or eat unclean foods, because the Nazirite vow started immediately—when Samson was in her womb! What she ate and drank, Samson-in-utero also would eat and drink. God put Samson under this “rule” even when he was still unborn. He was truly to be “set apart to God from [and before] birth” (Judges 13:5). (Timothy Keller, *Judges for You*)

13:22 “...we shall surely die, for we have seen God.” Manoah’s fears echo those of Gideon on encountering the angel of the Lord (see 6:22; cf. Gen. 32:30 (Jacob after his wrestling match); Ex. 33:20). (*ESV SB*)

Judges 14: Sampson Starts His Ministry By Seeking What Is Right in His Own Eyes

Samson is now a grown man, stirred by the Spirit of the LORD (13:25). But at the start of chapter 14—and throughout the rest of his life—he will be stirred by a much more worldly impulse. One day, he “went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman” (14:1). Returning home, he says (literally) to his parents: “have I seen a woman, in Timnah, of the daughters of the Philistines. Now get her for me as a wife” (v. 2).

His parents no doubt remember the angel’s prediction that Samson would deliver the Israelites from the Philistines (it’s not the kind of thing you would forget!). So imagine their distress when Samson comes home and, instead of fighting Israel’s enemies, wants to marry one of them! They protest that there must be a woman in their wider family, or at least in Israel, whom he could marry (v. 3): “Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?” The word “uncircumcised” is key here. Circumcision was a sign that a family was in a personal covenant or relationship with God, as part of his people. Their issue was not a racial one (*No son of mine will marry one of those Philistines!*). It is about marriage with someone outside of the LORD’s covenant. (Timothy Keller, *Judges for You*)

14:3 Israel is told not to intermarry with the Canaanites (Deut. 7:3). In Samson’s case, the Lord uses it for good (Judg. 14:4), but it ultimately becomes Samson’s downfall (ch. 16), indicating the need for a perfect savior to deliver people from their spiritual “marriage” to idolatry. (*ESV SB*)

14:4 An editorial comment: “**this was from the LORD.**” God, who does not cause humans to sin, can nevertheless use human sin and folly to accomplish his divine purpose. In other words, God used Samson in spite of Samson’s wrong motives and actions (cf. Gen 45:8; 50:20; 2 Chr 25:20; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Rom 8:28–29). (*NIV BTSB*)

14:8–9 the carcass of the lion. Part of the Nazirite vow is to avoid even approaching a human corpse (Num. 6:6). Many interpreters consider Samson’s act of touching the lion’s carcass to be a tacit violation of his vow. (*Ref SB*) Samson flagrantly violates his Nazirite status and carelessly defiles his parents. Food from a corpse defiles. (*NIV BTSB*)

14:10–18 Philistine wedding feasts, like those of other people of the ancient Near East, included wine and beer. Drinking vessels of this type have been found in excavations of Philistine sites. The hostility between Samson and the Philistines flared up because of verbal jousting between Samson and his guests. Samson proposed a riddle they could not solve (or so he thought). Samson’s bride betrayed him (anticipating Delilah’s betrayal in ch. 16). (*NIV BTSB*)

14:18 If you had not plowed with my heifer. This may have been a saying in Samson’s time (heifers were occasionally used for plowing; cf. Deut. 21:3). Here, it is a coarse reference to their manipulation of Samson’s wife.

14:14–19 Israel’s hero, like Sisera, was defeated by a woman. (*NLT SB*)