

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

the PROMISED *land*

GOD THE JUDGE

When the Deliverer Needs Deliverance

Today, our focus turns to Samson the 12th and final judge recorded in the book of Judges. As far as biblical characters go, Samson has never been my personal favorite. I visualize Samson as a flawed superhero who valiantly died at the end of his story. Our lesson describes Samson as a deliverer who needed deliverance. Deliverance – that is what all of us need whether we are a superhero or ‘plain Joe or Jane.’ And we have a superhero available – one who died at the end of His mission but rose to life again conquering death so that we might be delivered from the stronghold of death.

Jesus is the all-time ultimate superhero. But the word superhero is lacking when applied to the Son of God. It is not really reverent enough a description of who He is. I love how the Old Testament prophet Isaiah described him in *Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)* ⁶ *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

We have been studying the ‘cycles of sin’ found in the book of Judges – God’s children fall into sin and then in the midst of their desperation cry out to God. However, now the people have fallen so far from God that they did not even think to ask Him for help. There is never once any recognition of their sin from the people and no public acknowledgement of that sin.

Even when sin is in control of a nation, there will be those who still listen for the Word of God. Amid this sin cycle, there lived a man named Manoah. Manoah’s wife is not named in the narrative although it was to Manoah’s barren wife that the Angel of the LORD first appeared and promised in *Judges 13:5 (ESV)* ⁵ *for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.*” I see a parallel to *Isaiah 9:6*, which I mentioned earlier, when Manoah asked the Angel of the LORD His name and the Angel responded in *Judges 13:18 (ESV)* ¹⁸ ... *“Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”* The couple together had an experience similar to that of Gideon when the flame of their offering ascended into heaven, the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Note, that the Angel of the LORD said that the child *shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.* The LORD knew even before the birth of Samson that he would not bring complete victory over the Philistines.

Unless a person was born by divine appointment like Samson and John the Baptist, the Nazirite vow was voluntary. The vow could be made by a man or a woman and the time was usually a brief one like the Apostle Paul committed to during New Testament times. The Nazirite vow was made for the purpose of remaining separate from worldly things. *Numbers 6:1-12* lists the Nazirite requirements: (1) no consumption of wine or anything related to the vine, (2) no cutting of the hair, and (3) no contact

whatsoever with a dead body even if the body was a family member. It was God's desire for Samson to serve as an example to Israel of his commitment to God but sadly Samson fell short of God's plan early in his life.

Samson's impulses led him to break his vows.

Read Judges 14:1-4 (ESV) ¹ Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. ² Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." ³ But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes." ⁴ His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

The territory of the Philistines formed a portion of the promised land, and was assigned to the tribe of Judah. None of the Philistine land was conquered in Joshua's lifetime, and even after his death no permanent conquest occurred. They were still causing problems for the Israelites when David, the shepherd boy killed, the Philistine giant Goliath.

This particular Philistine woman Samson wanted to marry is not the famous Delilah. She will appear later in Samson's story. We see Samson's rebellion against the law of Moses in his desire to marry a Philistine instead of an Israelite. There are differences of opinion among commentators regarding verse 4. Some consider that Samson had a righteous ulterior motive in wanting to take a Philistine bride. Others believe that the words, *he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines*, is a reference to God and not Samson. And that is the interpretation I agree with.

Read Judges 14:5-9 (ESV) ⁵ Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. ⁶ Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. ⁷ Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes. ⁸ After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. ⁹ He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.

We can't be sure from verse 5 just how long Samson's parents were with him on his trip but verse 6 clearly indicates Samson was alone when the lion attacked. I picture him hurrying off ahead of his elderly parents. It is interesting that the man who was supposed to have nothing to do with grapes took a detour through a vineyard. At that point, he was putting himself in the way of temptation like we do when we dabble in sinful things. Did God send the lion as a warning to Samson that he was walking on the wrong path? The Holy

Spirit came upon Samson and gave him power to defeat the enemy, but Samson persisted on his path of disobedience into enemy territory and an unlawful wedding.

And even after his Spirit-filled victory over the lion, we see Samson moving farther from his vow of separation from the things of the world. He specifically went into the vineyard again to see the dead lion.. **1 John 2:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.* Most commentators consider that when Samson ate the honey from the lion's carcass, he was breaking his Nazirite vow to not touch something dead. He was most certainly breaking the general law for the Israelites to not touch unclean carcasses. When he shared the honey with his parents he brought uncleanness upon them. This is a reminder of how our sins affect those around us. If you read the rest of the story of the lion and honey you will find that Samson made a riddle of it – using the time that the Spirit of LORD came upon him in a joking manner. If you have not already, you might want to read **Judges 13-16** on your own for all of Samson's story. Our lesson now moves to his relationship with the infamous Delilah where Samson's success led him to behave irresponsibly.

Read Judges 16:4-5 (ESV) ⁴ *After this he loved a woman... whose name was Delilah.* ⁵ *And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver."*

Read Judges 16:15-20 (ESV) ¹⁵ *And she said to him [meaning Samson], "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies."* ¹⁶ *And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.* ¹⁷ *And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."* ¹⁸ *When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart."* *Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands.* ¹⁹ *She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.* ²⁰ *And 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 left him.*

Samson had been married to a Philistine woman but there is no indication that he was married to Delilah. This was the fourth time when Delilah questioned him about the truth of his strength. The other three times, Samson had made up stories. When Delilah had done as he suggested, she would shout, *"The Philistines are upon you, Samson."* It's unlikely that the Philistines who hid in her chamber revealed themselves those times since his strength was not diminished. If they had, surely, Samson would have realized Delilah's betrayal.

There is a certain amount of 'insanity' for lack of a better word that comes from continually falling into the same trap of sin but it happens all the time. Each of us have our particular weak points. For Samson, one weak points was his relationships with women. For some reason, it is often easier for us to recognize the 'insanity of sin' in others than to recognize the 'insanity of sin' in our lives. Falling into a perpetual sin

cycle can be the story of some people's past. But, with the Lord's help anyone can change – even someone who has fallen as low as Samson. Remember, Samson lost the power of God and he did not even know it had happened. However, Samson's defeat led him to turn back to God.

Read Judges 16:21-30 (ESV) ²¹ *And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. ²² But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. ²³ Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." ²⁴ And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us." ²⁵ And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. ²⁶ And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." ²⁷ Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. ²⁸ Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. ³⁰ And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.*

Part of the conclusion of the Nazirite vow when it was done for a short period of time included the shaving of the head and putting the hair on the fire of the sacrifice of the peace offering to the LORD. Samson took his life that should have been given to the LORD and turned it over to sin. He disregarded the plan God had for him. However, unfaithfulness on the part of God's people does not prevent God's purposes. God's purpose for Samson was to be a deliverer of his children from the Philistines. His hair began to grow again picturing the growth of his commitment to the God he had forsaken. Sometimes, the LORD takes us down in our sin in order to lift us up in His glory.

Even in his weakened blind condition, the LORD used Samson. Samson was to the point in his life where he is now found praying and the destruction of the pagan temple and its pagan occupants reveals that the LORD answered his prayer. Samson gave what life he had left to aid in the deliverance of his people.

Samson's life is certainly not a biblical role model but it is testimony that the LORD uses His children for His purposes – sometimes even in spite of ourselves. Samson's name among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 reminds us that no matter how far we may have wandered away from God in the past, He can still use us. As long as we have breath, there is more of our story to be written. Let's strive to make our story have an ending that glorifies the LORD!