

Judges Ch.13
“The Announcement of the Birth of a New Deliverer”

Introduction:

The account of Samson, that begins in this chapter, represents the longest single story in the Book of Judges.

The primary introduction to this final cycle in the Book was in chapter ten (vs.6-16), where the oppression that is spoken of here, and that of the Ammonites was said to be brought on by the sin of Israel in turning away from Yahweh and embracing foreign gods. Now the author, having described the defeat of the Ammonites, turned to the enemy that would prove to be a thorn in Israel's side until they were mastered during the time of king David. The Samson narrative specifically begins with an abbreviated version of the cycle that has defined this entire book. But we see here that the cycle has degraded by the time of Samson. Whereas the elements of sin, discipline, the Divine word, and the death of the judge are recounted, nothing is said about a cry for help, no real deliverance is recorded, nor would there be any peace for the land of Israel after the judge finished his task. The lack of any reference to the Israelites calling out to God for deliverance from the Philistines seems to indicate that the Israelites may have lapsed into an apathetic acceptance of their situation. This is demonstrably true in the case of Judah in light of what we are told later in the narrative (15:11). The following factors indicate a continued spiritual/moral deterioration in the period of the Judges:

- Battles of deliverance give way here to various skirmishes that relate not to the deliverance of the nation, but to the private interests of the judge's life.
- The pattern of apostasy, oppression, cries to Yahweh, deliverance is changed. The first two in this pattern are merely announced, not described, there was no response of Israel calling upon Yahweh, and the deliverer who was raised up does not even seek to deliver the nation.
- The original focus had shifted earlier from the nation to the fortunes of individual tribes, and now it re-focuses again, now on the deliverance of an individual, which result from tragic circumstances of his own creation.
- Israel's attitude to the oppressor was no longer hostile, but subservient to the point of resisting the judge rather than the oppressor.
- This story along with that of Jephthah highlight that one of Israel's main problems was the lack of real devotion to Yahweh in the life of those raised up to lead her.

As to this new, oppressing nation, the Philistines, we know historically that in the 12th century B.C. they began to play a major role in the political and military affairs of Canaan. This was no accident of history, but a part of God's providence, in response to the Israelites continued involvement in idolatry and immorality. Prior to the time of Samson, the Philistines played a small but significant role in the historical development of the southern portion of Canaan. When Pharaoh Ramses III turned back an invading group known as the “*sea peoples*” in 1194 B.C. it caused some of the Philistines to settle in the coastlands of southwest Palestine. These

Philistines joined the earlier Minoan settlers and became a significant military force in the years that followed. Unless the repentance mentioned in 10:10-16 includes the western Israelites who were being oppressed by the Philistines (10:7) - which is unlikely in view of their apparent acceptance of the Philistine domination (15:11) - there is no mention of Israel's cry to God before He raised up Samson as a deliverer. This is a significant contrast to the previous deliverances recorded in this Book (3:9,15; 4:3; 6:7; 10:10). Since Samson judged Israel 20 years (15:20; 16:31), beginning apparently at about age 20, his entire life span must have approximated the 40-year Philistine oppression which began shortly before his birth (cf. 13:5). He was thus a contemporary of Samuel who in the time of Saul would also be involved in conflicts with the Philistines (I Sam.7:10-14).

I. The Setting of the Story: (vs.1-2)

In verse one we read, "*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.*" The Philistines are well known from the narratives of Judges and the Books of Samuel. As noted above, they migrated into the land of Canaan with other peoples from the region of the Aegean Sea. Previously, these migrants were known as the "*Sea People*". The Sea Peoples were generally thought to have been responsible for the fall of the Hittite Empire and the destruction of many cities along the coast of Syria and Palestine, such as Ugarit, Tyre, Sidon, Megiddo and Ashkelon, though the evidence for their involvement in those areas is circumstantial. It is this vast people movement that was also reflected in the Homeric Epic of the siege of Troy. Coming from Crete, Greece and Anatolia, these people probably used Cyprus as a base from which to launch their attacks. Following the repulsion of the Sea Peoples from Egypt, the tribe that came to be known as the Philistines settled on the southern coast of Palestine, where they established their five capital cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath and Gaza.

Israel's ongoing and monotonous downward spiral comes to a climax with this, the seventh national act of apostasy recorded in the Book of Judges (3:5-7,12-14; 4:1-3; 6:1-2; 8:33-35; 10:6-9). This apostasy appears to have been part of the idolatrous worship previously described in chapter ten (vs.6), where we were told that among the other foreign gods the Israelites worshipped, were "*the gods of the Philistines*". God had sent an oppression by the Philistines (in the west) and by the Ammonites (in the east), also according to chapter ten (vs.7). The depths of Israelite apostasy and the greatness of Philistine strength were causes for the unprecedented length of oppression that Israel experienced at this time. The oppression that Israel experienced would last for forty years, though the Philistines continued as a threat against Israel until the early years of David's reign. Earlier Philistine settlements had been present in Palestine for some time (Gen 21:32-34; 26:1-18), but only at this time did they become a threat to Israel.

When the Philistines moved aggressively into Israelite territory they proceeded eastward into the portions of the land that had been allotted to the Tribes of Dan, Benjamin and Judah. Unlike what happened in previous occupations, the Israelites

apparently accepted the domination of the Philistines without resistance (14:4; 15:11) till the time of Samuel (I Sam.7:10-14). This verse marks the beginning of the Philistine oppression, and we read here that the tribes of Dan and Judah were the first to come under Philistine rule.

A question that might occur to those who read this book is why Samson's parents, who were Danites, were still living in the Sorek Valley at this late time in the period of the judges, when much earlier the tribe of Dan as a whole had migrated north (ch.18)? The answer is, apparently a few of the Danite clans stayed behind and did not move northward with the rest of their clans.

In verse two we read, "*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.*" Zorah was approximately sixteen miles west of Jerusalem in the Sorek Valley, which was along the major trade route that went from the coastal plains through the Shephelah to the hills around Jerusalem. This town is named five times in the book, always in conjunction with the nearby town of Eshtaol. Samson's parents lived in this city, which was near the dividing line between Philistine and Israelite territory. In light of this reference to this town as being a town of Judah (15:33) and of Dan (19:41) it is almost certain that historically it first belonged to the Danites and became a town of Judah sometime after the Danites left the area and migrated north. In Samson's day some Danites still occupied the area, but their position there was increasingly precarious.

In the Ancient Near East, the Israelites and their neighbors all saw barrenness as a curse by the gods for some sort of wrong that one had done. The inclusion of this detail was of course to focus on how God was the clear source of the provision of the deliverer, not to suggest a particular fault with this couple. It is not an uncommon idea that the life of a pivotal person in the Old Testament begins with the story of an infertile mother. These stories all reinforce the same idea that it is God who supplies what is needed for the chosen seed. According to the culture of that period, the inability of a wife to bear children also often made her vulnerable to her husband's whims. In fact, most marriage contracts allowed a husband to divorce his wife on the grounds of infertility. Another common practice was for such a husband to take additional wives, who, upon producing children, would assume a more favored status within the family, than that of the original wife. The author of Judges does not go into what if any tension existed in Samson's family, as this was apparently not relevant to the main focus of this account.

The most significant human character in this part of the Samson story, ironically is unnamed, she is simply referred to as Manoah's wife. As noted, like other Semitic peoples, the Israelites tended to view childlessness as an indicator of Divine disfavor. That Manoah and his wife had no children does not necessarily mean that they were already old, simply that their hopes to have offspring had been disappointed for some time. As we read this, we are to understand that by choosing a barren couple, Yahweh made clear that deliverance Samson would later accomplish would only come because of this special dispensation on Yahweh's part, so that afterward His people would realize that they had been powerless to bring

about their deliverance, and that they had only been able to receive it because it was a gift from above. As with Sarah before her, and Hannah after her, God would enable this woman to gift birth to a child who would perform a significant role in the history of Israel.

II. A Messenger Brings Glorious News: (vs.3-5)

In verse three we read, “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.’*” The childless wife of Manoah was visited by the Angel of Yahweh. Zorah, the highest point in the Shephelah, was on a high ridge north of the Sorek Valley. The author made the choice not to give any details about the couple; like prayers they may have made for a child, or even the piety of the mother. The purpose for these omissions was to focus the reader’s mind on the fact that the provision of the deliverer was completely by God’s initiative. A gracious work by Him from beginning to end.

As to the identity of “*the Angel of Yahweh*”, some theologians have speculated that this was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Though this might be true, there is no way to determine this specifically, as the New Testament never confirms this. It is better to conclude that in this book, the figure of the Angel of Yahweh is presented as both Yahweh Himself, and also as His special messenger.

This record concerning Samson is unique in the Book of Judges in that it includes a detailed account of a supernatural announcement of his birth. Whereas nothing is mentioned regarding the births of any of the judges before him, except that Jephthah was born illegitimately. This immediately suggests that Samson would be unlike any judge who had preceded him. However, there is no implication that this conception would be miraculous (meaning apart from sexual intercourse), simply that the sudden reversal of her condition from barrenness to fertility clearly marked the pregnancy and the son that would come from it as a special gift of God.

In verse four we read, “*Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean.*” The words “*please be careful*”, carried the idea of guarding oneself to be sure to strictly follow the will of God. So that she could do this, God gives her a list of what she was to abstain from during her pregnancy, followed by instructions that were to govern the life of the child after his birth. Samson’s mother was called to observe many of the requirements of a Nazarite during the time of her pregnancy (excluding the prohibition of cutting her hair). This is because the child in her womb would be a Nazarite from conception onward.

In verse five we read, “*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 language of the first clause indicates that the birth would follow shortly after this announcement. It was announced that the child would be a Nazarite. As with most vows in the Ancient Near East, the Nazirite vow typically represented a conditional agreement with a deity that was concluded with offertory gifts in response to a

favorable answer to a petition. What distinguished the Nazirite vow was the period of abstinence preceding the offerings. According to Numbers 6:1-8 there were three things that a Nazirite had to abstain from:

- Wine or any other intoxicating drink
- Having one's hair cut
- Touching a corpse

A Nazirite (from a root word meaning “*devoted*” or “*consecrated*”) was a person who made a vow to separate himself or herself to God and His purposes for a specific amount of time. Samson's Nazirite dedication was unusual in four ways:

- It was divinely imposed rather than voluntary
- It took effect from the moment of his conception
- The vow was not temporary but would last until his death
- His mother was also not to eat unclean foods during the pregnancy or else violate this calling of her son (though this commandment was originally applicable to all Israelites, it can be assumed here that given the general apostasy and degeneracy of the people, it is unlikely these prohibitions were being followed by the majority of Israelites, and therefore it was necessary to specifically command this woman to observe these things).

There was good reason for God imposing this life requirement on Samson. Samson was to be highly honored by God. He would be entrusted with bearing a continual miracle in his life. He would be endowed with greater physical strength than any other man, and in this way, he would be a living miracle for the entire period he lived. This meant that God was extending to Samson a high privilege, but at the same time a heavy responsibility. He would have the responsibility to refuse the temptation to use the great strength given to him for his own honor, or to further his own selfish ends. He would have to remain humble and continually recognize that his unique gift was to be used only for the glory of God. Samson was intended to live such a life of dedication that others, both Israelites and Philistines, would be able to see evidence that he was especially devoted to God, so that they in turn might appropriately recognize the true source of his strength. Through these things the intent was that the honor and credit for all that would happen because of Samson's great strength would not go to Samson but to God. It should be noticed that the Angel of Yahweh made a close relation between the fact that he was called to be a Nazirite and the task that Samson was to perform, namely that he was to begin to deliver Israel. This implies that the success of the latter would be directly dependent on the degree of his adherence to the former.

In the messenger's announcement, Manoah's wife is told that Samson's calling would be to “*begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines*”; rather than do it completely. This announcement is in one sense modest, and in another sense, ominous. It was modest in the sense that all the previous judges were able to fully accomplish a deliverance from those who were oppressing Israel. Samson's destiny was to be different, and this reflected what God in His omniscience knew would be the outcome of Samson's life. It was ominous in the sense that it revealed that the Philistines would be foes of a different order from former ones, and the struggle to

free Israel from them would be hard and long. This delivery would not be completed in Samson's lifetime, but it would begin. Samson would strike the blow that would set the process of deliverance in motion, and he would not be released from his Nazarite vow until he had accomplished this.

We know from later accounts in the historical books that the Philistines would remain a problem during the tenures of both King Saul and King David; with the final deliverance being accomplished during the reign of David (II Sam.5:17-25). It would seem that Yahweh's expectations of the judges were decreasing as the Israelites continued to persist in their sin. Just how Yahweh planned on using Samson's Nazarite status is something that would be gradually revealed over the subsequent chapters.

III. The Husband's Response to the News: (vs.6-10)

In verses six and seven we read about the wife's report to Manoah; "*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. 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.'*" Below is a chart comparing what the Angel said, and what Manoah's wife reported to him:

What the Angel of Yahweh said (vs.3b-5)	What Manoah's wife repeated (vs.7)
<p>Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. 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.</p>	<p>'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."</p>

The comparison yields the following observations:

- The woman omits the angel's reference to her barrenness, his injunction to guard herself, and the prohibition of any razor touching the child's head.
- Although the translation obscures this there is a difference in the reference to her pregnancy. The angel expressed it as something already true, whereas she expressed it as something future.

- She added to the announcement that the child would be a Nazirite to his death, and since she omits the reference to the razor these words have an ominous foreshadowing, because in the end it is the violation of his vow by his being shaved by a razor that leads directly to Samson's death.

These verses contain the wife's report to Manoah regarding what the Angel of Yahweh had revealed to her. It is a significant detail of the story, so it is important to recognize from the beginning that this announcement came first to a woman, and then only secondarily to a man. This reversed the order one would expect in that patriarchal society.

The report itself came in two parts. The first part contained her description of the heavenly visitor that provides us with her understanding of his identity and role. He is called "*a man of God*". This title would mean that the individual was someone who was in direct contact with God. Normally that designation refers to a prophet (I Sam.9:7; I Kings 13:1-4), however, the description she offers suggests that she meant "*a divine man*". She added that he had the appearance of the Angel of God. She used the generic title for God, rather than His covenant name (Yahweh). This would suggest that the deterioration of the knowledge of Yahweh had affected this household as well. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the Divine name is used only by narrator, while the generic "*God*" is used by the characters in the story as they express their subjective convictions. The second part of the report related to the announcement of the child, and the special calling he would have. We are also told that the wife did not ask for any identification or name from the figure; something that would later be pursued further by Manoah.

Manoah's wife said that the messenger was "*very awesome*". The Hebrew word that is translated as "*awesome*" is often used to describe Deity. The word is a verb meaning to fear, to respect, to reverence, to be afraid, or to arouse fear. This aspect of her description continues to demonstrate the woman's awareness that the visitor was no ordinary holy man. That she thought of him as "*awesome*" most likely explains why she felt she dare not ask his name or where he was from for fear of presuming an intimacy with him that was not proper for a mere mortal.

By adding the detail that he would be Nazarite until the day of his death might suggest something foreboding that she discerned from the awesome messenger regarding her son's future. In the end, whether she knew it or not, her words were prophetic. This becomes clear at the conclusion of the story about Samson. Samson's destiny as a Nazarite of God from his mother's womb, would be consummated in his death.

In verses eight through ten we read, "*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.' 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. 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!'"* In response to what his wife had told him, Manoah prayed and asked God to reveal how the parents were to raise the son

they were being given. Since it is difficult to discern what information he was lacking, it is reasonable to conclude (particularly since not much new information will be forthcoming) that Manoah wanted the messenger to return because he was jealous that he was not addressed directly in the revelation and now wanted to be included. This conclusion is strengthened by the repeated use of the pronoun “us” and “we” in his prayer. It is interesting that Manoah refers to the messenger simply as “*the man of God*” ignoring his wife’s comments on his unworldly appearance. That he did this indicates that at this point he assumed the messenger was a wandering holy man sent by Yahweh, fully human, rather than as a supernatural messenger direct from the heavenly court.

In response, God graciously sent His envoy back to the couple. Although Yahweh honors Manoah’s request here, He ironically sends the messenger once again to the man’s wife alone in the field, effectively foiling the husband’s quest for control. The entire portrayal of Manoah in this chapter seems to subtly depict him in a negative light in comparison to his wife. Even the introduction of the angel’s arrival specifically makes reference to the fact that her husband was once again not present. Part of the dynamic here seems to be that God would not be manipulated by Manoah which would put him in control. It appears that the time and the place of this second visit were designed so that instead of appearing to Manoah alone, or even to the couple together, the messenger once again came to Manoah’s wife while she was alone in the fields. The only reason for this would seem to be that there was a focus on the role that the woman was to play in this revelation, rather than on his role. In the similar story of the birth of Samuel, his mother Hannah plays the major role in the story as well, and there it is because of her piety and prayers. There is also the implication that the wife is the more receptive to God’s purposes and this is why she is addressed rather than the husband. When the Angel of Yahweh did return, He did not give any more information, which meant that he was not granting a key part of Manoah’s request. In effect He was saying that Manoah was out of order in making the request, because all he needed to know, had already been told by his wife. Manoah was simply to wait and learn in God’s own time what sort of man his son would become and what he would do.

IV. The Messenger’s Instruction to the Husband: (vs.11-18)

In verses eleven through twelve we read, “*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.’ Manoah said, ‘Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy’s rule of life, and his work?’*” The dialogue here between the messenger and Manoah seems to revolve around Manoah again trying to manipulate information out of the messenger, and the messenger responding only in terms of what had been revealed to Manoah’s wife. In verse twelve, the Hebrew word “*misphat*” is translated as “*rule*”. This translation is forced and makes very poor sense in this context. It is preferable to understand that the word is used in a similar way to how it was used in Judges 4:5. In that verse it is written that the people of Israel would come to Deborah for an ocular pronouncement concerning the

crisis caused by the Canaanite oppression, and the Hebrew word “*misphat*” is the term employed to refer to that pronouncement. Therefore, the word actually relates to Manoah’s question “*what is the Divine word about the boy’s life and vocation*”. He was asking to understand more fully what God intended to do in the life of his son.

In verses thirteen and fourteen we read, “*So the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, ‘Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. 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.’*” Once again, the messenger simply repeated what he had previously revealed to Manoah’s wife. But this of course, this was the first time Manoah heard the instruction to be on guard to follow the angel’s instructions, because his wife had omitted this from her report to her husband. This was important because the child was to be considered a Nazirite from conception, and therefore it was up to the mother to maintain his ritual purity and the vow for the child until the time where he could do these things for himself. If she did not do what she was told, she could undo his calling before he ever had the opportunity to deliver his people. The only addition here is the tightening of the dietary restrictions by prohibiting the consumption of any grape products, not just wine. The repetition of this instruction puts responsibility on Manoah now as well to make sure these stipulations were obeyed.

The implication from the angel’s response, that the husband was to focus on making sure that the instructions given to his wife were followed, is that he would never be the guiding force in the boy’s life, the role a father would normally expect to play in his son’s development. Instead, as a Nazarite of God, it would be God and not Manoah who would shape the boy’s life. This would be hard for Manoah, but it was a reality that he would have to accept. The messenger said nothing about the boy himself, and it is likely that this was because Manoah’s question evinced a certain premature curiosity that had to be discouraged. Thus, the messenger’s second appearance was only intended to confirm the first, not to add something new to what had already been said.

A theme that continues is that the husband seems to be less aware than his wife had been about the true identity of the messenger, although his access to the messenger was now direct and no longer mediated by his wife. Still there is a gap between what he knows and what she knows, and this gap is never closed. Throughout this chapter Manoah is always trying to catch up with his wife and never seems to quite be able to do so. This was likely meant to reflect the sad spiritual state of the men of Israel at this time.

In verse fifteen we read, “*Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, ‘Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You.’*” Hospitality customs of that time required that all strangers who approached a dwelling were to be offered the opportunity to rest, refresh themselves, and eat a meal. This was done to foster congeniality toward strangers. This would be particularly true of someone who was offering such prophetic portents as are described here. What is particularly

generous here is the offer of fresh meat, an item not usually found in the daily diet of the people of the Ancient Near East, because of its expense.

The meal that was offered here by Manoah is done under the assumption that his guest was a man (a distinguished man of God, but still just a man), and this may account for the difference between the messenger of Yahweh's response to Manoah, and His response to Gideon. Up to this point, God's envoy, revealed to the reader to be the Angel of Yahweh, has not been further identified, and it is clear that Manoah did not know at this point, to whom He was speaking. The title "*the Angel of Yahweh*" refers to an individual who had appeared previously to Hagar (Gen.16), to Moses (Ex.3), Balaam (Num.22), the assembled Israelites before Joshua (Judg.2), and Gideon (Judg.6). This individual was not merely a member of the angelic host, but rather each and every appearance demonstrates that He spoke as Yahweh Himself, and not simply for Yahweh. Therefore, the couple were experiencing a Divine encounter.

Below is a chart comparing Gideon and Manoah's sacrifices to Yahweh:

Details in Account	6:17-24	13:15-23
Context	Response to Gideon's call to deliver Israel	Response to Manoah hearing about the call of his son
Motivation	Desire for a sign of the messenger's authenticity	Manoah's desire to learn more
Intention	To present an offering to the messenger	To present a meal to the messenger
Elements of offering	A kid with unleavened bread	A kid and a grain offering
Response of the messenger	Promised acceptance of offering	Rejection of offering of food; instead present a whole burnt offering to Yahweh
Place of offering	Rock	Rock
Response to the offering	Touched the sacrificial gifts with his staff and fire leaped from the rock and consumed the offering; messenger left	Messenger performed wonders. Flames leaped from the rock to heaven; messenger returns to heaven
Response of the Offerer	Expressions of woe; acknowledges he has seen messenger of Yahweh face to face	Protestation: recognizes that he has seen the face of Yahweh; expression of fear of death
Source of reassurance	Yahweh tells him directly to be at peace; he will not die	Wife tells him they will not die, for their offering has been accepted

Response of Offerer	Builds altar to celebrate peace of God	Unstated
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It seems that Manoah used the meal he offered as another opportunity to take control of the situation and place himself at the center of this visitation. The form of Manoah's request, "*let us detain you*" involves the plural cohortative verb form. Apparently, having been rebuffed by the messenger when using the direct approach, he now tried to wheedle his way into significance by associating himself with his wife who seems to be the favored audience.

In verses sixteen through eighteen we read, "*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.) Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, 'What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?' And the Angel of the LORD said to him, 'Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?'" The parenthetical statement clarifies that Manoah still regarded the figure before him as human, and so the offer of the meal was based on a false premise. It is interesting to note that the messenger did not explain why He rejected Manoah's offer of food; but the following are proposed reasons based on the context:

1. Manoah's offer reflected a defective view of who his visitor was (should have recognized the theistic presence)
2. Since sharing the table meal implied oneness in that culture, the rejection most likely related to the terrible spiritual condition of the nation and of Manoah's household in particular.
3. Apart from a relationship of covenantal faithfulness, a burnt offering to restore the relationship first would have been appropriate

The reference to giving the man honor would have suited the culture of the time where anyone bringing a good prophetic word would be deserving of being honored. Of course, from a Biblical perspective this was a flawed custom, because a prophet is only the messenger, while it is God who is the source of the blessing and is the only one to be truly celebrated.

An important question here is why did Manoah ask for the messenger's name? In that time, it was believed that someone's name was intimately connected to their being and essence. A name was believed to be important for magical purposes, hexing, or even pronouncing a blessing. Because of this, the giving of one's name was an act of favor, trust and, in human terms, vulnerability. The Ten Commandments had prohibited Israel from using God's name in vain; this would have included attempting to use Yahweh's name in magical ways to manipulate Him. But here, the intent was neither evil nor related to coercing God. The text indicates that Manoah did not realize that the visitor was supernatural, therefore, Manoah still didn't know what his wife knew. This is why he asked what his wife chose not to ask. From Manoah's perspective, if the messenger were a prophet, the individual's reputation could be enhanced by the report of the accuracy and benevolence of his pronouncements. Such rewards could only be given if the individual's identity were known. The Angel's answer "*why do you ask My name*" is

a rebuke of Manoah's obtuseness. This was another manifestation of the distance that the Israelites were from their God. Instead, of acceding to Manoah's request, and giving His name, the angel described His name as being beyond understanding, and thus extraordinary (the Hebrew word is used in this way in Psalm 139:6). This designation that His name was "*wonderful*" was another clear indication of this figure's divine nature. The description seems to have been chosen because of its connection to the Exodus (Ex.15:11) and the frequent use of one of its cognates to identify God's miraculous acts of salvation and judgment. This seems to also be the reason this designation is applied to the Messianic King in Isaiah 9:6; that He would be the incomprehensible deliverer. If Manoah had been a truly spiritually sensitive man, even the description of the name should have been enough to reveal that this messenger was not human. The response implied that even the messenger's name had this incomprehensible quality. This would mean that even if the messenger were to tell Manoah what it was, Manoah would not be able to understand it. Ironically, there was another way in which the response was more revealing than Manoah recognized. It implied that there was a mystery associated with the name of the messenger, and even this much information could have brought Manoah very close to the revelation of that mystery.

V. The Revelation to the Husband: (vs.19-23)

In nineteen we read, "*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*". The word used to describe the grain offering means "*gift*" or "*tribute*". In the Hebrew text, both the word for grain offering and the word for rock are expressed in definite terms (with the definite article). This is unusual on the surface since neither has been mentioned before in this chapter. The implication then is that the grain offering, and the rock were normal established aspects of the worship that Manoah and his wife offered in this place. The differences on this occasion were the addition of a kid goat, and the connection with the visit of the messenger. Grain offerings were used in situations where respect or honor were intended. The same term is used the same way in Ugaritic and Akkadian languages (in the areas of Canaan and Mesopotamia). The ingredients of this offering were grain, oil and incense. The grain was composed of the grits or semolina left in the sieve after wheat was ground into flour. The oil was olive oil, used as shortening in cooking and easily combustible. The incense was frankincense, which was made from the gum resin of a type of tree found only in southern Arabia and Somaliland. The grain offerings used a small amount that was entirely burnt in a slow smolder (Lev.2). Rocks were at times used as altars at this time (I Sam.14:32-34), usually with the intention of allowing the blood to drain from a slaughtered animal (in cases where animal sacrifices were made). But then something suddenly happened that shattered all normalcy.

There is debate regarding what we are to understand as the "*wondrous thing*" that the messenger did. Linguistically it is unclear whether it refers to the provision of the child, the deliverance the child would provide, or the way the

offering was consumed. It seems that the details in the text itself imply that the “*wondrous thing*” was how the messenger ascended in the flame of the offering.

In verses twenty through twenty-three we read, “*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. 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. And Manoah said to his wife, ‘We shall surely die, because we have seen God!’ 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.’*” This miraculous event was an authenticating sign in support of the unusual message the Angel of Yahweh had given to the couple. It is interesting and somewhat ironic to note that it was the disappearance rather than the appearance of the Angel of Yahweh that enabled Manoah to understand the nature of the visitation.

The concept of deity having an awesome, unapproachable appearance was not limited to Israelite theology, for in Mesopotamia the gods displayed their power, and these displays struck terror in the heart of worshippers. Such parallels are not surprising as the demonic world frequently seeks to produce similar phenomenon to increase deception among human beings. But the more relevant comparison here is to other divine visitations. Elsewhere we read that others who experienced an encounter with God were left in the same condition as Manoah and his wife.

Since what occurred was obviously not something that a normal human being could accomplish, the couple was overwhelmed, and they prostrated themselves in awe. This manifestation finally convinced Manoah that the person he had been speaking with was not merely a wandering holy man, but the Angel of Yahweh (just as his wife had observed earlier). It is possible that the Hebrew term “*Elohim*” here should be translated as “*a divine being*” not to imply polytheism to Manoah, but since the noun is without the definite article, it could have a more general meaning here, and this might have been appropriate coming from Manoah on this particular occasion.

We read that Manoah was terrified. He feared that since they had seen a deity that they might die as a result (a popular belief at the time). Manoah’s fear of death, and his wife’s reassurance demonstrates that he was still lagging behind her in his understanding of spiritual things. Manoah’s panic is contrasted with his wife’s calm logic. She gave three reasons why his fear was groundless.

- First, because God had accepted the burnt offering
- Second, the visual demonstrations that God gave them was to assure them of the truth of the declaration about the birth
- Third, the verbal instruction about the child they were about to have and how they were to raise him demonstrated that they would not die, because the task God was calling them to do was still ahead of them.

Once again, Manoah’s wife is presented as mature, trusting, and reasonable. While Manoah himself is depicted as rather foolish, controlling, and fearful.

VI. The Fulfillment of the Prophecy: (vs.24-25)

In verse twenty-four we read, “*So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.*” The root word for Samson’s name is a form of the noun that in Hebrew means “*sun*”. There are a number of theories regarding how we are to understand the meaning of the name, “Samson”. One suggestion is that it should be understood to mean “*brightness*” as if the name reflected the parent’s joy at his birth. Another suggestion that is very unlikely is that the mother may have meant to convey through this name that Samson’s birth signaled a new dawn for the freedom of the Israelite people. However, there is no linguistic evidence to support such conclusions. Instead, the word would in some way associate Samson with the sun itself. It is noteworthy that just a couple of miles south of Samson’s home was the town of Beth Shemesh, which literally translated is “*house or temple of the sun*”. The name of this town and the name of Samson seem to be morphologically linked. The Philistines worshipped a sun god, and this religious aberration was known to have been present in Israel (II Kings 23:11), and some archeologists have suggested that Yahweh was at times depicted as the sun in relief (on the incense stand from Taanach). The naming of Samson then could reflect the polytheistic orientation of Israel at this time, including in particular Samson’s parents. Another suggestion is that the name “*Samson*” could be a shortened form of his original name, and that the original form may have included the name of Yahweh or El (the Hebrew word for God), yielding a meaning something like “*Yahweh is my sun*”. Those who insist that the name must link the family to pagan mythology fail to grasp that solar imagery featured prominently in almost all religious views of deity, for self-evident reasons.

The verse concludes with the notation that Yahweh blessed the child. The reference is to the role and great physical strength that were bestowed upon him. But as the ongoing account will reveal, this blessing apparently did not include that he was endowed with wisdom, a mature character, leadership skills, or significant spirituality.

In verse twenty-five we read, “*And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.*” The title “*Mahaneh Dan*” means “*camp of Dan*” and therefore most likely does not represent an established settlement. Zorah and Eshtaol were only about a mile apart, but there was a spring by the Wadi Kesalon running between the two towns that may be the area referred to here. Samson was later buried between these two towns (16:31).

More than any other judge, Samson was moved by the Spirit of God. In this verse, an unusual verb describes the Spirit’s activity. The rare Hebrew verb translated as “*move*” means to trouble, to disturb to stir, agitate or inspire. Elsewhere this verb is used of men whose spirits were disturbed by dreams (such as Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar-Gen.41:8; Dan.2:1-3). But the moving of the Spirit in the life of Samson must be understood in the context of the following chapter. There it will reveal that Samson and the Israelites would have been content to live intermingled with the Philistines indefinitely, but God would be at work in the life of Samson to provoke him into conflict with the Philistines and thereby begin the

process of deliverance (more in spite of Samson, then because of his desire to fulfill his calling). This verse acts as a bridge between the narrative about Samson's birth, and the beginning of his activities as Israel's deliverer that is recorded in chapter fourteen and following.

Conclusion:

The real wonder in the chapter is the complete reversal of the seemingly irreversible situation with which the chapter had opened. The previously barren woman gave birth, just as Yahweh's messenger said she would. God had brought life out of the deadness of her womb, and this demonstrated that the issues of life and death were in His hands and therefore no situation was hopeless, not even the situation in which Israel found itself.

Considering the spiritual apathy of the Israelites, their propensities to sin, and their apparent immunity to rebuke, it is not surprising that the Spirit now would have to resort to more potent measures to achieve His desired goals.

As the story unfolds the reader will recognize that Samson can be seen as a representative of the nation of Israel as a whole. Both Samson and Israel were chosen and raised up by Yahweh to fulfill His purpose, but both became self-involved, apathetic, inclined to sin, and negligent in their cultivation of their relationship with God. And Samson's propensity for chasing after foreign women paralleled Israel's whoring after false gods.

The question is, would the arrival of this amazingly gifted individual change any of this?