

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NAZARITE

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I can only imagine what it would be like to have someone document my shortcomings (I suppose the Lord is but He is kind enough not to put them in print) but that is exactly what we have here. The Jews have once again done evil in the sight of the Lord and presumably Samuel is tasked with the documentation. We begin chapter 13 and the beginning of the most famous of the judges on a negative note as the sons of Israel once again did evil in the sight of the Lord and were handed over to the Philistines. It is said that for 40 long years they were held captive by the Philistines (who are now the Palestinians) before a deliverer was brought forward. Mind you, this is God's chosen people at the time, not the United States of America (we are not God's chosen people, just a fallen nation), so one can't help but be curious as to why it would take them 40 years to repent and seek help from the Lord. I suppose that sometimes we can be stubborn and selfish, and I suppose it may be easier being under the rule of the Philistines without the struggle or stresses of governing yourself. What I do know is that the Lord is gracious, and He is always there to welcome us back which is what we shall see here beginning with the birth of Samson. As we venture into his birth and succession as a judge it is important to note that it is not merely his strength that makes him compelling, it is his humanity. He will love the Lord, but he will also make mistakes, fall short, and be incredibly human.

While under the affliction of the Philistines, "the" angel of God appears to the wife of Manoah, who is barren, and gives her a proclamation concerning a child as well as instruction on the raising of the child. Two things are intriguing to me in this first part and number one is that the name of the husband is mentioned but the wife is merely "the wife of". We never get her name although she is clearly the one that the burden of raising the child will fall upon and the privileged one that is visited by the angel. Number two is the definitive article "the" being used when referring to the angel that visits her. That seems to separate the angel in a way that would not be the case if the word "an" was used. Who is the angel of God? In the case of Abraham, I believe that the three men represent the trinity, with respect to Moses it was God Himself. This is one of three proclamations of a child being born with an angel as the messenger. In 2 Kings Elisha is the messenger so that one does not count. However, once we venture into the New Testament, we are quickly met with angels of the Lord appearing to announce the birth of John the Baptist and of Christ and that angel is called Gabriel (God is my strength in the Hebrew). So, am I permitted to surmise that the angel who visits the wife of Manoah is Gabriel? It is interesting to me, but the Lord did not seem to think it was relevant considering the scripture is silent, therefore I will suspect that it is Gabriel but not make that a definitive declaration. At the end of the day, it is "the" angel of God.

As the angel visits the wife of Manoah, it instructs her to raise the child as a Nazarite which would be one who is consecrated to do the service of God while abstaining from alcohol, cutting the hair and many forms of defilement as outlined in Number 6:1-21. After the

departure of the angel, she runs immediately to inform her husband of what has just transpired at which point he entreaties the Lord that he may come again to give instructions on raising the child. This had to have been a powerful prayer and the Lord heard his prayers thereby sending the angel of the Lord once again. However, as was the case before, the angel visits the wife in the field so that she runs to Manoah to inform him that the angel has arrived. Manoah leaves his spot in the field and immediately rushes over to visit with his wife's visitor. Upon arrival, Manoah questions the angel about the upbringing of the child to be and the angel is gracious enough to reiterate the instructions that he had given the woman. Two things; one, the angel went to visit the wife of Manoah once again, on her own. He did not visit Manoah while he was in the field, did not visit the two of them while they were at the dinner table, it was strictly a message of importance for the woman. Two, when he arrives to greet the angel, he quizzes him on the methods of raising the child although he already laid out the upbringing to the woman in detail. However, the angel is gracious and lays out the Nazarite methods once again and sits patiently while Manoah gushes over him asking to feed him and offer a sacrifice on his behalf. Advising Manoah that he will not eat but that a sacrifice to the Lord may be in order, Manoah makes the sacrifice of a goat and grain to the Lord while he and his wife watch the angel rise up in the flames. This would certainly be enough to fluster any sane minded individual, including me and Manoah begins to panic. At this time it was not a good thing to lay your eyes on the Lord and Manoah knew it. God is holy, too holy for our eyes and it was the sort of thing that would lead to death. Thank goodness for a level-headed woman.

The woman is there to stay rational and keep the man level-headed. With Christ as the head of the church, the man as the head of the family, it is the woman who is the glue that keeps it all together often times. This is the case when Manoah begins to panic while under the assumption that God will take their lives for daring to lay their eyes on him. She reminds Manoah that if God had wanted them dead He would have taken them already. He would not have accepted their burn and grain offerings nor would He have shown them signs. If He was going to take their lives He would not have made the promise of a Nazarite son. Nine months later that is precisely what happened and a young man named Samson grew up to be blessed by the Lord in Mahaneh-dan.

What we have here is merely an introduction to one of the most intriguing historical figures outlined in the scripture. This lays the foundation for his birth and the family that will raise him to honor the Lord. In a time where the foundation of the family is under attack, men and women are not seen as essential partners, and children are expendable, we see a woman that is recognized by the Lord as good enough to raise a child that He has chosen. We see a hardworking man that tends to the fields to provide for his family and offers sacrifices to honor the Lord and be a positive example for his family. We see a man and a woman who share a common interest to obey the Lord and will be the fruitful and obedient God fearing Israelites that Samson needs in his life as he is surrounded by the pesky Philistines.

