

## MAY 1

Although they are not linked in our reading, both Samson and Samuel lived during the same time and both are listed as judges in Israel. I mention this because both of these judges share some common elements and two very strong similarities. They both have unusual birth stories that God takes a lot of time to describe. I wonder why. Also, both were Nazirites from birth. There is an obvious comparison being made, yet it isn't obvious unless you are reading year after year.

I'm including these again at the end of this document, in case you need them.

“Chart of the Judges” - The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 375.

“Canaan in the Days of the Judges” - The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 377.

“The Judges and the Oppressors” - The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 385.

### Judges 13-14

#### Judges 13

V. 1 This entire chapter is the birth story of Samson. That really interests and surprises me. I've never noticed this before. There are some unknowns here. It seems that the Philistines oppressed Israel for 40 years before Samson came on the scene. No other enemy ruled over Israel that long. It seems then that the births of Samson and Samuel, both of whom fought to break the Philistine domination, must have occurred during this time of domination. If you look at the other judges, their victories ended the enemy's rule; but with Samson, his main victory was at his death. And even then, Samuel was still fighting against the Philistines.

Vs. 2-7 Notice who the angel is who makes this announcement to Samson's mother.

Vs. 4-5 Notice that the mother is told to *drink no wine or strong drink* and to *eat nothing unclean*. The only Nazirite condition given to the child is that his hair wouldn't be cut. Samson will violate every Nazirite condition except the cutting of his hair until, well, you know the story. What is interesting is that the only other person in the Bible whose Nazirite birth is spelled out this clearly is John the Baptist.

Vs. 8-14 This is the confirmation of Samson's coming birth. The Word of God was rare in those days. What is interesting is the faith of both of Samson's parents. Apparently the parents obeyed everything *the angel of the Lord* said to them.

Vs. 15-20 This seems just like what Abraham did when the angel of the Lord visited him. Here, the Lord was only interested in sacrifice and devotion, which only the Lord can receive. It is interesting that the Lord allowed the offering to be made in Zorah instead of Shiloh where the tabernacle was. When we see the situation at Shiloh when we get to 1 Samuel it will make sense. Eli's sons were desecrating every sacrifice and were turning the tabernacle into their private brothel.

Vs. 21-23 The result of Samson's parents having had this kind of interaction with the Lord was that it strengthened their faith. Verse 23 probably sums up what the Lord wanted to accomplish.

Vs. 24-25 The Lord blessed Samson. That's amazing. It is hard to understand what this stirring of the Spirit was, since among other things, Samson was not a moral man or a devoted follower of God. It looks like the Lord used Samson in spite of himself. This is not a good role model for kids, even if he had "superhero" strength.

I think the lesson I would see here, for me or us, is that God's blessing and privilege do not determine obedience or gratefulness. These parents were blessed and they obeyed, but Samson will not obey. He is listed in Hebrews 11 for his faith, and God used him, but his faith was mingled with deep rebellion, selfishness and debauchery. Oddly enough, these are the same

things Paul warns Christians against in his letters. I think the lesson for us following Christ in the harvest, during this very dangerous time on earth, is to be very careful about our devotion to the Lord and to be alert to what physical and emotional things are tugging at us. We need to understand the tug and take care of it the right, God-honoring way. Like Paul says in Ephesians 5:15, *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

It is instructive to see how both great faith and great disobedience can exist in the same heart. It is scary to see how this caused Samson's own downfall and limited the impact he had in serving God and the nation. David's life will be an even bigger and more profound lesson in this area. And we have popular people and preachers in the church who have fallen. Again, quoting Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:12, *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

#### Judges 14

Vs. 1-4 Samson's parents seem godly and were right in what they said to their son. Samson was disobedient to them and unconcerned for what would honor God. God didn't sanction this behavior; but in a case like this, God accomplished His own purposes, using a rebellious, immoral, disobedient servant.

Vs. 5-9 Samson's parents exercised their parental duty in overseeing the legal arrangements for the marriage. Maybe they saw Samson go off into the vineyard, thinking he was going there to pray and come to his right mind. That didn't happen, but a strange intersection of divine providence took place. Both in killing the lion and in getting the honey, Samson defiled himself by touching something dead. There is more here than meets the eye. It isn't just that Samson had super strength, God must have given him tough skin and amazing quickness and reflexes not to have been cut or stung.

Vs. 10-18 I'm always amazed by the creativity of Samson. In a way, he was an artist. He was emotional, creative and fun-loving. Also, I'm struck by his raw confidence. He experienced all sorts of very aggressive, hostile situations and remained without apparent fear. It appears he enjoyed the psychological warfare.

Just for some perspective here, The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 405, mentions that the word for feast is "drinking party." Samson was violating the Nazirite vow here too.

V. 17 This is our "hero's" fatal flaw. This is the same thing that will finally break him with Delilah. It isn't just that he gave in to whining women, but that he didn't choose faithful women who loved the Lord.

V. 18 This is really hard to wrap one's head around. This situation represented a defeat and humiliation for Samson. It appears that God designed this entire event to get Samson riled up and to move him to action. It seems to me that if Samson had had a heart for his people and a desire to honor God, he could have found some Philistine injustice to have motivated him to righteous wrath. It seems to me that Samson was indifferent to the plight of Israel or the promise to Abraham. And he definitely liked Philistine women. That God had to do this to get Samson motivated does not speak highly for our superhero.

I think it's interesting that even as Samson expresses his hurt and anger, he makes a very picturesque rhyme.

Vs. 19-20 It is interesting to see that when the Spirit rushes upon Samson, there is a spirit of judgment and anger. Samson isn't the only one this happened to. We've also seen this with Othniel and Gideon and will see it again with King Saul.

This uncontrolled and undefeatable strength is what will keep the Philistines so terrorized, that they will not extend their rule over Israel for the 20 years that Samson is a judge. Samson becomes the unstoppable “terminator” to the Philistines.

None of the judges in the book of Judges took an interest in directing the people to the Lord and encouraging the nation to be unified around their worship. Samuel will begin to do that, yet Samuel's judgeship will be one of conflict with the Philistines too. Here, a guy like Samson with all this potential is used, though very sadly, in spite of his selfishness and arrogance. Here and elsewhere, God will use his appetites and pride to put him in places to strike fear into the enemy. As followers of Christ, this story teaches us that God can use us in spite of our disobedience. As disciples in the harvest, that is the last thing we want. We want to be trained in every way to follow Christ, carrying our crosses as obedient servants in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples into the next generations. I wouldn't mind the strength and creativity, but I'll settle for obedience and humility, seeing fruit that gives glory to the Father and pleasure to our Lord.

### **John 1:29-51**

Vs. 29-34 This testimony is the fulfillment of John the Baptist's ministry. Notice that this was the day after his interrogation by the guys sent from Jerusalem. They probably had left for Jerusalem to report.

John the Baptist has two things to say. Verses 29-31 declare that Jesus is *the Lamb of God*. Verses 32-34 declare that Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Spirit and life. Jesus was baptized with the Spirit and baptizes with the Spirit.

Vs. 35-42 This is how it all began. What is amazing to me is that many of John's disciples did not follow Jesus. Even here listening to John, it took faith and obedience to leave John and follow Jesus. These two disciples of John the Baptist understood that John was sending them to Jesus. These two guys never stopped following Jesus.

Since John, the writer of this Gospel, never refers to himself directly, I suspect that John was the other disciple.

V. 38 According to the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 275, the word for “stay” is used a lot by the writer and is translated elsewhere in John as “abide.” So there is a double meaning here.

We don't hear much from Andrew, yet it was his faith in following that brought Peter to Jesus. The [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 275, makes the observation that in the three times we see Andrew in the Gospel of John, he is always bringing someone to Jesus. As you read, look for these.

V. 42 I wonder, at this point, if Jesus had some supernatural insight into Peter's future when He said, *So you are Simon, the son of John*. I've heard people wax eloquent regarding Jesus “taking authority” over Simon by “naming” him. That may be, but I worked with a guy in Germany, Dieter Michel, who always gave nicknames to younger workers he was training and they loved him and followed. It was fun and built a team. We'll see that Jesus had nicknames for some of the other guys too.

We see in v. 28 that this happened *in Bethany across the Jordan* (near Jericho). So this means that Andrew, Peter and John, who lived near Capernaum on the top of the Sea of Galilee, had traveled a long way (aprox. 90-100 miles) and had left their business to hear and follow John the Baptist. In that sense, they had a very deep spiritual interest to begin with. Jesus was looking for people with this kind of faith to build upon. That is good for us to remember as we are asking the Lord to show us who is ready to be brought into a disciple-making group. Jesus didn't select just anybody.

Vs. 43-51 Within two days of John's testimony, Jesus had three disciples. Now Jesus left this area and went straight up the Jordan River to the north side of the Sea of Galilee and gained two more disciples. We can assume that these guys were ready because of the ministry of John the Baptist. They were all extremely spiritually minded. These guys were more than warm bodies.

Notice that Jesus must have known Phillip and that Phillip probably knew Simon and Andrew. These were not huge cities. Phillip was another man of faith, waiting for the Messiah and he sought out a similar man, a friend named Nathanael. Nathanael is referred to as Bartholomew in other Gospels.

Vs. 47-48 There has to be more to this statement by Jesus than meets the eye. It might have involved a nickname or even something deep in Nathanael's heart that only Nathanael knew he was seeking. Nate's reply, *How do you know me*, would seem sort of insincere unless, in fact, Jesus hit on something that was important to Nathanael.

V. 49 This is interesting. You wonder what the average Jew (assuming Nathaniel was average) thought about the Messiah. Here it is. The Messiah was both the divine *Son of God* and the human *King of Israel*. Understanding that this was how Israel viewed the Christ, you wonder at the unbelief of the religious leaders. Jesus told them He was the Son of God and the Son of Man and they simply refused to believe. For the Messiah to claim these titles would not have been blasphemy. Everyone expected the Messiah to say He was the Son of God.

Vs. 50-51 might allude to what Nathanael was reading or thinking about *under the fig tree*. The image is Jacob resting at Bethel and seeing angels *ascending and descending* from heaven. It might illustrate Nathanael's own seeking to be close to God and His desire to interact with God. If that's the case, Jesus is telling Nathanael that he's about to get his desire and then some.

Not that we fully make use of our privilege, but having the Spirit living in us gives us exactly what Jacob saw and Nathanael desired, full and open communication with God.

It is interesting here that the apostle John is giving us a view of how Jesus first began to build His group of disciples. I think I've already learned a couple things.

### **Psalm 102**

With this psalm, I find I'm back to psalms I can deeply identify with, calling out to God for His answer and help. It is a long psalm with different parts which you'll notice if you use a pencil to mark where the thought changes.

Vs. 1-2 This is the initial, urgent cry for help.

Vs. 3-7 This seems to be the emotional state of the writer. He is suffering both physically and emotionally.

Vs. 8-11 This is the reason he feels like this. His enemies have been able to taunt and harm him and God has let it happen. This is like what happened to David when he had to run from Absalom as God was punishing David for his acts against Bathsheba and Uriah.

Vs. 12-17 It seems that the writer is appealing to God's love for Jerusalem, His promises to Israel and His plan to use this city to draw the nations of the world to Himself.

Vs. 18-22 Zion will be the place from which the Lord shows mercy to the needy, and it will be the place where the needy (including the writer) will praise God as the nations gather there to worship.

Vs. 23-24 This is another appeal of the writer for God to restore him.

Vs. 25-28 God made the earth and He made promises of faithfulness to His servants. The earth will end, but God's promises will be fulfilled. Therefore, our hope is secure because we set our hope on God who remains, and remains faithful.

**Proverbs 14:15-16**

We talk about simple faith and the faith of the simple. Apparently simple faith is prudent and careful, full of growing discernment regarding God's will. The faith of the fool (simple) seems based on feeling and is reckless and careless. This doesn't answer all the questions, but it does provide some guidelines for the wise.