

JUDGES 13

IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE

opening ILLUSTRATION

Before class, consider some similarities you have with various family members. These could be physical characteristic (such as green eyes, dimples, or a crooked smile), personality traits (such as being a night owl or a tendency to laugh too loud), or talents (such as a talent for music, art, or athletics). Show pictures that demonstrate any physical traits you've shared, if applicable. After you've shared your own story, ask a few student volunteers to share some similarities they share with their own family members. (Note: be mindful of students who are not raised by their birth parents.) Say, "Sometimes, we are happy to be similar to our family in certain ways; sometimes not. Some characteristics are out of our control. But we all need to carefully consider who we've set as mentors and examples in our lives, learning righteous living as we observe them."

context

In Judges 13:5, we see the angel explain to Samson's mother that "the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth." The Nazirite vow is explained thoroughly in Numbers 6: if someone desires to make a special vow, that person lets his or her hair grow long, abstains from eating or drinking anything with grapes or fermentation, and stays away from any dead bodies. At the end of the vow period, the person's hair is shaved and a special offering is made to the Lord. After Numbers 6, we don't see the word in Scripture again until Judges 13, in which God sets Samson apart even from the womb. Samuel and John the Baptist also seemed to be lifelong Nazirites.

expository OUTLINE

JUDGES 13:1-5 *God has a plan for His chosen people to be holy.* You've probably heard the stories about Samson, but did you know about his parents? Superheroes often have back stories, and Samson is perhaps the most superhero-like character in the Bible: tragic, conflicting, powerful, and struggling. In this passage, we see an angel of the Lord appear to Samson's mother. Like several other women in the Old Testament, Manoah's wife had been unable to have children; like several other times, God planned for this previously-barren woman to have a child that would be mighty for God's glory! The angel's words promise her a son but also contain an instruction for the woman: she is to live an especially set-apart life throughout the pregnancy (see v. 4) and her son would be set apart throughout his entire life. God certainly calls each of His children to live holy lives, but some of us have a more specified calling.

JUDGES 13:6-14 *God doesn't always answer our questions, but He tells us what we need to know.* When Samson's mother reported her angelic experience to her husband, he instantly wanted to ask some questions; no surprise there! Recognizing that the visitor was obviously from the Lord, Samson's father Manoah prayed that God would send the messenger back; yet he didn't realize the visitor was an angel and thought he was simply a man (such as a prophet). God, merciful and gracious, answered Manoah's prayer. But yet again, the angel came only to Samson's mother; this likely pointed to the fact that the message was for her, not Manoah. And when Manoah asked for some instructions about how to raise the boy and what his responsibilities would be, the messenger simply repeated his instructions to Samson's mother. God had a great plan for Samson, but He didn't choose to reveal all the details to Samson's parents; they would need to walk in faith and obedience step by step.

JUDGES 13:15-25 *God sees our obedience and blesses us.* Manoah asked a question that the angel didn't answer, and he thought the angel was a man. Manoah was off in his understanding of the situation, but he still wanted to present an offering, which shows that his heart was toward God. So, as we saw in the Gideon story (see Judg. 6:17-24), Manoah prepared an offering and presented it to the angel. Manoah and his wife watched, the flame from the burnt offering seemed to envelop the angel, and he disappeared from their sight. Like the Gideon story again, Manoah thought they would die, because he realized that they had been in the presence of the Lord. But Manoah's wife pointed out that God wouldn't kill them if He had sent an angel with a message and also accepted the sacrifice. Gideon's parents—panicky Manoah and his level-headed wife—were not perfect. But they were determined to obey God.

group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 13:1-5.

- .01** What was the state of Israel at this time, according to verse 1? Why are you not surprised at this opening line?
- .02** What holy things were Samson's mother instructed to do or not do? What were Samson's instructions? What are some holy things we should do and not do today?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 13:6-14.

- .03** How did Samson's mother describe the angelic visitor? How did Manoah describe Him differently?
- .04** Are you hearing God's Word regularly from teachers, pastors, or wise Christians? If so, how are you responding to it? If not, why do you think that is?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 13:15-25.

- .05** How did the angel point out that God alone was worthy of an offering? How do people today try to give too much glory to God's messengers (such as pastors or worship leaders)?
- .06** What one piece of information do we get about Samson in verse 24? How are you growing these days? How is God blessing your life?

session CONNECTION

Both of this week's lessons speak about commitment to God. In Mark 14:32-42, we see Jesus's commitment to God's plan as He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. He explains His grief and distress with Peter, James, and John and invites them to stay awake and pray as He prays in solitude. We see Jesus's commitment to obedience to God's plan, even as He recognizes the incredible sacrifice it would require. We also see the lack of commitment of the disciples, as they fall to the temptation of sleeping rather than praying as Jesus had asked. In Numbers 13, we see the commitment of Samson's parents as they dedicate their son to a lifetime of commitment, separating him apart from all others as a Nazirite for life. Hopefully this lesson will help us all consider our own level of commitment to the Lord.

application

Remind students of the opening illustration, in which they considered different ways they reflect their own family members. Say something like, "I'd like to close today by asking you to consider this: Who have you chosen to pattern your spiritual life after? Who are you choosing to learn from and set as an example in your faith?" Tell them about one person you have chosen as a spiritual mentor and why that person is your example. Read 1 Corinthians 11:1 aloud, in which Paul says to the Christians in Corinth: "Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ." Help students understand that Christ is our ultimate example for faith, life, obedience, righteousness, and hope. Then say something like, "But God has also set godly examples in our lives. As we cultivate relationships with people who intentionally follow Christ, we learn to be His disciples, as well."

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