

## “A Saved Soul, A Wasted Life” (Judges 13:1–16:31)<sup>1</sup>

Hello. My name is Samson.<sup>2</sup> My name means “little sun.”<sup>3</sup> I can tell from the looks on some of your faces that you recognize my name. I’m not surprised. After all, when I lived here on earth I was anything but “little.” I was a larger than life legend. I was not a “little sun,” I was an enormous sun. I had a bright and glorious future. I was the most famous man in the world. Everyone knew the name of Samson. And they spoke it with respect. They had to. I was the strongest man who ever lived. If I was on earth today, you’d not only admit me into your Olympics, but you’d have to set up a special category for me. Because I’m the strongest man of all time—bar none. What? You think I’m exaggerating? Overstating my case a little bit? Well, let me tell you the facts and you decide whether my claim is true or not.

As a young man, I fell in love with the wrong kind of woman.<sup>4</sup> She was not of my people.<sup>5</sup> The woman was a Philistine who lived in Timnah. She was an unbeliever. Yet, the moment I laid eyes on her, I fell in love...or should I say I fell in *lust*. I knew I had to have her. I told my parents, “Get her for me, she looks good to me.”<sup>6</sup> Naturally, my parents were concerned with my decision to marry an unbeliever, but I was a strong-willed child so I eventually broke them down.<sup>7</sup> In order to make arrangements for the wedding I had to travel to Timnah. The journey to Timnah was dangerous; rocks and bushes were scattered across the hilly terrain. There were countless perfect hiding spaces for bandits. But I was a bit distracted because I was thinking of my wedding night and honeymoon. Even though I kept scanning the horizon looking for danger, I was not prepared for what happened. Out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of something worse than a bandit—I saw a golden blur flying out from behind some boulders toward me. It was a lion!<sup>8</sup> But this lion was not the kind of lion that you’re familiar with. You know, the caged excuse for an animal that sits around all day and eats at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when someone throws him dead meat. Not that kind of a lion. I mean a real lion...a young lion. One who’s learned to think on his feet and to live by its wits. A lion whose body has been honed by constant action and constant killing. One with jaws so strong that it can snap the bones of an animal just like that (snap fingers).

Anyway, this lion suddenly lets loose a roar and launches itself through the air toward me. What would you have done at that instant? Freeze? Cry for your mother? Make a mess? Do you know what I did? Without a moment’s hesitation, as the lion leapt toward me ready for the kill, I bent down and grabbed it from underneath. And as it passed over me I grabbed hold of each end and began pulling. You could hear the cracking of bones and the ripping of sinew and then, suddenly, there was the lion at the side of the road...in two parts. I stood in awe of my own handiwork. And when the carcass stopped twitching, I knew that I was really the strongest man who ever lived.

Still doubt my claim? Still not sure I was the strongest man who ever lived? Let me give you another example, and you can make up your own mind. When I lived here on earth, the Philistines were Israel’s number one enemy. They brutalized and oppressed my people. They had large armies, state of the art weapons, and a thirst for blood. They knew that I was only one the only one who stood between them and their quest for total domination of Israel. So one day the Philistine commanders came to the elders of an Israelite town and said to them: “Give us Samson or we will kill you all!” So a delegation of 3,000 Israelite men came to me and said, “Samson, we don’t want to turn you over to the Philistines—we know that they intend to kill you, but what choice do we have? It’s either you or us. I said to them, “Guys, no worries. I’ll take care of myself. The Philistines have no idea who their messing with. What I want you to do is to tie me up with two new ropes.” Not the kind of ropes that you are thinking of! Not binder twine. Not that skimpy yellow stuff you use around the house. I’m talking about rope, real hemp rope. The rope as thick as your arm that is used in seaports to tie up the oceangoing vessels. I told my countrymen: “Tie me up with two new ropes and hand me over to the Philistines.” My Israelite brothers expressed great concern for me, but I told them to trust me and to hand me over to the Philistines. They did so.

My countrymen placed me at the end of a field and a group of thousands of Philistine warriors were waiting for me at the other end of the field. As soon as my countrymen took off, the Philistine army began running toward me. Every soldier wanted to be the man to kill the great Samson. As they came, I just stood there standing bound and helpless before them. As an army of men ran toward me the ground beneath my feet shook like an earthquake. They kept coming faster and faster, their war cry filling the air. When they were about two-thirds of the way down the field, I took my stance. As I began to press against the ropes, I could feel the God's Spirit come upon me. And those new hemp ropes? They became like charred flax. I snapped them as if they were burnt thread. When the Philistines leading the charge saw what I had done to those ropes, they were not quite as eager to claim their glory. They began to express a new willingness to share their anticipated glory. In fact, they became consummate gentleman and let other men go first. The problem was, however, that the soldiers further back had not seen the ropes snap, and they weren't stopping. The ones at the back were still running as fast as they could. Before I knew it, soldiers were bouncing off of each other and falling to the ground. There was a melee of confusion.

I took full advantage of this situation and began walking towards the dazed men. Of course, I immediately realized that I didn't have a weapon. How typical! Why is it that the Philistines always have all the good weapons? I began to frantically look around for anything that I could use. Lo and behold, I found a dead donkey. As I kicked at the donkey carcass in frustration, I realized that it was relatively fresh. The teeth were still in the jawbone! So I picked it up and began to use the donkey's jawbone as a sword. As the soldiers enveloped me I went wild. Spinning one way and then another Going low one moment and swinging high the next. As I danced my deadly dance, Philistines began to scream...and die! When the dust finally settled that afternoon, a thousand Philistines lay dead, and the others were running for their lives. I overcame any human odds!

Still not sure I was the strongest man that ever lived? Still need more evidence? I'll give you one more story. One day I decided to go to Gaza, a Philistine city on the seacoast (Judges 16:1-3). I was looking for a woman so I disguised myself well and began to mingle with the people who filled the busy streets. As I began to relax in my supposedly anonymity, I saw a drop-dead lady of the night. I liked what I saw so I paid money and slept with her.<sup>9</sup> In the middle of the night, when I was finished, I prepared to leave. But then I recognized that the men of Gaza had identified me. They were going to wait for reinforcements and try to prevent me from leaving their city. It was relatively easy for them to do this. Gaza, like all Philistine cities, was surrounded by large walls. Walls higher than you could throw a stone over and wide enough to ride a chariot on. These were huge stone walls built with the strength they needed to keep enemies out. The gate was considered the strength of the city. And this one was strong all right. It went from the ground up to the top of those walls. It was made of solid hardwood, six feet thick, and was mounted with solid bronze hinges to huge post driven ten to fifteen feet in the ground. As if that were not enough, the entire structure was reinforced with bronze bars. It was immense! No one could leave the city once the gate was shut. The Philistines knew I would be trapped.

I began to suspect something was up in the middle of the night as I began to make my way back home. As I walked through the streets I saw people looking out their windows and whispering: "We have him! At long last Samson is ours!" As I turned the corner and saw those massive gates shut and locked, the plan of the city fathers became obvious. They had me trapped like a lion in the cage (or to they thought). I don't know what you might have done in that situation. Try to hide, maybe? Try to pick the lock? Scale the wall? That wasn't my style. That's not Samson. I didn't quiver in fear. I walked straight and boldly right through town until I came to the main gate. I stood in the courtyard for a moment and then turned around to make sure everyone knew who I was. Then I walked up to those gates. I spat on my hands, bent down, and grabbed hold of the reinforcing bar. Boy, I was glad they put it there! It made a great handle. Then I began to pull...harder and harder. As I pulled, I began to feel the inner warmth of God's Spirit as He began to course through my body. As I pulled harder and harder the supernatural heat spiked with intensity. I began to hear creaks, and then groaning, and finally the snapping of timbers as the gate came

wrenching right out of the ground. A lesser man might have just dropped it on the ground and walked away. But I decided that would not be humiliating enough. So I lifted the gate up on my shoulder and carried it to the top of that hill twenty-eight miles away and dropped it there. They could go get a team of forces and pull it back if they wanted to, but it wasn't good enough for me just to escape from that town. I wanted to embarrass them. That was the strength of their city and I stole it. I am the strongest man that ever lived. No question. No argument.

What bothers me, however, is that when people like you remember me, they think of me only as a strong man not a great man. And I could have been great. I should have been great. Even my birth was special. It was announced by the angel of the Lord. By God Himself! I was His gift to a barren couple and to a nation in distress. The angel told my parents: "You are going to have a son—a son with a mission in life. The purpose of his life is to set Israel free from the Philistines." My mission was clear; my path of life had been laid out in front of me. Then the angel of the Lord went on: "The only thing you need to know, the only thing that he must remember, is that he must be raised as and live like a Nazirite." What makes a Nazirite so special? Three simple rules.<sup>10</sup> My mom told them to me over and over again when I was growing up. Parents are like that sometimes.

- Don't forget, you can't touch any unclean thing, Samson. Don't go near there. You can't touch any carcasses." "I know, Mom. I know. You've told me a million times."
- "Samson, don't go over there. That's where all that drink is served. All that fermented stuff. No fermented drink is to touch your lips. You are a Nazirite. Don't go close."
- My dad said to me, "Samson, remember, never cut your hair." Not many fathers have said that to their sons through the centuries. "I know, Data. That's the visible sign that I'm a Nazirite and everyone will recognize who I am because it's so unusual." Parents can be such a pain sometimes!

My problem was not a lack of knowledge. It was a lack of obedience. Remember how I told you about my visit to Timnah for my upcoming wedding? Well, I had to make another trip back to set things in order. But this was no easy task. Timnah was quite a distance and the terrain was difficult. As I made the trip, I felt like my stomach was eating away at itself. I may be the world's strongest man, but I am still a man, and I have a ravenous appetite. Finally, I came to the spot in the road where I ripped the lion and a half. I decided to take a look at the damage I did. Bees had made hives right there in the carcass. There was honey! All I could see was food! I didn't even think, I just plunged my hand into the heart of the hive and pulled out some honeycomb. I can tell you that nothing had ever tasted sweeter!

There I was eating at home with honey dripping down my arms and all over my beard into my mouth and I felt good. You know how when you finally get food, how wonderful that sugar rushes? You can feel the strength just coursing through your body again! Now I knew that I could make the rest of my journey. And then I remembered... I remembered what my mother had said and what the angel of the Lord had said...that I wasn't to touch any unclean thing. And I realize that by doing this I had touched a carcass and broken my vow. I waited and looked at the sky for lightning to come or God to swallow me with an earthquake or...but nothing happened. Hmmm...maybe my parents were wrong. Nothing happened. Maybe sin isn't that serious.

I went on and arrived at Timnah and we threw the world's greatest wedding and bachelor's party. Of course, all the Philistine guys are checking me out. You know what that's like. They want to see if I'm a real man, and I'm trying to prove that I'm one of the guys. And you know, I'm a man's man, and everyone else is pounding it back. What's one Philistine beer? So I knocked one back and suddenly I realized that I had broken the second Nazirite vow.

I looked around, wondering if God would hit me with a fireball. What would be the consequences of my sin? I didn't pause for quite as long this time. I wasn't quite as afraid, but still I wondered what God

would do. And you know what He did? Nothing! Nothing at all! I began to think that maybe all this sin talk was overblown. After all, the first two vows were broken and nothing happened. Life just went on. Not with that woman, by the way. Things didn't work out. There's another story there. A lot of dead Philistines at the end of that story too. But life went on. Without a serious girlfriend.

Then one day I thought I had met the answer to my prayers. I met the woman of my dreams. She had black hair, olive skin, and eyes that could just melt you. Boy, could she fill a dress! This was a woman! Her name was... Delilah. She was the perfect woman; she had everything a man could ever want. You couldn't imagine anything else. Except for one little thing... she was perfect except... she was a nag. She was easy on the eyes, but she was a nag! When she got something under her skin, she just kept going and going and going until she got it. And she wanted to know the secret of my strength. She would say, "Samson, if you love me, we'll have an honest, transparent relationship. Tell me the secret of your strength."<sup>11</sup> She fluttered her eyes. She tossed her hair. And I broke.

I told her, "If I am bound with seven fresh animal tendons<sup>12</sup> that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any other man."<sup>8</sup> Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.<sup>9</sup> Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.

**<sup>10</sup> Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound." <sup>11</sup> He said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any other man." <sup>12</sup> So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.**

**<sup>13</sup> Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man." <sup>14</sup> So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web. And she fastened it with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.**

Finally, Delilah said to me, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is" (16:15). Finally, I told Delilah about the one Nazirite vow I had not broken. I told her about how I was never to cut my hair. As I looked into her eyes, I was sure I could trust her. That night, I fell asleep with my head in her lap. I trusted her with my life, but I was betrayed. As I slept, she had someone come and cut my hair and time yet. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are here! Samson, the Philistines are here!" I got up as I had so many times before. I thought, "This is getting old, you know what I mean. We've done this so many times. Don't you guys ever learn?"

**It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. <sup>17</sup> So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man." <sup>18</sup> When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. <sup>19</sup> She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. <sup>20</sup> She said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep**

and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.<sup>21</sup> Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.<sup>22</sup> However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.<sup>23</sup> Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands."<sup>24</sup> When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us."<sup>25</sup> It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.<sup>26</sup> Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them."<sup>27</sup> Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them.<sup>28</sup> Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."<sup>29</sup> Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left.<sup>30</sup> And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.<sup>31</sup> Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.

Eventually the harvest moon begins a tidal pull on my libido. Before I know it, I'm at my wife's door with a goat (the equivalent to flowers in your culture).<sup>13</sup>

The Lord blessed me (13:24). When I was twenty years old the Holy Spirit came upon me (13:25).

I was the Philistines Public Enemy No. 1. Yet, when they attempted to kill me, I killed another 3,000 of them. I was a man of superhuman strength!

Proverbs 29:22: "An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."

While other judges were said to be clothed with God's Spirit (3:10; 6:34; 11:29), only of Samson is it said "the Lord blessed him" (13:24; see Luke 1:80 and 2:52). The hand of God was on him in a special way.

Sensuality may be dormant but it is never dead. Live embers smoldering beneath the surface of a thought-to-be extinguished campfire, lust, when fanned in the open air, can fuel a forest fire. And inevitably, someone always gets burned.<sup>14</sup>

When I was with this harlot, I thought to myself, "If I can just satisfy myself this one last time, this will be it." But as you know one sin leads right into another. I was planting seed that would bear fruit long into the future. As you know, there is always a span of time between planting and harvesting.<sup>15</sup>

I began to succumb to Delilah's caress. I didn't run from temptation; I stayed in the vicinity of it.

It may seem harsh, but it would have been better for me to have become physically blind earlier in my life. It could have prevented my sexual sin.<sup>16</sup>

Delilah means "the weak one" or "the longing one."

I was the strongest of all men, but I was weakened and defeated not by soldiers or armies but by one woman! I, the strong one could not entangle myself from “the weak one.”  
It was only after my eyes were taken away from me that I prayed for the first time.  
The Philistines had kept me caged up like an animal.

Just for the record, I did not commit suicide. Rather, I wanted God to be vindicated.

The crowds chanted, “We want Samson!” “We want Samson!” They wanted to mock me for entertainment. This was the most humiliating moment of my life.

My fall can be traced back to two things: (1) I didn’t know my weaknesses, and (2) I didn’t know my strength.<sup>17</sup> Mistakenly, I didn’t see God as the real source of my strength. Instead, I saw only myself (see 15:14–17). Consequently, God allowed my strength to be taken from me so that in painful circumstances I will learn that without the powerful God, I am powerless.<sup>18</sup>

I am living proof that God gives His people a second chance. When we fall, we can either fall backward or forward—that is, we can learn from what we have done and lay hold of the goodness of God. No one who falls is ever beyond the possibility of God’s forgiveness. However, forgiveness and restoration does not necessarily mean that we have the same relationships and ministries. Often there are permanent consequences for our actions. Nevertheless, the very fact that you are alive is proof that God still has some purpose for you on this earth. He’s waiting for you to repent, learn your lessons, and be quiet before Him that you might be brought back to a position of usefulness.<sup>19</sup>

The Lord had given Samson a godly heritage, and he had been raised to honor the Lord; but when Samson fell in love, he wouldn’t listen to his parents when they warned him. Samson had wandered four miles into enemy territory where he was captivated by a Philistine woman and decided to marry her. This, of course, was contrary to God’s Law (Exod 34:12–16; Deut 7:1–3; 2 Cor 6:14–18). Samson was living by sight and not by faith. He was controlled by “the lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16) rather than by the Law of the Lord. The important thing to Samson was not pleasing the Lord, or even pleasing his parents, but pleasing himself (Judges 14:3, 7; see 2 Cor 5:14–15).

When God isn’t permitted to rule in our lives, He overrules and works out His will in spite of our decisions. Of course, we’re the losers for rebelling against Him; but God will accomplish His purposes either with us or in spite of us ([Est. 4:10-14](#)). Samson should have been going to a war instead of to a wedding, but God used this event to give Samson occasion to attack the enemy. Because of this event, Samson killed thirty men ([Judges 14:19](#)), burned up the enemy crops ([15:1-5](#)), slaughtered a great number of Philistines ([vv. 7-8](#)), and slew 1,000 men ([v. 15](#)). Samson hadn’t planned these things, but God worked them out just the same.

It’s worth noting that there is no evidence given in the text that Israel cried out to God for deliverance at any time during the forty years of Philistine domination. The Philistines disarmed the Jews (1 Sam 13:19–23) and therefore had little fear of a rebellion. Judges 15:9–13 indicates that the Jews were apparently content with their lot and didn’t want Samson to “rock the boat.” It’s frightening how quickly we can get accustomed to bondage and learn to accept the *status quo*. Had the Philistines been more severe on the Jews, perhaps the Jews would have prayed to Jehovah for help.

In his case the paradigm of the judge cycle from Judges 2:11–18 appears for the last time in the book, but only two of the elements are given.<sup>20</sup> “Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years” (13:1). Though this is the longest period of time in which Israel was under another nation, there is no record of the Israelites crying out to the Lord for deliverance as they had done in the past. Instead they seem to have been

content to exist under foreign domination. Judah, which had begun the fight against the Canaanites (1:1–2), had dropped the goal of conquering the land in favor of a peaceful survival under the Philistines.

My name means “sunny,” yet I ended up in the darkness, blinded by the very enemy he was supposed to conquer. God gave Samson every advantage, and he threw it away in favor of doing what was right in his own eyes to his own undoing. The narrator did not explicitly say that Samson broke his Nazirite vows, but the implication is there for the reader to see. Samson went off by himself into a vineyard on his way to Timnah (14:5); he later took honey from the carcass of a dead lion and ate it (v. 9); he made a drinking feast for the men at the wedding party (v. 10);<sup>25</sup> he used the fresh jawbone of a donkey to kill a thousand Philistines (15:15); he told Delilah that fresh sinews could bind him (16:7);<sup>26</sup> and he willingly told Delilah the secret of his hair, knowing that she had performed all the other tests on him (v. 17). Through the four tests by Delilah, Samson became more open to her, sharing the secret of his life, only to have her use him for her own gratification in getting rich. As Samson slept on her knees, the picture of what happened brings the reader back to Sisera, who slept at the feet of Jael (5:24–27). Now, however, Samson was the enemy who was about to be killed and Delilah was the hero.<sup>27</sup> This is a picture of Israel in her harlotry (2:17). Through intermarriage with the Canaanites Israel forfeited the opportunity to build and strengthen their own families and nation and allowed their strength to become their weakness. The failure to capitalize on their strength of separated lives, focused in the homes of the nation, brought about their downfall.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 25. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 431.

<sup>26</sup> 26. Block indicates that sinews here refer to undried tendons taken from a freshly slaughtered animal (*ibid.*, 457).

<sup>27</sup> 27. According to Carol Smith, Delilah fascinates some feminist writers and must be viewed in a positive light for her “positive achievement” (“Delilah: A Suitable Case for [Feminist] Treatment?” in *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 115–16). For other links between these stories see Chisholm, “The Role of Women in the Rhetorical Strategy of the Book of Judges,” 43; Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, 164; and Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in Judges*, 137.

**He lost control of his tongue (vv. 10-18).**

Since Samson hadn't brought any men with him to serve as "friends of the bridegroom" ([Matt. 9:15](#), NKJV), the Philistines rounded up thirty men to do the job for him. These men may also have served as guards for the Philistines; for Samson's reputation had preceded him, and they were never sure what he would do next. Since the atmosphere must have been tense at the beginning of the feast, Samson sought to liven things up by posing a riddle. Sad to say, he constructed the riddle out of the experience of his sin! He didn't take seriously the fact that he had violated his Nazirite vows. It's bad enough to disobey God, but when you make a joke out of it, you've sunk to new depths of spiritual insensitivity. It would have been an expensive thing for the thirty guests to supply Samson with sixty garments, so they were desperate to learn the answer to the riddle. Their only recourse was to enlist the help of Samson's wife. Thus they threatened to kill her and burn down her father's house if she didn't supply the answer before the week was up. Samson resolutely refused to tell her; but on the seventh day, he relented. Since the marriage was to be consummated on the seventh day, perhaps that had something to do with it. First the Philistine woman enticed him ([Judges 14:1](#)), then she controlled him ([v. 17](#)), and then she betrayed him ([v. 17](#)), which is the way the world always treats the compromising believer. Samson could kill lions and break ropes, but he couldn't overcome the power of a woman's tears.

We wonder how his wife felt being compared to a heifer? The proverb simply means, "You couldn't have done what you did if you hadn't broken the rules," because heifers weren't used for plowing. Since the guests had played foul, technically Samson could have refused to pay the prize; but he generously agreed to keep his promise. Perhaps he found out that his wife's life had been threatened and he didn't want to put her and her family into jeopardy again. Those who can't control their tongue can't control their bodies ([James 3:2](#)); and in Samson's case, the consequences of this lack of discipline were disastrous.

**Samson lost his temper (vv. 19-20).**

He went twenty miles away to Ashkelon so the news of the slaughter wouldn't get back to Timnah too soon. His joke about the lion and the honey ceased to be a joke, for it led to the death of thirty men whose garments Samson confiscated. Samson was so angry that he didn't even consummate the marriage but went back to Zorah and stayed with his parents.<sup>9-8</sup> While he was away from Timnah, his wife was given to his best man. The Lord used this turn of events to motivate Samson to decide to fight the Philistines instead of entertaining them.

If Samson had won his way and married a Philistine woman, that relationship would have crippled the work God had called him to do. Believers today who enter into unholy alliances are sinning and hindering the work of the Lord too ([2 Cor. 6:14-18](#)). If Samson had sought God's leading, the Lord would have directed him. Instead, Samson went his own way, and the Lord had to overrule his selfish decisions. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you" ([Ps. 32:8-9](#), NKJV). If we're looking by faith into the face of the Lord, He can guide us with His eye, the way parents guide their children. But if we turn our backs on Him, he has to treat us like animals and harness us. Samson was either impetuously rushing ahead like the horse or stubbornly holding back like the mule, and God had to deal with him.

### **He avenges his ruined marriage (vv. 1-5).**

Although he had never consummated the marriage, Samson thought he was legally married to the woman of Timnah. Therefore, he took a gift and went to visit her in her father's house. How shocked he was to learn that not only was he not married, but also the woman he loved was now married to his best-man!<sup>10-2</sup> Samson had paid the legal "bride price" for his wife, and now he had neither the money nor the wife. Samson was angry, and even the offer of a younger and prettier bride didn't appease him. If anybody should have been punished, it was his father-in-law. He was the real culprit. After all, he took the money and gave the bride away—to the wrong man! But Samson decided to take out his anger on the Philistines by burning up the grain in their fields.

The word translated "foxes" also means "jackals," and that's probably the animal that Samson used. Foxes are solitary creatures, but jackals prowl in large packs. Because of this, it would have been much easier for Samson to capture 300 jackals; and no doubt he enlisted the help of others. Had he tied the firebrands to individual animals, they each would have immediately run to their dens. But by putting two animals together and turning them loose, Samson could be fairly sure that their fear of the fire and their inability to maneuver easily would make them panic. Thus they would run around frantically in the fields and ignite the grain. The fire then would spread into the vineyards and olive groves. It was a costly devastation.

Why he chose to destroy the Philistine's crops in such a strange manner isn't clear to us. If others were helping him, Samson could attack several fields at the same time; and the Philistines, unable to see the animals on the ground, would be alarmed and confused, wondering what was causing the fires. The jackals would undoubtedly make a racket, especially if caught in the rushing flame or overwhelmed by the smoke. His riddle and his rhyme (15:16) indicate that Samson had a boyish sense of humor, and perhaps this approach to agricultural arson was just another fun time for him. However, we must keep in mind that God was using Samson's exploits to harass the Philistines and prepare them for the sure defeat that was coming in a few years.

### **He avenges his wife's death (vv. 6-8).**

Violence breeds violence, and the Philistines weren't about to stand around doing nothing while their food and fortune went up in flames. They figured out that Samson was behind the burning of their crops, and they knew they had to retaliate. Since they couldn't hope to overcome Samson, they did the next thing and vented their wrath on his wife and father-in-law. In the long run, her betrayal of Samson didn't save her life after all (14:15).

Samson's response? "Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you" (15:7, NIV). We don't know how many Philistines he killed or what weapons he used, but it was "a great slaughter." Following the attack, he retreated to a cave in the "rock of Etam." This is not the Etam mentioned either in [1 Chronicles 4:32](#) (too far away) or [2 Chronicles 11:6](#) (hadn't been built yet). It was some elevated place in Judah, near Lehi, from which Samson could safely and conveniently watch the enemy.

### **2. SAMSON DEFENDS HIMSELF (JUDGES 15:9-20)**

If Samson could attack the Philistines, then the Philistines could retaliate and attack Israel; after all, Israel had neither weapons nor an army. The invasion of Judah didn't help Samson's popularity with his own people, who sadly were content to submit to their neighbors and make the best of a bad situation. Instead of seeing Samson as their deliverer, the men of Judah considered him a troublemaker.

It's difficult to be a leader if you have no followers, but part of the fault lay with Samson. He didn't challenge the people, organize them, and trust God to give them victory. He preferred to work alone, fighting the battles of the Lord as though they were his own private feuds. I realize that Samson's calling was to *begin* to deliver the nation (13:5), but it seems to me that he could have made a more forceful beginning. When God's people get comfortable with the status quo, and their leaders fail to arouse them to action, they are in pretty bad shape.

When the men of Judah learned that the Philistines wanted only to capture and bind Samson, they offered to help. A nation is in a sad state indeed when the citizens cooperate with the enemy and hand over their own God-appointed leader! This is the only time during Samson's judgeship that the Jews mustered an

army, and it was for the purpose of capturing one of their own men! But Samson realized that, if he didn't give himself up to the enemy, the Philistine army would bring untold suffering to the land; so he willingly surrendered. If he defended himself, he would have had to fight his own people. If he escaped, which he could easily have done, he would have left 3,000 men of Judah easy prey for the Philistine army. There was something heroic about Samson's decision, but the men of Judah missed it.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Samson easily broke the bonds the men of Judah had put on his arms, picked up a new jawbone of a donkey (an old one would have been too brittle), and slaughtered a thousand Philistines. We wonder what the men of Judah thought as they watched their prisoner, their own brother, kill the invaders single-handed. Did any of them feel the urge to pick up the weapons of the slain Philistines and join in the battle? Would they have known how to use them?

Samson had a way with words. At his wedding feast, he devised a clever riddle ([14:14](#)); and after this great victory, he wrote a poem. It's based on the similarity between the sounds of the Hebrew words *hamor* ("donkey") and *homer* ("heap"). James Moffatt renders it: "With the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass. With the jawbone of an ass I have assailed assailants."<sup>10-3</sup>

But his victory celebration didn't last very long, for God reminded him that he was only a man and had to have water to stay alive. So often in Scripture, testing follows triumph. No sooner had the Israelites crossed the Red Sea than they became thirsty ([Ex. 15:22-27](#)) and hungry ([Ex. 16](#)). Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel was followed by his humiliating flight to Mount Horeb ([1 Kings 18-19](#)). If triumphs aren't balanced with trials, there's a danger that we'll become proud and self-confident.

If Samson had only heeded this warning and asked God not only for water but for guidance! "Lead us not into temptation" would have been the perfect prayer for that hour. How quick we are to cry out for help for the body when perhaps our greatest needs are in the inner person. It's when we're weak that we're strong ([2 Cor. 12:10](#)); and when we're totally dependent on the Lord, we're the safest.

Samson's prayer indicates that he considered himself God's servant and that he didn't want to end his life falling into the hands of the godless Philistines. Unfortunately, that's just what happened. But God was merciful and performed a miracle by opening up a spring of water in a hollow place. Samson quenched his thirst and then gave the place the name "Caller's Spring." The place where Samson slaughtered the Philistines received the name "Jawbone Hill." Some translations give the impression that the water came from the jawbone because the name of the place in Hebrew is *Lehi*, which means "jawbone." In the NKJV, [Judges 15:19](#) reads, "So God split the hollow place that is in *Lehi*"; and the NASB and NIV are substantially the same.

### 3. SAMSON TEMPTS HIMSELF ([JUDGES 16:1-3](#))

Gaza was an important seaport town located about forty miles from Samson's hometown of Zorah. We aren't told why Samson went there, but it's not likely he was looking for sensual pleasure. There were plenty of prostitutes available in Israel even though the Law condemned this practice ([Lev. 19:29](#); [Deut. 22:21](#)). It was after he arrived in Gaza that Samson saw a prostitute and decided to visit her. Once again the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh combined to grip Samson and make him a slave to his passions.

It seems incredible to us that a servant of God ([Judges 15:18](#)), who did great works in the power of the Spirit, would visit a prostitute, but the record is here for all to read. The Lord certainly didn't approve of such behavior, especially on the part of a Nazirite; and the experience was for Samson one more step down into darkness and destruction. In recent years, there have been enough ministerial scandals in the United States alone to put all of us on guard. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" ([1 Cor. 10:12](#), NKJV).

We can't help it when Satan and his demons tempt us; but when we tempt ourselves, we become our own enemy. God doesn't tempt us ([James 1:12-15](#)). When we pray, "Lead us not into temptation" ([Matt. 6:13](#)), we're asking that we not tempt ourselves *or put ourselves into such a position that we tempt God*. We tempt Him either by forcing Him to intervene and rescue us or by daring Him to stop us. It's possible for people's character to deteriorate so much that they don't have to be tempted in order to sin. All they need is the opportunity to sin, and they'll tempt themselves. Illicit sexual experience may begin as sweet as

honey, but it ends up as bitter as wormwood ([Prov. 5:1-14](#)). Samson the man had become Samson the animal as the prostitute led him to the slaughter ([Prov. 7:6-23](#)).

Word that their enemy Samson was in town spread to the people of Gaza, and they posted a guard at the city gate to capture him and kill him in the morning. But Samson decided to leave town at midnight, while the guards were asleep. The fact that the city gates were barred didn't alarm him. He picked up the doors, posts, and bars and carried them off! Whether he carried them all the way to Hebron, a distance of about forty miles, or only to a hill that faced Hebron, depends on how you translate [Judges 16:3](#). Both interpretations are possible.

The city gate was not only a protection for the city, but also the place where the officials met to transact business ([Deut. 25:7](#); [Ruth 4:1-2](#)). To "possess the gate of his enemies" was a metaphor meaning "to defeat your enemies" ([Gen. 22:17](#); [24:60](#)). When Jesus spoke about the gates of hell (hades) not prevailing against the church ([Matt. 16:18](#)), He was picturing the victory of the church over the forces of Satan and evil. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has "stormed the gates of hell" and carried them off in victory!

#### 4. SAMSON BETRAYS HIMSELF ([JUDGES 16:4-22](#))

The Valley of Sorek lay between Zorah and Timnah on the border of Judah and Philistia. The city of Beth-shemesh was located there. Whenever Samson went into enemy territory, he "went down" both geographically and spiritually ([14:1](#), [5](#), [7](#), [10](#)). This time he found a woman in the valley, not too far from home; and he fell in love with her. It's a dangerous thing to linger at the enemy's border; you might get caught.

Along with David and Bathsheba, Samson and Delilah have captured the imagination of scores of writers, artists, composers, and dramatists. Handel included Delilah in his oratorio "Samson," and Saint-Saens wrote an opera on "Samson and Delilah." (The "Bacchanale" from that work is still a popular concert piece.) When Samson consorted with Delilah in the Valley of Sorek, he never dreamed that what they did together would be made into a Hollywood movie and projected in color on huge screens.

Scholars disagree on the meaning of Delilah's name. Some think it means "devotee," suggesting that she may have been a temple prostitute. But Delilah isn't called a prostitute as is the woman in Gaza, although that's probably what she was. For that matter, Delilah isn't even identified as a Philistine. However, from her dealings with the Philistine leaders, she appears to be one. Other students believe that the basis for her name is the Hebrew word *dalal*, which means "to weaken, to impoverish." Whether or not this is the correct derivation, she certainly weakened and impoverished Samson!

Each of the Philistine leaders offered to pay Delilah a considerable sum of money if she would entice Samson and learn the source of his great strength.<sup>10-4</sup> They didn't want to kill Samson. They wanted to neutralize his power, capture him, torture him, and then use him for their own purposes. Being able to exhibit and control the great champion of Israel would give the Philistines both security and stature among the nations and would certainly satisfy their egos as they humiliated the Jews.

When Delilah began to probe for the secret of his strength, Samson should have been aware of his danger and, like Joseph ([Gen. 39:12](#); [2 Tim. 2:22](#)), fled as fast as possible. But passion had gripped him, sin had anesthetized him, and he was unable to act rationally. Anybody could have told him that Delilah was making a fool out of him, but Samson would have believed no one.

It's unlikely that the Philistines who hid in her chamber revealed themselves each time Samson escaped his bonds, because then he would have known that Delilah had set a trap for him. Her cry "The Philistines are upon you!" was the signal for the spies to be alert; but when they saw that Samson was free, they remained in hiding. Each of Samson's lies involved Delilah using some kind of bonds on him, but the Philistines should have known that he could not be bound ([Judges 15:13](#)).

Delilah had to keep working on Samson or she would have lost the money and perhaps her life. After all, look at what the Philistines did to Samson's first wife! If Samson had stopped visiting Delilah, he would have kept his hair and his power,<sup>10-5</sup> but he kept going back, and each time she implored him to reveal his secret. Samson didn't know his own heart. He thought he possessed enough moral strength to say no to the temptress, but he was wrong.

Being wise in the ways of sin ([Luke 16:8](#); [Prov. 7:21](#)), during the fourth visit, Delilah knew that he had finally told her the truth. Since the Philistine “hit squad” had quit coming after the third fiasco, Delilah summoned them quickly, and they once again hid in her chamber.

When Delilah’s shout awakened Samson, he thought it was another one of her tricks and that he could handle the situation as before. But he was wrong. When he lost his long hair, the Lord left him; and he was as weak as other men. His power was from the Lord, not from his hair; but the hair was the sign of his Nazirite vow. The Spirit who had come upon him with such power had now departed from him.

[Numbers 6:7](#) reads literally “because the consecration (*nezer*) of his God is upon his head.” The basic meaning of the word *nezer* is “separation” or “consecration”; but it is also used of a royal crown ([2 Sam. 1:10](#); [Zech. 9:16](#); [Ps. 89:39](#)). Samson’s long hair was his “royal crown” and he lost it because of his sin. “Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” ([Rev. 3:11](#), NKJV). Since Samson didn’t discipline his body, he lost both his crown and his prize ([1 Cor. 9:24-27](#)).<sup>10-6</sup>

The Philistines easily overpowered Samson and finally had their way with him. They put out his eyes,<sup>10-7</sup> bound him, and took him to Gaza where he toiled at the grinding mill, doing work usually assigned to slaves, women, or donkeys. Someone has said that [Judges 16:21](#) reminds us of the *blinding*, *binding*, and *grinding* results of sin. In his epic poem *Samson Agonistes*, John Milton has the champion say:

O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!

Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,

Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!

Samson is one of three men in Scripture who are especially identified with the darkness. The other two are King Saul, who went out in the darkness to get last-minute help from a witch ([1 Sam. 28](#)), and Judas, who “went immediately out: and it was night” ([John 13:30](#)). Saul lived for the world, Samson yielded to the flesh, and Judas gave himself to the devil ([John 13:2, 27](#)); and all three ended up taking their own lives.

But there was one ray of light in the darkness: Samson’s hair began to grow again. His power was not in his hair but in what his hair symbolized—his dedication to God. If Samson renewed that dedication, God might restore his power. I believe Samson talked to the Lord as he turned the millstone, confessing his sins and asking God for one last opportunity to defeat the enemy and glorify His name.<sup>10-8</sup>

5. SAMSON DESTROYS HIMSELF ([JUDGES 16:23-31](#))

It was tragic that a servant of the Lord, raised in a godly home, was now the humiliated slave of the enemy. But even worse, the Philistines gave glory to their god Dagon for helping them capture their great enemy. Instead of bringing glory to the God of Israel, Samson gave the enemy opportunity to honor their false gods. Dagon was the god of grain, and certainly the Philistines remembered what Samson had done to their fields ([15:1-5](#)).

The people at the religious festival called for Samson to be brought to entertain them. They were in high spirits because their enemy was now in their control and Dagon had triumphed over Jehovah. They thought that Samson’s blindness rendered him harmless. They didn’t know that God had deigned to forgive him and restore his strength.

In the KJV, two different words are translated “make sport” in [16:25](#) (“entertain” and “perform” in the NIV). The first means to celebrate, frolic, joke, and entertain; and the second means to perform, make sport, and laugh.<sup>10-9</sup> We aren’t told exactly *how* Samson entertained the huge crowd in Dagon’s temple, but one thing is sure: He gave them every reason to believe he was harmless and under their control. He was even in the hands of a boy who was leading the blind man from place to place. We’ve seen previous indications that Samson was a clever fellow with a sense of humor. Thus no doubt he gave the audience just what it wanted.

In previous visits to Gaza, Samson had undoubtedly seen this temple and noted its construction. After all, it housed over 3,000 people, and it would be difficult for him not to notice it. During a break in the day’s entertainment, Samson asked his attendant to lead him over to the pillars; and there he uttered his last prayer.<sup>10-10</sup> The fact that God answered suggests that all was right between him and his Lord ([Ps. 66:18-19](#)).

It's likely that his parents were dead by now, but his relatives on his father's side came and recovered the body and buried it. The word "brethren" in [Judges 16:31](#) in the Hebrew carries a broad meaning of "relatives." As far as we know, Samson was an only child. The phrase "between Zorah and Eshtaol" in [verse 31](#) reminds us of [13:25](#). Samson is back where he started, only now he's dead. The light has failed.

How do you assess the life and ministry of a man like Samson? I think Alexander Maclaren says it well: "Instead of trying to make a lofty hero out of him, it is far better to recognize frankly the limitations of his character and the imperfections of his religion .... If the merely human passion of vengeance throbbed fiercely in Samson's prayer, he had never heard 'Love your enemies'; and, for his epoch, the destruction of the enemies of God and of Israel was duty."<sup>10-11</sup>

His decline began when he disagreed with his parents about marrying a Philistine girl. Then he disdained his Nazirite vow and defiled himself. He disregarded the warnings of God, disobeyed the Word of God, and was defeated by the enemies of God. He probably thought that he had the privilege of indulging in sin since he wore the badge of a Nazirite and won so many victories for the Lord, but he was wrong.

"Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls" ([Prov. 25:28](#), NKJV).

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" ([Prov. 16:32](#), NKJV).

Through the four tests by Delilah, Samson became more open to her, sharing the secret of his life, only to have her use him for her own gratification in getting rich. As Samson slept on her knees, the picture of what happened brings the reader back to Sisera, who slept at the feet of Jael (5:24–27). Now, however, Samson was the enemy who was about to be killed and Delilah was the hero.<sup>27</sup> This is a picture of Israel in her harlotry (2:17). Through intermarriage with the Canaanites Israel forfeited the opportunity to build and strengthen their own families and nation and allowed their strength to become their weakness. The failure to capitalize on their strength of separated lives, focused in the homes of the nation, brought about their downfall.

Hartman notes a change of roles in Samson and Delilah.<sup>28</sup> Samson is no longer the protagonist in the story; Delilah takes that position and Samson becomes the foil. Once Delilah achieves her purposes with Samson, he reverts to his old position. The lesson for Israel is obvious: when they go outside Israel and make covenants with the enemy, they are no longer in control of the situation. The enemy takes over and they are dominated. Samson, the strong man, was no longer in control. When he was captured, that position was made very clear to him. The Philistines gouged out his eyes and made him a grinder in the prison (16:21). Block notes that the Philistines were following an ancient Near Eastern custom. Prisoners were blinded and then forced to do menial tasks of slaves and women.<sup>29</sup> So Samson, ironically, ended up doing a woman's job. The man, who had incredible strength over other men was defeated in his greatest weakness, that of foreign women, to end up

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emasculated and doing the task of a woman. The reversal of responsibilities, already seen in the Deborah-Barak story, reaches its peak in the final judge himself. Samson in his strength is an attractive figure; Samson at his end is a pathetic ruin.

### Summary

Samson's life is filled with the theme of the failure of the family. The story began with a family that was admirable for its pursuit of the message from the angel of the Lord. Samson had perhaps the best of beginnings for a judge recorded in the Book of Judges. From Samson's answers to Delilah, especially his open heart at the end (16:17–18), it appears that he wanted an intimate relationship with a woman. However, he never established a marriage and family of his own. Even though his parents discouraged intermarriage, it must have been so commonplace by this time that Samson determined to pursue what looked good to him. That pursuit, in the wrong direction, brought his life to an end.

Though separation as a Nazirite was a central issue in Samson's life, one that he knew (16:17), precept and practice were separate issues. The faith of Israel was so compromised that marriage to a Philistine was viewed as a cultural issue rather than an issue of religious separation. Syncretism was the rule of life as everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes. As a result of his choices Samson ended his life with no wife, no children, and even his manhood endangered. His brothers and family had to retrieve his body for burial in the family tomb (v. 31). Jephthah destroyed what little family he had, but Samson never made the beginning steps of building a stable Israelite home.

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<sup>27</sup> 27. According to Carol Smith, Delilah fascinates some feminist writers and must be viewed in a positive light for her "positive achievement" ("Delilah: A Suitable Case for [Feminist] Treatment?") in *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 115–16). For other links between these stories see Chisholm, "The Role of Women in the Rhetorical Strategy of the Book of Judges," 43; Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, 164; and Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in Judges*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> 28. Hartman, "The Feminine Gender as a Literary Device in the Narrative of Judges," 222–27.

<sup>29</sup> 29. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 462. See also Chisholm, "The Role of Women in the Rhetorical Strategy of the Book of Judges," 43–44. Niditch takes this even further and says that the cutting of Samson's hair symbolized his being castrated (Niditch, "Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit," 614).

The message of the Samson story, as a parallel to the Othniel story, is that the process of building godly homes begins with a dedicated marriage. The failure of the family must be counteracted at this initial level. The story of Othniel gives the opening good example: a man who pursued a good woman for a good reason, in keeping with God's goal for the nation. Samson provided the closing bad example of the judges: a man who had great potential but who pursued the wrong women for the wrong reasons, with no apparent concern for God's goal for the nation.

The problem began with the spiritual ineptness of Samson's own father, a situation that indicated a role reversal in even the best of Israelite families. In Deborah, near the beginning of the period of the judges, there was already a need for a woman to be a spiritual spokesperson for the Lord. Men were reluctant leaders. In Jael and the unnamed woman of 9:53 there was a need for women

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to step into military roles. By the end of the period of the judges women were needed to shore up individual families spiritually as seen in Manoah's unnamed wife who reflected the need of the nation's families. Even that influence could be lost, however, if their children, pictured in Samson, did not choose to pursue godly Israelite women or if the parents did not arrange for such marriages. Instead of being a powerful deliverer in Israel, Samson was captured by the enemy, who then praised their god for this victory. The great irony of his story is that the final contribution in the life of this powerful man was to perform the daily task of women, for the sake of the enemy.

While Othniel and Samson provide contrasts in marriage, Gideon and Jephthah demonstrate the impact of parents on their children. Compromised lifestyles and foolish commitments resulted in children with twisted aspirations and pagan attachments or they ended the family altogether. The final two stories in the epilogues (chaps. 17–18 and 19–21) demonstrate that spiritual failure in the home will ultimately affect the whole nation.

Joshua closed the period of the Conquest leading into a time of settlement in the land in the period of the judges with his declaration that he and his family would serve the Lord (Josh. 24:14–15). The Book of Judges records the failure of the nation to follow that example by not passing on the faith through the family to the next generation, in disobedience to the commands in the Pentateuch and especially in Deuteronomy. Samson illustrates failure at the very beginning stage of establishing a godly home with a godly wife. After following after what looked good in his own eyes, his final act was to destroy himself. Except for God's mercy and grace, Israel, in the period of the judges, would have done the same.

With the final judge, Samson (chaps. 13–16), God set the stage before he was born by personally appearing to his parents and preparing them for his birth. While his parents demonstrated some role reversal, particularly in the spiritual leadership of the family, God had already indicated that He would use women to accomplish His purposes. Manoah's wife seemed a good choice for the job of raising a Nazirite son.

Samson, however, turned out to be a rebellious son, who operated on the basis of what looked good in his own eyes. If Jephthah failed in providing for a future generation, Samson failed by not even establishing the basis for a family and had no children to carry on his work. Refusing even to consider an Israelite wife, Samson lusted after Philistine women only. This final judge was constantly pursuing the very sin the narrator identified in the first introduction, namely, intermarriage with the Canaanites in the land. In spite of a seeming desire for intimacy Samson viewed women as objects to use, as illustrated in his visit to a prostitute in a place of great danger to himself. In the end a foreign woman, Delilah, acted the part of Jael in bringing down the man who was an enemy to her people. Ironically in this event Samson paralleled the Canaanite commander, Sisera, and died a shameful death.<sup>22</sup>

### **Scripture References**

Judges 13–16

Zechariah 4:6

Jeremiah 9:23–24

1 Timothy 4:8

Deuteronomy 7:3–4; 21:18–21

1 Corinthians 10:12–13

Matthew 6:33

### **Study Questions**

1. In what ways do I rely upon my own strength? How has this hindered me in my marriage, family, job, and ministry? What can I do to ensure that I am depending upon the Lord instead of my own resources? Read Jeremiah 9:23–24 and John 15:1–11.
2. How has sexual immorality damaged my life? What counsel could I give to a young person so that he or she can avoid my sin and its consequences? How can I apply the theology and instruction of 1 Corinthians 6:12–20?
3. Why does the Bible emphasize the importance of only marrying a believer? What consequences have I observed in my own life for failing to obey this command? If I am presently dating an unbeliever, will I be obedient to God and break off his relationship?
4. How have I forfeited ministry opportunities and positions because of my sin? Am I conscious of the potential to fail in my life and ministry? What safeguards am I putting in place to ensure that I do not disqualify myself? Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–27.
5. Despite our sin, God is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). Have I taken the time to praise God for how He has protected me in the past? Will I pray diligently that He will protect me in my present and future life and ministry? Read 2 Timothy 4:8 and Hebrews 12:1–3.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I have relied heavily upon the work of my doctoral director and dissertation reader, J. Kent Edwards, who wrote a sermon entitled, “Samson: The Strong Weak Man” (Judges 13–16) in his book *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 147–55. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Edwards for helping me to improve my skills in narrative preaching.

<sup>2</sup> Baylis writes, “While Jephthah delivers Israel east of the Jordan, Samson becomes a judge in the west (chaps. 13–16). The writer gives more space to Samson than to any other judge. He was chosen to be judge before birth, so his beginnings rival those of Samuel, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist. Certainly much should be expected from this man. But he is woefully disappointing. He regularly disregards the law, intermarries with the Philistines, and uses his delivering power to carry out acts of incidental violence. Why spend so much time on Samson’s failure? Because he climaxes the message of Judges. His life matches that of the nation itself. Samson, like Israel, had a special calling but deserted it to pursue his own desires. His power, though great and bestowed by Yahweh, did not deliver because his life was marked by unfaithfulness to Yahweh and intermarriage with the nations of the land.” Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 175.

<sup>3</sup> Samson is derived from the Hebrew word for “sun” (*shemesh*) and probably refers to “that which is distinguished, the pinnacle, one who is strong.”

<sup>4</sup> Commenting on Samson’s qualification as judge, Block remarks, “Like most of the other judges, Samson was an unlikely candidate for leadership in Israel. The narrator seems to stress that what accomplishments were achieved were all to YHWH’s credit, produced in spite of, rather than because of, the man.” 51.

<sup>5</sup> Samson is also a picture of the nation. Israel was faulted for living among and intermarrying with the Canaanite enemy. After Samson’s birth narrative (Judg. 13) the rest of his life story centers on his pursuit of Philistine women. Samson is an example of Israel’s “playing the harlot after other gods” (2:17; 8:27, 32). Smith 431.

<sup>6</sup> Lit. “She is right in my eyes” (Judg 14:3, 7). The narrator here illustrated and foreshadowed his theme from the epilogues, where “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). It is likely that the attraction was both physical and cultural. Crenshaw explains some of the differences and advances in Philistine culture that would have made their women attractive to Israelite men. See James L. Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, a Vow Ignored* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 81.

<sup>7</sup> The failure of Manoah and his wife will be discussed in the final sermon on the book of Judges.

<sup>8</sup> Did God send the lion as a warning to Samson that he was walking on the wrong path?

<sup>9</sup> Smith writes, “The Philistine woman and her father are unnamed (14:1) as is also the harlot from Gaza (16:1). Once again the fact of their being unnamed might be the narrator’s way of saying that they represent all or any Philistines.” Michael J. Smith, “The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 2: Samson,” *Bsac* 162:648 (October 2005): 431.

<sup>10</sup> Like John the Baptist, Samson would be a Nazirite from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:13–15). The word *Nazirite* comes from a Hebrew word (*nazir*) that means “to separate, to consecrate.” Nazirites were persons who, for a stated period of time, consecrated themselves to the Lord in a special way. They abstained from drinking wine and strong drink; they avoided touching dead bodies; and as a mark of their consecration, they allowed their hair to grow. The laws governing the Nazirite vow are given in Num 6:1–8.

<sup>11</sup> Waltke notes, “The Philistines offer Delilah a fantastic sum of money [1100 pieces of silver (Judg 16:5)]—more than a lifetime of earnings for the average worker.” 611.

<sup>12</sup> The word *yether* refers to a bowstring, probably made from animal tendons (See Ps 11:2; Job 30:11). See the NET Study Notes. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 457.

<sup>13</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, “Samson: A He-Man with a She-Weakness,” in *Old Testament Characters* (Fullerton, CA: Insight for Living, 1986), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Swindoll, “Samson,” 6.

<sup>15</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, “The Hidden Cost of Sensuality: Samson” in *When a Good Man Falls* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt 5:27–29).

<sup>17</sup> The American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, “Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending.”

<sup>18</sup> Swindoll, “Samson,” 11.

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<sup>19</sup> Lutzer, “The Hidden Cost of Sensuality,” 60–61.

<sup>20</sup> Block notes that there are six formulaic elements in the paradigm of the judge cycles: (1) The sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; (2) the Lord gave them into the hands of an oppressing nation; (3) the Israelites cried out to the Lord; (4) the Lord raised up a deliverer; (5) the Lord gave the oppressors into the hands of the deliverer; (6) the land had rest for some years. See Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 146–47.

<sup>21</sup> 433–34.

<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Smith, “The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 1: Jephthah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July 2005): 283.