



First Baptist Church Selmer

FIRM FOUNDATION • SAMSON • JUDGES 13:1-5; 16:19-30 • 10/8/2023

MAIN POINT

Samson offered a temporary deliverance of God's people from their enemies and pointed to a true Redeemer who would fully accomplish God's purpose.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What character qualities or personal strengths does a good leader possess?

Has a leader even not lived up to their promises? Has one ever not lived up to your expectations? Why or why not?

Why don't leaders always live up to our expectations?

God raised Samson to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines through supernatural physical strength, but Samson struggled to fulfill his role due to his own spiritual immaturity. By looking at the story of Samson, we will see that even amid our weakness and immaturity, we serve a God who is strong and faithful and can use weak people like us for His great purposes.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JUDGES 13:1.

1 "And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years." (ESV)

This section opens with the words, *"and the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord..."* (seen also in 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6).

From whose perspective had the people sinned? Were the people doing wrong in their own eyes? Explain.

What is the definition of sin?

If you had asked a rank-and-file Israelite in the time of the Judges if they thought they were doing something wrong, the answer would have surely been "no." The problem in Judges is that everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes (21:25). The author of Judges says that the people did what was evil "in the Lord's sight." Sin is evaluated from God's perspective, not ours. He sets the standard; when we depart from that standard—knowingly or unknowingly—we have sinned against God.

The spirit of our age teaches that the highest good is to be true to yourself. How does being true to yourself fly in the face of God's intention for us?

What is the danger of defining right and wrong on our own terms? Have you ever pursued your own way only to find out it left you empty?

In His grace, God gave people freedom within boundaries. The boundaries God has created are good for us and are meant to help us thrive and flourish. A good parent creates boundaries for a young child out of a sense of love, protection, and obligation; so, too, does God. Puritan writer Thomas Watson said, "Satan paints sin with virtue's colors." In contemporary culture, it seems virtuous to be true to yourself. However, embracing this line of reasoning makes human beings the ultimate source of authority and truth. By claiming the right to determine what is right and wrong, we have taken God's place and usurped His throne. The problem in Judges and in our own lives is that we have decided to do life on our own terms and gotten ourselves into a situation that we cannot get ourselves out of. Thankfully, God sends a rescuer.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JUDGES 13:2-5.

2 "There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. 3 And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, 'Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, 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." (ESV)

In what ways was Samson going to be set apart from before the time he was born? How does this make him different from other Israelites?

Samson is a unique judge because we learn that he was called to be a judge before he was even born. He was called to be a Nazirite. To become a priest, you could either be born into a Levitical family or you could offer yourself in service to the Lord as we see with Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Paul. Becoming a Nazirite means that you submit yourself to God's rule. The three main rules that were followed in the Nazirite vow were: 1) No alcohol or even fruit of the vine such as grapes or raisins 2) Hair couldn't be cut 3) No dead body or any dead thing could be touched. Typically the vow was made for a specific amount of time but in the case of Samson, it was a vow for a lifetime.

This made Samson distinct from the rest of his people. While they were following their own way, Samson was called to choose God's way. In a permissive age, Samson was called to be submissive to God. Yet the problem with Samson, and with all of us, is that we do the wrong thing even when we understand the right thing. Samson was imperfect, but imperfections point to our need for a Savior.

Look at Judges 14:8-10 and 16:19. In what ways did Samson reject the Lord's rule in his life?

Samson broke every condition of his Nazirite vow. He ate honey out of a dead lion's carcass, which caused him to come into contact with a dead body, making himself unclean. Directly after, Samson attended a drunken feast. While it is not explicitly stated that Samson drank here, the word the author of Judges used for feast strongly implies the uninhibited drinking of alcohol. Lastly, Samson told Delilah the source of his power and lost his hair. What Samson didn't realize, though, was that it was not his hair that gave him the power, but God working in his life.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JUDGES 16:19-30.

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. 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." (ESV)

Did Samson need the Lord to remember him (v. 28), or did he need to remember the Lord? What are some ways we “remember the Lord” today?

What impact did physical blindness and loss of strength have on Samson’s relationship with God? Can you relate this to a similar experience in your life?

Why was Samson willing to let himself be delivered over to the Philistines? How does Samson’s act of deliverance point us forward to Christ (Rom. 4:24-25)?

Re-read Judges 13:5. What was Samson called to do? Who finally delivered Israel from the Philistines?

Samson lost his spiritual sensitivity as he repeatedly disobeyed God’s commands. God can use flawed people like Samson and like us who are willing to put their faith in Him. It is

never too late to turn our attention back to the Lord, believing that He hears and answers our prayers. When Samson realized his weakness and the Lord's tremendous strength, he was empowered to deliver Israel in a profound way.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some spiritual habits and disciplines that can help us submit to God's way instead of choosing our own?

Judges teaches that sin occurs in cycles; at some point, you will sin again. What is the role of Christian community to keep you from sin and to help you when you fall into it?

Are there any areas of your life where you are actively choosing your way over God's and need to repent? Receive God's grace and wisdom through His Spirit today.

PRAYER

Pray that God would help us to stop relying on our own strength, wisdom, and power. Pray that we would trust Him to do more in and through us than we could ever do on our own. Ask Him to make us spiritually sensitive to His leading and humbly reliant on the Holy Spirit as we seek to advance His mission and live for His glory.

COMMENTARY

| JUDGES 13:1-5

13:1-2. Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Accompanying this cause is the promised effect that the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines, a people who have already been introduced as the "five rulers of the Philistines" (see 3:1-4) and later appeared in the story of Shamgar (3:31). They were reintroduced still later as part of a military pincer movement (from the west) along with the Ammonites (from the east, 10:7). The present oppression continued for forty years before Samson's birth and would continue until it was finally vanquished under King David.

We would expect at exactly this point to read that Israel cried out in repentance to the Lord, who sent them a deliverer to relieve them from Philistine oppression. Instead, the next verses introduce the family of God's deliverer in a story that is entirely independent from the presence (or absence) of any repentance on the part of Israel. We are introduced to the main male character of this chapter gradually through increasing specificity: by gender (a certain man), by geography (of Zorah), by tribe (of the Danites), and by name (Manoah). This reflects the Hebrew order (cp. the NIV order). The meaning of his name is uncertain, but may be related to "Noah," and carry the idea of "resting place." The important half of this couple, however, was the unnamed wife who was sterile, thus rendering the couple childless.

13:3. The Wife's Elation: Promise of a Son. Perhaps to the surprise of the reader, rather than appear to Manoah, the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife, who (despite her prominence as the only level-headed human being in this chapter) remains unnamed. We are not told how she responded to the welcome announcement that she would conceive and have a son, although presumably it was received with great joy.

13:4. The Wife's Restriction: Special Nutritional Regimen. However, in contrast to all other women in Scripture who were given the promise of a child, this woman was given a specific dietary regimen that we later learn accords with a provision in the law. At the beginning, however, she was simply told that she was to drink no wine or other fermented drink, nor was she permitted to eat anything unclean. The reason for this restriction would shortly be made clear.

13:5a. The Angel's Explanation: Nazirite Vow. The son that she was to conceive and give birth to would be a life-long Nazirite and would be set apart to God from birth. Even before birth, his post-natal regimen was known to be the same as his pre-natal regimen "shared" by his mother. The Nazirite vow (Num. 6) included proscriptions against the fruit of the vine, against the cutting of hair, and against contact with the dead. Two of these three were specifically mentioned.

13:5b. The Boy's Mission: Deliverance. Finally, we arrive at the nexus between this interlude and its context of the Philistine oppression: this child would be involved in the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines. However, unlike all previous judges, his work would only begin the process of deliverance (which would not be completed until the time of King David, 2 Sam. 5:17-25).

| JUDGES 16:19-30

16:19. The outcome of Samson's recklessness wasn't hard to predict. She let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. The seven braids probably included his beard as well as the hair on his head.

16:20. As before, once the deed was done Delilah roused Samson from sleep with a frantic warning about the Philistines. Samson calmly boasted, "I will escape as I did before and shake myself free." However, his hair and his strength were gone. The Philistines easily overpowered and bound him, blinded him, and took him off as a trophy to Gaza (see 16:21), just as he had once carried off their city gate.

We can think of Samson's "blindness" on multiple levels. First, he was blind to think that he could trust Delilah and that she really loved him. She had shown previously that she would take advantage of any weakness in him. Second, Samson was blind to think that he could escape the consequences of his foolish, sinful behavior. Third, on awakening, he didn't notice that his hair was gone. However, this "blindness" served only as a token for the fourth and most profound blindness: Samson did not know that the Lord had left him.

The Spirit had been with Samson in the sense that God empowered him to accomplish mighty feats in battle. Elsewhere in the Bible, the Holy Spirit empowered people for other tasks. The Spirit empowered the builder of the tabernacle to construct the facility properly (see Ex. 31:1-5). By the Holy Spirit, the prophets heard and proclaimed the words of God, and sometimes by the power of God they too could show amazing physical strength or endurance (see 1 Kings 18:12,46).

When the Spirit left Samson, the warrior lost the real source of his strength. It is perhaps significant that only in his physical weakness did Samson realize the Lord had departed. It seems that Samson's heart and soul were so far from God that, apart from his lack of strength, he never would have noticed God's absence.

16:28-29. At a festival in honor of their god, the Philistines decided to bring out their trophy and put Samson on display while drunken revelers watched (see 16:25-27). Shackled and humiliated, Samson nevertheless saw an opportunity for revenge. He asked his guard to be stationed between two of the temple's supporting pillars. Apparently, twin pillars served as primary weight-bearing supports, perhaps at the temple entrance.

It is difficult to know what to make of Samson's end. On the one hand, he prayed to the Lord for strength, and his prayer was answered. Yet his prayer contained no hint of repentance for sinful behavior or concern for the glory of God. All he wanted was

vengeance: "Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes."

16:30. We cannot endorse how Samson died, but we cannot deny that his prayer was answered. As a result of the prayer, he won a victory over his enemies. While God was dishonored by Samson's sinful behavior, God nevertheless honored the calling He had given Samson, whose Nazirite status was visibly demonstrated in the new growth of his hair (see 16:22). Samson had failed to fulfill his calling, but in the end, he turned to God in faith. God responded to Samson's faith (see Heb. 11:32-34).