

Haftarat Naso נשא

Torah: Numbers 4:21–7:89

Haftarah: Judges 13:2–25

From Barrenness to Blessing

General Overview

The Haftarah passage Nasso is where we learn about the birth of Samson. The Angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, who was barren. The Angel announced that she would have a son. Moreover, he told her that she and her husband were to let the son be a Nazarite from even before he was born, meaning that she was not even to consume any grape products.

This visitation was, at first, a private one; Manoah was not even present. After hearing about the announcement, Manoah requested one more visit so that he could ask the Angel how to raise the child. The Lord graciously granted his request, and the Angel appeared a second time. This time, the Angel performed some supernatural acts, including rising up to heaven in the fire of Manoah's sacrifice. Upon seeing the Angel, Manoah was convinced that he had seen a special appearance of God!

The passage concludes with a brief description of the fulfilment of the Angel's prediction where we learn that the baby was named Samson. God blessed him. When he had grown, the Spirit of God began to stir in him to begin to fulfil his calling.

Connection to the Parasha

Parashat Naso is the section of the Torah that contains the teaching about the Nazarite Vow. The parasha provided the basic instructions. This haftarah presents a living illustration of its application in the lives of real people, Samson and his family.

Exposition

This haftarah contains an easily understood story, but a difficult one in which to engage in an exposition. For one thing, it is difficult to know who, specifically, is the main focus of the story. A case can be made for all of the four main characters.

Certainly the mother is at center stage, for she is the barren one who is told that she will give birth to a son and that this son should be raised as a Nazarite, dedicated for some great purpose of God.

Yet, Manoah is also the focus of much attention in this episode. It is he who requests, and is granted, a second visit from the Angel. Moreover, it is Manoah who finally understood who the Angel really was.

In addition, certainly Samson is one of the main characters here. After all, it is his birth that is the reason for the visitation of the Angel.

Finally, we must not forget about the Angel. If the author meant for the Angel's appearance to be taken casually, then he would not have provided us with so much information about him. Accordingly, we have chosen our commentary to focus on the Angel. We will examine the information we have of him revealed in this passage. In doing so, of course, we will try to give adequate attention to the other main characters. Thus, we will be guided through our study by using the following outline:

- I. The Purpose of the Angel
- II. The Nature of the Angel
- III. The Reliability of the Angel

In this excerpt of the haftarat Naso, we will focus on the first section, The Purpose of the Angel.

I. The Purpose of the Angel

One of the most frequent reasons that the Scriptures record the visitation of an angel is to announce the birth of an important individual. In this case, the appearance was to announce the birth of a future deliverer, Samson. In other incidences, an Angel also appeared to Hagar (Genesis 16:11) and to Miriam in (Luke 1:26–38) to announce the births of Ishmael and Yeshua, respectively.

Here, the Angel appeared to the wife of Manoah. The text in Judges tells us that she was barren. It seems that there were several important biblical events that centered on barren people, such as Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth. Since the Israelites considered children as a gift of God they viewed barrenness as a mark of divine disfavour. To die childless was tragic indeed.¹

All of the barren women cited above were godly women. There was no indication that their behaviour was the reason for their childless condition. There was every reason, however, to say that God was the one who withheld children from them until His purposes were fulfilled. Admonishing or disciplining them may not have been His purposes. Thus, we cannot always assume that because a woman is barren there must be something sinful in her or her husband's lives.

A. *Two Messages*

There are two things the Angel came to announce. The first was the future birth of a son to Manoah's wife. Notice that when the Angel came to the woman, there was no rebuke for her, just a simple announcement of the birth of a son. The text seems to be redundant in 13:3 when it says, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no [children] but you shall conceive and give birth to a son."

One would think that since she was barren there would naturally be no children. However, the text is clarifying the fact that it was she who was barren and not her husband who was infertile, for the possibility exists that she may have had other

children in other marriages. We are, therefore, assured that a miracle is about to occur!

The second thing that the Angel announced was that not only would there be a son. But that he would be a Nazarite from his birth. Moreover, he was a Nazarite before he came into the world. That meant that his mother also would have to become a Nazarite. We need, therefore, to understand some of the implications of being a Nazarite, if we are to fully comprehend this passage.

B. The Nazarite

The teaching of the Nazarite Vow is one of the main emphases of *Parashat Naso*, Numbers 6:1–21. According to Herbert Wolf, the word Nazarite comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* - נזיר, and means “dedicated” or “consecrated.”² Accordingly, it seems to be a vow one may voluntarily take upon himself in order to temporarily dedicate himself either to do a special task for the Lord or to consecrate his life in a special manner for spiritual things. In order to accomplish this dedication, the Nazarite was taught to observe three things:

- 1) Total abstinence from grapes or all grape products.
- 2) Refrain from cutting his hair during the time of the vow.
- 3) Avoid coming near to a corpse.

Any breach of these stipulations nullified the period of consecration and a new beginning had to take place. There are not many examples of Nazarites in the Scriptures. Besides Samson, the two that stand out the most are Samuel (1 Samuel 1:21) and a group of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 21:22–24, 26. John the Immerser may also have been a Nazarite.

There is no provision in Numbers chapter six for a person being a Nazarite from birth. The fact that God instructed Samson to be one indicates that there was nothing wrong with a parent so dedicating their child. However, we would not want to assert that this is to be a normal experience. The fact that Samson and Samuel are the only examples of life-long Nazarites³ would caution us against such a practice, unless, of course, we were absolutely certain that we heard from the Lord. Such a directive would almost have to be as obvious as the revelation Manoah and his wife received.

The text in Judges chapter 13 tells us that Samson’s specific task for dedication was to be a military one. Verse 5 says that when the boy grew to the proper age (whatever that may be) “he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”

Yet, as important as that task would be, we are told that he would only “begin” to work the deliverance. The conquest would be an incomplete one. In fact, the power of the Philistines over Israel was not sufficiently broken until King David defeated them twice at Rephaim (2 Samuel 5: 17–25).

C. A Trusting Husband

Before we look at a different aspect of the Angel, let us examine one more purpose for his appearance to this chosen family.

The Angel actually made two appearances. The first was a private appearance to Manoah's wife. The second appearance was to both Manoah and his wife, at Manoah's request. Manoah apparently did not question his wife's story about the Angel. Instead, he went to the Lord Himself and asked, not for proof that the Angel came, but rather, that the Angel would come one more time to give him further instruction. It is indicative of the relationship existing between himself and his wife that he accepted the basic facts without question or suspicion.⁴

Notice what it was that Manoah wanted to know. He desired only to know how to raise such an unusual child. This is an example for all parents to follow, to ask the Lord for the wisdom to raise each specific child according to their uniqueness.

¹ Herbert Wolf, "Judges" from *The Expositors Bible Commentary* ("EBC"), vol. 3, 462.

² Ibid.

³ The Dead Sea Scrolls, in 4Q Sam a, inform us that Samuel was a "Nazarite forever all the days of his life." (Arthur E. Cundall, "Judges" from *Judges and Ruth* by Cundall and Morris - "TOTC"), p. 157.

⁴ Ibid.