

# Judges 13.1–25

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## *Samson's Mother*

Amington

Sunday 26 August 2018

Anon. but not a 'non' (5)

### **Saying thank you**

An atheist was taking a walk through the woods. 'What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!' he said to himself.

As he continued walking alongside the river he heard a rustling in the bushes. Turning to look, he saw a 7 foot grizzly charging towards him. He ran as fast as he could up the path.

Looking over his shoulder he saw that the bear was closing in on him. His heart was pumping frantically and he tried to run even faster. He tripped and fell on the ground.

He rolled over to pick himself up but saw the bear raising his paw to take a swipe at him.

At that instant the atheist cried out: 'Oh my God!...'

Time stopped.

The bear froze.

The forest was silent.

It was then that bright light shone upon the man and a voice came out of the sky saying,

‘You deny my existence for all of these years, teach others I don’t exist and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament?

Am I to count you as a believer?’

The atheist looked directly into the light, ‘It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now, but perhaps, could you make the BEAR a Christian?’ ‘Very well,’ said the voice.

The light went out.

And the sounds of the forest resumed.

And then the bear lowered his paw, bowed his head and spoke,

‘Lord, bless this food which I am about to receive and for which I am truly thankful.’

## A man's perspective?

In our Bible reading we heard about a woman (2) being visited by an **angel** (3), who announced she would **give birth to a son** (3), who would **deliver** God's people (5).

No, you haven't slept for four months and arrived at Christmas – this is how Samson was born – the super-strong but troubled hero of 'Samson and Delilah'. All that is to come – for now, the focus is on his parents, specifically his mother.

And unfortunately we'll have to refer to her as 'Samson's Mother' or 'Manoah's Wife' or 'the woman' – because we are not told what her name is. Despite being the hero of the story, she is repeatedly referred to as '**woman**' (4 times) or '**wife**' (11 times).

Why not give us her name?

My first thought was – these events happened something like 3,500 years ago. Society back then was patriarchal – even more so than today. Most women still take their husband's surname when they get married today, but back then it was more than that – women were mostly known and defined by their relationships to the men in their lives, for example 'Samson's mother' or 'Manoah's wife'. Only a few were known in their own right.

And actually, one of those is Deborah, who appears in Judges 4 and 5, who is described first as **a prophet** and *then* as **the wife of Lappidoth** (4.4).

So perhaps the writer of Judges isn't quite as chauvinistic as we might assume at first – perhaps there is something else going on here – and the link to Jesus' birth story might help us.

## Something from nothing

When the writer sets the scene, he (or she) makes sure we know that Manoah's wife couldn't have children, repeating it four times: **Manoah... had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth** (2). And then the angel says: **'you are barren and childless'** (3). It wasn't that they *didn't* have children yet – they *couldn't*.

Those few words give only a tiny glimpse into the pain that this woman must have been in. Some of you will understand that pain far better than I can. She would have been something of an outcast – the whispers no doubt going round the village that she must have done something wrong for God to punish her like this.

But that wasn't true – and in fact it's *never* true. God is not like that, he never has been, and he never will be.

For Manoah's wife, the angels words must have hurt – until the angel said the most wonderful word I suspect she'd heard in a long time: **'You are barren and childless, but...'** (3).

But, that desperate and hopeless situation is not a problem for God – exactly like Mary being a virgin wasn't a problem for God either, exactly like the world being **formless and empty** (Genesis 1.1) – I could go on.

On the road to Emmaus the resurrected Jesus **explained what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself** (Luke 24.27) – and I think this is one of the things he would have said:

God specialises in working with nothing, with obscurity, with helplessness, with people at the end of their energy and ability.

*Repeat*

Friends, this is good news for all of us. Do you remember how in school sports lessons the teacher would choose two captains, who would then go through the class picking their teams? They'd go for their friends first, the people who played in the school first team – and then only picking you because everyone had to be picked?

*That's not how God works!*

Throughout the Bible we have story after story of God choosing people who were hopeless and helpless – a childless octogenarian to be the father of his people, a shepherd boy to be the king of his people, countless barren and sometimes unmarried women, weak and pathetic losers to be all-conquering generals –

**[[ people who struggle with depression and anxiety to be leaders of his church (me). ]]**

Friends, this is *good news*. Because, it doesn't depend on us. It's not about what *we* bring to the party – it's about what *God* can make out of absolutely nothing.

And I think that's why this woman is not named. Manoah comes across as a few cards short of a deck, a few fries short of a Happy meal, that plastic thing short of a six-pack, a lift that doesn't go all the way to the top – you get my meaning.

But the woman – she listens to the angel, and lives faithfully by what he says. She patiently explains things to her husband, and very sensibly explains that of course God isn't going to kill them – he'd literally just promised them a baby (23).

In the eyes of the world she was good for nothing, barren and childless. But that was – and is – no problem for God.

For me this woman is one of the heroes of the Bible – all the more so because she's normal. She doesn't do anything spectacular – that's down to her son. She wasn't from a special family, she didn't have any special training. She was even from one of the more obscure tribes in the far and forgotten Northern part of Israel.

And yet she lived a faithful life, listening to God and following him every day.

That's the greatest miracle. The super-human feats of strength, defeating God's enemies – the stuff Samson did was pretty special, but for me *this* is the greatest miracle: a woman who listened to God and lived faithfully.

This mini-series has been about people who are anonymous but not nothing – anon. but not a 'non' (!). As I said last week, may we all be anonymous to history like Manoah's wife, but known to God as women and men who listen to him and live faithful lives.