

Topic	The Rise of Samson
Reference	Judges
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BACKGROUND:

Whenever we hear the name Samson of the Bible, the first thing that comes to our mind is a superhero, a super strength man with long hairs. We also think of Delilah, a woman who brought Samson down. In fact, if the life of Samson was a mere story, it would compete with anything that Shakespeare wrote. Unfortunately, Samson's life is a tragedy. Those amazing deeds were overshadowed by the failures in life. Overpowered by the spirit, Samson was called with a purpose and yet lived a life dominated by the flesh.

In order to understand Samson's time, we must understand the time of Judges in Israel. If you remember, God had chosen Israel as his nation, brought them out of slavery in Egypt, has given them his law to live by and placed them in the Promised Land. They were expected to live like his true people, to be holy because God is holy. They went into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, but after Joshua died things began to head into a downfall direction very fast. So, to see what the Book of Judges is all about from chapter 1 to 21, it summarizes into this last verse of the book

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

The Book is a 300-year history of what happened, when a nation depends on its own sense of morality rather than of God's. The Book is a record of Israel's dark ages. Joshua died even before there was a king to lead God's people to what is right and so they did what was the right in their own eyes. So, it was so depressing situation in the life of the Israelites. Their society was filled with murder, rape, idolatry, homosexuality, betrayal, deceit, fornication, divorce and all kinds of wickedness. The Israelites were God's people who had done what was right most of the time, now have walked away from God, doing what was right in their own eyes. So, God punishes His people for their sins.

In the book of Judges, we see the cycle of sin of the Israelites. Israel would sin, follow their idols and reject God, so God would raise up people around them to

oppress them and make them slaves. They would cry out to God and he would raise up a judge or deliverer to save them. Then there would be a time of peace and after the judge died, Israel would go back to sinning and the cycle would repeat. To deliver Israel from oppression, God would raise up a judge, which was basically a military or a civil leader, who would defeat the enemy and led the people for a period of time. There is where we come to Samson as one of the Judges called by God. Israel had been through this cycle time and time again. That's why it says in Judges 13:1

Judges 13:1 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.

Surprisingly, this time they didn't cry out of God to deliver them. They never complained. They were contented being slaves to the philistines. In the past, Israel can feel the suffering from their oppressor and they cry out to God for help, but now their enslavement is virtually unconscious, because it is nature is that of cultural accommodation. The Israelites did not go on and resist. Now because they have completely accepted and adapted to the values and customs of the philistines, even in worshipping their idols. There is absolutely no conflict at all between the Philistines and the Israelites, but God was still faithful to them. He is faithful to his promise that he will bless his chosen nation and to keep that promise he took the initiative to deliver them from their oppressor and He chose Samson to do so.

God had a special plan for Samson's life. God visited Samson's parents through the angel to tell them that they will have a son. This couple was under old age and they have been childless for many years. The angel told the couple that the boy will be special for the Lord. There were two factors for it.

1. Samson has to be dedicated to God as a Nazarite for his entire life. A Nazarite is a person consecrated to the service of God and there is a special vow to put restriction in his life. This includes the food that he must eat, that he will not cut his hair with razer, not to be near a dead body. So, Samson has to follow all the vows he has made to the Lord. Violation of this calling will play an important part in the life of Samson and will lead to the downfall of his life. So, a Nazarite vow was just a list of rules to conform but it was an outward expression of an inward dedication to God.
2. Apart from being a Nazarite, God called him to deliver Israel from the Philistines. We see that the Philistines were settled at living normal lives in the Israelite territory. They ruled the Israelites at this time as mentioned in Judges 14:4 and in Judges 15:11. We cannot exaggerate the danger to

Israel during this time. The Israelites were on the brink of extinction. Within a couple of generations, they could have been completely integrated into the Philistine nation, a nation of idolaters. So, Samson was called by God to deliver the chosen nation out from Philistine. Samson grew according to God's plan.

Samson name in original Hebrew is Shimshon, from the term 'shemesh u-magen', meaning "wall and protector". Or from the word Shemesh, which mean Sun. As Samson grew up, the Lord blessed him, qualified him, both body and mind for something great and extraordinary. Now, after such a remarkable way of growing up under the blessing of the Lord, I am sure with great expectations we want to know the details of Samson's vocation. How will this promise deliver, which has been consecrated to the Lord. It is up to bring about the salvation of Israel. Unfortunately, Samson's life is the one of contradiction. He was a man of great physical strength yet displayed great moral weakness. He continually broke the rules of Nazarite, but God came upon him many times, giving him strength to fight the Philistine. Now how can it be that God used even sinful man to accomplish His will. This what we are going to see in the life of Samson.

A. DOMINATED BY THE FLESH TO FIGHT THE PHILISTINES

a) Marriage

Judges 14:1 Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, *one* of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, *one* of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

When Samson decided to marry, a Philistine woman in Timnah, it was a violation of being a Nazarite. According to God's law, Israelite cannot intermarry with foreigners. This was not because God promoted racism, but because by marrying these pagans, they would turn the hurts of God's people away from God. The biblical prohibition was that against interracial marriages, but against interfaith marriages. The main issue was that such marriages weaken a believer's loyalty to God because of idolatry and that was what happened with the Israelites as it says in Judges

Judges 3:6 and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

Even apostle Paul then used the appeal to believers who are single and planning to get married.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The word bound together or in other translation, it says yoke. It refers to a binding relationship, but at least it would mean marriage, which is the most binding of all the human relationships. If we understand this verse, it might probably lead us to conclude that the Bible is concerned about the unbelieving spouse that will try to convert the believer.

When you don't share your faith with your spouse, there is a great pressure to adopt to that, by pushing God more to the sideline of your life. You are in an intimate relationship with someone who does not understand what the very motivation of everything should be and that is together to worship and serve a true God. However, we should also remember as Paul insists that a Christian who is married to a non-Christian should not seek divorce from him or her but should actively seek to do good.

Samson's Riddle:

In order to understand this, we have to know the marriage custom of Samson's day. Basically, it started with an agreement to be married. The agreement called a betrothal, was usually arranged by the parents. The betrothal period lasted anywhere from six months to one year and then at the end of which there was a 7-day wedding feast. At the end of the feast, the marriage was consummated.

Judges 14:12 Then Samson said to them, "Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. 13 But if you

are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Propound your riddle, that we may hear it." 14 So he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet." 15 Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, so that he will tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?"

Samson lost the battle, before the sun went down, before the marriage will be consummated he has to find thirty linen garments and 30 changes of clothes, what did he do to pay the bet. It says in Judges 14:19-20

Judges 14:19 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house. 20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his friend.

It means that Samson had to touch their dead bodies in order to get their clothes, which is a clear violation of the Nazarite vow. Samson was angry because he has been publicly humiliated, betrayed by his bride and embarrass with the groom's man. If we analyze his earlier action, what was there to be angry about? He was the one who went to Philistine territory in the first place. He was the one who peak out the girl. He was the one who decided to marry her. He was the one who taught up the riddle. He is the one who made the bet. He is the one who named the price. He was the only one who knew the secret. He is the one who gave the secret away. He can only blame himself for the mess and nobody else. Sometimes it happens to us, you do something against the will of God, make a wrong choice, got the wrong direction and when things mess up, we blame others, up to the point of blaming God. Samson's basic problem is that he never learned to control his anger. Time and time again, his attitude got him into trouble. Now can we see ourselves in the life of Samson. Maybe most of us cannot still relate, we say that we are Christians. We say that we have been Christians for a very long time. We say that we are not only nominal Christians, but workers of God in his kingdom and yet we live a life of anger, hatred and bitterness. We are used to lead to living a kind of life that we thought is just normal and acceptable to our society, justifying our acts in saying, anyway I don't murder like Samson, but Jesus says in Matthew 5:

Matthew 5:21-24

²¹“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.²³ Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

So, Samson is a perfect picture of a believer that is out of control. We can see ourselves in him. We act in front of God, we feel believers and most of all unbelievers, chances are almost every one of us get angry, at least once this past week. Think of what would happen if everyone learns to deal with this anger, surely there will be harmony in the workplace, in the home, in the church, in the community, child abuse and divorce would be eradicated. Murder, terrorism and war would stop.

Samson Burned the Crops

Now burning with anger Samson went up to his father’s house. This means he walked out of the marriage ceremony. He was angry, he wanted nothing to do with the marriage and so Samson’s wife was given to the best man who had attended here at this wedding. A few months had passed, it was now the time of the wheat harvest and Samson took a young goat as a gift to his bride. He still thought he is married. He thought that he just walked out on her and he could come back when he wanted to. When he arrived at the house and said to his father, I am going to visit my wife’s room, but the father would not let him go. Why not, because she was already married to somebody else. Then her father tried to make a deal. He offered his younger daughter to him. Samson was upset because his wife was gone. Samson was also upset because the father has now insulted him.

Judges 15:3-5

³Samson then said to them, “This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm.” ⁴Samson went and caught three hundred

foxes, and took torches, and turned *the foxes* tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails. ⁵When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards *and* groves.

Now, we need to understand that the Philistines had only three important crops as their source of living. One was wheat, one was olive and the other was grapes vineyards. Samson singlehandedly destroyed their source of everyday life. Philistines of course were not happy. When they asked, who did this? They were told that Samson had done it, because his wife was given to another man. So the Philistine went up and burned her and her father to death then Samson did another thing to get revenge on the Philistines.

Judges 15:7-8

⁷Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit." ⁸He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

If we notice there is a cycle of revenge. When the Philistines do something, Samson does something in return. Only each time it is getting more and more serious and more and more brutal and more and more blood thirsty. This is what happens when we try to seek revenge in our life. The only way to get out of the cycle of violence is not to seek revenge in the first place. As long as, we want to get even, we are going to a more serious and life-threatening situation.

Samson's anger has consumed him, when he kills them, he rips them apart. In the next verses, the Philistines were looking for Samson

Judges 15:11-13

¹¹Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?"

It took 3000 men to make them feel safe going down to see one of their own man, Samson. So, the Israelites were scared to death of the Philistines. They were so frightened that they approach Samson, asking him to surrender. So, they were to accustom to the status core of being ruled by the Philistines and they agreed that they will let go Samson and they will just bind him and give him

into the hands of the Philistines. What happened next, Samson killed 1000 Philistines. So, they sent Samson to Philistines. But when the Philistines approached Samson, his ropes fell down and with a jaw of a donkey he killed 1000 men.

Judges 15:14-15

¹⁴ When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands. ¹⁵ He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it.

That's the life of Samson dominated by flesh in fighting for the Philistines, but in spite of being dominated by the flesh, God still empowered Samson by his spirit to achieve his purpose. How can God evidently use such sinful person to get his work done? We expect that God will use people who are good and godly, people with the right lips and with right behaviour to do his will, his plan. Have you noticed that whenever Samson went to kill Philistine and when he tore the young lion into halves, we see that the spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily and this was mentioned in these three verses. It signifies that even though Samson was going against his Nazarite vow, God was still using him to fulfil his purpose.

Samson could have chosen a different path to take, he can fulfil the mission to set for him in a way that would still be pleasing to God, but in spite of being impulsive and making pleasing to God, he made irrational decisions. God continue to work through him to get the best of him in order to achieve his purpose. God's plan of delivering his chosen nation from the Philistines is clearly shown in this crucial verse. It says

Judges 14:4

⁴ However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

This is the key to understanding the whole story of Samson. God uses the very weakness of Samson, his mingling with Philistines, his sexual craving, and temper to bring about confrontation between the two nations. Samson weakness has become a blood feud that leads to more and more conflict and finally the

division, the separation between these two nations that is so desperately needed as Israelites are almost integrated in the life of the Philistines. If you have noticed, everyone in this story was acting out of his own ungodly character. Samson in his impulsive selfishness, the Philistine woman in her manipulatedness, the Philistine men in their violent threats and so on. They were all responsible for what they did, but God worked it altogether for a good purpose. He arranged things so that all the characters sinful deed workout to separate these two nations and Israel will be free and will be identified again as a chosen nation of God. During these conflicts, God is just supernaturally suppling Samson a superhuman strength with a plan to work and to achieve his purpose.

God remain unconditionally committed to his covenant promises with the Israelites. Even in this kind of situation, God is so faithful with his promises that he not only fulfils them in spite of their sin, but even through their sins. He uses their own sinfulness to bring about deliverance.

God's purpose for our lives is way greater than our biggest mistakes. God's purpose for our lives is way greater than our biggest mistakes. We might have gone to this kind of situation or we might be at present in a similar situation. Time and time again we may be committing big mistakes in our lives, but we must realize that each problem and trial we face bring lessons that we need to learn. Even if we don't fully understand, it is very sure that we will come to a point in our lives that all things will make sense, be it during this lifetime or in the life to come, we can gain comfort from the fact that God can use negative situations for our betterment. Though we might suffer, we are suffering for a purpose. Every trial we face in this life is used by God to improve our character and develop the character needed to rule in his kingdom. Hope we truly learn the lessons and fear the consequences that make us suffer but more than that let us fear God and be obedient to Him so our lives won't go through a cycle of sin.

At this time, we must realize that no matter what we are facing in this life right now, we should always remember that God is in complete control. Though Satan is ruling this world, God is ultimately in-charge.