



## THE MAN WHO HAD IT MADE

Judges 13–14

Samson is undoubtedly the best known of Israel's judges. He was blessed with godly parents and Spirit-given strength to deliver his people from oppression. Yet from the very beginning this strongman demonstrated some troubling weaknesses.

When people today think of Samson, they typically think of a man with long hair and superhero strength—a heavyweight champion who was knocked out by a featherweight named Delilah. But there is much more to learn from his biography here in the book of Judges.

Before Samson is even introduced, an entire chapter is devoted to his mother and father—and that's where we begin today, in Judges chapter 13, and verse 1:

*And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.*

The Philistines oppressed Israel longer than any other nation during the days of the judges. But God was behind this nightmare. This was God's discipline on the rebellious people of Israel, who had abandoned Him. Even the religious leaders and priests in Israel had become immoral and corrupt.

Against this dark setting, we're introduced to a faithful Israelite couple here in verses 2-3:

*There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman*



Sumerian statue of a man with a goat for sacrifice



*and said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.”*

In the next few verses, the woman is instructed to raise her son as a Nazirite. According to Numbers 6, a Nazirite was separated to God’s service and marked by not drinking wine, not cutting his hair, and not touching a corpse.

She runs to tell her husband, Manoah, the news, and he asks the Lord for more information (verse 8). The Angel of the Lord shows up again and repeats his message.

This Angel is a theophany—a visible, physical manifestation of the Lord. In verse 17, Manoah asks the angel what his name is, and the Lord answers in verse 18: “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” This is the wonderful Counselor! “Wonderful” could be translated “incomprehensible.” This is the incomprehensible Creator.

When the Lord ascends upward in the smoke of their burnt offering (verse 20), Manoah is pretty sure he and his wife are going to die, having seen the Lord (verse 22). I love his wife’s reassuring words in verse 23; she sort of pats him on the arm and says, “If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands.”

All this introductory information about Sampson’s parents is a testimony of faith in a dark period of rebellion. The closing verses of chapter 13 indicate they faithfully raised Samson according to God’s instructions. Verse 24 says, “The young man grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him.”

It’s about time for him to begin his public ministry. But then Judges 14 begins, rather surprisingly, with Samson wanting to marry an idolatrous, Philistine woman.

What in the world happened between the last verse of chapter 13 and the first verse of chapter 14? Maybe you have wondered what happened to your child

between the ages of 16 and 17 or when that son or daughter went away to college.

Well, in Samson’s case, chapter 14 gives us some clues as to what happened. As we work through the chapter, I want to draw out some important and timeless principles to consider.

First, *someone can follow external rules and completely lack genuine character*. Outward appearances don’t always reveal inward attitudes. Samson had all the external marks of a separated Nazirite—someone devoted to God. But his heart was far from God.

Second, *someone who ignores inward purity will eventually be governed by outward impurity*. Chapter 14 opens by giving us Samson’s first recorded words. Speaking to his parents in verse 2, he says, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.” Then in verse 3, he says, “She is right [or she looks good] in my eyes.”

This woman might be a follower of false gods, but so what—she’s beautiful. Samson is governed by his eyes. Ironically, he will eventually lose his eyes.

Mom and Dad are stunned and ask in verse 3:

*“Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?”*

In other words, “Can’t you find a girl who follows after God?” Their hearts are broken.

Let me give you a third principle to keep in mind—this one is for parents: *Parents who walk with God might have children who walk away from God*. Beloved, it’s possible for godly parents to have ungodly children. This truth is often missing in the average church seminar for parents.

Now as parents you do everything possible to make your children civil—and you should—and to introduce them to the gospel; but only God’s Spirit can open their eyes to see their need for Christ. (John 6:44) So,



it's possible for godly parents to end up with ungodly children; and, by the way, it's possible for ungodly parents to end up with godly children by God's grace.

As you raise your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (as Ephesians 6 tells us), remember that if they turn out to be godly, you shouldn't take the credit; and if they end up walking away from God, you shouldn't take the blame. Only God's Spirit can produce spiritual life.

Now here's one more principle to consider: *The failure of God's people never defeats God's purpose.* Verse 4 hints that even though Samson is rebelling in wanting to marry a Philistine, God is going to use this marriage to judge the Philistines.

Verses 5-6 go on to tell us Samson kills a lion that attacks him. Later, he discovers that honeybees have made a beehive in the carcass of that lion. And then at his wedding celebration, Samson turns this beehive into a riddle—verse 14: “Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.”

Samson tells the Philistine men at the wedding that if they can guess the riddle, he will give them new clothing; but if they can't figure it out, they have to give him a closet full of new clothes—which is a clever way of getting some wedding gifts you actually end up using.

Of course, they can't figure it out, so they pressure Samson's bride to get the answer for them. She agrees and turns on the tears in verse 16:

*And Samson's wife wept over him and said, “You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is.”*

Well, after seven days of this, and 700 boxes of Kleenex, Samson gives in and tells her, and she quickly passes on the answer.

Now *Samson* is obligated to get these men new clothing. So, he goes out and kills thirty Philistines and gives their clothing to the men to pay off his debt. We're told in verse 19 that “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him.”

Now in Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit empowered people for various tasks but did not permanently indwell them as He does every New Testament believer.

Samson has essentially begun his role of delivering Israel. The sad truth is that while he has wonderful parents and incredible potential, he is about to throw most of it away, as we will see when our journey continues.

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Your entry into the world may not be as grand as Samson's, but your purpose is. How does Ephesians 2:10 impact your understanding of your purpose in God's eyes? What evidence can you point to that you're pursuing that purpose?

What contrasts so far do you see between Samson and his parents? What accounts for the differences, and what do they teach you? How can Aunts and Uncles also utilize these principles to become godly influences on the lives of their nieces and nephews?

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