

Samson, Judges 13-16
A Study In Man's Failure - God's Grace and Sovereignty
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Chronology:

The time of Samson was toward the end of the period of the judges over Israel. Moses had previously led Israel out of Egypt (1446-1406). Joshua led them into the promised land. They fought several battles for the next 7 years and gained a significant part of Canaan. Joshua led Israel for the next 49 years. The judges ruled from the time shortly after Joshua's death (Jud. 1:1;3:9), about B.C.1350 until about 1055. In B.C.1051, Saul became king, followed by David, then Solomon. Each ruled 40 years. After Solomon's death around 930, the Kingdom divided between the North and the South. Samson was the last judge and ruled from 1075-1055.

Context

Israel had acquired a bad habit of picking up false gods wherever they happened to be. This was abominable in God's sight and in blatant rebellion to God's law that was given to them at Sinai (Ex.20:3, 4). The book of Judges records a series of seven apostasies, seven judgments by servitude to heathen nations, and seven deliverances by God. The root problem is declared in 17:6 and 21:25, "*In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*" They denied the Absolute Authority. This philosophy must be appealing because it is very popular today. It is the basis for humanistic philosophy.

Comments on the text

Chapter 13:

1. *And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.*

It was God's time to "*begin to redeem Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*" (v5). The angel of the LORD appeared to a woman of Zorah (a town between Jerusalem and Philistia on the coast of the Great Sea) to tell her that she would bear a son who would become this deliverer. She was the wife of Manoah and was barren. She was told that her son was to be a Nazarite and that "*no razor shall come on his head.*" (vs 1-7). Later events in his life graphically establish that this advice he would have done well to heed. Do we ever tend to ignore some of God's "less important" commands or those which "really don't make a lot of sense" when evaluated by our prideful wisdom? Most of chapter 13 tells of details preparatory to Samson's birth recorded in v24. The only thing we are told of his early life is in v24, 25; "*...the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.*

"Nazarite" or "Nazirite" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "vow." In practice it meant "one who took a vow of consecration, dedication, or separation." There is no connection with the word, "Nazarene" or one who comes from Nazareth. The regulations of a Nazarite are given in Numbers, chapter 6. He must not drink any wine, strong drink or eat grapes (v3, 4). He must not cut his hair (v5). Also, "he shall come at no dead body (v6). Samson blew it in at least two of these categories, possibly all three. It is obvious from the context that a Nazarite vow was usually for a specific period of time, not a lifetime. Some assume that John the Baptist was a lifetime Nazarite because of his diet prescribed in Luke 1:15.

Chapter 14:

The very first recorded words of Samson may be an indicator of a potentially lethal problem that he had. "*I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife... she pleaseth me well*" (vs1, 3). At times, he was more a slave of his passion than a servant of God.

Marriage to a heathen was not allowed by the Law of Moses and Samson's parents advised against it, but to no avail (v3). Apparently, this was part of Samson's plan to get to the Philistines and God used it for His purpose (v4). Perhaps if Samson had sought God's method, more of God's purpose could have been realized without near the amount of anguish that he suffered.

Samson then took his parents to Timnah to make wedding preparations (the politically correct manner in that culture). At Timnah he went to a vineyard and came upon a lion that wished to be upon him (v5). This surely was not in the job description of a grape-picker, but *“the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him and he rent him as he would have rent a kid...”* (“rent,” literally to tear in two. “Kid” is speaking of a young goat). He did not tell his parents about the lion (v6). Perhaps this is an example of a typical man of today: “How did things go at the vineyard today?” “OK, I guess.”

Samson later returns to get his wife and makes a detour to see the lion that he took out with his bare hands. A swarm of bees had taken up housekeeping in the carcass. He ate some of the honey and took some to his parents to eat (vs8, 9). Neither a Jew nor a Nazarite was permitted to partake of this type of contact with a dead body.

During a pre-wedding feast, Samson introduced a wager and riddle to his thirty party companions: The wager; thirty changes of clothes; considerable stakes in that culture. The riddle; *“Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness”* (vs10-14). He was referring to the dead lion and the honey.

The thirty companions accepted the wager but after three days still could not figure out the riddle. Just before the imminent 7-day marriage feast, the men threatened Samson’s wife with death by fire to entice Samson to tell her the answer to the riddle so that they may win the wager (v15).

So she *“wept before him”* (v16) and questioned him. She not only wept before him but *“she wept before him the seven days, while the feast lasted”* (v17). She probably deserved some sort of medal for that act. It finally worked on the last day of the feast. He told her and she told them.

The men of the city sprung the answer on Samson. He, realizing that he had been had, responds with a pointed remark about them and his deceitful wife; *“If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle”* (v18).

Samson was displeased and we see the third time recorded that the Spirit of the LORD comes upon him. In order to keep his word and probably as part of his purpose to *“begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines”* (13:5), he goes into the city and kills and disrobes thirty men who probably wished that they had not worn clothes that day. He gives the clothes to his cheating companions and leaves the party to go to his father’s house. Unknown to him, his wife’s father had since given his wife to a friend (vs19, 20). This was not the wisest or healthiest move that he could have made.

Chapter 15:

After a while, Samson returns to Timnah to fetch his wife. His wife’s father replies to his visit with something that may be transliterated like, “Oh, by the way, Samson, I gave your wife to your friend. But have I got a deal for you. Have you ever seen her younger sister?”

It was a good try but it didn’t work. About this time Samson was probably thinking, “No more Mister nice guy.” He rounds up three hundred foxes (possibly jackals), ties them together in pairs by their tails with a torch between them, and sets them loose in the grain fields and vineyards of the Philistines (vs3-5).

This presented a major setback for the Philistines. This conflagration, no doubt, devastated their likelihood of food and income well into the future. When they found out who was responsible they *“burnt her and her father with fire”* and sought Samson for retaliation. It is interesting that she died in the same manner as was threatened in Judges 4:15 (v 6, 7).

They chased Samson until he caught them. He slew them all and then went to dwell in the “top of the rock Etam” (v8). I learned early as a child not to make someone mad who was bigger or rougher than me, unless, of course, I knew I could run faster than him. I might now add, don’t mess with God’s People. This problem is prevalent in the Body of Christ today and usually is manifested in the form of gossip.

All this commotion did not go unnoticed by other of the Philistines. They came to Judah seeking Samson. The Jews feared the Philistines presence and sent a 3,000 man entourage up to the rock and, in effect, said to Samson, "Please let us capture you and turn you over to the Philistines." It appears that, although fearful of the Philistines, that they respected that God's Spirit was on him and would not try to take him by force. Samson had them swear that they would not kill him themselves. Samson agrees to the offer (vs 10-13).

While en route to Philistia, bound and in custody of at least 1,000 Philistines, "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily" upon Samson. His cords and bands were loosed and fell off. He then found "a new jawbone of an ass" (perhaps the ass was using it a few moments before to chew his food) and commenced to slay 1,000 men with it. After the slaughter, he made a brief speech, perhaps to no one, then named the place, Rammeth-lehi, which appropriately means, "The Hill of the Jawbone" (vs 13-17).

Sometime after this divinely guided battle, Samson was thirsty. He calls on the LORD and God miraculously provides water for him (vs 18, 19). The chapter ends with the report that Samson judged Israel for 20 years (v20).

Chapter 16:

Sometime after this great victory Samson returns to Gaza and goes in unto a harlot. What a disgrace for God's people. What grace that God still used him and still wants to use us, in spite of all our rebellion and failure. When the Philistines hear of his whereabouts they decided to lie in wait for him at the city gate and kill him in the morning. Not to be hindered by being trapped at the city gate, Samson gets up before morning and leaves the city, taking the gate and the posts with him. He carries the whole works up a hill and throws it all off the top (vs 1-3). I bet there were some angry gate repairmen in the morning.

Sometime afterward Delilah comes into the picture and he loves her (v 4). The rulers of the Philistines approach her with an offer of 1,100 pieces of silver each to entice Samson for the secret to his strength (v).

She accepts the offer. She proceeds to request of Samson his secret of his strength. He apparently decides to play around and have a little fun. He tells her that if he were bound by seven green withs (probably, animal sinew used for bowstrings) that he would be weak. The lord of the Philistines brings the green with and she binds him with them. She has men lying in wait in her chamber. She says to him, "*The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.*" At which he breaks the cords like threads (vs 6-9).

Delilah was not any too happy. She complains that she had been mocked and again requests the secret to his strength. There are two more similar episodes with similar outcomes. The supposed secret in scene two is to use "new rope." The third try was proposed as weaving his "seven locks" or braids in a particular manner would weaken him. Up until that time, Delilah's plan was thwarted (vs 11-15). Samson must have had fun teasing her. Is it possible that Samson is weakening under this seductive onslaught? Do you notice how close to the truth that he is getting? He is now talking "hair." The Biblical response may have been to retreat at square one, instead of playing around (James 4:7; I Cor. 6:18).

Delilah was patient and persistent. She kept at it until he was worn down. With his defenses weakened, he told all (v 17). A fatal mistake had been made. I Cor. 10:13, gives us a precious promise about God making a way that we can escape temptation. The reason that this does not work very often is that we do not take advantage of the escape that God gives very often. He does not say to play with sin until it is too late and then He will bail you out. Sometimes, our loving God does do that but that is not what the verse is saying.

After taking advantage of her newfound knowledge, Samson awakes without any hair. His hair is not all he lost. His strength had gone from him. He said, "*I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself.*" Then we read one of the saddest statements in this passage, "*And he wist [knew] not that the LORD was departed from him*" (vs 18-20). God had blessed him greatly and given him great power to use for God's glory. It had been misused and now it was gone. Samson, in his pride did not even know it, at least at that moment.

This may be the answer to how Delilah could be so obvious in her pursuits and for Samson so willfully to go along with it. It is doubtful that he was so blind as to not see the men in her chamber each time she

called for them. Likely, it was his pride that careened him headlong into the figurative spider web. He felt that he had the power to overcome anything that was thrown at him. He did not care that he was going on his own power, not under God's direction. Just because we win many battles for God in His power, it does not mean that we can go out on our own.

The Philistines then bored out his eyes, bound him with fetters of brass, and put him to pushing a grinding wheel as a prisoner (v21). He lost his physical vision sometime after losing his spiritual vision. Perhaps the prison barber became lax in his duties, but after a while Samson's hair began to grow back (v22).

Sometime later, the Philistine leaders gathered the people together to offer a sacrifice to their chief god, Dagon. He was worshiped as the god of grain. They gave their idol-god credit for delivering their enemy, Samson, to them. The true God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7). About three thousand people were present to observe the spectacle. They wished to deride Samson. Samson was brought out of prison and set between two pillars of the temple (vs 23-27).

Maybe it took the trials that God allowed in his life to humble him. At this point he wanted to be used of God to avenge the Philistines for the loss of his eyes and possibly he wished to achieve one last victory for God to *"begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines"* (13:5).

In a prayer of faith, he asks God to remember him and strengthen him for one last victory. He pushed on the two pillars *"with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life"* (v30).

Man's failure - God's grace - God's sovereignty.