

A SUREFIRE WAY TO WRECK YOUR LIFE

Over the last couple of weeks we have been following the story of Joshua and Israel's quest to actually possess the Promised Land. Today we are going to hit fast forward a little bit and move on into the Book of Judges.

Just to recap; when it comes to Israel being established as a nation we began with a promise given to individuals (a promise that originated with Abraham, that was then passed on to Isaac, and that was ultimately given to Jacob). When we get to Jacob the promise then begins to take shape through a nation and the 12 sons of Jacob that would make up the twelve tribes of Israel. The redemption story and this promise then transitions to a deliverer named Moses who would lead the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. Only to then transition to Joshua who would lead Israel into the Promised Land where they would establish themselves as a sovereign nation. And now we are going to see a series of Judges who will lead Israel while in the Promised Land until God sees fit to set a king over them.

The title "**JUDGES**" refers to the unique leaders God gave to His people for preservation against their enemies following the death of Joshua. As we think about this period of the Judges we need to think of them more in terms of "**deliverers**" or "**saviors**" as well as "**judges**" that God would raise up to lead Israel during this time. The period of the judges spans about 350 years and covers the time from Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land until the time of Eli and Samuel who would judge Israel prior to the rise of the period of the kings.

Just to set the context for the Book of Judges it is important to note that at the beginning of this book Joshua has died and Israel has been enjoying a time of peace as God has given them rest from all of their enemies. However, there is still a remnant of the Canaanites still left in the land that must be dealt with. In fact, right before Joshua passes away he gives a farewell address to the nation in **Joshua 23** reminding them of their unfinished business regarding possession of the land and of God's faithfulness to them through this process. He warns them of the dangers of not finishing what they had started and of the consequences that would await them if they failed to be obedient to God.

The Book of Judges is a tragic sequel to what we see in the Book of Joshua. In the Book of Joshua the people were obedient to God and victorious as God moved on their behalf. But when we get to Judges the people are going to be disobedient to God, even idolatrous at times (being tempted to turn to the gods of their neighbors), and as a result, often defeated by their enemies facing God's discipline for their disobedience. In essence, we could refer to The Book of Judges as the Book of the Spiritual Roller Coaster as the people go from doing things their own way, only to meet hardships as a result of their disobedience, which in turn leads them to turn back to God in a spirit of repentance. **Sound familiar?** Throughout the book they are going to repeat this same cycle over and over again multiple times. Kind of describes our life sometimes, doesn't it?

Today we are going to take a look at one of the more famous judges that led in Israel during this time as we take a brief look at the story of Samson. Our goal for today is **to show you a way to avoid subtle missteps so you can fulfill the calling God has for you and not waste your life in the process.** So, if you would turn to **Judges 13** I am going to PRAY for us as we get started.

Judges 1:28 (NIV) sets the spiritual tone for the entire Book of Judges and it is also is a reminder to us as to why you and I tend to struggle in our relationship with God, and here it is:

28 When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely.

You and I do the same thing when it comes to temptation and sin in our lives! Rather than totally drive it out of our lives when we have the opportunity, we let it linger only to become a snare to us later on. Israel did the same thing with their enemies. Rather than totally remove them from the land when they were strong enough to do so, they kept them around to serve them and this proved to be a costly mistake because from this point forward they are going to allow the gods of their enemies to entice them and tempt them away from God.

This begs the question, **“Why were they so tempted to turn to the gods of their enemies?”** especially when we consider all God had done for them and when we see that the gods of their neighbors were simply idols and not even real.

Well, in order to understand the temptation facing Israel we need to understand what it was that the Cannanites worshiped. The chief gods of the Canaanites were Ba-al and Asherah. The reason they were such a problem for Israel was threefold.

- 1) The worship of Ba-al and Asherah held the allure of illicit sex and their worship involved ritual prostitution. Forbidden expressions of sex that exist outside of God’s design has always been a stumbling block in the hearts of mankind and it was certainly a stumbling block for Israel.
- 2) Another reason the worship of Ba-al and Asherah was a problem for Israel was due to peer pressure. Israel wanted to be like the other nations around them just like we are tempted to want to be like our peers. 1 Samuel 8 highlights this fact for us.

1 Samuel 8:4-5 (NIV) So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. **5** They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

Of course Samuel instructs the elders as to why this is not a good idea and how they don’t need a king because they have God. But notice the stubborn response of the people.

1 Samuel 8:19-20 (NIV) 19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. **20** Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

- 3) Lastly, we cannot overlook the fact of Satan’s temptations and our basic sinfulness. The enemy of our soul tempted Israel to worship idols just like he tempts us today. The stubborn willfulness of humanity works in tandem with Satan’s seductions and causes us to jump at any chance to rebel against God. Thus Israel repeatedly forsook God’s commands, despite losing God’s blessings, and chased after the Ba-als and Asherahs to their own destruction. And we do the same! We chase after the gods of our culture; pleasure seeking through drugs, alcohol, sex, etc. and we do so to our own destruction!!

The book of Hosea aptly uses adultery as a metaphor in describing Israel’s problem with idol worship. And the same is true for us! And that is why before Joshua dies he reminds the people of the importance of finishing what they had started by making sure they remove their enemies from the land completely so that they would not be a stumbling block. And you and I need to do the same thing when it comes to the things in our lives!!

But because they don’t, Israel is going to desire to become like their neighbors. This will not only impact the people, but it will also impact the leaders whom God has called to lead the people. And this is what happens to Samson. As we look at the events of Samson’s life I want to share with you **3 subtle missteps we need to avoid so that we will not waste our life** and then I want to close our time with **three practical ways to avoid these missteps**.

Judges 13:1-25 (NIV) 1 Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

2 A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. **3** The angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, “You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. **4** Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. **5** You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”

Of course the deliverer or judge that God was going to raise up here to deliver Israel from the Philistines is none other than Samson. It was God’s plan from the beginning of his life to use him to deliver Israel and as a sign of his dedication to the Lord his parents were commanded by the Angel of the Lord to raise him up as a Nazirite. The Nazirite Vow was a vow of holiness where one was to be fully dedicated to the Lord and the vow consisted of 3 main commitments as spelled out for us in **Numbers 6**.

Vow #1 - a Nazirite was to abstain from anything having to do with the grape vine. Which obviously meant Samson must not be a consumer of wine.

Vow #2 - a Nazarite was to never cut one's hair. It is important to note here that the hair by itself wasn't some magic hair that gave Samson special powers. The hair was to be the embodiment of God's call, presence, and power in his life,

Vow #3 - a Nazarite was to never touch a dead body of any sort because to do so would be to defile oneself and make oneself unclean.

Just like the High Priest that would serve the Tabernacle, a Nazarite was to have a life that was considered to be completely set apart to the Lord. But as we look at Samson's life there were three crucial missteps that he made along the way that lead to him wasting his opportunity to serve the Lord victoriously.

Misstep #1 - Samson Disrespected His Parents

We see a couple of occasions where Samson allowed his fleshly appetites to cause him to disrespect his parents. From the very beginning his mother dedicated him to the Lord and like any good mother she raised him right by making sure to set proper boundaries for his life to protect him from the things that would seek to destroy his life spiritually. That's our job as parents. That's why we honor our mothers here today. They not only give us life but they watch over us and train us up in how to navigate this dangerous world in which we live. If they didn't we wouldn't make it to be adults. As parents who follow Jesus we are to shepherd our children's hearts and help them establish boundaries that will protect their hearts spiritually. And this is what Samson's parents did for him.

Judges 13:3-5 (NIV) 3 The angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. **4** Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. **5** You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

This is a great example of parents who dedicated their child to God and then raised him to live a life of obedience and faith because they knew God had a plan for his life. They taught him to set fences around his life in order to maintain a life that would honor God. And we should do the same thing for our children. But Samson, like all of us, was enticed by the things of the world and he started to venture outside of what his parents taught him. One day Samson sees a beautiful Philistine girl and we see him begin to draw in some of the fences that his parents had established for his life. Fences that were designed to protect him spiritually. Boundaries that would not hinder the work and power of God evident in his life. **That is why boundaries of holiness that signify our dedication to God are so important. They protect us from things in our lives that want to harm us and they keep us from quenching the work of the Holy Spirit.** One of those fences for Samson was to beware of young ladies who did not share the same passion for God that he did. But notice what Samson does. Rather than avoid them, he was drawn to them.

Judges 14:1-3 (NIV) Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. **2** When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." **3** His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"

Samson had a weakness for Philistine women. Once you start removing boundaries in your life it becomes easier to do so the next time and you begin to dance too close to things that will eventually destroy your testimony and your life. Not long after this, in pursuit of this Philistine woman, Samson breaks one of his Nazarite vows simply because he was hungry and he even hides that fact from his parents.

Judges 14:5-9 (NIV) **5** Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. **6** The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. I want you to notice Samson's strength came from the Lord not from his hair. His hair was simply a symbol of his calling and God's presence on his life as one who has been set apart to God. **But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done.** **7** Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her. **8** Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. **9** He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. **But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.**

Here Samson violates one of the tenants of his Nazarite vow which was to not touch anything dead. We are beginning to see a slow fade in Samson's character where he is being driven more by his fleshly appetites than He was by God Himself. We know he knows what he is doing because he doesn't tell his parents where the honey came from. Samson's spiritual decline begins with disrespecting his parents and some of the boundaries they had taught him at an early age.

Misstep #2 - Samson Disregarded God's Commandments

Remember once you start removing important boundaries it becomes easier to do so the next time. What began with disrespecting his parents now begins to manifest itself further leading to Samson disregarding God's commandments. After his marriage to the Philistine woman never fully materializes due to Samson leaving and her father giving her to another man, Samson goes exploring for other Philistine women.

Judges 16:1 (NIV) One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her.

Here was God's anointed deliverer and leader, one who had been raised under a Nazarite Vow and who was supposed to be holy set apart to the Lord, giving himself to a Philistine prostitute.

Remember Samson has a thing for Philistine women. Not only women of low moral character but women who did not even acknowledge his God.

Judges 16:4-6 (NIV) **4** Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. **5** The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver." **6** So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

Delilah was being used by Samson's enemies to find out where his strength came from. Samson's strength came from God! This power unleashed on his life was in fact the work of the Holy Spirit and He resided in his life because he was originally set apart to God for the purpose of defeating the Philistines. Now the very ones who he is to defeat want to know the secret to where his power comes from. Rather than taking care of business it is as if Samson uses his gift to toy with his enemies and to entice and intrigue Philistine women.

Samson toys with her and the Philistines several times. First saying that if they tie him up with seven fresh BOWSTRINGS he will become weak. Then he says NEW ROPES will do it. And finally, he says if they were to weave the SEVEN LOCKS of his hair into the web of a loom they could overtake him. Of course each time Samson was able to break free. But Delilah breaks him down with her persistence.

Judges 16:15-16 (NIV) **15** Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." **16** With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.

Samson in essence is toying with sin. He has gone from DISRESPECTING his parents to DISREGARDING God's commands. Do you see where this is headed? It is a slow fade away from God. It started with boundaries that were set to protect him and now little by little he is removing those boundaries in order to satisfy his flesh. With each step away from God Samson begins to take the power which has been given to him by God for granted and begins to think that it's his power rather than God's. He thinks the power relies on his hair when really it relies upon his holiness to the Lord. And this leads to a third misstep.

Misstep #3 - Samson Discredited His Calling

Judges 16:17 (NIV) So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

It was God who gave him strength not his hair. Samson didn't credit God for his power and he didn't take seriously the calling on his life to defeat the Philistines. He ends up misrepresenting where his strength came from. Using his strength to toy with his enemies and to try and impress

the ladies. As a result of discrediting his calling, Samson is going to lose his strength, his eyesight and ultimately his life.

Judges 16:19-21 (NIV) 19 After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. **20** Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. **21** Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison.

This was a humbling and humiliating experience for Samson. His strength came from his unique relationship with God based on his Nazarite pledge. His hair was simply a sign of it. When Delilah became more important to him than God, his strength was removed. The real tragedy was that his sin had caused him to forfeit the power and presence of God. And the same is true for us when we allow sin and our fleshly desires to quench the work of the Holy Spirit in us!

1 Thessalonians 5:19-24 (NIV) 19 Do not quench the Spirit. **20** Do not treat prophecies with contempt **21** but test them all; hold on to what is good, **22** reject every kind of evil. **23** May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **24** The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

But God was not done! And no matter where we find ourselves God is not done with us either. If we have breath in our lungs there is always an opportunity for repentance and redemption!

22 But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. **23** Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands." **24** When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, "Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain." **25** While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars, **26** Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." **27** Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. **28** Then Samson prayed to the Lord. It is only at our weakest moment when we are broken and humbled that God is at His strongest and we are most useful! "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." **29** Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, **30** Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

Notice, God accomplished His plan despite Samson's sin. We will not derail what God wants to accomplish but we sure can make it harder for ourselves and cut our opportunity to serve God short. How could things have been better had Sampson protected his boundaries or had the necessary accountability to call him out on His missteps? How much more could he have accomplished had he not had these missteps and truly had set his heart apart to God? I believe his life ended prematurely because of his missteps.

So how do we keep from making missteps that will not waste our life?

- 1) **Recognize that being set apart to God is a PRIVILEGE.** Too many people look at holiness as a negative thing. As if to pursue it with your life is somehow weird or a bad thing. Why would we not want a life that reflects the God we say we love and worship? It is an honor and a privilege. It is also the key to unleashing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Until we see this as important we will never see the need to guard our heart from the things that quench the power of God in our lives.

1 Peter 1:13-16 (NKJV) Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; **14** as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; **15** but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, **16** because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

- 2) **Guard your gates** There are four areas where we allow ourselves to become defiled by the things of this world. Four gateways that lead straight to our heart.

- The tongue (what you say)
- The ear (what you hear)
- The eye (what you see)
- The feet (where you go)

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) **23** Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

In order to maintain a pure heart we need to guard these four gates and be careful of what we allow to enter into our lives through these gateways. We must set boundaries regarding what we SAY. What we LISTEN to. What we LOOK at. And where we GO. And we must allow God's word and His Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us in this area.

3. **Establish ACCOUNTABILITY**

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV) Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Samson isolated himself. He thought he was strong enough on his own. He got taken out. And so will you and I if we try to go it alone. Don't allow Satan to put you on an island. Develop and cultivate accountability into your life. There is power in accountability!!

Worship Team Comes Back Up

Invitation: