

The Samson Syndrome ([Judges 13](#))

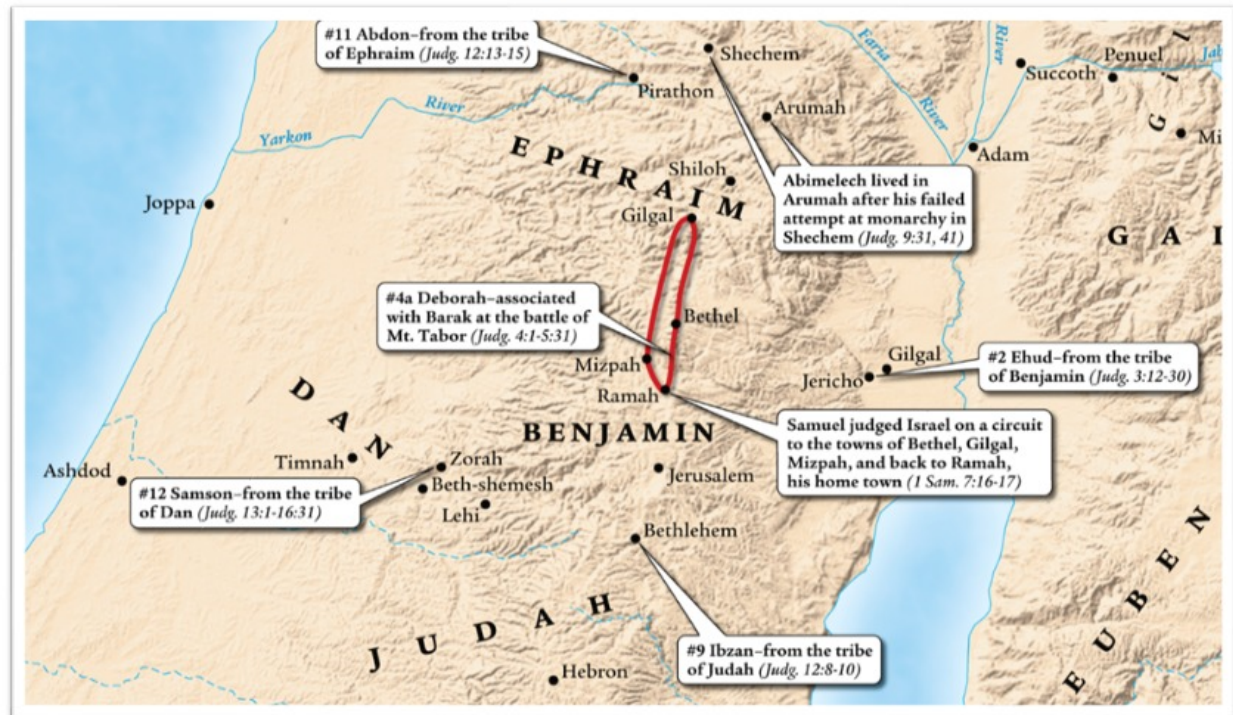


Figure 1: Zorah was assigned to the tribe of Dan and is the birthplace of Samson. It is located at the coordinates 31°46'10.9"N 35°03'19.6"E

Even When They did not Cry Out ([Judges 13:1-5](#))

1 Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. **2** Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of 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, “Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. **4** Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or *similar* drink, and not to eat anything unclean. **5** For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”

The national downward spiral into depravity has been chronicled through the prior material of this book. In earlier chapters Israel repeatedly rebels against the commandments of God and discards the calling of God to be his own special people. Israel was supposed to cast out the false religion of worshiping through sexual immorality. Israel was supposed to cut down the people sacrificing children to false gods. Israel was supposed to bring justice for the foreigner, relief for the widow, and help for the orphans. They were commissioned to cast out the evil of the Canaanites. Instead Israel has become canaanized.

And their evil is not a point of view - right for me wrong for you. Their works are wickedness without question because they are *evil in the sight of the Lord*. And not for the first time; the people are doing evil in God’s sight again (Take the time to see [Judges 2:11](#); [3:7](#), [12](#); [4:1](#); [6:1](#);

10:6; and 13:1. Note that in this list of verses the term again is used in 4:1, 10:6, and here in 13:1.). It is a pattern. In each cycle of the pattern the children of Israel rebel and then they are rebuked by God. The rebuke is seen as the hand of harassment or oppression from their enemies. In this case the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years (Judges 13:1). Prior to this iteration the pattern has seen rebuke followed by repentance and then a measure of restoration. Not this time.

Noticeably absent from the pattern is the part where the people repent. That is what they had done in former times (See 3:9, 15; 6:6; and 10:10.). The people do not cry out for relief. There is no groaning before God with their grief. No war is waged by the nation against their oppressors. They have become acclimated to oppression by the Philistines. It becomes obvious that Israel is no longer fighting the good fight when they state it as a fact and are perturbed when a God-sent deliverer begins to deliver them (Judges 15:11). Israel is content being under the control of a nation that opposes the program of God and the prosperity of His people. Why?

Fully canaanized communities don't cry out for relief from oppression or oppressors. The soul of such communities, whether seen in passive acceptance or active support, has become congruent with the personalities and policies in place.

Although the people do not cry out God still comes to their aid through a unilateral act of grace. Apart from an appeal Yahweh raises up another judge. This time the judge is from a barren woman.

As we consider this passage we do well to search for and enumerate important points. There are five things that should be noticed in these opening verses of a new cycle.

The People's Rebellion (Judges 13:1) - What was the evil being done by the people? It was the old habit of worshiping other gods (Judges 3:7). Israel was consecrated unto God himself (Deuteronomy 6:4), commanded not to go after other gods (Deuteronomy 6:14), and brought in to rid the land of idolatry (Deuteronomy 9:4-5; 18:12; Joshua 3:10). Instead they became part of the problem that had polluted the land (Psalm 106:38; Jeremiah 2:23; 3:2). Israel is also worshiping the false gods of the people in the land.

Question: Am I part of the solution that God is bringing to the community. Or have I become part of the problem? The answer is found in prayerfully considering my desires and conduct in light of the calling that is on my life.

- The Period of Rebuke (Judges 13:1) - 40 years! This is the longest period of oppression in the book. Prior to this part of the narrative the longest period has been 20 years (Judges 4:1-3); it took that long for the people to cry out to the Lord (Judges 4:3). It has been twice that amount of time and there has been no mention of crying out. The length of time is especially noteworthy considering that a period of 40 years or days is generally what is presented as the amount of time required to bring about change or demonstrate a difference. After all this time nothing has changed; the people are stiff-necked (Exodus 32:9; 33:3; Deuteronomy 9:13; 2 Chronicles 30:8).

- The Names, the Nameless, and Naming ([Judges 13:2, 24](#)) - The husband (Manoah), the homeland of the family (Zorah), and the son to be born (Samson) all have names. However, the mother remains nameless. This will be true of all but one woman in the story of Samson. The father's name, Manoah, means *rest* or *place of rest*. And yet he is restless. It is also interesting that Manoah does not name his son. The name Samson is given to him by the nameless ([Judges 13:24](#)). In this time of serious decline and depravity the women of the story are foils. The men of the story are fools. This is not what is promoted by God but what is presented to be true.
- The Nazirite Vow ([Judges 13:4-5](#); [Numbers 6:1-21](#)) - The son to be born would be consecrated or devoted to God. This is the essence of the Nazirite vow. The person taking this vow is especially separated to God for a period of time. Outwardly the consecration is seen in the uncut hair. The start of their son's separation was in the womb. Why is Mrs. Manoah not allowed to drink wine or similar drink? The Nazirite, in order to be useful during the period of consecration, should not be under the influence of any other spirit. (Even now we refer to alcoholic beverages as spirits.) If the period of time under the vow is to be especially useful to God the use of wine, which can be the cause of dissipation when used in excess ([Ephesians 5:18](#)), will threaten the mission. The Holy Spirit will have enough work the son's wanton excess with women. The additional distraction of intoxicating drink is being expressly forbidden.

What is the meaning of the dietary restrictions given to the woman ([Judges 13:4](#))? And why was the head of her child never to be shaved ([Judges 13:5](#))? The answer can be summarized: the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb.

What She Said ([Judges 13:6-14](#))

6 So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance *was* like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He *was* from, and He did not tell me His name. **7** And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or *similar* drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.' " **8** Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born." **9** And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband *was* not with her. **10** Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the *other* day has just now appeared to me!" **11** So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?" And He said, "I *am*." **12** Manoah said, "Now let Your words come *to pass*! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?" **13** So the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. **14** She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or *similar* drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe."

The woman came and told her husband about what had happened. If Manoah is going to learn about the message of hope and the regulations for their son she has to tell him. The Angel of the Lord did not appear to Manoah. Which is somewhat odd. When God intended to bring a special child to Zacharias and Elizabeth he appeared to the husband. When God

began the work of bringing His Son into the world He sent an angel to explain the situation to Joseph. Why did the Angel of the Lord appear to the nameless woman and not to Manoah?

Manoah believes his wife. But intends to get the message first hand. In his wife's relating of the Angel's message there may have been mistakes. Or what if, given the opportunity to talk to the man of the house, the Angel would have more to say. To his credit Manoah knows what to do. He prays. He cries out to God for answers. And God listened to the voice of Manoah ([Judges 13:9](#)). But he did not appear to Manoah. The Angel of God came to the woman again. What may have seemed incidental in the narrative is now revealed to be intentional - God has focused his communication on the wife. If Manoah wants to get this message firsthand, Mrs. Manoah has to be present.

The prayers are answered. And now the man is following his wife ([Judges 13:11](#)). That is the word picture that is being created in the narrative. But when the opportunity for face-to-face conversation with the Angel of the Lord finally arrives, nothing further is added to what had already been said. In fact, based on the reading of verses 3 through 5, the Angel says less to Manoah than he says to Manoah's wife. His wife said more to him than the Angel does. In the summary statement of the Angel it is indicated that she knows all that is needed and he can just help her with that. Based on three things in the text it seems that the Angel of the Lord does not want to communicate with Manoah. Here is what is clearly seen:

- First Appearance - The Angel of the Lord appears to the woman alone the first time. Was it not possible to speak to them together. Taken alone it seems like the Angel is indicating that talking with the mother is sufficient for the work that lies ahead.
- Second Appearance - God listened to Manoah. But the Angel still does not appear to him. Then prayer is heard; the text says that God listened to the voice of Manoah (v 9). But in the heeding of the request the angel appears to the woman again (v 9). Do not miss the fact that the Angel has answered the prayer in such a way as to make sure that the woman is present.
- Terse Response - The Angel has less to say to the woman than to her husband. In giving an answer He indicates that what was told her is what needed to be heeded. In this way the woman is given credibility by the Angel of the Lord as being able to understand and ably communicate what had been shared (v 14).

The Dullness on Display ([Judges 13:15-25](#))

15 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You." 16 And the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord." (For Manoah did not know He *was* the Angel of the Lord.) 17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What is Your name, that when Your words come *to pass* we may honor You?" 18 And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it *is* wonderful?" 19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Lord. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on—20 it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar—the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell on

their faces to the ground. ²¹ When the Angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He *was* the Angel of the Lord. ²² And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, because we have seen God!” ²³ But his wife said to him, “If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these *things*, nor would He have told us *such things* as these at this time.” ²⁴ So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. ²⁵ And the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Manoah is eager to show his appreciation to the visitor. Perceiving him to be merely a human being he offers the Angel of the Lord a meal. Although the Angel consents to staying for the preparation of the meal He says that he will not eat their food (v 16. See also [Luke 24:39](#)). And if there is an offering, contrary to the thinking of that time ([Deuteronomy 12:8](#); [Judges 17:6](#); [21:25](#)), it must be offered to the one true God ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#), 13). Intending to give honor to the Angel the man asks for a name. It seems that his intent was to worship using the name. However, the Angel again redirects Manoah with a somewhat evasive response: Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful? But was the Angel being difficult. Hardly, it must be noticed that the wife of Manoah told him that the person who appeared to her seem to be the Angel of the Lord (v 6). With that description and now with his own eyes he has been given enough to realize that this is a theophany. But he did not get it. She did.

Manoah goes on to offer the young goat and the grain offering upon the rock to the Lord. As the flame and smoke of their offering is going up toward heaven the Angel did something that made His identity clear: he ascended in the flame of the altar! The Angel received the worship Himself. How could that be? Unless it is as the nameless woman suspected. She said (v 6) that the appearance of the messenger was like the countenance of the Angel of God. But until now Manoah has not been able to receive it. Only as the messenger ascends in the flame does the truth become clear to him. We must not overlook what the passage clearly presents - *the woman has greater spiritual insight than her husband*.



Figure 2: Wisdom is something we can get from God. It comes to us freely if we will ask [James 1:5](#); [Proverbs 2:3-6](#); [Matthew 7:7](#).

Only when the messenger disappears in the fire of the sacrifice does Manoah realize his divine identity ([13:21](#)); his wife had sensed it from the beginning (v 6). Her husband knows the tradition that one cannot look at the Almighty and live ([Exodus 33:20](#); [Judges 6:22–23](#); [Genesis 16:13–14](#); [Exodus 19:21](#); [Genesis 32:30](#)). It is too much. Faced with what seems to be certain death Manoah begins to have a breakdown.

He turns to his wife and says, “We shall surely die, because we have seen God!” Now, at last, we know why the Angel did not appear to Manoah first or alone. Given the information he not only is slow to understand... he also reaches the wrong conclusion. And now, at last, in the wife’s attempt to calm Manoah’s fears we see conclusive proof that talking with her first was necessary. Consider her statement.

23 But his wife said to him, “If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these *things*, nor would He have told us *such things* as these at this time.”
Judges 13:23, NKJV

By three obvious truths she refutes the falsehood that they were about to suffer an immediate death because of Who they had seen. First, if the Lord had wanted to kill them it made no sense to (1) give them instructions on worship and (2) then to receive it from them. The desire to kill them would be inconsistent with relating to the husband and wife what He wanted; it would make God out to be capricious and untrustworthy. Second, if the Lord had desired to kill them he would not have shown them all these things. What things? Himself and his desire to see them experience deliverance from the Philistines. There is no point in showing them these things and

then killing them for hearing and seeing his intention to help them. Especially since she is instrumental in the plan. It was illogical to think that they would be immediately killed in light of how they figured into the Lord's plan to help. Manoah should have seen this. Although he did not she did. Third, the desire to immediately dispatch them would not make sense in light of the instruction given to them for the child that had not yet been conceived. The Angel had said that she would both conceive and bear a son. If they were dead how would that happen. Further, Manoah was to let her observe all that she had been commanded. It was clearly implied that he was to be alive long enough to support his wife in bearing the child. She picked that up. But her husband did not.

Meeting with Manoah without his wife would not have been fruitful. Again, even when he is given all the information, he does not put it together. He also is slow to perceive who he is dealing with. It becomes obvious to us as we go through the chapter that Mrs. Manoah is more perceptive.

Small Group Questions

Try not to impress anyone with your answer. The point of these questions is getting to and dealing with the truth. As we prayerfully consider the truth of who we are in light of God's word there can be breakthroughs and deliverance.

1. Are you more like Manoah or his wife in the way you handle revelation from God? ([Judges 13:21-22](#)) What does Scripture say about getting wisdom and discernment? ([James 1:5](#); [Proverbs 2:3-6](#); [Matthew 7:7](#))
2. Why does God want bless the couple with a child? ([Judges 13:5](#)) What is your reason for wanting a blessing? ([James 4:1-4](#))
3. Why does the Angel of the Lord keep appearing to Manoah's wife and not Manoah? What indicator is in the passage about God's willingness to hear and help Manoah? ([Judges 13:0-10](#))

Excursus: Barrenness

In barrenness we are broken. Through our seemingly unending season of unanswered prayer for something (e.g., a baby, a spouse, a job) we are made to feel the unrelenting pain of some neediness. In the midst of our emptiness we entreat God for help in hope that He will hear and have mercy. But in the delay we become more than desperate and we are undone. In the silence of no answer we are made to regard our wretchedness and the reasons why the Almighty is not obligated to answer. In that time outside of "a long while" the barrenness breaks us. Let it, saint. Let the barrenness break you. Be broken.

In barrenness Hannah breaks through her competition with the other woman, through her rivalry ([1 Samuel 1:1-6](#)), and through her desire to have a son and she enters into the blessedness of wanting a son that can be devoted to the Lord all the days of his life ([1 Samuel 1:11](#)). The Lord closed her womb in order that He might at last raise up a priest with the right priorities ([1 Samuel 1:5](#)). In barrenness Elizabeth is made ready to receive Elijah, made fit for her role of raising the forerunner, and prepared for worship when the Holy Spirit comes on her and her son. She was a long time childless so that she could cherish the blessing of a boy that would belong to the Lord from the womb ([Luke 1:15-17](#)).

Out of barrenness is born Samson; from childlessness comes a churlish deliverer with supernatural strength. The Angel of the Lord did not appear to the apparent authority of the husband but to the nameless woman without child - to the barren ([Judges 13:2-3](#)). And the commands for the coming child were not given to the man of the house; they were given to the barren. It was to her that the Angel of the Lord said the deliverer shall be a Nazirite from the womb ([Judges 13:5](#)). It is out of barrenness that the Lord brings forward the better priest Samuel. A Nazirite as well. And it is out of barrenness that we get the baptist - John the Baptist. Also a Nazirite. All of these exceptional people came from persons who could not produce a child. It was God's will that they would wait an unreasonable amount of time for what came so easily to others. Why? Listen closely: *Because through their barrenness these women were broken and became mothers gladly committed to carrying and caring for a child God's way.*

Before either of these women suffered with the shame of having no child Sarai was barren. But in barrenness Sarai becomes Sarah, Abram becomes Abraham, and an elderly man learned to love God more than the lad on the altar. By the blessing of barrenness the natural tendency to own the gift gives way to the realization that we are but stewards and that the real blessing is in the opportunity to give what was given back to God... for His glory... and for the good of His people.

Your barrenness is not the cruelty of God or the outworking of His unwillingness to see you happy. It works in you, by His grace through your faith, to change you. In it you are being broken so that if the Lord grants your plea it will be received by someone made ready for the present and glad for a special charge in handling a special package. If you are willing to receive it, your barrenness is working to produce in you special worship. If you are willing to receive it, your barrenness is sanctifying you for the saint-work of surrendering the gift back to Him without a grudge and with gratitude. In that time outside of "a long while" the barrenness tries to break us. Let it, saint. Let the barrenness break you. Be broken. Listen to David!

18 The Lord *is* near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. ([Psalm 34:18](#), NKJV)

Hear him again.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise. ([Psalm 51:17](#), NKJV)

The breakthrough is not in getting what you want from God. It is in wanting to honor Him with whatever you get... even with the gift of barrenness. It is in the determination to worship Him in whatever He decides to do ([Job 1:19-20; 13:15](#)).