



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for January 25, 2009
Released on Wednesday, January 21, 2009**

"Preparing for Commitment"

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 91.
Background Scripture: Judges 13.
Lesson Text: Judges 13:1–13, 24.**

Judges 13:1–13, 24

1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

2 And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

3 And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:

7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

8 Then Manoah entreated the Lord, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

9 And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her.

10 And the woman made haste, and ran, and showed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.

11 And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am.

12 And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?

13 And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

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24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to describe the grace of God in providing Samson to deliver Israel from its oppressors.

Principle: to realize that God takes care of His own people.

Application: to urge believers to look to God for help in difficult situations caused by either themselves or others.

Introduction

Experiencing Expectancy

The conscientious expectant mother in Western culture takes seriously the preparations for the arrival of a baby. The mother-to-be often alters her eating habits, takes more rest, gains weight, thinks about possible names, tells her relatives and close friends, decorates an area, gains weight, prepares a place for the baby to sleep, visits the doctor regularly, gains weight, resolves to avoid alcohol and nicotine, tries to avoid morning sickness, gains weight, talks to other mothers about what to expect, buys maternity clothes, makes arrangements to continue working or to resign, and begins to secure the necessary clothing and linens.

That's a great list, but the most important element is missing. Nothing is said about a spiritual commitment to rear the child in a godly home, to pray for the faithfulness of the child throughout life, to pray for the child's future spouse, or to make sure there will be Bible story books to read in family devotions. The ultimate goals in the preparation should be to please God and to model Christ in such a way that will enable the mother, the child, and the entire family to spend eternity with Jesus.

In a self-centered society, the unborn and the newborn may not be wanted; they may be cast aside in various ways and for different reasons. At the other end of the spectrum are couples who desperately desire to have children and are unable to do so. In addition, there are those prospective parents who have made all the right preparations, but their newborns are unable to exist outside the womb. Caution is therefore encouraged in the remarks that are made by the teacher and the students who consider this lesson, since it concerns a childless woman who received a message from a heavenly being that she was to have a son.

Lesson Background

The previous lesson presented the Israelite nation as it crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan. The fall of Jericho was followed by two subsequent campaigns, one to the south and one to the north. Data from Caleb's statements in Joshua 14 lead to a conclusion that these campaigns consumed six to seven years of time. The conquered territory was divided among the nine and one-half tribes that settled in Canaan. The tribe of Levi did not receive a territory, but was given 48 cities throughout the land (Joshua 21).

The nation of Israel finally has its land, the laws of God, and the promises of God. God promised that if they would keep His covenant they would be blessed with crops, children, and protection from enemies. There were no taxes to support kings, armies, or national programs—just tithes (which some considered a form of a tax). It was an ideal situation in which to "live happily ever after."

The Israelites failed to do what they promised. The older generation did not take the lead in teaching the children about God's works (Judges 2:10). Idolatry as practiced in Canaan seemed more exciting and enticing than the righteous demands by God, so the Israelites forsook the Lord and served other gods (Judges 2:11–13).

The book of Judges shows us that mankind generally does not learn from history. We are, in fact, seeing that in our own nation. If we study the decline of previous nations, we soon discover that many of the cultural trends we see in our own society contributed to the fall of those nations. It is an even sadder fact that histories are being rewritten so as not to portray accurately the ungodly trends that have contributed to the demise of nations. We can learn what we need, though, from the book of Judges.

Judges is a cyclical book, showing that Israel repeatedly sinned, was punished by God by being given over to the domination of a foreign power. Eventually the Israelites appealed to God, and God sent deliverers called *judges*. As each judge died, the cycle repeated (Judges 2:16, 19). The cycle is often described as *sin, sorrow, supplication, and salvation*.

The last of these oppressions involved two different nations: the Ammonites and the Philistines (Judges 10:7). God had two answers for this oppression from the west: Samson and Samuel. Both men served late in the period of the judges at about the same time, but in different ways. Samson's home was near Philistine territory, and Samuel lived in the area north of Jerusalem. The births of both involved divine intervention. This lesson features the preparations for the birth of Samson.

A NEED FOR PARENTAL COMMITMENT—Judges 13:1-7

1. How do we repeatedly see the sovereignty of God in Judges (Judges 13:1)?

The sovereignty of God is clearly seen in this book in the repeated mention that God delivered Israel into the hands of another nation. This time when Israel returned to living in sinful ways, God delivered them over to the Philistines. The Philistines were already in existence during the days of Abraham (Gen. 21:32) and had already been defeated once by the judge Shamgar (Judg. 3:31). They were a very warlike people and had established themselves in five cities near the Mediterranean coast.

The forty-year oppression by the Philistines is the longest one recorded in Judges.

2. Why do God's people have such a difficult time remaining faithful? How do we guard our faithfulness?

It's a story repeated throughout the history of the people of God. We see it in biblical accounts, we read about it in history, and we all know personally of people who at one time were faithful to the will of God, but for some reason turned away. Backsliding, apostasy, reversion to the world, or whatever name it goes by, hurts each time you see it (or commit it).

Some people forsake God because of pride. They get caught up in wanting things their way and even thinking they have a better idea than God. Others forsake God because they get swept up in a certain moment and forget God's blessings in the past and His promises for the future. A church that provides a good teaching and fellowship network can minimize this danger.

3. Who appeared to Manoah's wife, and what announcement and instructions did he give her (vs. 2,3)?

At first it may seem strange to change the topic from national crisis to the concerns of one married couple. The intention, however, is to show that God is preparing to begin a national deliverance through the son of this couple. Their village is located in the Danite territory of southwestern Judah (Joshua 19:41). The father's name is *Manoah* (which means "rest"); the mother's name is not revealed.

The barrenness of Manoah's wife is emphasized in the statement "His wife was barren, and bare not" (Judg. 13:2). This is an important part of the narrative because it accents

the miraculous birth that was about to happen. The method of announcement to Manoah's wife was another evidence of this miracle. It came directly from the angel of the Lord to Manoah's wife while she was alone. The angel also emphasized her barrenness by saying, "Thou art barren, and bearest not" (v. 3). This was the first part of his message, which was a straightforward, right-to-the-point announcement.

The rest of the announcement was that she was going to conceive and bear a son. Manoah's wife was not the first woman of faith to be barren and have the privilege of bearing a son. Both Sarah and Rachel had been through this, and later Hannah would also experience this by giving birth to Samuel. Barrenness was considered to be a mark of disfavor with God, and giving birth to a son was viewed as a special blessing. In each case of barrenness being erased through the birth of a son, there was great rejoicing. No doubt Manoah's wife experienced this same joy.

4. What three requirements were given to Manoah's wife, and what reason was given for them (vs. 4,5)?

A special commitment was required of Manoah's wife that we do not read about regarding the others. Three specific requirements are mentioned here: she was to avoid drinking wine or similar drink, she was to avoid eating anything unclean, and after her son was born she was not to cut his hair. The reason given to her was this: her child was to be a Nazarite from birth, and his mission for life would be to begin Israel's deliverance from the oppression of the dominating Philistines.

Since Manoah's wife was going to give birth to a Nazarite, she would be required to adhere to some of the restrictions specified for Nazarites while she carried him in her womb. Numbers 6:1-8 gives the commitments of the Nazarite himself. First, he was to avoid wine, grape juice, vinegar, and everything else that came from a grapevine. Second, he was to allow his hair to grow without cutting it. Third, he was to avoid all contact with dead bodies. These were all external evidences of a special internal commitment to God.

The task to be given Samson was the beginning of deliverance from the Philistines. The wording indicates that he would not accomplish a complete deliverance but would substantially lessen the degree of Israel's subservience. During Samson's lifetime the Philistines were mostly focused on him instead of on their domination of his people. His individual skirmishes with them seemed to keep them off balance and unable to concentrate on inflicting much oppression on the Israelites. This seems to be how God used him as a judge.

While Manoah and his wife would naturally be encouraged to hear of this mission, it was not until the days of David that the Philistines were fully subdued. Samson served to keep them from becoming stronger.

5. What do you think God expects of parents today as they prepare for the birth of a child?

A lot of attention is put into planning for the birth of children; this involves baby showers, setting up rooms, and attending birthing classes. But more attention can be given to pondering the spiritual life of the child before the birth takes place. Will the parents-to-be consider spiritual nutrition as important as physical nutrition?

Parents can make a conscious decision to dedicate themselves to bringing up children in the fear of the Lord. This involves, among other things, taking advantage of Christian education opportunities from the child's earliest days. Praying regularly for them is part of the process—probably the most important part.

6. How did Manoah's wife describe the "man" who had appeared to her, and what did she not know (vs. 6,7)?

Manoah's wife went immediately to re-port to her husband about her visitor and his message. She was not certain how to describe him, though. So she referred to him as a man of God but with the countenance of an angel. She added that it was "very terrible," meaning his appearance had frightened her. His looks could be described as awesome, because she was struck with awe as she looked upon him and reflected upon him after his departure. The term "man of God" usually meant a prophet.

However, she did not know his name, because she had not asked and he had not volunteered it. Manoah later asked him his name, giving the reason for wanting to know as planning to name their son after him as a way of honoring him. Manoah's wife had probably been so surprised and awestruck that she was dumbfounded and did not think to ask any questions. This is understandable, considering that such appearances were very rare and neither she nor her husband had ever had this happen to them before.

She then repeated the angel's message almost word for word, but failed to mention the purpose of the son that is to be born...the part about the child beginning to deliver Israel from the Philistines. She also stated that the boy was to be a Nazarite from his birth to the day of his death. The usual practice was for a Nazarite vow to be taken voluntarily by an adult, but in this case it was decided by God prior to birth. It was also usual for the vow to be temporary, but in this case it was to be a lifelong one.

There are many who think the angel who appeared in this incident was the preincarnate Christ, who also appeared to Joshua with directions about how to conquer Jericho (cf. Josh. 5:13-6:5). From the miraculous things he did at this time, this might well be true.

A RESPONSE OF PARENTAL COMMITMENT—Judges 13:8-13

7. What did Manoah pray after his wife's report, and how did God answer this request (vs. 8,9)?

In response to what his wife told him, Manoah prayed and asked God to send the man again in order to teach them what they should do with the child being promised. There has been some speculation about his prayer. Some have even wondered whether he suspected his wife of imagining things (Gaebelein, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan). He did not realize at first that the man was the angel of the Lord (v. 16), but he did appear to recognize that the message had come from God.

Manoah was as certain as his wife that the announcement came from God, but he prayed to the Lord and asked Him to repeat it. This was not a sign of unbelief, for his faith comes out clearly in this prayer. But since the angel had spoken only to his wife and the announcement had placed a great responsibility on himself as well, it is understandable that he wanted to learn exactly what their duties were in regard to this promised son" (Goslinga, *Bible Student's Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Zondervan).

God answered Manoah's prayer but again sent the angel to his wife when Manoah was not present. She was sitting in the field, but we are not told what she was doing there. Since women were often involved in the outdoor work, she might have been working with a harvested crop. What is encouraging to us is to read an example of quickly answered prayer. In this case it reminds us that God truly does want us to know His will and delights in revealing it to us when we ask Him about it.

8. How did Manoah and his wife respond to the angel's reappearance (vs. 10,11)?

Manoah's wife quickly ran and found her husband. It was probably with a great deal of excitement in her voice that she announced, "Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day." It was a stunning revelation when he appeared the first time, but to have him reappear so soon must have been doubly exciting. This time she had the presence of mind to think about getting her husband as quickly as possible. He too was probably excited about this answer to prayer.

Manoah wanted to be certain that this man was the same one who had come before. He needed to have his words confirmed, so he asked the man directly whether he was the one who had spoken to his wife. It was an important question, for he sensed that something extremely unusual was about to take place, and he wanted to be as fully informed about his role in it as he could be.

9. Why did Manoah say to the angel "Now let thy words come to pass" (v. 12)?

Manoah is persuaded that the *words* of the previous revelation will be accomplished. At this point he demonstrates that he and his wife want to be the best parents they can possibly be. They are willing to accept the responsibility, but they want to be certain that what they do will work toward fulfilling the purposes of God. Manoah's request should be a part of the thoughts of every godly couple who have the awe-inspiring task of rearing a child.

10. What are some areas where we need to say to the Lord, "Now let thy words come to pass"?

We know from Scripture that the Word of the Lord is true and trustworthy. Jesus taught in the model prayer to pray for God's will to be done and for the kingdom of God to come on earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:10). Knowing that God will be faithful to His Word and His will should cause us to pray the words of Scripture.

We can pray that we will be His witnesses in the world (Acts 1:8). Our prayer can be for our leaving worry behind and trusting God to provide our needs (Matthew 6:33). The words of God concerning how His people are to care for others and meet the needs of one another can be an area where we seek God's Word and God's will to come to pass. Joining John the apostle, we can also pray for the return of Jesus to come to pass (Revelation 22:20). That certainly will happen whether we pray for it or not, but praying for it allows us continually to submit ourselves to God's plan.

11. What did the angel say to encourage Manoah's wife not to be careless in this matter (v. 13)?

The response of *the angel of the Lord* does not provide any additional details. Although, a warning is sounded that the mother must do *all* that was expressed to her initially. She is the one who must safeguard her pregnancy by avoiding certain food and drink.

We may assume that this mother-to-be has the primary task of teaching *her* son during his early years. This may include telling him, at the right time, about his special purpose for God's people. Both husband and wife may wonder about the timing and the methods.

SAMSON'S BIRTH—Judges 13:24

12. How was Manoah's wife rewarded (Judges 13:24)?

The verses in the interval between sections of the printed text are also fascinating. The conversation among the three continues, and at the conclusion there is a miraculous disappearance of the divine being.

It is safe to assume that doing all that God asked of her allowed her the privilege of this birth. Her barrenness was erased, and she knew the joy of presenting her husband with a son.

The divine assessment of Samson's youth is that he *grew, and the Lord blessed him*. The wording is similar to what is said about others whose births are prominent in the Bible. These include Samuel (1 Samuel 3:19), John (Luke 1:80), and Jesus (Luke 2:40, 52).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Those who persist in evil are enslaved by it (Judges 13:1).
2. The Lord always prepares His servants for their work (vs. 2-4).
3. Our commitment to the Lord will be reflected in our children: for God will use them in His time, for His purpose (vs. 5-7).
4. If we are to live for the Lord, we must be eager for Him to teach us (vs. 8-10).
5. Parents can do nothing better than to seek the Lord's direction in raising their children (vs. 11-13).
6. Faithfulness to God brings His blessing on our family as well as on ourselves (v. 24).

CONCLUSION:

The "Bad Boy"

One woman said that as a child she was captivated by the bad-boy image of Samson, and that she felt guilty for this. As an adult she came to realize that Samson is listed as a hero of the faith (Hebrews 11:32). This caused her to understand that the important thing is the faith of the individual, and that sinless perfection is not a requirement in order to be used of God to serve Him.

Samson served the Lord and Israel by his great feats of strength against the people's pagan enemies. However, his life was scarred by selfishness and sins, and he deserved condemnation for them. We must remind ourselves that no human being is perfect in his thoughts, motives, words, and actions. We all make mistakes, and sometimes we even sin deliberately.

In December 1917, a home for boys was established in Omaha, Nebraska. The oft-repeated philosophy of the founder was "There is no such thing as a bad boy." The founder resolved that encouragement, care, and love would be applied to prepare disadvantaged boys to serve God and humanity. Every parent can easily do an assessment to see that those qualities are being provided for his or her children. Preparing a child for eternity involves much more than providing food, a roof, and a bed. God still prepares to use people from their birth. And the work of parents is a key part of that preparation—His preparation.

PRAYER:

Almighty God, I resolve today to help prepare someone else for eternity with you. May I allow your Word to teach me how I am to do that. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:

God may prepare someone through you.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

The Prophet Elijah had gone, translated from earth to heaven without dying (2 Kings 2:11). Elisha had taken his place, and he stopped often at the home of a couple in Shunem. He rewarded their kindness by announcing the birth of a

son despite the husband's old age. Study 2 Kings 4:8-17 "Commitment to God's Messenger" in preparation of next week's lesson.

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