

Judges 13:1-25

The Birth of Samson Foretold

See <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/samson>

<https://ladderofjacob.com/2018/05/28/samson/>

The story of the Judges now enters its darkest phase. Usually the text says, "And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD." But there is no cry recorded. There is only spiritual indifference.

Samson seems on the surface to have no redeeming qualities other than his miraculous strength. His character is flawed, he thinks only of his own needs. Moral virtue is missing.

So why is this story in the Bible?

One reason is that Samson - like the other judges - is a "deliverer" of Israel, and therefore a type of Christ. In Samson's case there are also other close parallels to Jesus' life and death.

Recall that Jesus said the scriptures "speak only of me."

- **John 5:39** - "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

"Woe to the sinners who consider the Torah as mere worldly tales, who only see its outer garment; happy are the righteous who fix their gaze on the Torah proper. Wine cannot be kept save in a jar; so the Torah needs an outer garment. These are the stories and narratives, but it behooves us to penetrate beneath them."

- Zohar III:152a, Soncino Press Edition

The Tribe of Dan

Samson was from the tribe of Dan. The blessing of Jacob on Dan refers to Samson, according to the rabbis:

- **Genesis 49:16-18** - "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

"Concerning Samson he uttered this prophecy. We can also explain the phrase שְׂבָטֵי דַן כְּאַחַד מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "as one of the tribes" [as follows]: like the special one of the tribes, namely David, who came from Judah. — [From Targum Onkelos, Sotah 10a, Gen. Rabbah 99:11]"

"Dan" = judge. But Rashi interprets it as "to avenge": Concerning Samson he uttered

this prophecy. He will avenge his people from the Philistines, like “When the Lord avenges (יָדִי) His people” (Deut. 32:36). - [From Targum Onkelos]

“a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels”

Rashi - This is a snake, and I say it is given this appellation because it bites, “and you will bite (תִּשׁוּפְנוּ) his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Rashi continues: We find something similar in [the story of] Samson: “And Samson grasped the two pillars of the center, etc.” (Judges 16:29), and those on the roof died. Targum Onkelos renders [נָחָשׁ] as כְּחַיֵּי חוֹרְמָן, the name of a species of snake whose bite has no antidote, and that is the אֲפֻעָנִי (adder). It is called חוֹרְמָן because it destroys (חָרַם) everything.

"Dan shall be a serpent by the way" refers to Samson, who by craft and policy managed the Philistines, as in the affair of the foxes, and especially in his last enterprise, when he got placed between the two pillars of the house, which answer, as some think, to the horse heels, as the multitude on the roof of the house to the riders. - *John Gill*

- **Genesis 49:18** - “I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.”

or "for your salvation (yeshua) do I hope."

This is an aside by Jacob, who prays for Dan in his future conflicts.

Rashi - He (Jacob) prophesied that the Philistines would gouge out his (Samson's) eyes, and he (Samson) would ultimately say, “O Lord God, remember me now and strengthen me now only this once, etc.” (Judges 16:28). - [From Num. Rabbah 14:9]

Samson's supernatural strength at first made Jacob think that he would be the Messiah (Gen. R. 98:14), but...

The Targum explains: “...said our father Jacob, not for the salvation of Gideon, the son of Joash, which is a temporal salvation, do I wait; nor for the salvation of Samson the son of Manoah, which is a transitory salvation; but for the salvation of Messiah the son of David, (which is an everlasting one,) who shall bring the children of Israel to himself, and his salvation my soul desireth.”

Samson would be a unique leader to arise from Dan - and is compared by the rabbis to David, a similarly unique leader arising from Judah. But the ultimate Deliverer would be Messiah son of David.

A Serpent

David's father, Yishai, had another name, Nachash (Targum Ruth 4:22). “*Nachash*” means “snake” in Hebrew, and this is the title that Jacob's prophecy attributes to

Samson.

- Nachash (snake) and Mashiach (Messiah) each share a numerical gematria value of 358 and are therefore equivalent in Jewish mysticism.

In **Numbers 21:4-9**, God commanded Moses to make a brass serpent and lift it up on a pole so that anyone bitten by the fiery serpents could look at the serpent on the pole/cross and live rather than die.

Brass represents judgment - Jesus would take the judgment on Himself.

- **John 3:14-15** - "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Messiah would be associated with his adversary, the serpent - the *Satan* (opposer) - on the cross, becoming a curse for us at the cost of His own life, and bringing redemption for the world.

[But Jacob's prophecy about Dan could also be taken in a negative sense. It may have respect to the offenses of this tribe toward the rest of the tribes, causing them to stumble by the idol of Micah (**Judges 18:1-31**), and more especially later by the golden calf set up in Dan by Jeroboam].

Samson's name is linked to the Hebrew word for the Sun (*shemesh*). The sun is associated with the Messiah:

- **Malachi 4:2** - "But to you who fear My Name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings."

- **Psalms 84:11-12** - "For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."

- **Psalms 72:17** - "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed."

The Jewish translation has, "Before the sun was, his name was flourishing"

Targum: "before the sun was, or was created, his name was prepared"

The name of the Messiah was one of the seven things created before the world was.

"The School of R. Jannai said: His (Messiah's) name is Yinnon, for it is written, 'Before the sun was, his name is *Yinnon*' or *ynyn* (**Ps. 72:17**). [From the root *nun* = "continuing, flourishing"]

- Lamentations Rabbah 1:51, Soncino Press Edition

Samson's Story Begins

Judges 13:1 - "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years."

The Philistines

The Philistines probably emigrated to the coastal plain from Crete, which the Bible calls Caphtor. They were called the "Sea Peoples" by the Egyptians in the 12th century B.C. Their arrival is described in **Deuteronomy 2:23** - "And the Avims which dwelt in Hazerim, even unto Azzah, the Caphtorims, which came forth out of Caphtor, destroyed them, and dwelt in their stead."

Although immigrants, they adopted many Canaanite customs and deities.

Their district on the coast was called in Hebrew *Pelesheth*, which eventually became "Palestine."

We first meet the Philistines in Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar. He reigned in the time of Abraham (**Genesis 20:1-18**). Abimelech is a dynastic name for several succeeding Philistine kings. He was probably part of a much earlier wave of settlement by Aegean immigrants related to the Philistines before the main invasion of the "Sea Peoples" arrived later.

The Philistines were envious of Abraham and later of Isaac. At that time they are overmatched by Abraham and Isaac's power and wealth.

First, because of Abraham's deception, Abimelech wanted to take Sarah into his harem, believing she was Abraham's sister. He was stricken with disease, but then spared because he was ignorant of the criminal character of his deed.

Once the misunderstanding was settled, he spoke to Sarah:

- **Genesis 20:16** - "And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved."

The rabbis interpret this as a curse: "May this one that will be thine have a covering on his eyes" (haggadic translation of Gen. 20:16) This resulted in Isaac's blindness in his old age (Meg. 15a). Interestingly, Samson was also blinded by the Philistines, but he then destroys the temple of Dagon.

The rabbis note that Abraham made a covenant of peace with the Philistines at Beersheba (**Genesis 21**), but it was only valid for three generations (Gen. R. 54:2), and

for this reason Samson was permitted to wage war with them.

But some said the covenant was to be for four or even seven generations: One tradition says God was not pleased with this arrangement:

(Gen. R. liv. 4; Midr. Sam. xii. 1; Yalk., § 103 on I Sam. vi. 1).

God said to Abraham: "Thou hast given seven lambs to Abimelech in concluding the league of friendship with him; by thy life, for seven generations shall I retard the joy of thy off-spring; from Abraham unto Moses. Thou hast given him seven lambs; by thy life, seven righteous of thy race shall the Philistines [descendants of Abimelech] slay: Hophni, Phinehas, Samson, Saul, and his three sons. Thou hast given him seven lambs; by thy life, seven sacred possessions of thy people will his children destroy: the tabernacle, the sacred objects in Gilgal, Nob, Gibeon, and Shiloh, and the two temples. Thou hast given him seven lambs; seven months shall the holy Ark of the covenant abide in the land of the Philistines."

Later, a similar misunderstanding happens between Isaac and Rebekah and Abimelech (presumably the son of the earlier Abimelech) in **Genesis 26:1-33**.

The rabbis said this later Abimelech - in the time of Isaac - was also misguided by envy. Among the inhabitants of Gerar the saying went, "I would rather possess the dung of Isaac's stables than the gold and silver of Abimelech." This exasperated Abimelech to such an extent that he sought to engage Isaac in a quarrel by declaring that the latter owed his wealth to the Philistines, to whom it rightfully belonged. In punishment for this, Abimelech, like Job, was visited by disease, and his house was robbed by thieves (Gen. R. lxiv. 7).

The Philistines envied Isaac and had filled in with dirt the wells Abraham had dug, in order to pollute, clog and render them useless for his descendants. But...

- **Genesis 26:18** - "Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died."

Spiritually, the Philistines represent (at the very least) "envy," that spawns a growing hatred, with the result that the springs and wells of spiritual life are clogged up and become useless. And Israel was warned not to go to the Promised Land by "the way of the land of the Philistines" because they would encounter war and turn back (**Exodus 13:17**). Believers must avoid that way too - the boasting of Goliath, the envy of Abimelech and the general hatred burning in the heart of the Philistines.

The presence of Goliath the giant (and other descendants of the Anakim) among the later Philistines (**2 Samuel 21:15-22**) shows that the Philistines represent an amalgam of all Israel's enemies. Joshua expelled the giants from the land, except for some who found a refuge in the Philistine cities of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (**Joshua 11:22**).

Later, Jeremiah gives an oracle concerning the sack of Ashkelon by Nebuchadnezzar: "Baldness has come upon Gaza, Ashkelon is cut off, with the remnant of their

valley" (**Jeremiah 47:5**) But Ashkelon is not a valley. In place of "the remnant of their valley," the Septuagint has "the remainder of the Anakim."

The Philistines are pictured as implacable, unendingly hostile enemies who take revenge and are malicious at heart:

- **Ezekiel 25:15-17** - "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred; therefore this is what the Lord GOD says: Behold, I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant along the coast. I will execute great vengeance on them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I lay My vengeance upon them"

Gaza, and the other cities of the Philistines, are also judged because their slave-trading with Edom (**Amos 1: 6-8**). This would imply not seeing all men as made in the image of God, which would justify hatred.

All Philistine sins came from their idolatry, though, as the root.

- **Isaiah 8:19-20** - "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

The antitype of this Philistine character of hatred, revenge and holding a grudge is love and forgiveness:

- **Ephesians 4:31** - "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you."

Jephthah's slaughter of the Ephraimites (**Judges 12**) may have weakened Israel generally and encouraged the Philistines to drive inland. By the time of Samson they became strong enough to encroach on Israel's territory and hold sway over them.

The Philistines were early adopters of Iron Age technology, and their **iron weapons** made them superior in battle over Bronze Age weapons. They presumably got the secret of making iron from the Hittites, and they had a monopoly on iron making in Palestine. Judah was unable to conquer the Philistine cities of the plain because they had "chariots of iron" (**Judges 1:19**). They were even able to capture the Ark of the Covenant (**I Samuel 6:1**).

One reason Israel finally wanted a king was to establish a continuing military presence with a standing army that could effectively confront the Philistines.

The Philistines would remain Israel's chief enemy through the reigns of Saul and David. They are finally eliminated as a major threat by David. **2 Samuel 5:21-25** states that

David defeated them from Geba to Gezer and "took away their images." Still they remained long enough to be included with enemies denounced by the prophets.

The Promise of Samson's Birth

Judges 13:2 - "And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not."

Most of the Danites - unable to conquer their original territory - had moved north and resettled in Laish near the source of the Jordan River. But a small contingent had remained, and this was where Samson was born - on the boundary between Judah and Dan, near the Philistine lands.

Manoah, the name of Samson's father, means "rest," similar to the name of Noah.

The Talmud (Babha Bathra, 91) says that the name of Samson's mother was HaZelepni, or Zelepni (**1 Chronicles 4:3**), and that she was from the tribe of Judah. Zelepni means "the shadow falls on me" or "the shadow looking at me" or "turn to face the shade" (pana means turn your face toward or away from something)

This "shadow" could refer to her being barren.

Other barren women in the Bible: Sarah (**Genesis 16:1**), Rebekah (**Genesis 25:21**), Hannah (**1 Samuel 1:2**) Elizabeth (**Luke 1:7**)

The judge Ibzan (identified by some rabbis as Boaz) had not invited Samson's parents to any of the 120 feasts in honor of the marriages of his 60 children because he thought that "the sterile she-mule" would never be able to repay his courtesy. However, Samson's parents were blessed with an extraordinary son, while Ibzan's 60 children died during his lifetime (BB 91a).

The Angel of the Lord

Judges 13:3 - "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son."

Samson, like Messiah, had a miraculous birth since his mother was barren. His birth was foretold by an angel, as Jesus' and John the Baptist's birth was.

In **Exodus 3:2-6** "the angel of Yahweh" (מלאך יהוה) appeared to Moses in the flame of fire of the burning bush, and then "Yahweh" (יהוה) says to him: "I am the God of thy father."

Some Jews before and during the time of Christ routinely appropriated language used in scripture to describe the angel of the LORD and used it to characterize certain of God's attributes, including God's word, glory, wisdom, spirit, power, and name — almost as if

these aspects of the Deity were themselves independent angels.

The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo identified the angel of the Lord with the Logos.

"The functions of the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament prefigure the reconciling ministry of Jesus. In the New Testament, there is no mention of the angel of the Lord; the Messiah himself is this person." - *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*

Justin Martyr and other early church fathers saw this as an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ as the Angel of the Lord. (Current commentators like Ben Witherington, though, take the view that this is simply an angel).

Later, in verse 18, the Angel says, "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?"

"secret" = *pil'iy* - wonderful, secret, remarkable

Rashi - i.e., hidden. It is constantly changed and it is not known to what it was changed today.

At the Angel's appearance to Samson's parents Manoah and his wife, the Hebrew word translated as "wonderful" in **Judges 13:17-19** is *Pil'iy*. The word not only means wonderful but also implies something that is extraordinary and incomprehensible. The only other time this exact word is used in the Old Testament is in **Psalms 139:6** where the knowledge of the LORD is described by David as being far beyond his ability to attain. The Angel of the LORD's name is not only "wonderful" but is beyond the ability for man to fully grasp.

See **Judges 13:22** - where Manoah says to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God."

A variant of the word from the same root is later used of Messiah:

- **Isaiah 9:6** - "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

"Wonderful" in Isaiah 6:9 and the "wonderful" in Judges 13:22 are both from the root "*pala*" (wondrous, marvelous)

A Nazarite from Birth

The Angel tells Manoah's wife, and then Manoah himself, that Samson was to be under a Nazarite vow from his mother's womb, like John the Baptist. Moreover, Manoah's wife would also be under those restrictions during her pregnancy.

The Nazarite Vow is described in **Numbers 6:2-8**:

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord:

3 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.

4 All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

6 All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord he shall come at no dead body.

7 He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head.

8 All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord.

The rabbis understood the name of the Angel of the Lord reflected his mission - to set Samson apart. In Hebrew, one who takes the Nazarite vow in **Numbers 6:2** "separates" himself = *pala*. This is from the same root as *piliy* - wonderful, the name of the Angel.

Numbers 6:1-2 - "Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special (*palah*) vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD,..."

In **Genesis 18:13-14** the LORD responded to Sarah's laughter with the question, "Is anything too difficult for the LORD?" which in Hebrew is "היפלא מיהוה דבר" – "*ha'yipaleh me'Adonai davar*" and is literally translated "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" The ability and power of the LORD is characterized by something great, by something separate, by something wonderful.

Judges 13:5 - "For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

Jesus and the Nazarite Vow

Some of Jesus' statements point to the consecration of the Nazarite. For instance, at the Lord's Supper:

Luke 22:17 - "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come."

Then later on the cross:

Mark 15:23 - "And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not."

Some think Jesus in this was fulfilling part of the Nazarite consecration concerning abstention from wine, and as the High Priest who was forbidden wine while ministering in the Tabernacle -

Luke 24:27 - "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

Rabbi David Kimchi - "begin to deliver - He would begin the task, but would not complete it, because his salvation would only be partial." His deliverance would be a type of the total deliverance of Israel by the Messiah - Jesus/Joshua/Deliverer

The other judges actually did deliver Israel in some way. But Samson, though he did kill a lot of Philistines, can only begin the process, given the low state of faith in Israel at the time and his own problems of moral character.

Like Jesus, Samson's birth is foretold by an angel:

Before Jesus' birth, Joseph is told:

- **Matthew 1:21** - "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

The couple's back and forth with the Angel is almost comical (**Judges 13:6-21**). The Angel appears to the wife twice, but Manoah has to go to the Angel.

But in the end, the Angel "did wondrously":

Judges 13:20 - "For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground."

By ascending in the flame (as the sacrifice) going up to God, the Angel was displaying the mission of Christ as a sacrifice for sin. By falling on their faces to the ground the couple acknowledged they were in the presence of God.

Their worship is accepted (or at least not condemned). But elsewhere in scripture the created angels won't accept worship:

John says,

- **Revelation 19:10** and **Revelation 22:8-9** - "I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. But he said to me, "Do not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Then Manoah says to his wife (**Judges 13:22**) - "We shall surely die, because we have seen God."

I love the practical logic of his wife's reply:

Judges 13:23 - "But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these."

Samson is Born

Judges 13:24-25 - "And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol."

No amazing childhood stories or feats of strength are told, just as Jesus' childhood is left blank until his questioning of the teachers in the Temple at age 12.