

WHAT TYPE OF SON IS SAMSON? READING JUDGES 13 AS A BIBLICAL TYPE-SCENE

BENJAMIN J. M. JOHNSON*

I. INTRODUCTION: A BIBLICAL TYPE-SCENE

What do Jacob, Joseph, Jesus, and Samson have in common? The answer is, quite simply, their birth narratives. But that is not the true issue at hand. The real question is, *why* do Jacob, Joseph, Jesus, and Samson have such similar birth narratives? Nor are these four characters the only ones with such similar birth narratives; they merely make for the most clever alliteration. What this article is really going to address is why there are several characters in the Bible whose birth narratives are so similar. The answer to this question seems most clearly to be that each of these stories is making use of the narrative convention of a “type-scene.”

In 1978, Robert Alter published an article in which he proposed the existence of this narrative convention he calls a “type-scene.”¹ In his work he borrowed from Homeric scholarship² and proposed that often in biblical narrative “there is a series of recurrent narrative episodes attached to the careers of biblical heroes that are analogous to Homeric type-scenes in that they are dependent on the manipulation of a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs.”³ Alter identifies six different biblical type-scenes: (1) the announcement of the birth of the hero to a barren woman; (2) encountering the bride at the well; (3) the epiphany in the field; (4) the initiatory trial; (5) danger in the desert and discovery of a source of sustenance; and (6) the testament of the dying hero;⁴ though many other type-scenes have been proposed since Alter’s work.⁵

* Ben Johnson is a Ph.D. student at Durham University. He resides at 42 Front Street, Durham, DH1 5DW, UK.

¹ Robert Alter, “Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention,” *Critical Inquiry* (1978) 355–68.

² Most notably the work of W. Arend, *Die typischen Szenen bei Homer*, *Forshungen zur Klassischen Philologie* 7 (Berlin: Weidmansche Buchhandlung, 1933). For more recent work on type-scenes in Homer, see B. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad: Studies in the Narrative Techniques of Homeric Battle Description* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1968); and M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

³ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 51.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ E.g. Min Suc Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” *JSOT* 31 (2007) 259–73; George Savran, “Theophany as Type Scene,” *Prooftexts* 23/2 (2003) 119–49; Brian Britt, “Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scene,” *CBQ* 64 (2002) 37–59; and Robert L. Cohn, “Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying Monarch,” *CBQ* 47 (1985) 603–16.

The type-scene in which we are interested is what Alter has called the “annunciation type-scene.” I will refer to it as the “son of a barren woman” type-scene.⁶ There are five, maybe six, occurrences of this type-scene in the OT and two in the NT. The five occurrences of this type-scene in the OT are (1) Abraham and Sarah with the birth of Isaac (Gen 16:1–21:7); (2) Isaac and Rebekah with the birth of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–26); (3) Jacob and Leah and Rachel with the birth of the eleven sons (Gen 29:31–30:24); (4) Manoaah and his wife with the birth of Samson (Judg 13:2–25); and (5) Elkanah and Hannah with the birth of Samuel (1 Sam 1:1–21).⁷ The two occurrences in the NT are (1) Zechariah and Elizabeth with the birth of John (Luke 1:5–80); and (2) Joseph and Mary with the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26–2:7/Matt 1:18–25).⁸

Is Samson to be considered with the rest of these characters as an immensely important person in Israel’s Scriptures? Or even more, as a type

⁶ Referring to this type-scene as the “son of a barren woman” further allows us to differentiate from the pure “annunciation” type-scene recognized by Robert Neff and further analyzed by Edgar Conrad and Raymond Brown (see Robert Neff, “The Birth and Election of Isaac in the Priestly Tradition,” *BR* 15 [1970] 5–18; idem, “The Annunciation of the Birth Narrative of Ishmael,” *BR* 17 [1972] 51–60; Edgar W. Conrad, “The Annunciation of the Birth and the Birth of the Messiah,” *CBQ* 47 [1985] 656–63; and Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, updated edition [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993] esp. 155–59). In Neff’s classification it is the annunciation that is the fixed form or type (Neff does not use the term “type-scene”). This classification includes many of the scenes we have identified as “son of a barren woman” type-scenes (Isaac, Samson, John, and Jesus); but it also excludes those that do not have a clear “annunciation” (Jacob, Joseph and brothers, and Samuel). It also includes a number of scenes that do not fit our identified type: Ishmael (Gen 16:11–12); Josiah (1 Kgs 13:2); Immanuel (Isa 7:14–17); and Solomon (1 Chr 22:9–10). What may be present in the texts that we are analyzing is a mix of two conventions. For our purposes, however, I am not analyzing the “annunciation” type *per se*, but analyzing it as part of a larger type-scene which I have identified as the “son of a barren woman.” Thus, only the seven scenes identified below will be used in the analysis.

⁷ Though Alter, Ackerman, and Williams include the Shunammite woman in 2 Kgs 4:8–17 in this category, I will not include it in my analysis (see Alter, “Convention” 126; Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* [New York: Doubleday, 1998] 185; and James G. Williams, “The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes,” *JSOT* 17 [1980] 110). Alter may be right that the use of the type-scene in the story of the Shunammite woman “may be what ultimately explains all the others,” for the episode of the Shunammite woman is clearly playing with this convention. In my analysis, however, I have identified this scene as the “son of a barren woman” rather than “the barren woman.” I believe this type-scene is about the son, not the mother. Therefore, I have limited my analysis to the scenes which introduce a major protagonist. In the story of the Shunammite woman, the son has no active role and plays no further role in the narrative of 2 Kings. He is born, he dies, and he is raised. He merely fulfills a function but does not seem to be a character in his own right.

⁸ Clearly, Mary is never identified as being barren. However, Williams and Ackerman have both persuasively argued that the story of Jesus should be counted as one of these type-scenes (Williams, “Barren” 110; Ackerman, *Warrior* 186). Williams notes, “The young virgin is an image in opposition to the (old) barren woman. But the outcome is the same: through a wonderful divine providence the religious hero is conceived in a womb which is not or cannot be brought to conception by the human father.” The importance for the type-scene is in the miraculous birth and the status of the woman as unable to bear children. In fact, the birth of a son to a virgin would be viewed as more miraculous than the birth of a son to a barren woman. It is not abnormally uncommon, after all, for a woman who appeared barren for a long time to finally conceive. To see how the birth of Jesus follows the pattern of this type-scene, see the appendix.

of Christ?⁹ Of all the characters in the biblical narrative who fit this type-scene Samson seems the most troublingly out of place. The other characters are patriarchs, mighty prophets, and Jesus.¹⁰ Samson, who in the final analysis is a failure of a judge, does not seem to fit in this list. We will therefore examine the narrative of Samson's birth to see why the narrator has told this story as an example of the type-scene of the "son of a barren woman." If this method proves to be a useful exegetical tool in the study of the narrative of Judges 13,¹¹ then perhaps Alter is right to say that we have recovered an ancient literary convention,¹² and we are justified in making use of it in our reading of the biblical narrative.

The advantage of recognizing a biblical pericope as a type-scene is that it provides another context in which to read the pericope. For the narrative of Samson's birth in Judges 13, we have the immediate context of the Samson cycle in Judges 13–16 and the context of the book of Judges as a whole. If, however, we recognize that Judges 13 is an example of the biblical type-scene of a "son of a barren woman," then we have the other versions of this type-scene which provide another context against which to read the narrative of Samson's birth.¹³ The purpose of this article is to study Judges 13:2–25 as a literary¹⁴ presentation and compare it to other uses of this biblical type-scene. This sort of extended exegesis of one particular example of a biblical type-scene is only possible when the existence of a type-scene has been identified. Thanks to the excellent studies of Alter, Williams, and Ackerman, there is something of a consensus regarding the existence of this type-scene, though extended exegesis of one particular example of it has previously been lacking.¹⁵ It is our purpose to contribute to the discussion of this type-scene by

⁹ See the discussion and literature cited in James L. Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, a Vow Ignored* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978) 139–40.

¹⁰ Not that the other characters that fit this type-scene are without their faults, but Samson appears to be negatively portrayed more consistently than the others.

¹¹ I use Judges 13 as shorthand to describe the birth narrative of Samson. Technically speaking, his birth narrative consists of Judg 13:2–24 or 25 depending on how you divide the sections.

¹² Alter, "Convention" 129.

¹³ Clearly, reading Judges 13 in the context of texts that were written much later is in some sense anachronistic. However, the idea of a "type-scene" is that these stories are drawing on a preexisting "type" that predates them all. We, however, being this far removed from that cultural context have no access to the type except by analyzing the examples of it to find commonalities. Furthermore, this type of intertextual analysis recognizes that when later writers present a particular story as a type-scene, they are intentionally placing their story within the context of the other type-scenes. The fact that these texts now exist in a canonical context allows us to read them as, in some sense, in dialogue with each other.

¹⁴ Alter speaks of the Bible as "*historicized* prose fiction" (*Art* 24; emphasis original). What he means by this is that the writers of Scripture "seek through the process of narrative realization to reveal the enactment of God's purposes in historical events" (*ibid.* 33). In other words, they are telling what they perceived as real history in the narrative form of prose fiction. This is not to question the historicity of the biblical narrative but to recognize that the history of Israel has been presented in a literary form that seeks to make theological claims about that history.

¹⁵ See the studies of Alter, "Convention" 115–30; Ackerman, *Warrior* 181–215; and Williams, "Barren" 107–19, cited frequently throughout this article. Ackerman has provided the most extensive study of Samson's birth narrative, allowing it just over seven pages in her study (see *Warrior*

offering an extended look at one example of the “son of a barren woman” and show the exegetical fruitfulness of this kind of reading.

The type-scene that I have called “the son of a barren woman” has been identified as having a basic three-part structure:

1. indication of the woman’s barrenness
2. promise that the barrenness will end (by a messenger or oracle or man of God)
3. the conception and birth of the son¹⁶

Though Alter has clearly identified the core of the type-scene, it will be helpful to broaden our examination into every element that the majority of the type-scenes have in common. In my analysis I identified seven major elements that are common to a majority of these scenes, plus two minor elements that are common to a minority.¹⁷ The major elements are: (1) a statement describing the woman’s barrenness; (2) an attempt by the woman or her spouse to obtain children; (3) the promise of the son; (4) information about the promised child; (5) a reaction (usually doubt) to the promise; (6) the birth of the son; and (7) the naming of the son. The two minor recurring elements are (1) the command to name the son; and (2) a statement of the son’s prosperity.¹⁸

The strategy of this study will be to examine the narrative of the birth of Samson as a literary presentation, noting along the way how this version of the type-scene of the “son of a barren woman” differs from the other versions. Though recognizing the common elements of this type-scene is the first part of the analysis, the most important part of the analysis is to recognize “what is done in each individual [case] to give it a sudden tilt of innovation or even to refashion it radically for the imaginative purposes at hand.”¹⁹ In other words, it is in the anomalies of the scheme that the most valuable information and emphases are probably found. For example, in the episode of Jacob and Leah and Rachel, where other versions of this type-scene have a simple statement of the birth of the son, some form of *וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן* (“and she conceived

186–93), but her main concern seems to be to (1) include the story of Danil and Danataya in the *Epic of Aqhat* as an example of this type-scene; (2) argue for the inclusion of the story of Jesus’ birth within this type-scene; and (3) argue that this type-scene includes a death or dedication of the promised son as an element of the type-scene.

¹⁶ Alter, “Convention” 119–20. Williams splits this type-scene into two separate type-scenes: “the agony of the barren wife” (Gen 16:1–6, 21:1–7; 29:31–30:24; 1 Samuel 1) and the “promise to the barren wife” (Gen 18:1–15; Judg 13:2–24; 2 Kgs 4:8–17; Luke 1:5–25); he also discusses Matt 1:18–25 and Luke 1:26–38 under the latter category (“Barren” 109–10).

¹⁷ See the appendix.

¹⁸ This second element can be found in every occurrence of this type-scene. However, it is often found so much further along in the hero’s story that its relationship to this type-scene is questionable. Thus, we have relegated it to a minor element.

¹⁹ Alter, *Art* 52. Cf. Meir Sternberg, who notes that “the similarity affords the basis for the spatial linkage [between two texts] and confrontation of the analogical elements, whereas the dissimilarity makes for their mutual illumination, qualification, or simply concretization” (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987] 365).

and bore a son”), the episode of Jacob and Leah and Rachel has a long, drawn-out narrative describing the scheming of the two women and the birth of eleven sons. This is fitting, however, when we understand that one of the main themes of this narrative is the birth of the twelve tribes of Israel. The convention, then, helps the author bring out this emphasis by a variation of the typical pattern. With this strategy in mind we will examine the birth of Samson.

II. THE BIRTH OF SAMSON (JUDGES 13:2–25)

1. *The statement of barrenness (v. 2).* The introduction to Samson’s parents begins with a major narrative shift: ויהי (“and it happened”).²⁰ It separates the narrative that follows from the introduction in verse 1 which was itself a use of the conventional statement in Judges that יספו בני ישראל לעשות הרע בעיני יהוה (“Israel continued to do evil in the eyes of YHWH”). Samson’s mother, the barren woman in this scene, is not even truly introduced. We read that there was a certain man (איש אהר) named Manoah and so forth,²² and we find out that his wife (אשתו) is barren (עקרה). The introduction implies that Manoah will be the main character of the story when in fact the opposite seems to be true. It quickly becomes clear that Manoah’s unnamed wife is the central character in this drama. This is not the first time the author of Judges has left out the name of an important woman (e.g. Jephthah’s daughter, Judg 11:30–40). However, Manoah’s wife is the only barren woman in the biblical type-scene who is not named.²³ While this may be characteristic in Judges²⁴ it should cause us to ask why within this type-scene. It seems that to the narrator the barren state of Manoah’s wife is more important than her name.²⁵

The fact that Manoah’s wife is unnamed in this story brings out two immediate themes and a third that we will examine later. The first theme that is brought out is the importance of women in the Samson narrative. It is a repeated theme in Judges that men’s and women’s roles are reversed²⁶ and the namelessness of Manoah’s wife contributes to this theme. It allows the narrator to repeatedly refer to Samson’s mother as “the woman.” Though her husband is introduced as the main character and she is unnamed—a

²⁰ Cf. Roy L. Heller, *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations: An Analysis of Clause Function in Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004) 433–34.

²¹ Perhaps an allusion to Judg 9:53 where another unnamed woman, an אשה אהר (“certain woman”) played an important role and killed Abimelech.

²² This is in itself another conventional beginning to a biblical story. See Crenshaw, *Samson 72*; and Jichan Kim, *The Structure of the Samson Cycle* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993) 180.

²³ With the exception of the Shunammite woman.

²⁴ Though J. Clinton McCann notes that elsewhere in Judges (e.g. 11:29–40 and chap. 19), “being unnamed seems to designate marginalization and victimization; but this cannot be the case in chapter 13” (*Judges* [Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 2002] 95).

²⁵ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) 195.

²⁶ E.g. Deborah in chapter 4 and the unnamed woman who kills Abimelech in chapter 9.

status usually relegated to minor or marginalized characters—she is clearly the primary character of this story. But more than the general theme in Judges, the importance of “the woman” (הַיְשָׁרָה) in Samson’s birth story anticipates the importance that women will have in the rest of Samson’s story.²⁷ As Crenshaw notes, it is deeply ironic that “a nameless person can be trustworthy, whereas a person whose name we know, Delilah, proved false.”²⁸

The second theme that is brought out by the nameless status of Manoah’s wife is her importance in the narrative.²⁹ Her unnamed status allows comparison to the unnamed status of the messenger. In truth, the only characters who are positively portrayed in this narrative are the unnamed characters, Manoah’s wife and the messenger. If this is a legitimate comparison then we must take seriously the words of Manoah’s wife, which turn out to be somewhat prophetic.³⁰

2. *Attempt to acquire a son.* Absent from the Samson narrative is any information about an attempt to acquire a son. In fact, we know very little about the situation of Samson’s mother. We do not know if she is old as Sarah was or if YHWH closed her womb as he had with Hannah. We have virtually no extra information about her situation.³¹ Though we have no information about any attempt to acquire children in Samson’s birth narrative, this is not the case in the majority of these type-scenes. Aside from Joseph and Mary, Manoah and his wife are the only characters in this type-scene who do not try to acquire children by some means.³² They neither offer prayer as Isaac, Hannah, and Zechariah do,³³ nor try to obtain children through the means of a handmaid as Sarah, Leah, and Rachel do.³⁴ This makes YHWH the sole initiator in Samson’s story. He is not answering any prayer, he is acting on his own, in order to carry out his will.³⁵

²⁷ Robert Alter notes that “Manoah’s arising and going after the woman—to be sure, for divinely sanctioned purposes—is a bit of choreographed movement that will come to stand as an emblem for the career of his son” (“Samson Without Folklore,” in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* [ed. Susan Niditch, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990] 52).

²⁸ Crenshaw, *Samson* 73.

²⁹ I owe this observation to the excellent article by Adele Reinhartz, “Samson’s Mother: An Unnamed Protagonist,” *JSOT* 55 (1992) 25–37.

³⁰ See pp. 7–8.

³¹ Cf. Exum, “Promise” 47; Kim, *Structure* 181.

³² Cf. Crenshaw: “No word is spoken about reasons for the woman’s barrenness; the slightest accusation is lacking. Nor do we hear anything about her agony—or even whether she prayed for God’s assistance. Her role is entirely passive” (*Samson* 72–73).

³³ The relevant texts are Gen 25:21; 1 Sam 1:10–11; and Luke 1:13. Though Zechariah’s prayer is not present in the text, it is assumed by the angel’s answer: “for your prayer has been heard” (δοῦτε εἰς ἡκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου).

³⁴ The relevant texts are Gen 16:2ff and 30:3ff.

³⁵ Also, absent from this story is the characteristic “reference to Israel crying out [קָרַע וְצָעַק] to Yahweh for deliverance from the Philistine yoke,” which we would have expected in 13:1 (Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999] 395). God is the sole initiator in this story. This makes the passivity of the characters in chapter 13 very comparable to the passivity of Israel who fails to cry out to God. Thus, just as YHWH is the sole initiator in Samson’s story so YHWH is the sole initiator in the deliverance (or at least beginning of the deliverance) of Israel. Cf. Kim, *Structure* 181.

3. *The announcement* (vv. 3–7). In this version of the type-scene it is the angel of YHWH (מלאך־יהוה) that appears to the woman.³⁶ The identification of the messenger as מלאך־יהוה is important because (1) his identity will play a key role in the story as it unfolds; and (2) this messenger's supernatural identity provides for interesting and potentially illuminating comparison to the messengers in other versions of the type-scene.

The identity of the messenger in the present story is described variously throughout the narrative. The narrator is clear to note at the beginning that this is מלאך־יהוה ("the angel of YHWH," v. 3). But he is immediately relegated by Manoah's wife to איש האלהים ("man of God," v. 6) who has the *appearance* of מלאך האלהים ("angel of God"). The categorical difference between the identification of the messenger as מלאך־יהוה and מלאך האלהים is pointed out by Keil who notes that איש האלהים denotes a prophet (e.g. Deut 33:1) whereas מלאך־יהוה is the "angel in whom the invisible God reveals himself to men."³⁷ Both Manoah and the narrator pick up on the change of the reference to the messenger as אלהים (vv. 8 and 9, respectively). He is then referred to by the woman simply as האיש ("the man," v. 10). Again this is picked up by the narrator and Manoah in verse 11. Finally, the perspectives of Manoah and his wife disappear, and the narrator refers to the messenger as מלאך־יהוה seven times in a row (vv. 13–20). Then, finally, after a miraculous disappearance, Manoah realizes that they have seen God (אלהים) himself.

Essentially, what has taken place is that the narrator has let the reader know up front that the woman is dealing with מלאך־יהוה, but the characters have only seen him as איש האלהים or simply as איש, though the woman does note that the messenger has the appearance of מלאך האלהים.³⁸ The narrator comes down to the characters' level for the first half of the story³⁹ but in verse 13 switches tactics and barrages the reader with seven consecutive references to מלאך־יהוה, which highlights the fact that the characters have

³⁶ The only times that מלאך־יהוה ("the angel of YHWH") interacts in a judge's story is in the Samson birth narrative (13:3, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21) and the Gideon narrative (6:11, 12, 21, 22).

³⁷ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 4: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (trans. James Martin; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1875; repr. as vol. 2; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 293. I follow the reprinted pagination.

³⁸ J. Cheryl Exum points out that Manoah's wife is "more perceptive than Manoah: she senses something otherworldly about the visitor from the start (v. 6), whereas it takes a miracle for Manoah to recognize him (vv. 16, 21)" ("Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests are Being Served?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* [ed. Gale A. Yee, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995] 79). While I think Exum's observation is generally correct, I am not convinced that Manoah's wife came to a full realization either. The correlation between what she calls the messenger and what Manoah calls the messenger shows they are close in their understanding of the messenger's identity. I do think, however, that the comment of verse 6 that מלאך האלהים כמראה מלאך האלהים ("and his appearance was like an angel of God") suggests that she had more insight than Manoah. I am, however, cautious of making too much of this fact. Cf. Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 140–41.

³⁹ The various names that the narrator gives to the messenger should not be understood as different sources but as a literary presentation that highlights the *characters'* understanding of who the messenger is. Similarly, Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975) 220; Exum, "Promise" 48, n. 16; Kim, *Structure* 189–90.

not grasped the fullness of the messenger's identity.⁴⁰ The narrator's willingness to refer to the messenger on a similar level as the characters could also be attributed to an allusion to the other version of this type-scene that has a similarly complex announcement scene. In the account of the announcement to Abraham and Sarah the messenger is referred to variously as אלהים (Gen 17:16, 19), one of three אנשים ("men," Gen 18:2–10) and as יהוה (Gen 18:13–14). If we read the complex of references to the divine envoy in Judges 13 and recall the complex of references to the divine envoy in Genesis 17–18, we could expect YHWH to be interacting in history here in a similar way that he did in the promise of Isaac. The subtle allusion to the annunciation to Abraham and Sarah in the annunciation to Manoah's wife heightens the reader's expectation of Samson, which only makes Samson's consequent failure to live up to any expectations all the more egregious.⁴¹

It is important to note that there are really two announcements here, one from מלאך-יהוה to Manoah's wife and one from Manoah's wife to Manoah. This is the only occurrence in the type-scene where the person to whom the announcement is originally given, repeats it to their spouse.⁴² There are also some significant differences between the version of the announcement that מלאך-יהוה gives to Manoah's wife and the version she gives to Manoah. The woman omits two significant elements of the divine envoy's speech. She first omits any reference to the prohibition against cutting the hair (13:5). She then omits the reference to her son as one who will "begin to deliver Israel" (v. 5, יחל להושיע את-ישראל, יחל להושיע מותו). Daniel Block notes that for the reader this provides ominous foreshadowing, for in the end it is the violation of what the woman omits (cutting of the hair) that leads to what the woman adds ("day of his death").⁴³ Furthermore, the association of Manoah's unnamed wife with the unnamed messenger requires the reader to take her words more seriously. When we do, we see that her change of the divine envoy's message turns out to be somewhat prophetic. For when Samson breaks his vow and finally ceases to be a Nazirite in any sense of the word, his death quickly follows. Thus, it turns out to be true that Samson was a Nazirite "until the day of his death" (עד-יום מותו).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ This is explicitly stated in 13:16: כי לא-ידע מנוח כי-מלאך יהוה הוא ("for Manoah did not know that he was the angel of YHWH").

⁴¹ Lillian R. Klein notes that "the annunciation type-scene arouses expectations which are diametrically opposed to the ensuing reality. The reader is set up for incongruity, for irony" (*The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* [JSOTSup 68; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988] 117).

⁴² Though this is clearly implied in the case of Elizabeth and Zechariah because although the announcement was given to Zechariah alone (Luke 1:11–20) Elizabeth knows to name her son John (Luke 1:60).

⁴³ Block, *Judges* 406. Cf. Exum, "Promise" 49; Crenshaw, *Samson* 74; Kim, *Structure* 191; and Alter, who notes that "[i]t is surely a little unsettling that the promise which ended with liberation—though, pointedly, only the *beginning* of liberation—of Israel from its Philistine oppressors now concludes with no mentions of 'salvation' but instead with the word 'death'" (*Art* 101).

⁴⁴ Reinhartz, "Samson's Mother" 31.

4. *Information about the promised child* (vv. 5, 7). This common element among the type-scene of the “son of the barren woman” is always imbedded in the announcement scene. It is an important element and is a driving factor in the life of the son. Therefore, it is worth examining separately.

The primary information the reader is given about Samson is that he will live under the Nazirite vow.⁴⁵ The Nazirite vow comes from Num 6:1–8. There, the vow is described as concerning three prohibitions: (1) abstaining from wine or strong drink; (2) having no razor touch the head; and (3) having no contact with a corpse. It was viewed as a voluntary and temporary act of special dedication to YHWH.⁴⁶ Samson’s vow is unique in three ways: (1) it is divinely imposed; (2) it is from birth to death; and (3) it imposes his mother to keep the sanctions during her pregnancy.⁴⁷ Among other versions of this type-scene only John is divinely imposed with a Nazirite-like vow from birth.⁴⁸ Samuel is also imposed with the Nazirite vow but it is imposed by his mother’s vow (1 Sam 1:11).⁴⁹ Samuel’s vow is also for his entire life (כל-ימי חייו). Samson, like John the Baptist and the prophet Samuel, is called to live a life separated to YHWH. He is not only the fulfillment of a promise; he is called to a special life of service.⁵⁰

Thus, the information that the messenger gives about Samson, while similar to the narratives of Samuel and John the Baptist, is in some sense unique. It is fitting, however, in the context of the book of Judges that the Nazirite theme would be especially pronounced. In the book of Judges, where Israel’s problems are most clearly seen in her idolatry and in her collaboration

⁴⁵ Some have argued that the element of the Nazirite vow is a secondary insertion into Samson’s story because it is rarely mentioned in the rest of the Samson cycle (e.g. Crenshaw, *Samson* 74). However, it is clearly a necessary element both for the climax of the story—the scene of Samson’s downfall with Delilah (16:4–22) makes no sense apart from the Nazirite vow—and for the characterization of Samson as one who rashly disregards his Nazirite vow. Cf. McCann, *Judges* 99; and Kim, *Structure* 185, 192.

⁴⁶ Cf. Block, *Judges* 403. The temporary nature is implied by the phrase ער-מלאת הימים אשר-יזיר (“until the days fulfilled are which he swore to YHWH to be holy”) in Num 6:5.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.* Contrary to the view of Philippe Guillame, *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges* (JSOT Sup 385; New York: T & T Clark, 2004) 164, and others, it must be noted with Kim that these “restrictions also pertain to the boy” (*Structure* 185). That the messenger declares that the boy will be a Nazirite (נזיר) makes it clear that the stipulations concerning the mother’s drinking habits are an extension of the Nazirite vow placed upon the boy rather than separate stipulations given to her alone.

⁴⁸ Luke 1:15: καὶ οἶνον καὶ σικερα οὐ μὴ πίη (“and wine and strong drink he will not drink”). Cf. the LXX of Judg 13:4: καὶ μὴ πίηης οἶνον καὶ σικερα (“and do not drink wine and strong drink”).

⁴⁹ Neither the LXX nor the MT uses the word “Nazirite,” though the LXX does use δοτός (“given” or “devoted one”). The NRSV, however, apparently considers the allusion so strong that it adds “as a Nazirite” in verse 11.

⁵⁰ Ackerman postulates that the type-scene of the “son of a barren woman” has as a common element of either (1) a scene of the near death of the hero or (2) a dedication of the hero to YHWH. This shows, according to Ackerman, that the child of promise is a gift from God and he has the right to demand that life (*Warrior* 189–93). This observation is apt, but I wonder if it is trying too hard to fit other stories into the pattern of the Shunammite woman (not a true example of the type-scene in my thinking) and perhaps the *Aqedah*.

with the inhabitants of Canaan (see 2:1–5), a leader who is a Nazirite, and who is specially “set apart” for service to God seems a perfect fit.⁵¹ So there is great expectation that Samson will finally be the deliverer of Israel that we have anticipated for the entire book of Judges.

Structurally, in terms of the Samson cycle itself, there are only two places where the Nazirite vow is explicitly mentioned: in his birth narrative and in the narrative that leads up to his death. These form a thematic frame by which we can judge Samson’s whole career.⁵² If this is the case, then Samson’s career is an utter failure, because although Samson’s downfall comes about because he breaks one of the specific parameters of the Nazirite vow,⁵³ he lives his entire life contrary to his vow. As McCann notes, Samson will break every part of his vow:

Samson apparently does not shun “wine and strong drink” (see 14:5, 10; cf. Num. 6:3); he does not avoid contact with a carcass (see 14:8; cf. Num. 6:6–8); and finally, he foolishly allows his hair to be cut (see 16:15–22; cf. Num. 6:5–6). Then too, of course, Samson is in regular contact (quite literally!) “with the inhabitants of this land” (2:2), something prohibited from the beginning by the book of Judges (2:1–5; see 3:6).⁵⁴

Though Samson’s birth narrative makes the reader expect that he is just the leader that Israel needs, one who is set apart to YHWH, he turns out to be just the leader that Israel deserves, one who is decidedly not set apart to YHWH, but who rashly disregards his special status before YHWH (as does Israel).

The other information we receive about this promised child is that “he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (v. 5, והוא יחל להושיע, את־ישראל מיד פלשתים). In the context of the book of Judges, saying that Samson will deliver (ישע) Israel from their enemies is paramount to saying he will be a judge of Israel.⁵⁵ In the context of the type-scene, however, we cannot help but think of announcement of the birth of Jesus, which in the Matthean version says that he will σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν (Matt 1:21: “he will save the people from their sins”), which sounds strikingly similar to the LXX of Judg 13:5: αὐτὸς ἄρξεται σφῆζειν τὸν Ἰσραηλ ἐκ χειρὸς ἀλλοφύλων (“he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines”). Thus, the expectation that the reader has for Samson’s mission is very similar to the expectation that the reader has for Jesus’ mission.

5. *Reaction to the promise (vv. 8–23).* We now come to the longest and most elaborate element of this story. This entire scene proceeds from Manoah’s reaction to the news of the promised son.⁵⁶ Manoah’s immediate

⁵¹ McCann, *Judges* 98.

⁵² Kim, *Structure* 192.

⁵³ He breaks the vow of Num 6:5 that תער לא יעבר על־ראשו (“a razor shall not come upon his head”) when Delilah cuts his hair in Judg 16:15–18.

⁵⁴ McCann, *Judges* 99.

⁵⁵ See Judg 2:16, 18; 3:9, 31; 6:14–15, 36–37; 8:22 for similar use of deliverance language.

⁵⁶ To be fair, it should be said that the scene of the woman telling Manoah of the messenger’s promise is her reaction to the promise. However, that scene is more characterized by her lack of reaction than her reaction. Cf. Exum, “Promise” 48.

reaction is to ask YHWH to send the messenger to them again in order to teach them what they should do about the child. However, it may be that Manoah is not looking for more information but looking to be included in the promise. Block has observed that the “repeated use of the pronoun ‘us’ suggests that in the author’s mind [Manoah] was jealous because the messenger had approached his wife instead of him.”⁵⁷ If this is the case, as seems probable in light of the characterization of Manoah throughout the story, then the irony is that YHWH’s answer to Manoah’s prayer is to again send his messenger (מלאך האלהים) to his wife, not to him. The narrator even makes a point of telling the reader of Manoah’s absence.⁵⁸

The contrast between the woman’s reaction to the news and Manoah’s reaction is clearly seen in the fact that the woman specifically says that she did not ask him anything (ולא שאלתיהו), and the first thing that Manoah does is ask questions of the messenger (13:11).⁵⁹ Manoah asks the messenger, “what is to be the boy’s rule of life; what is he to do?”⁶⁰ Instead of answering his question, the messenger tells Manoah that his wife should do what he told her to do (מכל אשר אמרתי אל-האשה תשמרי).⁶¹ The focus of the story is continually put back onto Manoah’s wife. She is the agent through whom this miraculous birth is going to take place, thus she is thrust into center stage at every turn.⁶²

If we compare this reaction to other reactions in this biblical type-scene, it appears to be unique. Other reactions include doubt (Abraham and Sarah; Zechariah and Elizabeth; Joseph and Mary) and joy (Elkanah and Hannah). The reaction of Manoah is proactive, almost scheming. He seeks to include himself in the promise, to buy the favor of the messenger, and then to discover the identity of the messenger, something his wife considered inappropriate to do. While it is unclear why Manoah asked to detain the messenger,⁶³ it seems that he is seeking to do something for the messenger, perhaps to gain his favor. Instructive is the parenthetical note that “Manoah did not know that he was the angel of YHWH” (Judg 13:16, לא ידע מנוח כי-מלאך יהוה הוא).

⁵⁷ Block, *Judges* 407. Cf. Schneider, *Judges* 198–99.

⁵⁸ Judg 13:9: ומנוח אישה אין עמה (“but Manoah, her husband, was not with her”).

⁵⁹ Exum notes that, “Unlike his wife, who readily accepts the divine message, Manoah wants answers” (“Promise” 51). Kim is very sympathetic to Manoah’s cause, arguing that he is rightly cautious and curious given that a woman’s vow had to be sanctioned by her husband as is seen in Num 30:10ff (*Structure* 195–96). While this should perhaps caution us from painting too negative a picture of Manoah, I seriously doubt the narrative is intending to depict him as a “righteous and trusting husband” as Kim suggests.

⁶⁰ Judg 13:12. Ironically, Manoah answers his own question. He asks what is to be the rule (משפט) of the boy’s life. The answer is that he will judge (שפט) Israel.

⁶¹ Though תשמרי could be translated as either “she must do” or “you must do,” in the context it is certainly reiterating to Manoah that the woman must do as the messenger told her. It makes no sense in the narrative for the messenger to tell Manoah that he also must keep the Nazirite stipulations. Cf. Louis C. Jonker, “Samson in Double Vision: Judges 13–16 From Historical-Critical and Narrative Perspectives,” *JNSL* 18 (1992) 52–53.

⁶² As Susan Niditch notes, even in a type-scene where the woman predominates, Samson’s mother is especially prominent (“Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak,” *CBQ* 52 [1990] 610–12).

⁶³ Block suggests that “Manoah’s offer is quite secular,” perhaps the equivalent of the question: “will you eat with us?” (*Judges* 412).

This note reminds the reader of Manoah's ignorance as well as provides the reasons for his actions: Manoah is still operating under the understanding that this is a purely human, though probably prophetic, messenger. His actions are proactive but ultimately foolish because they are based on a lack of understanding of the actual situation.

The length and complexity of the "reaction" scene in Samson's birth narrative suggests that it contains key information about how we should view this version of the type-scene. What then can we say about this section of the story? First, throughout this scene the ignorance of the characters, especially Manoah, is highlighted. YHWH is seen as working *in spite* of the main characters of the story. Second, the divine envoy repeatedly tries to get the characters to understand. The messenger does return upon Manoah's request. And he further tells Manoah not to prepare him a meal but to offer up a burnt offering (עלה) to YHWH. The divine envoy is seen as desperately trying to get the characters to "get the picture." These themes run constantly through Samson's story. If Samson even *begins* to deliver Israel from the Philistines it is because YHWH is working *in spite* of him. And if there is any character in any biblical narrative who foolishly did not get the picture, then it has to be Samson as seen most clearly in his final encounter with Delilah.

6. *Arrival of the child (v. 24a).* We now know much about the promised child. We are now waiting for his arrival. However, in Samson's case it happens a little differently than we expect. In every version of this type-scene in the OT, the birth of the hero is described with the verb הרה ("conceive, become pregnant") followed by the verb ילד ("bear, bring forth, beget").⁶⁴ In the Samson story Manoah's wife is told, as we would expect, that she will conceive and bear a son (v. 3, והרית וילדת בן). However, when the time to give birth comes we are simply told that "the woman bore a son" (והילד האשה בן), with no mention of conception (הרה). In fact, the only mention of conception came much earlier in the second announcement from the divine envoy. He first says "you will conceive and bear a son" (v. 3, והרית וילדת בן); he then says, "for behold you, pregnant, and you will bear a son" (v. 5, כי הנה הרה וילדת בן). The first clause is a verbless clause, with a subject and predicate;⁶⁵ in this case the indefinite predicate (הרה) *classifies* the subject.⁶⁶ This construction

⁶⁴ See Gen 21:1–2; 25:21–26; 29:31–30:23; 1 Sam 1:19–20. The only possible exception to this is the story of the birth of Jacob and Esau. In Gen 25:21, it is said that Rebekah conceived (והרה רבקה), but the story then goes into the description of Jacob and Esau wrestling in the womb. However, the story does use the verb ילד in verse 26 in the infinitive construct form, "When her time to give birth was at hand. . . ." This is, however, an appropriate variation on the pattern, because a key theme of the Jacob and Esau story is the rivalry between the brothers.

⁶⁵ E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2d English ed. by A. E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910) §141b. Boling takes these to be two participles, translating, "Actually, you are already pregnant and bearing a son" (*Judges* 220). Even if he is right, it does not change the discussion below.

⁶⁶ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) §8.4.2.

has the force of saying to the woman, “you are already pregnant,”⁶⁷ and is the exact phraseology that is announced to Hagar in Gen 16:11.⁶⁸ There Hagar is told that “you have conceived and will bear a son” (הֵנָּךְ הָרָה וְיִלְדֶת בֵּן) in verse 11⁶⁹ and in verse 15 it is simply pronounced that “Hagar bore Abram a son” (וַחֲלָד הֵגַר לְאַבְרָם בֵּן).

This element of the “birth of the son” is clearly different in the Samson narrative than the other versions of this type-scene. What does this differentiation communicate? Most clearly we see that Samson’s birth is more similar to the birth of Hagar’s son Ishmael than to the births of the other characters of this type-scene. It is surely ominous that the birth narrative of Samson, a child of promise, should cause us to recall the birth of Ishmael who is not the promised child rather than the birth of Isaac who is the promised child. The similarity to Ishmael suggests that Samson may not be a child of promise in the way that Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob were, but he is still a divinely promised son who has a role to fill. However, Samson notably fails this role. In fact, the characterization of Samson is very close to that of Ishmael. The description of Ishmael, that “He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin” (Gen 16:12), is also a perfect description of Samson. So where other elements of Samson’s version of this type-scene caused us to raise our expectations of him, this element causes us to temper that expectation with doubt.

7. *Naming the child (v. 24b)*. Almost every other version of this biblical type-scene gives a reason for the name of the promised son.⁷⁰ This is not so with the birth of Samson. In verse 24, we are told very briefly that וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שַׁמְשׁוֹן (“and she called his name Samson”). While it is not uncommon in this biblical type-scene for the woman to name the son,⁷¹ it is often pointed out that the fact that Manoah’s wife names Samson “serves to highlight the

⁶⁷ So, Block, *Judges* 402, esp. n. 230; Boling, *Judges* 220; Schneider, *Judges* 195; and George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) 317. This observation runs counter to the claim of those like Klein and Guillaume who argue that when Manoah’s wife describes the divine envoy as “coming unto her” (בָּא אֵלַי) she is describing a sexual encounter (Klein, *The Triumph of Irony* 111–15; Guillaume, *Waiting* 166; Othniel Margalith, “More Samson Legends,” *VT* 36 [1986] 400). If Manoah’s wife is already pregnant in verse 5 where, according to the flow of the narrative, the divine envoy is only recorded as “appearing” to her (וַיֵּרָא), then the description of the divine envoy as “coming unto her” (בָּא אֵלַי) in verse 6 should not be taken to mean a sexual encounter. Though it must be conceded that perhaps Manoah misunderstood her words that way.

⁶⁸ Boling, *Judges* 220; Moore, *Judges* 317.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, the ESV, JPS, NASB, NET, NIV, NRSV, and TNIV all recognize the past action here in Gen 16:11 (“you have conceived” or “you are now pregnant”) but maintain the future aspect in Judg 13:5 (“for you shall conceive”) even though the construction is identical.

⁷⁰ The only obvious exception is in the case of John in Luke 1:5–80/Matt 1:18–25.

⁷¹ Isaac and Rebekah name Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:25–26); Leah and Rachel each name their children and the children of their handmaids (Gen 29:32–30:24); Hannah names Samuel (1 Sam 1:20); both Elizabeth and Zechariah declare John’s name (Luke 1:60, 63). Abraham (Gen 21:3) and Joseph (Matt 1:25) are the only fathers described as solely naming their sons.

woman's role (and the feminine element in the Samson narrative as a whole) and also to marginalize Manoah even more."⁷²

What is uncommon, in terms of the type-scene, is for there to be no etymological reasoning for the promised son's name.⁷³ Though Samson's name is clearly related to the Hebrew word שמש ("sun"),⁷⁴ what this means for our judgment of Samson's character is difficult to say. Rather than speculate reasons for the name,⁷⁵ it seems best to accept the name as of no importance in light of the fact that "no etymology or explanation of the name is suggested, nor is there any hint of its significance elsewhere in the story."⁷⁶

Perhaps what Samson is named is less significant than what he is *not* named. If we were to guess at what Samson's name would be based on what we know of him from the story, then we would likely recall the phrase, "he will begin to save (ישע) Israel from the hands of the Philistines," and very plausibly suggest that he be named ישוע ("Jeshua").⁷⁷ Since the pun on the name would be from the verb ישע, meaning "to save," then the fact that he is not named Jeshua causes us to rethink whether or not Samson really will "begin to save (ישע) Israel." While this observation is conjectural, it is certainly not the first time that what a character is *not* named has caused much discussion and reflection.⁷⁸

What is significant about Samson's name in the story of Samson's birth is simply that *he has a name*. This story began with the statement of a certain man whose name was Manoah (ושמו מנחה). It now ends with the naming of his son (ותקרא את שמו שמשון). As Exum noted, "These two references provide an additional instance of inclusio in chap. 13."⁷⁹ They also highlight the namelessness of Samson's mother, Manoah's wife. Perhaps the importance of Samson's name is not in its etymology, as in other versions of this type-scene, but in its presence. As the only other named character in the scene Samson is compared to his father, Manoah, who showed himself to be

⁷² Block, *Judges* 416.

⁷³ In the OT versions of this type-scene, only Isaac does not have a clear, stated reasoning for his name. However, the clear wordplay between his name Isaac (יצחק) in Gen 21:3 and Sarah's declaration that "God has brought laughter (צחק) for me; everyone who hears will laugh (צחק) with me" in 21:6 makes the reasoning for his naming obvious.

⁷⁴ So Boling, *Judges* 225; Block, *Judges* 417–18; and others.

⁷⁵ For various proposals, see Block, *Judges* 416–18.

⁷⁶ Moore, *Judges* 325.

⁷⁷ In the LXX, the name ישוע ("Jeshua") is always translated Ἰησοῦς ("Jesus"); see, e.g., Ezra 2:2, 6, 36; Neh 3:13; 7:7; 1 Chr 24:11; 2 Chr 31:15. Obviously, in terms of the type-scene this allows for the comparison of Samson with Jesus and suggests that Samson will not be what Jesus was. Or, more appropriately, Jesus will be what Samson should have been, a deliverer of the people.

⁷⁸ In 1 Sam 1:20, Hannah names her son שמואל ("Samuel") because she asked (שאל) him of the Lord. It has long been pointed out that the etymological pun does not work, and the reader is really led to expect the name שאול ("Saul"). For a recent discussion, see David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 127–28. For the suggestion that the wordplay and failure of Hannah to name her son Saul provides foreshadowing for what will come, see Stanley D. Walters, "Hannah and Anna: The Greek and Hebrew Texts of 1 Samuel 1," *JBL* 107 (1988) 405–6; and Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) 25–26.

⁷⁹ Exum, "Promise" 57.

a very foolish character. This foreshadows what we know will be Samson's fault. Samson's downfall will be because he foolishly trusts a more cunning and perceptive woman. Where Manoah foolishly did not trust his wife, Samson will foolishly trust Delilah.⁸⁰

8. *Minor elements of the type-scene.* The two minor elements I have identified are: (1) the command to name the son; and (2) a statement regarding the son's prosperity. The former element is considered minor because few of the type-scenes have it. The latter element is minor because while some type-scenes, such as Samson's narrative, have this element clearly linked to the birth-narrative, others are so far removed that their relationship to this type-scene is questionable.

As in many of the versions of this type-scene, there is no command to name Samson. Similarly there is no command to name the sons of Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, and Elkanah and Hannah. This is not all that surprising because, as we noted earlier, there is no apparent etymological significance to Samson's name. The importance of Samson's name in his birth narrative is merely that he is named as opposed to an unnamed character.

Surprisingly, Samson's statement of blessing is as strong as any of the blessing statements among these type-scenes. Immediately after his birth the narrator briefly states, "The boy grew, and YHWH blessed him (ויברכהו יהוה)" (13:24). Elsewhere the hero is blessed by his father,⁸¹ blessed by אלהים,⁸² has YHWH with him,⁸³ or is strong in the spirit.⁸⁴ Among the heroes of this type-scene, Samson is blessed most directly by YHWH, with the use of the divine name (יהוה) and the verb "to bless" (ברך).

III. CONCLUSION

When we look at the list of biblical characters whose introduction fits the biblical type-scene we have been examining: Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Jesus; we see that Samson does not truly fit this list. He is a dubious character who, in the final analysis, cannot be considered a "good judge." He has a problem with foreign women (the Timnite in chap. 14 and Delilah in chap. 16); he breaks all the stipulations of his Nazirite vow; and his sole motivating factor for fighting for Israel against the "enemy nations" is revenge (e.g. 15:3–5). Even his last great act is motivated by revenge for his two eyes (16:28). Nevertheless, Samson's story is introduced with the same biblical type-scene as the patriarch's, Samuel,

⁸⁰ Crenshaw, *Samson* 73.

⁸¹ Isaac blesses Jacob in Gen 32:30: "And there he blessed him" (ויברך אתו שם).

⁸² Gen 25:11: "God blessed his son Isaac" (ויברך אלהים את יצחק). Similarly, Jesus in Luke 2:40: "The child grew (Τὸ δὲ παιδίον ἤρξανεν) and became strong, filled with wisdom (καὶ ἐκράταιοῦτο πλούσιον σοφίᾳ); and the favor of God was upon him (καὶ χάρις θεοῦ ἦ ἐπ' αὐτό)."

⁸³ Gen 39:2: "YHWH was with Joseph" (ויהי יהוה את יוסף); and 1 Sam 2:21: "And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of YHWH" (ויגדל הנער שמואל עם יהוה).

⁸⁴ John: Luke 1:80: "The child grew (Τὸ δὲ παιδίον ἤρξανεν) and became strong in spirit (καὶ ἐκράταιοῦτο πνεύματι)."

John the Baptist, and Jesus. The question we must now ask, in conclusion, is: How has analyzing this story in light of the other versions of this type-scene illuminated the meaning that the author is trying to convey with their use of the type-scene in Samson's story?

First, as we saw, other than the narrative of Jesus' birth, the Samson narrative is the only version of the convention that does not record the main characters attempting to acquire a child in any way. This variation emphasizes YHWH as the sole actor in this story. This is strikingly appropriate given another unique element in Samson's story: that of the prolonged "reaction" scene. The ignorance of the characters in their understanding of the significance of מלאך־יהוה, and especially Manoah's unwillingness to accept the message as it is, without his involvement, emphasize that YHWH is doing something in Israel's history *in spite* of the main characters through whom he is choosing to work. This is a critique of the main characters as well as a testament to the covenant God's faithfulness to Israel.⁸⁵ Not only is this true of Samson's birth narrative, but it proves to be true of Samson's whole life. As we have said, if Samson even begins to deliver Israel, it is because YHWH works *in spite* of him. Thus the variation in the type-scene has brought out a theme that proves to be true of Samson's entire career, and thematic within the author's entire presentation.

A second significant theme is highlighted by the divine imposition of the Nazirite vow on Samson. Like John, the only other character to have the Nazirite vow divinely imposed upon him, Samson is called to be set apart as holy to YHWH. This is the specific purpose of the Nazirite vow in Num 6:5, ליהוה קדש יהיה ("he will be holy to YHWH"). As we noted above, a Nazirite leader is exactly what the people of Israel need at this time. Ironically, it is not what they get. Time and time again, Samson fails to live up to his calling and his special status before YHWH. Thus, this variation of the type-scene raises our expectations of the character of Samson, only to be grossly disappointed.⁸⁶ In the rhetoric of the Samson cycle this is clearly an important theme.

Three themes were brought out by the relationship between Samson, as a named character, and his mother, an unnamed character. First, the fact that Samson's mother was unnamed allowed for her to be constantly referred to as "the woman" (האשה). As we saw, this foreshadowed the significant and negative effect that women would have on Samson's career. Second, the relationship between the unnamed messenger and Samson's unnamed mother caused us to take her more seriously as a main, intuitive, and trustworthy character. Thus her addition to the messenger's words about Samson being a Nazirite "until the day of this death" (13:7, ער־יום מותו) sounded a much more

⁸⁵ Cf. McCann, who notes that, "If there's a faithful hero in the story, besides Samson's mother, it is the God who proves persistently faithful to Samson (see 16:28–31), who proves himself persistently unfaithful to God" (*Judges* 101).

⁸⁶ I wonder if the reader's frustration at Samson's failure to live up to his great expectations in some way mirrors YHWH's frustration at Israel's failure to live up to their great expectations.

ominous tone. Third, the fact that Samson is a named character caused us to compare him to his father, who seemed to act foolishly throughout the narrative. And unlike Manoah who did not trust his unnamed wife's words, Samson will trust his named woman's words, to his ruin. Thus, in this variation of the named and unnamed characters in this type-scene, we are privy to a complex theme of the relationship between men and women (or between Samson and women) that is not only key for Samson's story but for the book of Judges as a whole.

A final, seemingly minor, but perhaps significant theme that is developed by studying Samson's story as a variation of the biblical type-scene is the similarity of Samson's birth to the birth of Ishmael instead of the birth of Isaac. Though several elements in Samson's birth narrative recalled the story of Abraham and Sarah (e.g. the complexity of the announcement scene), thus raising our expectations, the description of the birth of Samson breaks with the normal pattern of this type-scene in the OT—some form of the phrase *וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן* (“and she conceived and bore a son”)—and is more akin to the story of the birth of Ishmael, thus seriously calling our expectations into question. The narrative's subtle allusion to Ishmael's birth scene and Samson's failure to live up to his great expectations show that Samson is much more aptly described as Ishmael was, as a “wild ass of a man.” This variation seems to hint strongly at the kind of character that Samson will be.

In conclusion, this method of studying Samson's story is successful in illuminating some of the key themes of this pericope and the Samson cycle as a whole. The other examples of the type-scene of a “son of a barren woman” provide an illuminating context against which to read Samson's birth narrative. It seems that we have indeed found a way to tap into an ancient convention that significantly aids our reading.

Samson may not fit the elite group of characters who occupy the other versions of the type-scene, but the variations in his story help us to anticipate this fact. If we pay attention, read closely, and recognize that the author of Judges 13 is playing with this convention of the “son of a barren woman” type-scene, then we do not really expect Samson to live up to the expectations of the other characters of this type-scene. Or, if we do have high expectations of Samson, upon reading his story we go back and recognize the strategic ominous notes that were present in his birth narrative all along. The significance of Samson's story is not that Samson is a new promised child as Isaac was, nor that Samson is some “type” of Christ. If Samson is to be compared to Christ, it is as an anti-type, to show that Jesus was what Samson should have been. The significance of Samson's story is as an expression of YHWH's willingness to work wonders in Israel *in spite* of the vessels he chooses to use. The one thing that is true of all of the versions of this type-scene is that YHWH is faithful.

Appendix

<i>Element</i>	<i>Abraham & Sarah</i>	<i>Isaac & Rebekah</i>	<i>Jacob & Leah/Rachel</i>	<i>Manoah & His Woman</i>	<i>Elkanah & Hannah</i>	<i>Zechariah & Elizabeth</i>	<i>Joseph & Mary</i>
Major Elements							
Barrenness	Gen 16:1; 18:11	Gen 25:21	Gen 29:31; 30:1	Judg 13:2–3	1 Sam 1:2, 5	Luke 1:7	Luke 1:27, 34/Matt 1:18 (virgin)
Attempt	Gen 16:2ff.	Gen 25:21	Gen 30:3ff.	—	1 Sam 1:10–11	Luke 1:13 (implied)	—
Promise of a Child	Gen 17:16, 19; 18:10, 14	Gen 25:23? ('two nations are in your womb')	—	Judg 13:3, 5, 7	1 Sam 1:17? (Eli: May God grant your request)	Luke 1:13	Luke 1:31/Matt 1:20–21
Information about the Child	Gen 17:19, 21 (covenant)	Gen 25:23 ('two nations'; 'the older shall serve the younger')	—	Judg 13:4–5, 7 (Nazirite vow)	1 Sam 1:11? (Nazirite vow imposed by Hannah)	Luke 1:15–17 (filled with the Holy Spirit, will turn people to God)	Luke 1:31–33, 35/Matt 1:21–23 (Son of the Most High/save people from sins)
(Negative) Reaction to the Promise	Gen 17:17–18; 18:12 (doubt)	—	—	Judg 13:8–19 (scheming)	1 Sam 1:18 (joy)	Luke 1:18 (doubt)	Luke 1:34, 38 (doubt but willingness)
The Lord Brings a Child	Gen 21:1–2	Gen 25:21, 24–26	Gen 29:31–30:23	Judg 13:24a	1 Sam 1:19–20	Luke 1:24, 57	Luke 2:7/Matt 1:25
Naming the Child	Gen 21:3	Gen 25:25–26	Gen 29:32–30:24	Judg 13:24a	1 Sam 1:20	Luke 1:60, 63	Matt 1:25
Minor Elements							
Command to Name the Child	Gen 17:19	—	—	—	—	Luke 1:13	Luke 1:31/Matt 1:21
Child's Prosperity in the Lord	Gen 25:11	Gen 32:30 (32:29 ET)	Gen 39:2	Judg 13:24b	1 Sam 2:21	Luke 1:80	Luke 2:40

Elements in a particular story that may not fit the type precisely are marked with a question mark.