

# JUDGES 13

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## THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

Judges 13 inaugurates the account of Israel’s final judge: Samson, whose story is told in Judges 13–16. The narrative of Samson’s tenure as Israel’s judge begins, uniquely, with an account of his birth, told in chapter 13 after the customary formula introducing a new narrative cycle (verse 1).

The details of Samson’s birth echo other accounts in the Bible of barren women who give birth through divine intervention.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the account in Judges 13 can be classified as a type scene, or a narrative that exhibits tropes and motifs that tend to follow a general pattern.<sup>2</sup> The narrative of Samson’s birth is sometimes classified as an annunciation scene, in which a divine messenger announces the miraculous birth of a destined child.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the text reports how the angel of the Lord appeared to Samson’s mother to announce his birth and prophesy his future as a judge (Judges 13:2–5). According to the divine pronouncement, Samson was to be a Nazarite (verses 5–7), meaning someone devoted or consecrated to God (from the Hebrew *nazir*, “devoted, consecrated”). The details of Samson’s birth and career as a Nazarite parallel those of Samuel’s birth and life given later in the Bible (see 1 Samuel 1:9–22), suggesting that the two men belong generally to the same annunciation type scene.

After the initial annunciation, Samson’s parents received additional visitations from the angel of the Lord (verses 8–23). The description of these encounters given in the text impresses upon the reader two things:

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1 See Rachel Adelman, “Barren Women in the Bible,” *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, Jewish Women’s Archive, June 23, 2021, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/barren-women-in-the-bible>.

2 Consult generally Robert Alter, “Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention,” *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 355–368; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011).

3 See Robert Alter, “How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible’s Annunciation Type-Scene,” *Prooftexts* 3, no. 2 (May 1983): 115–130.

first, the unmistakable anthropomorphic nature of the divine beings visiting Samson’s parents, and second, that one of these beings was God Himself. Note how Manoah and his wife both mistook the divine personage for an ordinary man, going so far as wanting to prepare food for him (verses 8, 10–11, 15–19). The exclamation given by Manoah in verse 22 also indicates the couple’s eventual understanding that they were in the presence of deity: “We shall surely die, because we have seen God.”

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