

Judges 13:1-25 -- Let's read:

Jdg 13:1 NIV 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.

Jdg 13:2 A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth.

Jdg 13:3 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.

Jdg 13:4 Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean.

Jdg 13:5 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."

Jdg 13:6 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.

Jdg 13:7 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.'"

Jdg 13:8 Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "Pardon your servant, Lord. I beg you to let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."

Jdg 13:9 God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her.

Jdg 13:10 The woman hurried to tell her husband, "He's here! The man who appeared to me the other day!"

Jdg 13:11 Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the man who talked to my wife?" "I am," he said.

Jdg 13:12 So Manoah asked him, "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule that governs the boy's life and work?"

Jdg 13:13 The angel of the LORD answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her.

Jdg 13:14 She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her."

Jdg 13:15 Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you."



Judges 13:1-25
A MIRACULOUS BIRTH

Jdg 13:16 The angel of the LORD replied, "Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD." (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.)

Jdg 13:17 Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?"

Jdg 13:18 He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding."

Jdg 13:19 Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched:

Jdg 13:20 As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground.

Jdg 13:21 When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD.

Jdg 13:22 "We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!"

Jdg 13:23 But his wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this."

Jdg 13:24 The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him,

Jdg 13:25 and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

As we consider the birth of Samson, the last deliverer and judge highlighted in the book of Judges, you'll notice that, unlike the past cycles of sin -- where people sinned, they were oppressed, they repented, they cried out for mercy, and then the Lord showed mercy and raised up a judge -- you will notice in this instance, the opening verses of the chapter, it lists the Israelites sin and their oppression by the Philistines. **But there is no record of their repentance or of them crying out to the Lord.**

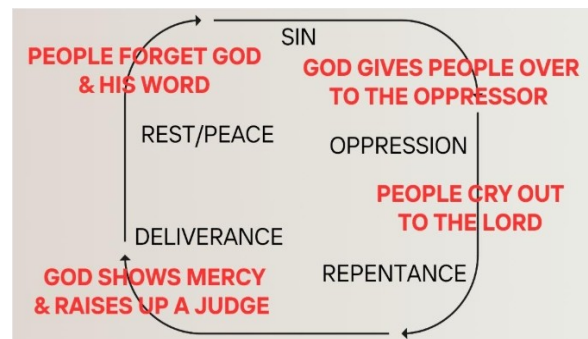
The Israelites had become used to their sin.

In the following three chapters in this book of Judges, you'll see that the Israelites coexisted with the Philistines. Samson moved freely in and out of Philistine towns and villages. The Israelites accepted the Philistines as their rulers.

The Israelites had become used to their oppressors.

And then, in Chapter 15, we'll read that when the Philistines threatened to attack the tribe of Judah because of Samson, 3,000 men of Judah went to the cave that Samson was hiding in, bound him with ropes, and handed him over to the Philistines. The Israelites chose continued oppression by the Philistines, over Samson's ability to deliver them because they had no confidence in Yahweh, or His anointed.

The Israelites had become inattentive to the Lord.



Continued cycles of sin will have a way of searing the conscience and hardening the heart.

Overlooking -- rather than resisting sin -- leaves us:

- compromising the truth and
- appeasing the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Yielding to the devil's schemes results in

- doubting God and
- rejecting His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

And yet -- and yet -- God shows mercy!

The angel told Samson's mother that the child she was to bear was to be dedicated to God from the womb because he would take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Even though the Israelites weren't crying out for a deliverer, the Lord, knowing what they could bear and the consequences of their compromise, used Samson to break the physical and spiritual stronghold of the Philistines over the Israelites.

Isaiah 9:7 refers to the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecy of a coming Messianic deliverer by stating that it is the zeal of the Lord Almighty that will accomplish it.

So Isaiah, a prophet who had much to say about the coming Messiah, records in Isaiah, chapter nine there, that the zeal of the Lord will accomplish this prophecy -- will fulfill this prophecy.

The zeal of the Lord is the power of the Lord that is focused on fulfilling His will.

He has a certain objective. He has a certain plan. He has a certain purpose. And there is the zeal of the Lord -- that is the power of God that's focused on fulfilling that objective.

So you will see that word referred to in the Bible in multiple places. But when it is referred to in terms of the Lord -- the zeal of the Lord -- this is the purpose. **And it truly needs to be the same kind of reference when it is used of human beings: that the zeal of the Lord would be where we are focusing our attention, focusing our energy, focusing our every resource to fulfill God's objectives.**

You see, because the justice, the righteousness, and the covenant-keeping nature of the Lord cannot allow the devil to prevail -- even when the people didn't call out for a deliverance -- **God, knowing what is necessary, is coming in and intervening.**

- The Lord will keep His word.
- The covenant that He had made with Abraham and his descendants -- the Lord will keep His word.
- Even when we are unfaithful.
- The Lord is faithful.
- The Lord delivers us from our sin.
- He shines His light in the darkness.
- He restores us to love to Himself -- in love, to Himself -- even if we turn our backs on Him.
- The Lord has done it repeatedly, and
- He will do it again.

So in the midst of everything that is going on -- even if you think that the world around you is not calling on the name of the Lord Jesus -- there is hope.

- There's always a hope and a plan for the future.
- There is a future of freedom.
- There is a future of abundant life.
- There is the present where the Prince of Peace will come and reign.
- And there is everlasting peace with the Lord.
- That's the Lord's promise.
- He will make that happen.
- That's the joy that we have as we come together in the name of the Lord.

Now, at this particular point in the history of Israel, when God needed to break the yoke of bondage of the Philistines, He appointed Samson, even before he was born, to fulfill His will.

There are three essential elements in the story of Samson's birth that connect the miracle of Samson's birth to another miraculous birth.

1. And the first is this: There's a heavenly messenger.
2. Second, a mother who could not have borne a child naturally but was willing to accept the promise of God that she would do so supernaturally.
3. And three, there were specific instructions from the Lord on what the parents should do for the child. So. A heavenly messenger.

Throughout the Bible, we see that almost always, when God is about to do something remarkable -- when He's about to do something that is marvelous in our eyes, something that spurs or accelerates the eternal plan of salvation -- He sends an angel, or appears Himself, to communicate a vital message.

Why? Well, first of all, because God is personal.

- He interacts with human beings,
- He makes Himself known, and
- wants to deal with us directly and
- wants us to deal directly with Him.

It is in character for a loving Heavenly Father to cultivate His relationship with His children by communicating directly with them.

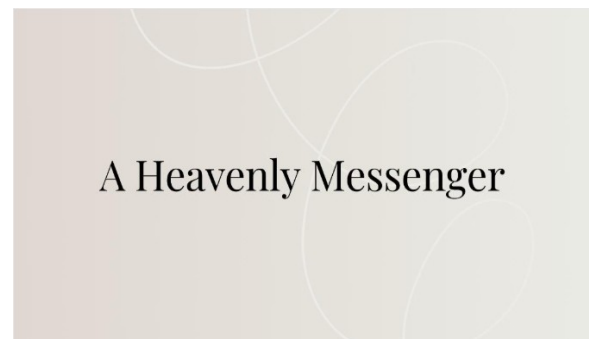
He's not a distant God. He intervenes. He is involved. He's speaking these messages directly.

And second, the nature of the message, including its significance in the Lord's eternal plan of salvation, necessitated a heavenly messenger who would deliver the message precisely and with a demonstration of the Lord's power and authority.

And so we have these heavenly messengers.

That brings us to the second element in this miraculous birth: Samson's mother, Manoah's wife.

As the angel of the Lord makes very clear, she is barren and childless.



And, by the way, before we get to her reaction, the angel also makes very clear: she will conceive and give birth to a son. No need for a pregnancy test or a gender reveal. He says, "You're going to conceive. You will. And you will bear a son." Even though you are barren, you are childless, you can't do this -- this is going to happen. That's quite a statement.

Samson's mother's reactions to the angel of the Lord and her interactions with Manoah -- by the way, she seems to demonstrate a whole lot more wisdom. Manoah is like freaking out when the angel of the Lord ascends. He goes, "Oh, we're going to die!" -- and she goes "If God wanted to kill us, He would have done it already. The fact that we're alive means that He's still not done, and we're okay." She's speaking wisdom to him.

Her interactions and reactions to the angel of the Lord, and her interactions with Manoah, indicate that she was willing and obedient to the Lord -- to bear the child and raise him as directed.

And that brings us to the third element of this birth: there's a Divine Directive.

Manoah and his wife were given specific instructions on how they were to raise Samson as a Nazirite.

The vow of the Nazirite is described in **Numbers 6:1-21**. This vow could be taken by both men and women. During the period of the vow, the person was to consecrate themselves -- they were supposed to set themselves apart.

"Nazir" comes from the Hebrew word for "consecrate."

And so, the Nazirite was to consecrate themselves by abstaining from alcohol, avoiding the grapevine -- not even eating grapes or raisins. Nothing of the kind. They were to let their hair grow out; they were not to cut their hair during the time of the vow. They were not even to go near a dead body.

And then, depending on what they did, or how things happened, or if they accidentally did something or not -- whatever -- they were supposed to go through a variety -- they were to offer up various sacrifices -- for multiple purposes. So there were specific instructions that were given to people who were seeking to observe this Nazirite vow. It was usually done by people on their own initiative.

But here, in this case, the angel of the Lord -- the Lord Himself -- is speaking to Samson's mother and saying, "This is what you must do. This child is called, is appointed, to be a Nazirite even from the womb. So, you must start to do these things. You must train up the child in this way. You must move forward in this way." And unlike the typical Nazirite vow, that applied only for a specific period, **Samson was dedicated from the womb, and was supposed to remain a Nazirite until his death.**

Now, we're going to see, in the next few chapters that, that didn't happen. But that's the statement that the angel of the Lord makes in this appearance. Then when Manoah asked the angel, "What should we do to train up the child? How should we instruct this child?" the angel of the Lord does not actually answer that question directly. The angel of the Lord doesn't say, "Use this kind of a lesson plan, and go through this, and do this, then when he's ten years old, do this." He doesn't say any of that. He just says, "This is what you must do: You, the mother, must do this, and then this is how you must instruct, or this is how you must bring up the child."

The implication of that is that there were already given commands -- the law and the Word of God -- that were sufficient for what the parents needed to do and they were simply to obey what the Lord had already instructed.



The Word had already been given, and there was already considerable directives to how to raise up a child -- to speak of the goodness of God, to bring to mind all the things that the Lord had done in delivering the children of Israel from Egypt, and what it meant to serve the Lord, and the covenants that the Lord had established with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob, and what he had promised as the Messiah would come -- for the Messiah to come.

So, the instructions were already given.

Manoah was asking for something more -- he was still not seeing all that he needed to. But the angel of the Lord simply says, "This is what you have to do. The only difference in this case is that your child, that is to be born -- is a Nazirite from birth -- this is what you need to observe."

Now, I think it's very important, or very commendable, that the parents ask that question. And it is necessary for us to consider what they did, even as they went on. There were clearly things that they did well and things that they didn't do so well. But the responsibility for keeping this vow, once this child is born and reared, falls on the child -- as we talked about some weeks ago in terms of the responsibility of parents and children and so on. And so we'll see that as we go through the life of Samson.

But as we've gone through these three elements of Samson's birth -- these three main elements of Samson's birth -- **you may be reminded of the birth of John the Baptist**, when the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his barren wife, Elizabeth, would conceive and bear a son named John, who would prepare the way for the Messiah. And that John should not take any wine or any other fermented drink, and that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit right from the womb. So, the story of Samson's miraculous birth and his circumstances may remind you of John the Baptist.

Or you may be reminded of other miraculous births in the Bible. **Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age**, when Sarah was barren. **Isaac's wife, Rebecca, was barren, and bore Jacob and Esau after the Lord answered her prayer for a child.** And then, after she cried out to the Lord for a son whom she vowed to dedicate to the Lord's service, **Hannah bore Samuel.** So you have those kinds of examples -- very clear examples. Then you have other instances where it keeps talking about, or shows these things, about these kinds of miraculous births.

But as you consider Samson's birth, and particularly because we're a few days away from what the whole world commemorates as the birth of Jesus -- the day that we celebrate the birth of Jesus...

...you are most likely reminded of the angel Gabriel telling Mary that

- she would give birth to a baby boy
- even though she was a virgin.
- That he would be named Jesus, Yeshua,
- because he would save his people from their sins.
- That Jesus would be great,
- be called the Son of the Most High, in that
- he would bear the image of, and demonstrate the character of, God.
- That the Lord God would give him the throne of David and
- that he would reign over Jacob's descendants.
- His kingdom would never end.

Every one of these miraculous births -- every one of these miraculous births -- announced by a heavenly messenger amidst impossible circumstances and in fulfillment of God's plan of salvation:

- was to foreshadow,
- was to foretell,
- was to prepare the people.
- To prepare not just Jacob's descendants,
- but to prepare the whole world.
- That the greatest miraculous birth of all was coming:
- the birth of Jesus.

Every time you read one of these stories in the Old Testament -- and this is why the Word says that **those people of the Old Testament that experienced these things, they saw only in part**. They did not have the fulfillment of these promises that had been made. **They believed in faith. They looked forward to what was to come.**

For us, we look back

For us, **it is a confirmation of what the Lord had said**. But every one of those things from the past, and all of those ways in which the Lord was sending his messages and intervening in the circumstances of people's lives, and causing these miraculous births, and causing all of these things to happen, that furthered the plan of salvation -- **all of it was to point to Jesus**.

- The ultimate miraculous birth.
- The ultimate deliverer.
- The one who would come, and do all that had been promised.
- Because God so loved the world,
- that every miraculous birth before Jesus pointed to the ultimate gift of God:
- of a deliverer who would free humanity from every oppression.

That's what we sang about even -- that **this would be a deliverer who would not just have a temporary deliverance**, who would not just free the people from some of the oppressors, who would not just come into the midst and bring some kind of relief, **but who would break the cycle of sin forever**. Who would, through his sacrifice, make it possible for each one of us to enjoy eternal life, with him, by believing and appropriating what he has done for us.

That's the simple gospel message:

All that the world had been hearing before Christ came, and all that it has heard -- all that we hear -- after he has come: same consistent message:

That because God so loved the world, he gave his Son, he gave of himself, he gave a deliverer. He allowed a miraculous birth to take place so that we could have eternal life with him. So that **everyone who believes** in what has happened, accepts it in their heart, confesses with their mouth, and is joined to the Lord Jesus to say,

"Lord God, because of what you have done, because of what you accomplished, I am joined to you, and I now have life. I am no longer headed for death. Death in the world has no harm, no threat, no hold on me, because I have been united to Christ Jesus, and I am a recipient of eternal life."

And because of that, because of that, we respond and apply the Word of God we have heard by celebrating **the miraculous birth of the Lord's deliverer.**

I referred earlier to the zeal of the Lord in **Isaiah 9:7**. The zeal of the Lord to fulfill the prophecy of a messianic deliverer was manifest in a miraculous birth. And all those years ago, when Isaiah was giving that prophecy, they were already familiar with all these miraculous births -- in the life of Abraham and Sarah and the others. And then in Samson.

We respond and apply the word of God by celebrating the miraculous birth of the Lord's deliverer

So they had seen this take place. The people of Israel had seen it, had witnessed it, and they had told the

generations that came after them, "This is what the Lord has done. And he has promised that a Messiah will come. That an ultimate deliverer will come. That he who sets us free and sets us free indeed. He sets us free. He breaks the power of sin and death and all of it. He breaks the yokes of bondage. He doesn't just remove them temporarily; he breaks them. That Messiah is coming. That Lord is coming."

That is the message that was communicated, and the zeal of the Lord was to fulfill it. But in **Isaiah 9:6**, right before it mentions the zeal of the Lord, it says this: **A child was born. A son was given. The government is on his shoulders. And he is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Ah, praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!**

It is appropriate for us to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

- We must be grateful that Jesus's birth fulfilled every messianic prophecy, and
- revealed God to humanity.
- We must be glad that, as Jesus grew, he was tempted in every way, as we are and yet without sin.
- We must marvel that the Lord Almighty took on a frail human form that
- one day would be put to death on the cross for the sake of all humanity.
- We must rejoice, filled with joy.
- We must rejoice in the remarkable work of God,
- that the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us.

But this Christmas season -- and really, at any time as we remember this message --

I want to remind you that,

- just as Jesus demonstrated in every way possible, it is more blessed to give than to receive.
- And the best way we can celebrate the miraculous birth of the Lord's ultimate deliverer is
- **to pray and labor for everyone we know to also know and celebrate the Lord.**

The best way that we can celebrate this miraculous birth is not just in us singing songs, or us having this memory, or us saying, "Let's exchange gifts," or do whatever. By all means, enjoy all of that. Rejoice in what the Lord has done.

But the best way that we can celebrate our Lord is to share this truth with somebody else

- so that they may also celebrate,
- so that they may also be set free from sin,
- so that they may also experience the cycle of sin being broken in their lives,
- so that they may also be freed from addictions and temptations and all of the things that beset us.

That's the power of the Word of God.

That's the power of the gospel message.

- That's the challenge for us.
- That's the encouragement --

that we would rejoice. We must rejoice, but we would do so with

- this call in our hearts,
- this challenge in our hearts,
- this word ringing in our ears:

"Oh God, I desire to see more and more people come to know you as their Lord and Savior.

- I desire for people to know you as their deliverer.
- I desire for people to be set free.
- I desire for people to be joined together with me as my brother, as my sister.
- I desire for the body of Christ to be built up."
 - I am praying, Lord, that in this local church, we will be able to reach out to people living within a 15 to 20-minute driving distance from the church, and
 - we will share with them the life and the truth of Jesus.
- This is the word that is given for us.

You see, our celebration is not to consume the gift of God for ourselves. Our celebration is to receive all that the Lord would give us and to allow that to then be given freely from us. What we have received freely, that we would give freely. That we would come to those in need and say,

"Lord God, help me to speak a word, and Lord, help this person's heart and ears and eyes to be opened so that they would see, they would hear, they would know that there is salvation."

Oh, what a joy, what a privilege we have! This Christmas season, don't let it be all about just what we enjoy. But pray earnestly. Pray sincerely. Maybe you will have opportunity even in the next few days -- maybe right after, maybe whenever -- to actually encounter somebody who needs to hear about this, or who may even ask a question about it, or who has no idea what Christmas is about. The world celebrates it, but many people don't know what it's about. And so maybe even in this week, maybe even in just before the end of this year, you'll have an opportunity to share with somebody about the love of Jesus and what Christmas is really about.

But I encourage you to do that, with this knowledge:

- that the Word of God, from start to finish, presents one message.
- It presents one plan.
- There's no Plan B with God. There's only Plan A.
- **There's one plan of salvation, and he brings it into fulfillment.**
- **He accomplishes his purpose.**
- The zeal of the Lord is manifest in what he does, and
- all the prophecies and all these births make it very clear that the Lord will keep his word.
 - So let that be what is filling our hearts and causing us to celebrate this year.

Heavenly Father, I thank you so much that, Lord, you are a good God. That, Lord, all of the Word of God tells us, points us to Jesus. And, Lord, even a miraculous birth in the time of the judges is speaking to us about a miraculous birth in the first century. And, Lord, it is allowing us to know of miraculous births that are to take place in the lives of people all over the world today, thousands of years later.

Because, Lord, the greatest birth that we can anticipate -- Lord, just as you spoke to the rich young ruler -- **the greatest birth is to be born again.**

Lord, that we would be people who are dying to self, who are crucified in our sinful nature, who are put to death in terms of the old, but are born again, are raised up to new life in Christ Jesus. Oh, who receive this gift of salvation and who understand that this birth that took place those thousands of years ago was for me, was for us, to also experience a supernatural, miraculous birth.

Make it so, Lord. Make each one of us ambassadors of this truth. Make each one of us, Lord, eager to share this joy with somebody else so that they too may come into the body of Christ. **We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.**