



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: JUDGES 13:1-25**

To understand how Samson's story began.

## Same Old Song and Dance

1974 was significant in a lot of ways. In March of that year, the so-called Watergate scandal began when seven former White House officials were indicted for their role in conspiracy to obstruct justice. In April, Stephen King's *Carrie* was published, and has since become a cultural icon in the horror industry. That same month, Hank Aaron, then playing for the Atlanta Braves, broke Babe Ruth's home run record with 715 career home runs. By August, Richard Nixon became the first United States president to resign from office in order to avoid impeachment and conviction in response to the Watergate scandal. In the midst of all of this, the second career album was released by the upcoming sensational band called *Aerosmith*. Following their self-titled release and just before what is hailed as their best album (*Toys in the Attic*), they released *Get Your Wings*, which included the single "Same Old Song and Dance." It's a well-known phrase that means even though someone may appear to have changed, they are same person deep down. They look different, but it's "the same old story, same old and song and dance."

The song strikes a chord with me when I read the book of Judges. Though Israel goes through a litany of changes in the literal hundreds of years that pass in this book (around 325 to 400 years, give or take), they always end up coming back to that same old song and dance: "And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (Jg. 13:1a). And predictably, God brings them under judgement, and upon crying out, He sends another judge. This time, the judge we meet is named Samson.

## A Special Child

Judges 13 begins with an introduction of a man named Manoah, “a man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites” (Jg. 13:2). His wife is apparently barren, and not able to have children, when an angel of the LORD appears to her and delivers to her the good news that she will have a son. Below is a breakdown of this interaction, and some key details.

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE WOMAN**

The instructions for the woman at first seem puzzling especially to the ancient context, although more reasonable to the modern context. The angel tells her: “Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean” (Jg. 13:4). The emphasis to not drink wine or strong drink is consistent with modern scientific findings pregnancy, but to the ancient world it was a strange request. The additional command to not eat anything unclean was not uncommon but in fact binding on all of Israel. Given their current moral and theological condition, however, the reinforcement recognizes how foreign even basic biblical commands were to the people of God. Why is the woman being asked to take special care of herself regarding this pregnancy? The angel answers: “for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the land of the Philistines” (Jg. 13:5).

### **A NAZIRITE VOW**

The Nazirite vow was a voluntary vow one could make with the LORD in order to “separate himself to the LORD” (Num. 6:2). It was significant and required specific action for the one taking the vow. The three restrictions given in Numbers 6:1-25 are: 1. “He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink” (Num. 6:3), 2. “No razor shall touch his head” (Num. 6:5), and 3. “He shall not go near a dead body” (Num. 6:6). Two of these three restrictions are emphasized to the woman by the angel in Judges 13. She is not to drink strong drink because by doing so it would affect the baby in her womb, and that baby boy is to be a “Nazirite to God from the womb” (Jg. 13:5). Secondly, the angel emphasizes: “No razor shall come upon his head.”

The fascinating thing about this vow in Judges 13 over any other example of the Nazirite vow is that this one is not a voluntary vow taken, but one that is enforced by God Himself onto the individual. Even the mother must observe the laws while the baby is in utero in order to not make him unclean. Beyond that, the length of the Nazirite vow was not intended to be forever. Numbers 6:1-25 gives express instruction for when the person is ready to end the vow. Samson, however, “shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death” (Jg. 13:7). The life-long vow made for him and crucially not by him is unique; there is no other example like this in Scripture.

### **SAMSON**

Samson is eventually born, and “the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him” (Jg. 13:24). His story as a judge is unique because of this vow. Every other judge was called and confirmed as an already grown adult. In this case, it seems Samson’s entire purpose was to be a judge, and a specifically holy judge at that. This should peak the interests of the reader to anticipate some significant actions and/or abilities for Samson over what we have already witnessed thus far in the book of Judges.

## The Divine Messenger

Throughout this chapter, we are interacting primarily with three main characters: Manoah, Samson’s father, his unnamed wife, and the angel of the LORD. Below are a couple of key observations regarding this mysterious angelic figure.

**HOW ANGELS ARE DESCRIBED**

What is particularly interesting about the angel is that while he is clearly described as an angel, he is also described and interacted with as a man. For example, the wife describes him to her husband as “a man of God” with “the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome” (Jg. 13:6). He speaks with them in person and interacts with them in a very human manner. In fact, at the time of the discussion and before the burnt offering, both Manoah and his wife did not even realize that this person was the angel of the LORD (Jg. 13:16b). It’s an interesting observation because it demonstrates how wrong the modern perception of angels is. Angels very clearly can and do sometimes take very strange and supernatural forms, as is seen in Isaiah 6:2 and Revelation 4:6-7. They do also, however, take the form of what looks like a Godly man, as is seen both here and in places like Genesis 19:1-2 (Lot’s story). Perhaps this is why Hebrews 13:2 tells us: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” It’s a puzzling verse, but perhaps the idea is that we would not be able to recognize angles when they are in this human-looking shape?

**THE BURNT OFFERING**

The way that Manoah and his wife come to learn that this man is in fact not a man but the angel of the LORD is through this sacrifice of burnt offering. Initially, Manoah wanted to “detain” the man and “prepare a young goat” for him (Jg. 13:15). But the angel answered: “If you detain me, I will not eat of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD” (Jg. 13:16). It is during this burnt offering in Judges 13:19-20 that the angel reveals himself in the fullness of his power: “So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground.” After this instance, the angel of the LORD “appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife” (Jg. 13:21). This scared Manoah, but his wife assured him that God would not have promised such good news if He had not accepted the burnt offering and, by extension, him and his wife.

Clearly, with the involvement of the angel of the LORD, the strict dietary restrictions, and the promise of a boy who would not only be a Nazirite for life, but also a judge that would save Israel from the Philistines, the reader can be certain that Samson’s story will be elevated in an unusual manner.

## What About Now?

One takeaway from this week’s passage is that sometimes God has special plans for people that they are set apart to accomplish. This is true of the apostle Paul as well who was “called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1). Often God calls people in a specific point in their life and equips them for the task He has in mind, whether big or small. However, there are anointed people throughout human history that clearly were brought forth for a specific and set apart purpose. It’s not common, but it does happen. Another takeaway is that you might, as Hebrews 13:2 says, have entertained angels by your hospitality towards other people and were completely unaware that they were angels! It’s a shocking concept, but a clearly biblical one.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Judges 13:1. What did the people of Israel do yet again? How did God respond?
- 
-



2. Read Judges 13:2-7. Who is Manoah? Who is his wife? Who visits his wife and what does he tell her? What is unique about the mention of the Nazirite vow? (Hint: See above notes)
- 
- 

### Day Two

1. Read Judges 13:8-14. What did Manoah pray to God, and how did God respond? Was Manoah able to meet the angel of the LORD? What did Manoah ask him and what did the angel say in response?
- 
- 

2. Read Judges 13:15-18. What did Manoah propose to the angel? What was the angel's response? Did Manoah know who the angel was at this point? What did Manoah ask the angel, and how did the angel respond?
- 
- 

### Day Three

1. Read Judges 13:19-20. What two kinds of offerings did Manoah and his wife offer? When the flames went up, what happened? What did Manoah and his wife do in response to this?
- 
- 

2. Read Judges 13:21. Did the angel appear again after this? What did this event prove to Manoah?
- 
- 

### Day Four

1. Read Judges 13:22-23. What was Manoah's response to his wife after seeing the burnt offering take the angel of the LORD up with it? What did his wife say to him?
- 
- 

2. Read Judges 13:24-25. What was the child's name? What did the Lord do once he was born? What began to stir in him?
- 
- 

## Week 11 Discussion: Purpose

Samson's story is one that begins with the very clear message that he has a special purpose. He is set apart while still in the womb, and made a Nazirite. This is highly unusual given that, normally, it's a vow people enter into voluntarily. While not everyone has a specific and unusually set-apart purpose, all of God's people have a

purpose that He is drawing them towards. Talk as a group about the need for Christians to discover their God-given purpose, and how that purpose should direct your day-to-day actions.

1. Icebreaker: Do you believe God has a purpose for you? Why or why not?
2. Do you think you know what God's purpose is for you? If so, what is it?
3. If you don't know what your purpose is, how can you go about discovering it?
4. How does knowing your purpose help direct your actions and decisions?
5. Can your purpose change? Why or why not?
6. How can the church help people discover their God-given purpose and then encourage them to live it out?

## Takeaways:

1. Samson was to be a Nazirite from the womb until death, and a judge to save Israel from the Philistines.
2. Angels sometimes take the form of humans in such a manner that not even other humans are aware they are angelic beings.

### ***PRAYER REQUESTS:***