

**GOD WITH US**  
**Part 2: Conquest and Chaos**  
**Joshua – Judges – Ruth**

**Message 9 – Judge Samson**  
**Judges 13-16**

**Introduction**

The tragic cycle of sin in the book of Judges grinds toward a conclusion with the story of Samson. Sadly, it seems that the character and life of Samson provides a parallel to the character and life of Israel as a nation. Samson was a strong man made weak by his own uncontrolled lusts. Israel was a strong nation made weak by her own out-of-control idolatries. Samson was under a special covenant (Nazirite vow) to serve God with his God-given strength. Israel was under a special covenant (Mosaic law) to serve God with her God-given resources. Samson became weak by violating the terms of his covenant. Israel became weak and oppressed by violating the terms of her covenant. Samson's life never reached its full potential. Israel, under the weight of her sin, never represented God well to the surrounding world. Samson died in the rubble of a pagan temple. Israel was overrun by the pagan ways of the Canaanites. Samson's own life pictures the wasted strength, the 'what might have been' of Israel as a whole.

**The announcement of Samson's birth: 13:1-7**

The angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, announcing the birth of a special son (much like the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus to Mary):

*Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines" (13:3-5).*

The news of Samson's birth was accompanied by special instructions placing him under a lifetime Nazirite vow (see

Numbers 6 for the laws governing Nazirite vows). This vow meant that he was dedicated for special work for God. Most Nazirite vows were undertaken for a temporary period of time; but Samson's vow was a lifetime commitment. He had to remain separate from defilement and wholly consecrated to the mission given to him by God. Allowing one's hair to grow uncut was part of the Nazirite vow.

Specifically, Samson's God-given mission was ***"to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines"*** (13:5). The Philistine domination of Israel lasted 40 years. Samson served as judge for only 20 years. He never mustered an army to completely overthrow the Philistines, as David finally did (2Samuel 5:17-25). Yet, by his personal acts of power against the Philistines, Samson kept the oppressors off balance and "began" the work that David would later complete.

### **Manoah seeks an audience with the angel: 13:8-25**

Manoah *entreated* the Lord to send the angel again, so that he could personally hear the instructions concerning the raising of the boy. The angel appeared again *to his wife*. When Manoah asked for further instructions, the angel referred back to what he had already told his wife:

***So the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded" (13:13,14).***

In many ways, Samson's birth parallels that of John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-16). Angels announced both births. Both were dedicated to God's work prior to their births. Both lived under Nazirite vows. Samson was to begin the deliverance that David would complete. John was to begin a deliverance that Jesus would complete. Both fathers had questions and, at times, doubts. Both mothers believed. Both sons, once born, grew in the strength of God's Spirit as they waited for their mission to begin.

Samson: ***"And the Lord blessed him as he grew up. And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him while he lived in Mahaneh-dan" (13:24,25).***

John: ***"And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts . . . (Luke 1:80).***

## **Samson's demand for a Philistine wife: 14:1-4**

At the very outset of the Samson narrative we are introduced to his fundamental weakness. He falls for women the moment he sees them. He has no ability to evaluate the worth of the relationship based upon higher principles. He is controlled by what his eyes see, not by what his conscience knows to be right.

***Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. 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." Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me" (14:1-3).***

Moses forbade Israel from taking wives from the inhabitants of Canaan. Nevertheless, Samson demanded what "looked good" to him, even against the protests of his father and mother. He more or less ordered his parents to give him what he wanted.

*It is always wise to have an objective set of eyes helping you to make big decisions. Our own appetites and desires can mislead us, causing us to overlook important details about the long-term viability of a decision (what to purchase, what job to take, who to date/marry, who to partner with in business). The key is to invite input from wise counselors, and then to seriously consider their point of view. Samson was unwilling to heed the wisdom of his own parents, deciding instead only by what his own eyes desired in the moment. As a result, his path was repeatedly filled with the pain of disappointment, defeat and heartache.*

Yet, in spite of his sins and flaws, the Lord used Samson for His sovereign purpose – to begin delivering Israel from the hand of the Philistines. There is always the God-side of every situation:

***"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" (14:4).***

## **Samson goes to marry the Philistine woman: 14:5-9**

The story of Samson's trip to Timnah, to marry the Philistine woman, has a parenthetical story about him killing a lion with his bare hands. While this incident clearly demonstrates his God-

given strength, it also shows Samson's propensity to jeopardize the terms of his Nazirite vow and, thus, risk his God-given strength. Coming into contact with dead bodies was forbidden in the law (Leviticus 11:27).

***“When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion. So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went” (14:8,9).***

He did not tell his parents that he got the honey out of the body of a dead lion because he did not want them to know that he had compromised his Nazirite vow.

### **Samson's wedding debacle: 14:10-20**

We've all heard stories about wedding ceremonies going awry. Samson's weeklong wedding ceremony was a disaster because 1) he decided to play games that would shame the men, and 2) the woman he had chosen to marry was not loyal to him.

Since Samson brought no groomsmen with him to Timnah, 30 Philistine men were chosen to be part of his bridal party. In turn, Samson was to give gifts to these men. To avoid giving them gifts, he proposed a riddle involving the dead lion and the honey (which only he knew about). IF the 30 men could solve the riddle within the 7-days of the wedding week, then Samson would provide them with 30 linen wraps and 30 changes of clothes. IF they could *not* solve his riddle, then they would pay him the same amount. (Since when do the attendants to the bridegroom ever pay the groom for their participation?) His riddle was as follows:

***“Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” But they could not tell the riddle in three days (14:14).***

Frustrated that they could not solve the riddle, the 30 Philistine men began to threaten Samson's wife with harm if she did not entice him to divulge the answer to the riddle.

***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?” (14:15).***

Samson's wife then began to use *all* her powers of female persuasion to get him to tell her the answer to the riddle.

***Then Samson's wife threw herself on him, sobbing, "You hate me! You don't really love me. You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer" (14:16).***

***"She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people" (14:17).***

Samson paid up on his bet by going to Ashkelon, a key Philistine city, killing 30 men, stripping them of their garments and giving them to the 30 groomsmen! Meanwhile, his wife ***"was given to one of his companions who had attended him at the feast" (14:20).***

Women have a God-given power to use the gift of persuasion for good or for destructive ends. Though Samson was physically strong, he was weak in the face of female manipulation and persuasion. His first wife sobbed and complained that he did not really love her. He finally caved in to her, and it cost him his marriage (and much more). His second wife, Delilah, also pressed and pressed, finally playing the 'you-don't-love-me' to get Samson to reveal the secret of his great strength (16:15). "With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death" (16:16). That fall cost Samson his God-given strength, and ultimately, his very life. The book of Proverbs says much about the dangerous power of the tongue of a temptress (Prov. 7:7-22). "For the lips of the adulteress drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil" (Prov. 5:3). On the other hand, the woman of wisdom is highly praised for her ability to use her tongue to impact people positively. "She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue" (Prov. 31:26). Women, how are you using your God-given power of persuasion?

### **Samson's revenge on the Philistines: 15:1-8**

Samson returned to Timnah, hoping to reconcile with "his wife." He did not know that her father had already given her in marriage to another man. Enraged, Samson took revenge on the Philistines. First, he destroyed their grain fields with the help of 300 foxes.

***"Samson 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. When 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” (15:4,5).***

The Philistines retaliated by killing Samson’s former wife and her father. He, in turn, avenged their deaths by using his God-given strength to slaughter them ruthlessly.

***“He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam” (15:8).***

Again, in return, the Philistines amassed an army and prepared to attack the tribe of Judah (15:9). This was a classic case of tit-for-tat, with the carnage escalating at each new level. And it all started with Samson saying, *“I merely did to them what they did to me” (15:11)*. “Revenge is an uncontrollable monster. Each act of retaliation brings another. It is a boomerang that cannot be thrown without cost to the thrower. The revenge cycle can be halted only by forgiveness.” (Life Application Study Bible, p.408).

*It is fascinating to see how God’s sovereign purposes are fulfilled even through human sin and error. Samson was making mistake after mistake in his personal life; yet, God was using him to “begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.” God’s plans never fail. The ultimate example of God using human sin to bring about His purposes was the death of Jesus. Jesus taught His disciples that “the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:7). On the day of Pentecost, Peter put it like this: “This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23). The hands of God and the hands of godless men combined to put Jesus on a cross to die for our sins. The sovereign plan of God and the free-willed actions of human beings are like two sides of the same coin. You can’t see both sides clearly at the same time; but they are both true simultaneously.*

### **The men of Judah oppose Samson: 15:10-20**

When the tribe of Judah saw that they were about to be attacked by the Philistine army, because of Samson, they came to his hideout at the cave of Etam intending to bind him and hand him over to the enemy in order to avert war. How ironic that Israel had come to the point where they were ready to hand their God-given deliverer over to the enemy in order to keep the peace!

The men of Judah bound Samson with cords and led him to the Philistines. When he came near, however, the Spirit of God gave him the power to prevail over the enemy once again.

***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. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. Then Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men" (15:14-16).***

"The Lord's strength came upon Samson, but he was proud and boasted only of his own strength. 'With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men,' he said, and later asked (demanded) God to refresh him because of his accomplishments (15:16-18). Pride can cause us to take credit for work we've done only because of God's strength." (Life Application Study Bible, p.409).

This section concludes by noting that Samson "*judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines*" (15:20). Yet, there is one final defining sequence of events for judge Samson.

### **Samson and Delilah: 16:1-22**

A brief story of Samson spending the night with a prostitute in Gaza (a Philistine city!) precedes the final story of Samson and Delilah. The minor point of the Gaza-prostitute story is that Samson kept falling into traps brought about by his own uncontrolled lusts. The larger point seems to be the tale of his great strength in ripping the Gaza city gates from their foundation and carrying them to the top of the mountain opposite Hebron, a distance of 9 miles! Truly, his strength was supernatural.

The final story concerning Samson has become the most famous, and it highlights not his great strength, but his great weakness.

***"After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah" (16:4).***

There really is no story about Samson that does not involve, at the outset, the love of some woman. The *entire* focus of the Delilah narrative is on how the Philistine lords used her to entice Samson in order to learn the secret of his God-given strength and rob him of it. By now, they *knew* his Achilles heel was *women*. Thus, they

wisely used a woman to defeat him. Delilah, for her part, was motivated by sheer greed, in that each of the Philistine lords promised to give her 1,100 pieces of silver (v.5), a massive amount of money! Delilah three times tried to coax out of Samson the secret of his strength; but he three times deceived her with false answers. Finally, she pulled the “love card” on Samson:

***Then she said to him, “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.” It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. 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” (16:15-17).***

Samson revealed his secret, thinking it would be safe with his lover. Instead, she betrayed him, and he was suddenly left hairless and powerless. His Nazirite vow had been broken, and with it went the Spirit-power that had marked his career.

***Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. 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 (16:19,20).***

It was a sad day when the Lord “departed” from Samson (i.e., removed His special Spirit-anointing given to Judges). Yet, more revealing is the fact that Samson did not even know that God’s special anointing power was gone. He thought he could get up and overpower enemies “as at other times.” Here are a few diagnostic questions to assess your own dependence upon God: IF the Lord removed His presence and power from your life right now, would you notice? Are you living in such close dependence upon Him that you simply could not continue to move forward without His strength? Or, are you living so much in your own strength that you would go about your day “as at other times?” (Note: I am glad these are just diagnostic questions. The New Testament assures us that once the child of God is indwelt by His Spirit, He will NEVER depart from us!)

***“Then the Philistines seized him and put out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison” (16:21).***

What sad irony in the fact that it was Samson’s eyes that kept taking him into sin . . . and his eyes he lost in the end.

Samson’s enemies knew his weaknesses better than he did. They knew he was an easy prey for a beautiful woman. When you know that you are prone to fall in a certain area, it is wise to “make no provision for the flesh, in regard to its lusts” (Romans 13:14). As J.B. Phillips translated it: “Give no chances to the flesh to have its fling!” What practical steps can you take today to guard yourself against your major weaknesses? What can you do to rob your sinful nature of the chances it needs to take you down?

### **Samson’s final victory over the Philistines: 16:23-31**

The Philistines held a feast to worship their god, Dagon, for giving Samson into their hands. Some 3,000 people were gathered on the roof of the building, looking down at Samson, who was tied between two pillars. He was the “entertainment” for the crowd of spectators.

***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.”***

It is telling that Samson asked for strength to avenge the Philistines for his two eyes, rather than for God’s glory and the honor of Israel. In spite of his self-serving motive, God answered his prayer, and gave him supernatural strength for one final victory over the Philistines.

***“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. 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” (16:28-30).***

There were terrible consequences for Samson’s sins. He lost his freedom, his strength, his family, his wife, his eyesight, his dignity and, ultimately, his life. Yet, God still did not abandon His servant. He answered his prayer of repentance and filled him with

power for one final mighty victory over the Philistines . . . in fact, his greatest victory of them all! If there is one last lesson here, it is that *it is never too late to turn back to God, asking Him to make something of your life . . . or your death.*

Samson's feats of strength were many:

- He killed a lion barehanded (14:5,6).
- He killed 30 Philistines and took their garments (14:9).
- He caught 300 foxes and tied torches to their tails (15:3-5).
- He repeatedly broke ropes apart (15:14; 16:9,12,14).
- He killed 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15).
- He carried off the city gate of Gaza (16:3).
- He toppled a Philistine building (16:30).

Yet, he could not rule his own spirit! The ancient words of Ambrose are a fitting commentary on Samson's life: "Samson, when strong and brave, strangled a lion; but he could not strangle his own love. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned up the crops of others, and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman." The words of Proverbs are fitting also: "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls" (Proverbs 25:28).