

CALM WOMEN IN TURBULENT TIMES

A study of Bible women
from the time of Samson to Saul

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Calm Women in Turbulent Times

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Introduction:

Calm Women in Turbulent Times

Calm Women is a short study which asks big questions.

- What is God doing when men fail and His institutions appear to be crumbling?
- What should women do in turbulent times?
- What does God do for and through women during these times?

Five cameos of godly women from the time of Samson to Saul provide answers that may surprise, but if received, will calm and encourage us all.

Tumultuous and Transitional Times

The time of Samson through the time of Saul (Judg.13-1 Sam. 31) was a tumultuous and transitional period for God's people. Three great institutions of God—the judges, the priesthood, and the monarchy—failed because the men appointed to these institutions failed.

The judges failed (Judg. 16-21).

The period of the judges which began with so much promise for freedom and godliness ended in anarchy and moral chaos. Samson began to deliver the people from the Philistines. But due to pride and immorality, he was unable to complete the job. Because of his weakness toward Delilah, he was taken captive, blinded, and made a laughingstock. While Samson killed many Philistines in his death, he and the judges before him failed to establish Israel in godliness.

The priests were corrupt (1 Sam. 1-4).

Shiloh was the first home of God's tabernacle and the first center for the feasts of the Lord in the land of Canaan. The godly came there to worship the Lord. However, Eli the priest and his sons failed to lead Israel in holy worship. Eli, as high priest, honored his corrupt sons more than God and did not reprove their immorality, their theft of God's offerings, or their arrogance in taking the ark of God to war. As a result, God cursed Eli's line and removed the priesthood from his family. Israel was defeated in battle by the Philistines, Eli and both his sons died in one day, the ark of God was lost, and Shiloh was abandoned forever as the site of God's house.

Israel's first king failed (1 Sam. 13-31).

The first monarchy ended in death and defeat. Saul, the first king of Israel, was handsome, brave, and a crowd-pleaser, but he lacked godly maturity and depth of character. After winning one victory for God, he rebelled against God. He sought to usurp the priesthood. He made friends with God's enemies, and he hated David, God's choice as Saul's successor. Saul ended his days oppressed by demons and defeated in battle by the powerful Philistines.

Now having painted a scene of failure and discouragement on the national scene, let us look into the lives of five women who were not on the national scene, but rather were coping with their own personal problems in private and lowly places.



Lesson One

Mrs. Manoah: Intelligent Submission in a Pedestrian Marriage

pedestrian: related to going on foot; therefore, indistinguished, ordinary, not spectacular or flashy.

The parents of Samson are one of the most interesting and perhaps amusing couples in Scripture. Like Abraham and Sarah before them, and Zecharias and Elizabeth after them, they were especially chosen in old age to bring forth a miraculous son, destined for greatness.

As we read the story of God's announcing the birth of Samson to his parents, we will focus on the relationship of Manoah and his wife.

The Angel Appears the First Time

Judg. 13: 2-5—There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children: ³And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. ⁴Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, ⁵for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." *

*Samson was to be a life-long Nazirite from conception. That the rules of his order must be kept from conception is another clear evidence that life begins at conception. This care and discipline were uniquely his mother's responsibility. (Details of the law of the Nazirite vow are provided in Numbers 6.)

God often speaks to particular women and to women in general about childbearing because it is their unique domain. Judges 13 is a dramatic example of this pattern. God, in the form of the angel of the Lord, appeared to Manoah's wife, reviewing her barrenness, promising a son, and giving specific directions for his care.

Mrs. Manoah Faithfully Reports

Manoah's wife reports to her husband accurately and concisely. We see no evidence that she acted "holier than thou," autonomous, or self-important even though God came to her first and alone with this tremendous news of a son after years of barrenness.

Judg. 13:6 — Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, ⁷ but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.' "

Complete and concise reporting is a very valuable skill for any one; it is particularly felicitous in wives. Most men like to hear essential facts, with the option of asking more questions. Concise speech has the added benefit of making others more interested in what you say. Long, highly detailed, and meandering reports frustrate most people, especially husbands. The longer one takes to say little, the less people want to listen.

Manoah Prays For the Angel to Come Again

Judg. 3:8-14—Then Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born." ⁹And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah her husband was not with her.

Manoah, understandably, being the head of the household, wanted to know firsthand about the care and training of the son who would supernaturally come into his home. He prayed accordingly that the angel would “come to us and teach us.” Interestingly and surprisingly, the angel comes again to the woman when she is alone.

Why would God come again to the wife alone when the husband prayed for Him to come to them? The text does not explicitly say. However, pondering this passage and other parallel passages yields some interesting ideas.

When God Announced Babies

Of the six births that God announced in Scripture, not one is like the other in circumstance.

- Eve received the announcement that a victorious seed would come through her in Adam’s presence (Gen. 3:15).
- Hagar was alone when Ishmael was foretold (Gen. 16:11-12).
- Abraham received the announcement of Isaac in Sarah’s presence, though she was hidden (Gen. 18:9-10).
- God appeared first to Mrs. Manoah, then to Manoah to announce Samson’s coming (Judg. 13).
- Gabriel appeared to Zechariah alone in the Temple; he reported to Elizabeth (in writing) that John would be born (Luke 1).
- Gabriel appeared to Mary alone to announce the virgin birth of Christ; she fellowshiped with Elizabeth about this great truth (Luke 1).

It is relevant to note that Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah were all barren and bore supernaturally in answer to prayer. God answered Rebekah’s questions about her pregnancy (Gen. 25:21-26). He spoke through Eli to Hannah to assure her of His answer to her prayer (1 Sam. 1:12-18). God spoke to Isaiah to tell him what to name his coming son (Isa. 8:3-4). Yet God did not appear to any of these to

tell them of the coming births as He did in the six cases above.

Pointing to the Woman

When the angel of the Lord appeared twice to Mrs. Manoah, it is as if He highlighted her with the spiritual version of a yellow highlighter. Why would He do this? Let me suggest three reasons.

First of all, it is through the woman that the Savior will come. The first announcement of the Savior was addressed to Eve and the last announcement was addressed to Mary. The Angel's direct communication with Samson's mother emphasizes again the role and responsibility of woman directly before God as a lifegiver and savior-bearer.

Secondly, Samson was to be a Nazirite. Most of the responsibility for this vow would fall immediately on Manoah's wife, not Manoah. She would be the one who must insure that her diet was free of wine, strong drink, and anything unclean during the pregnancy and during the life and training of the young child.

Thirdly, as we shall see in the following verses, it appears that Manoah needed to learn to listen to his wife.

Note in the case of Abraham and Sarah and Zechariah and Elizabeth, God appeared to the men. In the case of Abraham and Sarah, Sarah was the one lacking faith. In the case of Zachariah and Elizabeth, Zechariah was the one lacking faith. Here with Manoah and his wife, God appears twice to the woman and then to both according to the man's prayer.

God deals with each couple in a different way. As we consider God's dealings with these three barren couples, it is a wonderful reminder of His unchanging grace and His unique and individual relationship with each person and each married couple!

Reporting Again



Judg. 13:10—So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me.”

It was the pattern of Manoah’s wife to honor her husband *and* to speak frankly as well. The Lord appeared to her first, not once, but twice. On both occasions Mrs. Manoah goes to her husband quickly, to report completely and concisely.

Judg. 13:11-14—And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to this woman?” And he said, “I am.” ¹²And Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what is to be the child’s manner of life, and what is his mission?” ¹³And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. ¹⁴She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe.”

The Angel tells Manoah nothing new that He had not already told his wife. Yet He graciously appears and repeats the message, commanding Manoah only to “let her observe” what God had already told her to do. While childbearing is the unique domain of woman, it is not her autonomous domain. God has appointed the headship of the husband over every area of her life, and He honors that headship here by appearing to Manoah.

Manoah’s Response to the Angel

Judg. 13:15-20—Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you.” ¹⁶ And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “If you detain me, I will not eat of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord.” (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord.)

When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham to announce

Isaac's birth, Abraham immediately knew who He was. In that case, the Lord and His accompanying angels consented to eat the food of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18). Thus was pictured for the first time in history the great occasion of God communing with His people in their midst!

But Manoah did not know the Lord well enough to recognize Him; and not knowing Him, he made the further mistake of presuming He is a mere man. Because the worship of God comes before fellowship with God, the Angel declined dining with Manoah in favor of receiving sacrifice from him. However, it was God's gracious intention to lead Manoah further into the knowledge of Himself. He, therefore, revealed His divinity in supernatural fire.

Judg. 13:17-20—And Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?" ¹⁸ And the angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" ¹⁹ So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the Lord, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. ²⁰ And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground.

Who is the Angel?

If Mrs. Manoah did not know for sure, she had a very good idea from the beginning that the Angel was the Lord. This is why she notes His awesome appearance, but does not ask Him questions (13:6). Manoah, on the other hand, was much slower to discern the actual identity of the "man of God." Supposing him to be a mere prophet, he offered him human hospitality and inquires of his name that he might give him honor at the proper time.

Only through a miraculous display of pyrotechnics does Manoah understand that the Angel is the Lord. Then, understanding this fact, he draws a completely illogical conclusion. Whether Mrs.

Manoah's greater perception is rooted in spirituality alone (she knows the Lord better than her husband); or whether it is rooted in her feminine capacity to discern people; or whether she is simply more intelligent than he, we cannot judge.

A Wrong Conclusion and Intelligent Submission

Judg. 13:21-24—The angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord. ²²And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." ²³But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these."
²⁴And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him.

When Manoah finally realized that God had appeared to him, he concludes that he and his wife will die.

After giving us two examples of concise and faithful reporting (13:6-7 and 10), Mrs. Manoah models the concise and faithful response (13:23). In three phrases she summarizes the actions of the Lord toward them which demonstrate His beneficent intent. "If the Lord had meant to kill us, He would not have:

- 1) "accepted an offering from us"
- 2) "or shown us all these things," (presumably the miraculous display of fire and His disappearance in it)
- 3) "or now announced to us such things as these."
(the revelation that they will have a son)

At various times all of us feel (rightly or wrongly) that our perception is greater than our leaders. What we do at such times is a real test of our "gentle, quiet spirit." Biblical submission is neither haughty nor servile; it is neither proud nor fawning. Mrs. Manoah falls off neither "side of the horse." When ahead of



her husband in knowledge and insight (directly from God in her case!), she does not lord it over her husband, but reports to him quickly and concisely. When he draws a foolish and erroneous conclusion, she does not fawn over his folly, but rather corrects it in a straightforward way.

Mrs. Manoah models both the honoring of authority and the intelligent self-respect that are the hallmarks of the Biblical follower. **Biblical submission does not parrot folly nor affirm falsehood. Neither is it pushy or demanding. Mrs. Manoah's actions are both intelligent and submissive. She is a wonderful example for us in our pedestrian days.**

Questions for Review, Thought, and Application

Note: "Some Suggested Answers," p. 83, is not a comprehensive answer guide, but it does provide more thoughts on the questions asked in this chapter and in the following chapters. Please consult these pages as you complete each study.

Review the Facts

1. Who was the Angel of the Lord in this passage? How do you know?

2. What is a Nazirite? a Nazirite vow? See Numbers 6.

6. In this lesson we have summarized the responsibility of wives in this way: Submit and speak truth. We have summarized the responsibility of husbands as: Listen and rule well. Is this a fair summary of the Scriptural commands to husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1-7) as you understand these commands? Why or why not?

Apply the Lesson

7. Examine yourself. Can you improve in any of the following areas?
 - a. Do you talk too much when reporting to authorities, going on and on about details that might not interest them?
 - b. Are you ever cowardly, refusing to say anything that would displease, no matter how important?
 - c. Are you a people-pleaser, tailoring and padding your reports to please the hearer without close attention to the truth?

8. How should you counsel yourself if you thought that you were more perceptive, spiritual, or intelligent than your authority?

9. At times our lives and our marriages may seem “pedestrian.” As you consider Mrs. Manoah’s example in Judges 13, name at least one element of her behavior that you want to incorporate into your life.