



"Because there is very little honor left in American life, there is a certain built-in tendency to destroy masculinity in American men."
—Norman Mailer

20-Sep-19

Manoah (Part One)

In August 2018, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued new guidelines for the treatment of men and boys. The "headline news" within the guidelines was its redefining of "traditional masculinity" as a pathological state. Being a man, the APA decreed, "is, on the whole, harmful." This criticism dovetails with the attempts over the last few generations to turn little boys into little girls and men into women. To an uncomfortably significant degree, those efforts have succeeded.

A case in point is a commercial recently aired by the Gillette razor company, which has stirred a great deal of comment about "toxic masculinity." I tried to watch the advertisement but could not finish it. If I had, I would probably have lost my "man card." Part of the problem is the way society has come to view masculinity: as aggressive, overly competitive, testosterone-fueled, stoic, and even dim-witted. Is this the kind of man that [God](#) had in mind when He created Adam?

What does God want from men? The short answer—the spiritual answer—is that what He expects from men is not that much different from what He expects from women. He wants men to "seek first the [kingdom of God](#)" (

[Matthew 6:33](#)) and to "seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" ([Isaiah 55:6](#)). The apostle Paul tells us that, spiritually, within the church, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for [we] are all one in Christ [Jesus](#)" (Galatians 3:28).

Even so, while both sexes in the church have the same goal—to become more like God and prepare for His Kingdom—men and women have different but complementary responsibilities. The weakness of one is supplemented by the strength of the other. When men and women work together as a team, striving to obey God, they stand a far better chance of success.

Scripture contains an example of a man, Manoah, father of Samson, who has suffered a fair amount of criticism over the years. Some preachers and commentators have held him up as a poor excuse for a man. But was he? Various commentators consider him to have been lazy, jealous, weak, hen-pecked, faithless, not too bright, and sterile, among other things.

What did he do to deserve this vitriol? Was he really a horrible husband, father, and man in general? Was he "toxic" or otherwise?

His story appears in Judges 13. The children of Israel had been under the heel of the Philistines for forty years. Verse 1 may be one of the saddest sentences in the Bible: "Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD." Again! How sad, how disappointing it must have been to our Creator. They sinned *again*, and He had been forced to punish them—for forty years—as a loving father must do.

The writer of Judges—perhaps Samuel—tells us that a Danite man named Manoah and his wife have no children ([Judges 13:2](#)). In verse 3, the Angel of the LORD appears to the wife out in a field and tells her she will conceive and bear a son. He goes on to instruct her about the standards that this son must follow because he will be a Nazirite (verses 4-5). In verse 6, she hurries to her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name."

Manoah prays, asking God to send this Man of God again to "teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born" (verse 8). In the next verses, God hears the man's prayer, and the Angel of God appears to his wife again. She literally runs to tell Manoah, and he follows his wife back to this Angel and asks if He's the one who spoke to his wife. "I am," replies the Angel. At this, "Manoah said, 'Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?' So the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, 'Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful'" (verses 12-13).

In verses 15-18, Manoah asks that he be allowed to prepare a young goat for this Angel, who says He will not eat, but offering a burnt offering would be acceptable. Manoah again asks His name, and the Angel of the Lord says, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?"

The couple offers the young goat, along with a [grain offering](#), on a rock to the Lord (verse 19), and while they watch, the flames leap up toward heaven, and the Angel of the Lord rises up into the fire and disappears (verse 20)! What a sight that must have been!

Manoah and his wife fall on their faces, and he says to her, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" (verse 22). She replies, "If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time" (verse 23). At this point, the narrative proceeds into the story of Samson.

From the scant details that appear in these verses, it is commonly taught that Manoah was not much of a man. A professor of Judaic studies at Duke University has written, "Samson's birth story deprecates . . . Manoah [and] serves to highlight the identity of his real father . . . the angel of the Lord." He accuses Manoah's wife of [adultery](#), claiming that "the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman" is a Hebrew euphemism that means the angel had "come on" to her! In other words, Manoah is such a wimp that the Angel must impregnate his wife! Another writer insists that Manoah was so dumb that he was unable to figure out where the parts went!

Because the name *Manoah* means "rest" or "quiet," many have interpreted this to imply that he was "slow" or "thick." One writer calls him a "fop," and

another, "dim-witted." The Duke professor goes so far as to assert that Manoah was a "slow-witted laggard." One of the kindest things written about him is that he "lacked [faith](#)." Commentators insist that he shows no signs of interest in the news that he and his wife would have a child, that he is inattentive to his wife—who, in their estimation, is much wiser than her husband—and that he fails to see the big picture. So-called "biblical scholars" portray few biblical figures as negatively as Manoah.

So why would we want to consider him as an example of true masculinity? Although we do not have the inside track on his life and times, a closer look at Scripture will shed some light on his true character. We will do this in Part Two.

- Mike Ford (1955-2021)

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Samson and the Christian \(Part 1\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh asks if we have known people who seemingly had everything going for them but never reached their potential. Samson had what it took but made horrible mistakes and lapses in judgment. Nevertheless, Hebrews 11 says that he will be part of the first resurrection. Even with his dalliance with women and problems with prevarication, he is counted among the saints. God can use people despite their flawed character. During the time of Samson, the Philistines wanted to dilute Israel's identity and assimilate them into their own culture (Hamitic by race, but Greek in culture). Samson's faithful parents were from the tribe of Dan, one that produces good leaders, yet who sometimes do things underhandedly and not by the rules. By taking on these characteristics, Samson did not live up to his potential, and nearly lost it altogether.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Who Were the Philistines?

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

For several centuries, the Philistines were a constant menace on Israel's southwestern flank. Richard Ritenbaugh summarizes what the Bible, history, and archeology have to say about this little-known yet biblically significant people.

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