Lesson 9: Set Apart Before Birth, Compromised in Desire

Teaching Outline — Sovereign Preparation and Personal Compromise
Passage: Judges 13-14 | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes

Lesson objective

- Class will see:
  - God sovereignly prepares a deliverer
  - God does not approve Samson's compromise

Introduction and context (5 minutes)

A familiar verdict, a different beginning

- "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD" (13:1)
- Delivered "into the hand of the Philistines forty years"
- Unlike earlier cycles, no national cry recorded before God begins His rescue
- The initiative is entirely His
- Before Samson is born, God is already preparing a deliverer

God's initiative

- Forty years of oppression; Israel's need is profound
- The silence makes God's initiative shine
  - He sees their bondage and begins before they seek Him
  - Grace isn't a reward for spiritual alertness
- Grace that comes first is never permission to continue in compromise
  - The God who appoints Samson's calling gives commands that define being set apart

A deliberate contrast

- Sovereign grace doesn't mean Samson's choices are approved

- A child consecrated from the womb
- The adult Samson:
  - Pursues a Philistine woman
  - Turns aside to see the carcass of the lion he killed
  - Takes honey from it
  - Enters escalating conflict with Philistines
- Judges 14 does not say Samson moved toward “Philistine food” — keep to the text

Two homes

- **Ch. 13:** Manoah and his wife receive God’s word with awe
  - Ask for instruction, seek to obey, worship the LORD
- **Ch. 14:** Samson’s first recorded adult words end in a demand
  - “now therefore get her for me to wife” (14:2)
- Not a flawless family vs. a uniquely bad son
- Humble reception of God’s instruction vs. a life directed by personal appetite
- Samson isn’t outside God’s plan, nor a safe pattern for following every strong desire

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Exposition: God begins the deliverance (9 minutes)

Read Judges 13:2-7

- **Read aloud**

The announcement

- Manoah’s wife is barren
- “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman,” promising a son
- Barrenness: repeatedly the setting where God displays power and keeps promise
  - She doesn’t earn a miracle — the LORD takes the initiative
  - Child and calling announced before Samson does anything
  - His strength, birth, and purpose are gifts
  - Prevents treating Samson as a self-made hero

The instructions

- “Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing.”
- No razor upon the child’s head
- “a Nazarite unto God from the womb”
- He will “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines”

Nazarite background

- Recalls Numbers 6
  - Specially separated to the LORD
  - Restrictions: grape products, hair, defilement by a dead body
- Samson’s calling is unusual: announced before birth, lifelong
- Be careful
  - Don’t insist every detail of Num 6 applies in precisely the same way
  - Judges specifies the commands to his mother and the razor prohibition (13:5, 14)
  - Affirm the real connection; don’t flatten two passages into one list
  - Avoid claims the text doesn’t make at a particular moment
- The certain point: Samson is marked by [BLANK: separation] to God — distinctive and public

What separation means

- Not a technical case study
- Public, lifelong, distinctive belonging to God
- His body and conduct testify that deliverance comes from the LORD
- Not social oddness or superior spirituality — belonging to God for His purpose
- For believers
  - Nazarite regulations don’t define Christian holiness
  - The redeemed aren’t free to shape life solely by appetite, convenience, or culture
- [BLANK: calling] is not a license for compromise

Manoah’s prayer (13:8-14)

- That the man of God may return “and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born”
- Doesn’t ask how strong or famous his son will be
- The posture of humble parents and disciples: “Teach us how to obey the word You have given”
- God sends the messenger again to the woman

- No new private program — the Angel repeats what God already said
- God often guides not by satisfying curiosity, but by confirming clear obedience

The name and the flame (13:15-20)

- Manoah asks His name
- “Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?” (13:18)
- Manoah offers a kid “unto the LORD”
- The angel does wondrously, ascending in the flame of the altar

“We have seen God” (13:22-23)

- Manoah: “We shall surely die, because we have seen God.”
- His wife reasons well: He wouldn’t have accepted the offering or shown them these things
- A quiet model of faith
  - Reasons from God’s revealed actions
  - Faith isn’t the absence of fear
  - It’s answering fear with what God has actually said and done
  - Samson will be impulsive; his mother shows thoughtful trust in God’s revealed mercy

The Angel of the LORD — reverence and restraint

- The narrative shifts between “the angel of the LORD” and “God”
- Many Christians: a theophany; many specifically the pre-incarnate Christ
  - That reading has serious theological reasons
- Others: God’s uniquely authorized angelic messenger
- Clearly: a messenger who speaks with divine authority and overwhelms Manoah
- Discuss reverently — not a test of fellowship beyond what Scripture clearly reveals
- Don’t deny the scene’s weight to avoid speaking beyond the text
- The Angel of the LORD discussion calls for reverent [BLANK: worship]
  - Worship belongs to God alone
  - Receive His word with awe

Samson’s beginning (13:24-25)

- “the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him”
- “the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times”

- God rules over the story by His [BLANK: sovereignty]
  - His saving purpose isn't thwarted by Israel's weakness or Samson's future failures

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Exposition: A God-given purpose does not approve a self-chosen path (10 minutes)

Read Judges 14:1-4

- **Read aloud**

"She pleaseth me well"

- Sees a Philistine woman in Timnath
- "now therefore get her for me to wife" (14:2)
- Parents object: "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people?"
  - Accords with Israel's covenant calling
- Samson answers: "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well" (14:3)
- Highlights desire, not prayer, wisdom, or obedience
- Strikingly self-centered
  - Desire treated as sufficient authority
  - Wanted, therefore must be obtained

His parents' interruption

- Not enemies of his happiness — a needed interruption
- Godly counsel feels inconvenient; asks us to slow when desire wants speed
- May expose that we've decided and only seek permission
- We needn't obey every human preference
  - We must hear biblical concerns without contempt
- No evidence Samson weighed his calling, sought the LORD, or honored nearest counsel

Verse 4 requires careful reading

- "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines."

- Explains God's providential purpose in the conflict
  - The LORD sought an occasion against those with dominion over Israel
- Doesn't:
  - Call Samson's desire morally good
  - Erase or correct his parents' concern
  - Baptize a choice as righteous because God later overrules it
- God works through and over human choices without approving sin
- "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen 50:20)
  - Evil intention stayed evil; God's good purpose stayed good
- God's [BLANK: providence] works through human acts without approving sin
  - It never converts disobedience into obedience

The lion and the honey (14:5-9)

- A young lion roars against him
- "And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him"; he tears it apart
  - God's gift, not a performance Samson manufactures
- Later turns aside to see the carcass; bees and honey in the body
- Takes the honey in his hands, eats, gives some to his parents
- "he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion" (14:9)

Teach only what the text says

- The passage doesn't call the honey "Philistine food"
- Doesn't expressly say he touched the carcass — though it naturally raises the question
- Doesn't declare it a violation in the formula used elsewhere
- Don't add a detail or make a specific charge the narrator hasn't made
- Carefulness isn't evasion
  - A set-apart man beside a dead lion, secrecy, a choice to take what he finds
  - Fits a growing pattern of secrecy and proximity to the unclean
  - Stands uneasily beside Nazarite separation
- Valuable habit: anchor strong convictions to Scripture's actual words
  - Not a detail that feels likely or makes a warning sharper

Hiddenness

- Gives the honey, withholds the source

- Secrecy can be necessary in some situations
- Here: managing information rather than welcoming accountability
- Hiddenness signals a need to examine the heart
- If you'd be embarrassed for a wise Christian to know how a choice was made, what was viewed, what was said, how money was spent
    - That discomfort may be mercy calling you into the light

The riddle (14:10-20)

- A riddle about the lion and honey at the feast
- A wager with thirty Philistines — self-display and manipulation
- The threat: "Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire" (14:15)
    - Her fear is real; the Philistines' coercion is wicked
- She weeps and presses until he tells; she tells her people
- "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle" (14:18)
    - Contemptuous
- Anger leads to Ashkelon; kills thirty men for their garments
- His wife is given to his companion
- Strength doesn't heal disordered desires
    - It's entangled in a cycle of insult, threat, retaliation, and loss

Power is not character

- The Spirit's empowering ≠ approval of all his motives
- The narrator reports both: the Spirit came mightily; Samson acted out of anger
- Spiritual [BLANK: power] is not the same as holy character
- Gifts, influence, skill, or success don't prove every desire is holy
- Teach effectively, lead decisively, build a ministry, excel at work, show courage — real gifts
    - No gift excuses secrecy, contempt, uncontrolled desire, or disobedience
- God may use a person while exposing serious weakness in them
- Neither cynical despair nor careless admiration
- Humble dependence on God; insistence that character matters

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Application (8 minutes)

God’s call must shape our choices

- Samson’s first adult desire is guided by what “pleaseth” him
- Modern compromise: I want it, it suits me, it makes me feel alive
- A believer asks: does this please the LORD and fit the separation He called me to?

Modern versions of “she pleaseth me well”

- “It feels right.”
- “I deserve this.”
- “No one will know.”
- “I can handle it.”
- “My work for God proves that it cannot be a serious problem.”
- Each makes private desire the final authority
- Not every desire is automatically evil
- Desire must be brought under God’s word, tested in the light, submitted to wise counsel
- Ask not only “May I do this?” but “Will this help me live as one who belongs to Christ?”

Take seriously the ordinary safeguards

- Manoah and his wife listen, ask, and obey; Samson conceals
- Healthy Christian living:
  - Welcomes godly counsel
  - Brings desires into the light
  - Refuses to let appetite become master
- [BLANK: compromise] rarely announces itself as rebellion — it often begins as a private exception

Private exceptions are dangerous

- They train the heart to divide life into areas where God speaks and areas where appetite rules
- Bring hidden patterns into the light before they become public harm
  - Ask a mature believer to pray and speak honestly with you
  - Change an environment that feeds temptation
  - End a relationship that requires compromise
  - Confess rather than manage appearances

- These don’t make God love us; they’re walking in the freedom and holiness of those He loves

Weakness in those God uses

- Don’t despair when you see it; don’t excuse it because God uses them
- Comfort of ch. 13: God acts first and keeps His purpose moving
- Warning of ch. 14: servants can do grievous damage living by appetite

For those who counsel others

- Give patient, biblical instruction
- Don’t confuse intensity with maturity
- Celebrate ability, but ask about:
  - Integrity
  - Truthfulness
  - Sexual purity
  - Teachability
  - The use of power
- The church needs men and women whose desires are formed by the Lord they profess

Courage from God’s sovereignty

- We don’t expose compromise believing one failure can defeat God’s purpose
- We don’t ignore it because His purpose can’t be defeated
- We address it because the LORD is holy and His grace restores those who turn
- He works in frail people without lowering His standard

The conspicuous gift

- People excuse patterns they’d confront in someone less useful or admired
- Judges allows no double standard
- Samson’s strength is genuine; God is at work; the narrative still records his choices truthfully
- Love for a gifted person tells the truth — doesn’t protect the gift by hiding the character problem

Every believer

- Ordinary, unseen gifts are still used under the Lord’s rule
- Faithfulness in small choices, honest speech, and teachable relationships isn’t less spiritual than public usefulness

When compromise is exposed

- Don’t respond as Samson does — defensiveness or retaliation
- Receive correction as an opportunity to return
- The gospel has no room for hiding sin, but abundant mercy for confessing it
- Christ forgives the record and, by His Spirit, teaches us to desire what pleases the Father

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Christ and the gospel (3 minutes)

Samson and Jesus

Samson	Jesus Christ
Set apart from the womb; repeatedly compromised	Conceived by the Holy Ghost; perfectly holy, entirely obedient
Began to deliver Israel from the Philistines	Accomplishes eternal redemption for His people
Strength episodic and externally visible	Strength revealed in sinless obedience, humble service, and the cross

A limited pointer, a greater contrast

- The miraculous birth announcement points forward in a limited, preparatory way
- The contrast matters as much as the resemblance
- Jesus never needed correction for compromise
- The faithful Deliverer Samson could never be
- [BLANK: Jesus] does the Father’s will and saves His people — not by indulging desire

Perfect obedience

- Doesn’t use power to serve Himself in the wilderness
- Doesn’t conceal sin
- Doesn’t retaliate in sinful anger
- Gives Himself willingly at the cross
- Rises to accomplish the salvation Samson could only begin to picture
- Our hope isn’t becoming strong enough to repair our compromises
- The faithful Deliverer forgives repentant sinners and remakes them by His Spirit

Discussion (7 minutes)

Discussion questions

1. What does the absence of a recorded national cry in Judges 13 teach about grace?
2. What can we say confidently about Samson's Nazarite calling, and what should we avoid overstating?
3. How does Judges 14:4 teach providence without approving compromise?
4. Where can a gift or visible success tempt someone to neglect character?

Closing prayer (3 minutes)

> **Closing prayer:** "Holy Father, thank Thee that Thy purpose stands and that Thy mercy reaches us before we seek Thee. Make us a people set apart in heart and conduct. Expose our private compromises, give us willing obedience, and fix our eyes on Jesus, the faithful Deliverer. Amen."