

Judges 13:1-25 – “Samson: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?”

(Pew Bible Page: 213-4)

Intro: Sometimes things fall together so well that they become “can’t miss” propositions, seemingly destined for success. As we read chapter 13 of Judges, we are tempted to feel that way about Samson, whose heritage and birth are described in the passage. Samson had every advantage one could wish for. Special circumstances surrounding his birth; godly parents who wanted to do the right thing; special separation to God from the cradle to the grave; an important mission to fulfill for his nation; a powerful anointing of God’s Spirit. Samson had every advantage one could imagine. What could possibly go wrong? And yet, we know the rest of the story, don’t we? A good beginning doesn’t always foretell a happy ending. Tonight, we’ll begin a multi-week study of Samson’s life by examining the advantages God gave him from the very beginning. As we’ll learn, no one can ever say that Samson’s struggles were the result of getting a poor start in life!

Proposition: God is merciful when we don’t deserve it. P.S.: We never deserve it!

Billboard:	(v.1)	Israel’s Hardened Condition
	(vv.2-7)	Samson’s Miraculous Birth
	(vv.8-23)	Samson’s Godly Parents
	(vv.3-5)	Samson’s Perpetual Nazirite Vow
	(v.5)	Samson’s Important Assignment
	(vv.24-25)	Samson’s Holy Spirit Empowerment

(v.1) Israel’s Hardened Condition – Verse one tells us that Israel once again became unfaithful to God: **Judges 13:1 - 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.* Israel once again seems to have entered the cycle of sin, affliction, repentance, and rescue that we have so often seen in the Book of Judges. But notice here that things are different from previous occasions. Israel sinned and God brought affliction on them, but there is no word of repentance on their part this time. Nevertheless, God had mercy on them and sent Samson to give them relief. Yet Samson would not deliver Israel from Philistine oppression. Our text carefully tells us that Samson “*shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines*” (v.5) but Samson would not finish the deliverance he began. That would be left to another who would come after Samson. Samson is the last judge before Samuel and the nation had reached a deadly tipping point of hardness of heart by his time. Some feel that this part of Judges overlaps with 1 Samuel 4-6 in which Israel was defeated by the Philistines, the Ark of the Covenant captured, and Eli and his sons removed by death from the High Priestly ministry – all because of unfaithfulness and hardness of heart. Samson was apparently born soon after these events took place and was given to the nation by God to accomplish a “holding action” against the enemy until Samuel, Saul and finally David came on the scene and broke the Philistine hold over Israel. Because of her hardness of heart, Israel didn’t deserve God’s mercy – but He sent it anyway in Samson. God gave Samson every possible advantage for fulfilling this mission, as we’ll see below.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Israel was in a spiritually hardened condition and didn’t deserve mercy, but God was merciful to her despite her sin.

(vv.2-7) Samson’s Miraculous Birth – God selected “*a certain man*” and his wife through which to send Israel relief through a child. **Judges 13:2-7 - 2** *There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of*

Judges 13:1-25 – “Samson: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?”

(Pew Bible Page: 213-4)

the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. 3 And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, 5 for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” 6 Then the woman came and told her husband, “A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, 7 but he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’” Children are born every day. What’s miraculous about Samson’s birth? We are told that at least three things made Samson’s birth unusual:

1) He was a gift from God to a godly, barren couple. Doubtless Manoah and his wife had been praying for a child. Barrenness in those days was considered a great shame for a woman. Often in Scripture God withheld conception for a time when He was about to do something special. Think of Sarah and Isaac; Rachael and Jacob; Hannah and Samuel; Elizabeth and John the Baptist. God had withheld conception from Manoah and his wife (she is never named) because, as in those cases, something special was afoot.

2) He was announced by a special messenger. The messenger was none other than the pre-incarnate Christ. We know this from the language used in the text (“*the angel of the Lord*”) and “*why do you ask my name seeing it is wonderful?*” (cf. 18 w/ Isaiah 9:6), and the context itself (“*we have seen God*” (v.22)). Clearly the messenger who brought the news of Samson’s birth was no ordinary angel but was indeed the Lord Jesus in a pre-incarnate manifestation. Here again is something unusual.

3) His mother was specially dedicated through sharing in Samson’s Nazirite vow. This was unusual as we’ll see below.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Samson had the advantage of a miraculous birth.

(vv.8-23) Samson’s Godly Parents – Samson’s parents were true followers of the Lord, part of the believing remnant God keeps for Himself in every generation (cf. 1 Kings 19:18). What is the evidence of this:

1) They were praying people. **Judges 13:8-9 - 8** *Then Manoah prayed to the LORD and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born.” 9* **And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah her husband was not with her.** Manoah prayed and God answered his prayer, sending the “*man of God*” once again. God does not listen to the prayers of sinners, as John 9:31 informs us. Manoah and his wife were praying people.

2) They were believing people. **Judges 13:12 - 12** *And Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what is to be the child’s manner of life, and what is his mission?”* When the “*man of God*”

Judges 13:1-25 – “Samson: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?”

(Pew Bible Page: 213-4)

reappeared, Manoah made clear his confidence in the messenger’s original message saying, “WHEN YOUR WORDS COME TRUE...” There was no expression of doubt about the message they had received. Manoah and his wife were true people of faith.

3) They were diligent people. **Judges 13:8 - 8** *Then Manoah prayed to the LORD and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born.”* Their request for the messenger’s return was based in a sincere desire to do all things well, not in some doubt about what had been promised.

4) They were worshipping people. **Judges 13:19 - 19** *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.* The messenger commanded that a sacrifice to the Lord be made, and they obeyed without question. A believing heart is always ready for worship.

5) They were God fearing people. **Judges 13:21–23 - 21** *The angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. 22 And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.” 23 But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these.”* Manoah knew doctrine and his wife knew the Lord’s character. Manoah and his wife were people who took God seriously.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Samson had the advantage of having godly parents.

(vv.3-5) Samson’s Perpetual Nazarite Vow – Samson was dedicated to the Lord from his mother’s womb in a special way – Samson was a Nazirite. **Judges 13:3–5 - 3** *And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, 5 for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”* A Nazirite vow was a special type of dedication to the Lord, characterized by three signs: 1) Abstinence from Strong Drink; 2) Avoidance of Dead Bodies; 3) Refusal to Cut the Hair. All Israelites were separated to the Lord as members of the Jewish community, but Nazirites encompassed a special category of those devoted to such separation. There were two kinds of Nazirites – those who voluntarily took on such a separation for a limited amount of time, and Perpetual Nazirites, who were appointed by God (not volunteers) from their conception until the day of their death (cf.13:7). The Bible only gives us three examples of this type of Nazirite: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. Samson was in elite company indeed! Even his mother had to keep the Nazirite vow while carrying him to birth (cf. 13:4). It is important to emphasize that this dedication of Samson to the Lord in this special way WAS NOT VOLUNTARY. The Lord sovereignly appointed Samson to this separation without consulting Samson, or his parents.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Samson had the advantage of being specially set apart for service to the Lord by the Lord Himself.

Judges 13:1-25 – “Samson: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?”

(Pew Bible Page: 213-4)

(v.5) Samson’s Important Assignment – Samson’s entire life would be dedicated to a special mission for the Lord: **Judges 13:5** - *5 for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.*” Samson would “begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” He would not finish that task. That would come through the prayers of Samuel (cf. 1 Samuel 7:9-10) and the sword of David (cf. 2 Samuel 5:17-25).¹ The strange thing about how Samson fulfilled his mission is that it does not follow the pattern of other judges. Samson was a loner. There will be no army for him to lead into battle. He will not break the power of the Philistines over Israel in his lifetime. Samson will fulfill his mission by being a disrupter – he was sent by God to keep the Philistines “back on their heels” until the King arrived – first Saul, and ultimately David. Despite his faults, Samson fulfilled his assignment until the day of his death.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Samson had the advantage of having an important mission to which he could devote his life.

(vv.24-25) Samson’s Holy Spirit Empowerment – Samson had many advantages from the very beginning of his life, but surely the most significant is this: he was endued with the Spirit’s power in a special way from his youth. **Judges 13:24–25** - *24 And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.* Samson’s advantage over previous judges in this matter may not be apparent at first glance. “While other judges were said to be clothed with God’s Spirit (3:10;6:34;11:29), only of Samson is it said ‘the Lord blessed him’ (13:24; see Luke 1:80 and 2:52). The hand of God was on him in a special way.”² The ESV Study Bible describes it this way, “God’s Spirit was pushing Samson toward the work God wanted him to do.” While others were “clothed,” Samson was “stirred” – the Spirit of God working deeply in Samson’s heart urging him to the tasks God assigned him to do. Samson seems to have enjoyed a special measure of the Spirit’s presence and power from his youth until the day of his death.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Samson had the advantage of being endued with the Spirit in an unusually powerful way.

Samson had every advantage one could wish for from his mother’s womb until the day of his death. What could possibly go wrong? We’ll answer that question in future studies. For now let’s think about four helpful applications of tonight’s teaching.

1) God is merciful to His people even when we least deserve it. Consider the nation of Israel, so hardened in their rebellion by the time of Samson’s birth that repentance apparently was not even considered an option. They wouldn’t cry to the Lord for help. But He sent them a champion anyway. Even when we are at our worst, our heavenly Father still feels compassion for us. We may fail in our faithfulness to Him, but He will never fail in His faithfulness to us (2 Timothy 2:13).

¹ Warren Wiersbe.

² Warren Wiersbe.

Judges 13:1-25 – “Samson: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?”

(Pew Bible Page: 213-4)

2) Even when we possess every advantage, we are still capable of spectacular folly. We dare not take for granted the privileges God has given us in Christ. Yes, we are secure in Him. “He will hold us fast,” even when we’re acting like “knuckleheads.” But to presume on our own strength is to invite stumbling. Our enemy the devil is always on the lookout for careless Christians he can trip up. Peter’s exhortation speaks to each of us today: **1 Peter 5:8–11** - **8** *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* **9** *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* **10** *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.* **11** *To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

3) Godly parents are no guarantee of godly offspring. As far as I can tell from the account in chapter 13, Samson was blessed with faithful, diligent parents. Indeed, Samson had advantages we should all envy, yet he ended up being a world-class bonehead before his story came to its conclusion. But notice this for your encouragement: That didn’t keep God from using him, and his name is in Hebrews 11’s Hall of Fame. But how much more glorious it could have been if only... Don’t despair if you have a child who’s wandering tonight. You may have given that child every advantage, but that is no guarantee that things will turn out well in the end. But, even when it all looks most discouraging, remember – grace got Jephthah in the Hall of Fame and did the same for Samson. Keep praying and waiting for your wandering child. The story’s not over with yet.

4) Samson is a picture of Israel’s unfaithfulness. It will help us to remember this as we study further the life of Samson. Like Samson, God’s people had been blessed with every advantage. Chosen by God to be His special people; possessing a heritage of the patriarchs who walked with God; separated from the world around them for God’s special purposes; commissioned to be God’s representatives on earth through whom He would reveal Himself to all mankind; the people who enjoyed God’s living presence among them. Israel had every advantage, but repeatedly lived far below her calling. Like Samson, Israel was terribly flawed, yet still they were God’s people by God’s grace.

Conclusion: Sometimes things fall together so well that they become “can’t miss” propositions, seemingly destined for success. What could possibly go wrong? But isn’t it comforting to know, that when things do go wrong – when the wheels come completely off your plans, and it looks like your mission is destined for the dust - God is merciful when we don’t deserve it. P.S.: We never deserve it! And for that, there is God’s grace!