

## Judges | When All Hell Breaks Loose

### The Death of Samson

Judges 16.15ff

11.10.19

*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.*

We've been working through the Book of Judges – and today we come to the most famous characters in the book... the not-so-dynamic duo!

Not only do Bible readers recognize this couple but people who don't read the Bible also know them. Their story has been romanticized but it's actually TRAGIC – male/female relationship NOT as God intended (opposite of Othniel/Achsah; CH 1 & 3).

As we saw last week, Samson is the last Judge of the cycles – when the Israelites forget God, turn to the idols of their neighbors, suffer the consequences of oppression/violence FROM those neighbors and then they cry out to God who sends a rescuer/judge.

With the death of Samson, the cycles are over and the next judge, Samuel, gets his own book and a new era begins. Samuel is a major contrast to Samson.

Today, we ponder this “strongweakman” who failed in life and was NOT a great rescuer but who nevertheless IS remembered as a man of faith in the New Testament (Heb 11.32) and someone used by God. As we look at the end of his life we ask: where did he go wrong? And what do we learn from his life and death?

I want to think of Samson and the infamous Delilah on TWO levels – the obvious and the hidden, what's on the surface and what's underneath, the shallow and the deep, what we SEE and what WE DON'T SEE.

If you're a spiritual person (and we all ARE – spiritual as much as we are physical) but if you're interested in the pursuit of “true spirituality” there are pitfalls to avoid in the story of Samson and Delilah – but there's also THE great pitfall (below the surface) and I want to bring it to the top – unearth this landmine of the spiritual life so we avoid it (and not only the obvious dangers).

Today, **the spiritual life:**

1. **Problems** (what we see and what we don't see)
2. **Consequences** (what we see and what we don't see)
3. **Remedy** (what we see and what we don't see)

When I talk about problems of life you might think: bills. And bills can be a problem. You may think of sickness...or conflict...or traffic...things that annoy us.

But pretty soon...after starting the spiritual life or becoming intentional we learn that what really ruins life IS NOT A LONG COMMUTE or broken appliances or that guy at work you try to avoid... It's how we respond to these things. And the word we use for the WRONG response is...sin. Sin ruins life.

And there are many easy-to-identify SINS on the surface of Samson's life. He seems to be petulant with his parents (boys and girls, DON'T do that! – don't be impatient and rude with mom and dad!)

He is driven by his appetites. He sees women and wants them. He dates the wrong girls. He consorts with a prostitute. He sees honey in the dead lion and he wants it – even though the corpse of the lion is off limits (and breaks his Nazirite vow). He was cruel to animals (killed 300 foxes as a way of burning down the grain fields of the Philistines). On and on!

The Hebrew scholar Lawson Younger wrote about Samson: “He is one of the most narcissistic persons in all the Bible. Self-gratification is what drives this man.” (p.327)

Sin... self-gratification...narcissism ruins life. God’s law defines the good life and disregarding God’s law is like ignoring the law of gravity. You will fall and you will get hurt. You don’t break the law without the law breaking YOU!

But there’s something deeper than law-breaking at work in Samson. Something is driving him... and if you look a little below the surface... if you pay attention to the words used to describe him and his actions, you’ll notice throughout these four chapters a repetition of the words, “see” and “go”.

“Samson saw her and she looked good to him” – it reminds us of the whole “mood” of society at this moment when “everyone did what was right in his own EYES”. Faith is the evidence of things NOT seen but Samson is living by what is seen. He is NOT living by faith but by seeing. He relies on his senses.

And he goes here and there. He is a loner. He’s a restless, independent entity. He acts NOT in concert with others but as an autonomous individual. He pulls up the Gaza City Gates singlehandedly and then GOES, carries the enormous gates like 30 miles away, leaving the city totally exposed... but then he never rallies the Israelites to take the city. He comes and goes self-reliant, self-sufficient – independent.

These are all descriptors of UNBELIEF. To believe, to have faith is to TRUST what God says. It means to rest and receive from God but Samson is restless and relying on what he sees.

And you see, when WE sin... any of the surface kind of sins we find in the life of Samson... and then we realize what we’re doing, our first impulse is to stop it. But we don’t stop to ask, “What’s going on below the surface? What part of God’s promise am I NOT getting or NOT BELIEVING here? Why is the infinite treasure of forgiveness and peace with God based on Jesus Christ living for me, obeying for me, dying in my place and ascending into heaven to prepare a place for me – IF I WERE SEEING THAT WITH THE EYES OF FAITH I would not be enslaved to my eyes and restless, independent and alone.

Now the consequences (2<sup>nd</sup> point) the results of Samson’s sins are also obvious. He gets allured by the world. He is “a slave to fashion”, fascinated by the Philistines and when he consorts with

them, they betray him. He gets ensnared by his first Philistine wife (CH 14) and she manipulates him and betrays him. Then, he doesn't learn his lesson and it happens again. He's like a teenager who sort of jettisons/ditches his convictions to get in with the cool kids and then the cool kids use him and throw him away.

But remember, Samson is a miniature of the whole NATION... and on a deeper level, he's not simply a victim of peer-pressure, he's a picture of what it means to forget The Covenant.

On the surface, Samson looks silly (BTW – people picture Samson as a kind of Hercules with bulging muscles [I called him a caveman] – but apparently the cool kids couldn't figure out where he got his strength so maybe he was like a long-haired version of Sheldon Cooper or Steve Urkel or George Costanza) but I digress.

The point is Samson makes these forays among the cool kids and then gets rejected and he looks ridiculous until at last he's literally enslaved and they make him a clown...but at a deeper level, God is showing us what happens when His people forget who they ARE. Unbelief leads to a loss of identity.

Samson is a picture of the unbelieving Covenant People who, due to unbelief, forget that they are the cherished, secure and redeemed children of the heavenly Father.

Israel's unbelief in God and in God's agreement with them has been forgotten. She has, like Samson, turned away from the Lover of her soul and jumped in bed with the nations. Israel has been given, in God's marriage covenant, infinite "kabod" – i.e. glory, weightiness, significance and purpose and mission. But she wanted – like Samson to go and see – to rely on her senses and on her restless desire to be in control.

And now Israel – like Samson has been betrayed by her lovers (a huge theme in the Hebrew Bible – spiritual adultery – that reaches its ZENITH in the Book of Hosea and in Ezekiel CH 16 – yuck!)

And for us – when Christians forget who they are, people who (in ourselves) are big sinners but IN CHRIST, in the life-death-resurrection of Jesus, we are infinitely loved (John 17.23) – when we don't see that with the eyes of faith (Eph 1.18ff, 3.18ff) – when we don't see that WHO I AM IN CHRIST is infinitely more weighty than what I have in my bank account, my title, my ethnicity, my education, my coolness, my marital status or achievements OR my failures and secrets and shame – God's covenant is for ME and by faith I receive it. IT DEFINES ME.

And when we don't receive that – when this isn't our trust – we turn to other things and those things ALWAYS LET US DOWN and leave us... disappointed, ashamed and ridiculous.

And that brings us to the last point – the remedy. Samson does get his sweet revenge. He loses his life but dies as a hero. Tragic but a great act of self-sacrifice – we’re still talking about it (3000 years later!)

But, again, below the surface God is showing us something here. First, it’s when Samson loses his eyes that he first begins to see – to really see. He has done what is right in his own eyes and now those eyes are gone and he calls on YHWH! V. 28 “Then Samson called on the name of the LORD.” He renews his faith.

Second, it’s when the (25) Lords of the Philistines make this a battle of Dagon vs. YHWH that the one true God brings the house down (literally) and it all reminds us of the GREAT AND DEEPER remedy, the deeper magic (Narnia) that the greater Samson is seen.

St Paul says of Jesus Christ that “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the Cross.” (Colossians 2.15)

In Samson, who defeated the enemy MORE in his death than in his life that we see a picture of Jesus Christ defeating all His and our enemies and ruling us as King and Defender.

Samson is a type of Jesus Christ – NOT because Samson was like Jesus Christ (in character) – but that Samson was a foil – a contrast. Jesus also stretched out His arms and pulled down the pillars of the corrupt world. He rendered all spiritual powers, all false gods and forces defeated.

This aspect of His work/atonement is sometimes called “Christus Victor” (Christ the Victor) who has saved us from the powers, from Dagon and the Philistine lords so WE DO NOT HAVE TO FEAR – i.e. unless we rely on our eyes... and NOT the eyes of faith.

See...that really is THE great impediment to the life of true spirituality. To live in unbelief, to trust in what we SEE instead of what God has said and in what God has done in Jesus Christ.

When HE the greater Samson pulled down the pillars of this decadent/fallen world system He Himself fell with it...but unlike the foil, Samson, He rose from the dust and decay and is the first evidence of a New Creation that will soon emerge with the words, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.” (Rev 11:15 NAU)

One last note: I can’t pass up – v. 22 – such a touching and hopeful note: 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. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off. (21-22)

Maybe you have wandered this week...into real sin...into spiritual failure...maybe you've been living solely by sight and not by faith...for a long time.

God knows His own and He will not abandon you. Grace reasserts itself – and God is welcoming YOU today. Come... call on the Name of the Lord.