



## From Jephthah to Samson Judges 12:1-13:5

### Introduction

After Jephthah's hard won victory over the Ammonites and the devastation of carrying out of his vow to God, the Ephraimites confronted the heartbroken leader with a complaint and a threat.

### Outline of Judges 12:1-13:5

- I. Jephthah's Last Years - Judges 12:1-7
- II. Judges Following Jephthah - Judges 12:8-15
- III. Judge Samson - Judges 13:1-5

### I. Jephthah's Last Years - Judges 12:1-7

#### A. Ephraim's Complaint - Judges 12:1-3

The petulant Ephraimites confronted Jephthah with a hostile question and an ultimatum, *Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!*

Jephthah's answer was brusque, *My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me...When I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands...and God delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come...to fight against me?*

#### B. Ephraim's History of Complaints

Ephraim was a chronic complainer. As E.L. Ellison says, "There seems to have been something pathological about the pride of Ephraim. They did not rise against Moab until Ehud had borne the brunt of the day (3:27); they did not stir against the Midianites until Gideon had broken their power (7:24); they ignored the needs of Trans-Jordan for 18 years until Jephthah had won a decisive victory. Though they were the strongest tribe, only the minor judge Abdon (12:15) came from Ephraim. Now they turned on Jephthah, but received a decisive defeat" (Daily Devotional Bible Commentary, Volume 1).

What accounted for this superiority complex of Ephraim? Perhaps it was because Joshua, leader of the conquest and their greatest leader since Moses, was an Ephraimite. Yet, like many complainers, they were weak on performance and long on talk. Complainers compound the problem but are rarely part of the solution. Are you quick to find fault? If this is you, the Lord Jesus stands ready to hear your complaint

in prayer, to comfort you, and to use you to help find the solution.

#### C. Jephthah's Battle with Ephraim - Judges 12:4-6

To compound their complaint and threat against Jephthah, the Ephraimites insulted all the Gileadites by calling them renegade Ephraimites hiding out in Mannaseh across the Jordan River. Jephthah reassembled the Gileadite army and fought a tribal battle with Ephraim.

A tragic civil war began. The Ephraimites crossed the Jordan to fight their neighboring tribe. They were soon defeated and scurrying back only to find the Jordan River crossing guarded by Gileadites. Unable to tell friend from foe, since they were all Israelites, the Gileadites devised a test. Any who attempted to cross the Jordan had to identify themselves by saying "Shibboleth". Those from Ephraim could not pronounce it correctly but said "Sibboleth" instead. For 42,000 Ephraimites, it was their last word. They were killed on the spot. Their speech betrayed them, as Peter's speech betrayed him at the home of Caiaphas, warming himself by the fire while His Lord was under arrest. Your speech, also, can give you away as siding with the enemy. What does your speech say about you?

Jephthah and the Gileadites won the battle. Ephraim was silenced until after Solomon's time.

#### D. Jephthah's End - Judges 12:7

Jephthah ruled Israel six years, died, and was buried in a Gileadite city. He was truly a mighty man of valor who knew God.

### II. Judges Following Jephthah - Judges 12:8-15

After Jephthah, three undistinguished judges judged Israel.

#### A. Ibzan of Bethlehem - Judges 12:8-10

All that is known of Ibzan is that he had 30 sons and 30 daughters. He exported his daughters, probably marrying them into neighboring tribes to increase his influence. He also "imported" daughters to marry his sons, extending his influence further. He judged Israel seven years, died, and was buried at Bethlehem. (This was not THE Bethlehem, but probably a city ten miles north of Megiddo.)

## B. Elon the Zebulonite - Judges 12:11-12

Elon of Zebulon judged Israel 10 years, died, and was buried in Aijalon in Zebulon. One cannot leave much less history than that.

## C. Abdon the Ephraimite - Judges 12:13-15

Abdon, the son of Hillel, was a Pirathonite. He judged Israel eight years. The facts that he had 40 sons and 30 grandsons who rode 70 donkeys, probably indicate polygamy and wealth. He was the only judge to come from the tribe of Ephraim. He died and was buried in Pirathon, Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites. This was possibly Mt. Gilboa where Saul, Israel's first king, was slain fighting the Amalekites. These three judges covered a period of twenty-five years during which they kept the peace in Israel.

## D. The Judges

Before moving on to Samson, the final judge in Judges, a review might be in order. Israel's last judge was Samuel.

<b>Deliverer/ Judge</b>	<b>Oppressed by</b>	<b>Years oppressed</b>	<b>Israel rested</b>
Othniel	Mesopotamia	8	40 years
Ehud	Moab	18	80 years
Shamgar	Philistines		
Deborah	Canaanite king	20	40 years
Gideon	Midian	7	40 years
Tola		23	
Jair		22	
Jephthah	Ammonites	18	
Ibzan		7	
Elon		10	
Abdon		8	
Samson	Philistines	40	20 years

## III. Judge Samson - Judges 13:1-5

## A. Seventh Cycle - Judges 13:1

The Israelites did evil again in God's sight so He *delivered them into the hands of the Philistines* who oppressed them for 40 years. The Philistines came from the area which is the present day Gaza strip. The Palestinians who live there press their claims to this very day.

The oppression under the Philistines was the longest which Israel suffered. Do you ever feel oppressed? Like the Israelites, are you oppressed by evil? Are there things in your life which God calls evil, such as pornography, child abuse, an affair, dishonesty? Will you put it out of your life now?

Perhaps you are an angry person, harboring resentments

and nurturing memories of past hurts or insults? Do you love gossip and being "in the know"? Have you dabbled in the occult, a cult, New Age meditation, astrology, or drugs. Have you failed to confess your sin or believe in God's forgiveness? Christians have an enemy, Satan, who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). These are traps he uses to oppress and depress people. But the Scriptures say, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

You may think you have the right to feel and act the way you do. Or you may think that others do the same things and get by with them, so why shouldn't you? It may be too soon to tell whether they are truly getting by with it or not. Are you getting by with it? Or would you like to experience the joy of the Lord and the peace of God which passes all understanding (Nehemiah 8:10; Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:7)?

We have a Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has defeated the devil, delivered us from his oppression, and from the depression of our sin and guilt. Will you turn to Him now for deliverance? *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28). Why delay?

## B. Preparation for Samson - Judges 13:2-5

## 1. Samson's Parents - 13:2

Mr. and Mrs. Manoah were from Zorah of Dan. They were a barren couple, childless after many years of hoping and praying. Childlessness was a tragedy in Israel because the importance of the nation, the family, and the land were all tied up with the blessings and promises of God. (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6). A childless couple (especially the wife) bore the stigma of being deprived of one of God's greatest blessings.

## 2. His Announcement by the Angel - 13:3

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife with the wonderful news, *you shall conceive and bear a son*. This stunning announcement reminds us of other similar supernatural announcements in scripture.

Sarah, the wife of Abraham, despondent over her barrenness, suggested to Abraham that he help God keep His promise by impregnating their servant girl, Hagar, which he did (Genesis 16:2). God then revealed to Sarah that she would bear a son, though she was past child bearing age. Abraham and Sarah's son was named Isaac, meaning laughter.

Elisabeth and Zacharias had given up the hope of having a child. When an angel appeared and spoke to the old

priest, he had a hard time believing that his prayers had been heard (Luke 1:11-18). John the Baptist was born and cheered their old age.

Mary, a young virgin engaged to Joseph of Nazareth, was understandably puzzled by the angel's announcement that she would have a son. Through her faith and surrender to God's will, she bore the Savior of the world.

NOTE: For more information on the Angel of the Lord, see Lesson 6, The Call of Gideon.

### 3. His Destiny as a Nazarite – 13:4-5

#### a. Pre-natal preparation

The Angel of the Lord instructed Mrs. Manoah to drink no wine or strong drink and eat no unclean thing, for her son was to be a Nazirite (or Nazarite) to God from the womb. We are still learning about what the Angel revealed, such as the importance and relationship of the mother's diet to the unborn infant.

Others who were known "from their mother's womb" include the writer of Psalm 139, the prophet Jeremiah, the apostle Paul, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ and each one of us (Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15; Matthew 1:20-21; Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 1:4-5).

By caring for him from the moment of conception, Samson's mother was to have an active part in his being a Nazirite. Parental responsibility for the physical, emotional, and even spiritual health of the new little being begins well before birth. Many Christian parents dedicate their unborn child to the Lord and begin to pray for him or her. The child they hold at birth is no stranger to them. We now know that babes in the womb are influenced by rhythms and stimuli of various kinds. They hear sounds, suck their thumbs, can feel pain and react to it, and are born with definite personality structure!

#### b. Nazirites

When a person took the Nazirite vow, he or she was set aside for dedication to God for a period of time or for life. (With their husband's permission, women of Israel were permitted to take a Nazirite vow.) Merrill Unger says, "The origin of the custom is involved in obscurity. The prescriptions of Numbers 6 presuppose it to have been an institution already in existence..." (Unger's Bible Dictionary).

Samuel and John the Baptist were lifelong Nazirites. Paul took what appears to have been the Nazirite vow for a brief time (Acts 21:23-26). The Nazirite vow involved abstaining from wine or strong drink, cutting one's hair, and touching a dead person. These were the outer signs of separation which depicted a total inner commitment to God.

#### c. Life purpose

Samson's life purpose, in the form of a job description, was determined by God before his birth. *He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.* We will see that God provided everything necessary for Samson to fulfill his destiny. The first thing God provided were loving, godly parents who were willing to sacrifice their comfort for the privilege of raising a child.

### Applications

1. What are you willing to give up to help a child fulfill his or her destiny? Who might God be calling you to teach, train, assist, and hold up in prayer?
2. Are you, like Jephthah, a mighty man or woman of valor in God's sight, though misunderstood by others, because you are true to Him? How will you take a stand for God today, even if that stand is unpopular with some?



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## QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

### **DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.**

1. What did you learn from Jephthah's episode with the Ephraimites?
2. ★(Memory Question)? Who was the Angel who appeared to Manoah's wife?  
See Judges 6:11-12 for help.

### **DAY TWO: Read Judges 13:6-23.**

3.
  - a. What did Manoah's wife tell her husband about her visitor?
  - b. What did she tell Manoah about the news the visitor brought?
  - c. What did she tell Manoah about the instructions the visitor had given her?
4.
  - a. What was Manoah's first response? Give verse.
  - b. ? (Thought Question) Why do you think Manoah did this?
  - c. How did God answer Manoah's prayer?
  - d. Did Manoah learn anything new from the Angel? If so, what?
5.
  - a. Did Manoah think the Angel was a man or a heavenly being? Give a reason for your answer.
  - b. What two things made Manoah realize that it was the Angel of the Lord? Give verses.
  - c. What was Manoah's reaction?
6. What wise advice did Manoah's wife use to comfort and encourage her husband?  
Underline the correct answer(s) below.
  - a. If the Lord had wanted to kill us, He would not have accepted our offering.
  - b. God does not want to kill us. He has blessed us. Let's go tell our friends all about it.
  - c. Manoah, you worry too much! Chill out!
  - d. God would not have revealed all these things at this time if He planned to kill us.

### **DAY THREE: Read Judges 13:24-14:4.**

7. From Judges 13:24-25, give two ways God showed grace to Samson?

8. Answer the following questions using Judges 14:1-3.
  - a. Where did Samson go?
  - b. What did he see?
  - c. What did he want?
  - d. From your answers above, how might 1 John 2:15-16 apply to Samson?
9.
  - a. From Leviticus 20:26, and Deuteronomy 7:1-4, what was wrong with Samson's choices?
  - b. How could his parents have helped him make wiser choices?
  - c. What was God's plan in all this? Give verse.

**DAY FOUR: Read Judges 14:5-18.**

10. Using verses 5-7, pretend you are a reporter and write a brief newspaper article on Samson's trip to Timnah.
11. From verses 8 and 9, what else did Samson not tell his parents?
12.
  - a. How did Samson break the Nazarite vow?
  - b. How did Samson use this incident at his wedding feast?
  - c. How did the Philistines figure out the answer?
13. What is your opinion of Samson's wife? Give reasons for your answer.

**DAY FIVE: Read Judges 14:19-20.**

14.
  - a. How did Samson pay for his lost bet?
  - b. How was he able to do this?
  - c. What else did Samson lose?
15. How would you describe Samson to a friend?
16. 🎓 (Senior Question) What advantages did Samson have that should have helped him be a more godly man?