

Lessons From Samson

Introduction:

- A. Though we live in the age of computers, fax machines, video conferencing, and cell phones - I am sometimes encouraged by the fact that something very old fashioned, is still very popular with a lot of good people today.
 - B. Bible stories. I want to tell you a Bible story tonight - about a man named Samson.
- II. His story begins in a time when the nation of Israel was suffering under oppression from two hostile sources - *The Ammonites and The Philistines*.
- A. Jephthah achieved some success against the Ammonites east of the Jordan - but west of the Jordan, the oppression from the Philistines dominated the Israelites for 40 years.
 - B. Now in this 40 year period, the Israelites enjoyed some relief from the Philistines through a man named Samson.
 - 1. He was not a military leader like Gideon or Jephthah.
 - 2. In the case of Samson, it was personal strength he used to inflict devastating blows upon the Philistine oppressors.
 - 3. He was never able, however, to completely free the nation from the power of the Philistines.
 - 4. That remained for Samuel to accomplish.
 - C. Now Samson was an extraordinary character in many ways, but he does not appear to have been a solid and zealous servant of the Lord.
 - 1. He was not as close to his own people as other judges and leaders - in fact, he was very friendly with the Philistines.
 - 2. He was particularly attracted to Philistine women, and was a man of impulse, when it came to temptations of a sensual nature.
 - D. Manoah and his wife had no children, then an angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son."
 - 1. The angel told her the baby boy was to be a Nazirite, "set apart to God from birth."
 - 2. And the angel also said, "he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."
 - 3. Manoah and his wife took this very seriously, and Manoah prayed to the Lord saying: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."
 - 4. God responded - the angel came again - and when the angel arrived, Manoah inquired: "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?"
 - 5. Instructions were given and followed - and at the end of Judges 13, the writer says this ... "... So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon ..."

III. THE NEXT PHASE OF SAMSON'S LIFE - WE FIND IN JUDGES CHAPTER 14.

- A. And it is interesting and not without significance - in the first half of Judges 14, several times, the writer speaks of Samson GOING DOWN, or in one verse HIS FATHER GOING DOWN.
 - 1. I have the NIV here - and I'm noticing this in verse 1, verse 5, verse 7 and verse 10.
 - 2. Perhaps our first thought is - this has to do with geography or elevation ... *we know that from Jerusalem to Philistine territory would literally be down.*
 - 3. But before we settle on that explanation - it should be pointed out, Samson was not in Jerusalem; 13:25 locates Samson and his family in Dan.

4. Also, when you consider what influences eventually brought Samson to his end - it may be, **Samson was going down, not just geographically but also spiritually.**
 - a. And I remember when Nehemiah had rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem - and his enemies wanted to meet with him on the plain of Ono ... and Nehemiah sent reply to them, **“I cannot go down!”**
 - b. Well -- it is not necessary for me to make too much of this, but I’m persuaded the significance is more than just geographic: SAMSON WENT DOWN.
- B. He went down to nearby Timnah, saw a Philistine woman who attracted him, then told his parents he wanted this woman.
 1. His parents tried to dissuade him.
 2. Could he not find a suitable mate among the Israelite women?
 3. Physical attraction prevailed, however, over wisdom and parental objection.
 4. “Get her for me,” Samson said, “for she looks good to me.”
- C. Now there isn’t any doubt - based on the language of the text - that God was seeking an occasion to inflict upon the Philistines several blows of judgment ... but there is no evidence at all that God put any kind of carnal desire in the heart of Samson.
- D. After this first trip to Timnah, where Samson saw this woman and expressed his desire for her - **THERE WAS A SECOND TRIP TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MARRIAGE.**
 1. Samson’s parents accompanied him, for they would be involved in the marriage negotiations customary in that time.
 2. On this trip, Samson turned aside into some vineyards, and something happened ... *this is Judg. 14:5b-7...* Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.
- E. Then there was a third trip to Philistine territory - when Samson returned to take his bride.
 1. On the way, he saw the carcass of the lion he had slain on the earlier trip - and there he found a swarm of bees and honey.
 2. He scooped up the honey in his hands and ate it as he walked along.
 3. He rejoined his parents - and gave them some; but still, did not tell them where he found the honey.
 4. Following the custom of the time and culture - there was a great marriage feast, a week-long celebration, and - **SOMETHING LIKE WHAT WE WOULD CALL A DRINKING PARTY.**
 5. Now here, two things should be noted:
 - a. In eating honey from the carcass of the lion, Samson violated the Nazirite rule about touching something that was dead.
 - b. Then, the rule against drinking was ignored in his wedding feast.
 6. To use a baseball metaphor - Samson has two strikes against him.
- F. At this marriage feast - Samson proposed a challenge to his Philistine guests.
 1. He would state a riddle.
 2. If the guests could solve the riddle during the seven days of the feast, Samson promised to give to them thirty changes of garments.
 3. If, however, they were unable to solve the riddle - then each of them would provide for him a similar wardrobe.
 4. The Philistines agreed - not believing that any Israelite hillbilly could outwit the sophisticated men from the plains.
 5. So, Samson put forth a two-line rhyming riddle: “Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet,” (Judg. 14:10-14).
- G. Three days pass, and the Philistines still had not solved the riddle.

1. On the 4th day - they approached Samson's bride.
 2. If she did not coax the answer from him before the 7th day, they threatened to burn her and her father's house.
 3. *I think the Philistine attitude was* - we are not going to be at any disadvantage, especially when we have agreed to attend a wedding feast honoring someone who is marrying an Israelite!!
- H. At this point - the threatened Philistine bride goes into Samson, her new husband ... and she turns on the tears.
1. She said, "Samson, you hate me don't you."
 2. Samson doesn't know what's going on ... this is no way to start a honeymoon!
 3. She says, "Samson, you hate me. You don't love me anymore. You've given my people a riddle, but you won't tell me the answer."
 4. Samson said, "Honey, I haven't even told my parents the answer!"
 5. Well, she cried and sobbed and begged for the whole week.
 6. Judg. 14:17 reveals what we now expect: "...on the seventh day," Samson "finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her parents."
 7. Before sunset on the 7th day, the Philistines explained the riddle.
 8. Samson burned with anger ... (now who should he have been angry with?) ---- And, he WENT DOWN again - this time "to Ashkelon," and there - he killed 30 Philistines.
 - a. He took the garments from these men back to Timnah and threw them down in front of those who had solved the riddle.
 - b. We are now into chapter 15 and the punishment of the Philistines is underway.

IV. Judges 15 contains three examples of the kind of blows which Samson was able to inflict against the Philistines during his twenty year career.

- A. Samson's marriage to the Philistine woman did not last - he made another trip to Timnah, but his father-in-law wouldn't let him come in the house.
1. The father said that he believed Samson had deserted his daughter.
 2. And, he had given the woman to Samson's best man.
 3. In an act that seems deplorable to us - but was common then - the father offered his younger daughter to Samson ...
 4. Samson went into a rage, rounded up three hundred foxes ...
 - a. By twos, he tied the tails of the foxes to a burning torch.
 - b. The terrified animals drug the torches hither and yonder through the grainfields and vineyards of Philistia.
 5. A good portion of the crop was destroyed - and Samson won no points with the animal rights folks.
- B. Well, the Philistines found out who the culprit was ... and in reaction - a group of angry Philistines went to Timnah and torched Samson's wife and her father.
1. This enraged Samson, and he launched a personal vendetta against the Philistines.
 2. The text does not give details, but simply states: " he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam."
- C. In Judges 15 - there is still another example of Samson's attack against the Philistines.
1. The Philistines launch a massive search and destroy campaign - and their primary objective is to find and kill Samson.
 2. Three thousand men of Judah find Samson, and they hand him over to the Philistines.
 3. They tied Samson up and brought him from the rocks of Etam - to the Philistines, who shouted with celebration at the sight of their enemy.
- D. BUT, the Spirit of God came upon Samson again.

1. He snapped the ropes that bound him, and grabbed a donkey's jawbone ... using that as his weapon, he was able to slay **a thousand Philistines.**
 2. Samson celebrated with a little poetic verse: "With a donkey's jawbone, I have made donkeys of them, with a donkey's jawbone, I have killed a thousand of them."
- E. At this point, and for the first time - the narrator of the story mentions that SAMSON SOUGHT THE LORD! — Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the LORD and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

V. NOW FINALLY, IN JUDGES CHAPTER 16, - **The Final Chapter In The History of Samson.**

- A. This chapter sketches the pitiful details of the downfall of Samson.
- B. Before chapter 16 - in the two previous chapters - there are three distinct references to the overpowering of Samson by the Spirit of God. **No such reference appears in chapter 16.**
1. Here, Samson acts without the influence or spirit of God.
 2. He is self-sufficient and out of control.
 3. The chapter begins with Samson's head on a harlot's pillow ... it ends with his hands on the pillars of a pagan temple in Gaza.
 4. That's followed by his death.
- C. As chapter 16 opens - Samson is going down again, this time to the Philistine city of Gaza.
1. There he met a harlot and went into her.
 2. The men of Gaza heard that Samson was in town, and they surrounded the woman's house --- *they intended at light of day to slay their great Israelite enemy.*
- D. Samson learned of this, and at midnight he slipped out of the house, right by the guards.
1. He went down to the city gates which had been bolted shut for the night.
 2. He ripped the doors of the gate off their hinges, along with the posts and bars of the gate ... Samson carried the doors on his shoulders to the top of a hill near Hebron.
 3. So, in the heartland of Judah - Samson left tangible evidence of his latest humiliating blow against the Philistines.
- E. Some time later - Samson fell in love again; another Philistine woman.
1. Even after his failed marriage at Timnah, and his most recent escape from the house of a harlot - still, Samson becomes involved with another woman...**and her name was Delilah.**
 2. Judg. 16:4 says -- " ... it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah."
- F. The leading men among the Philistines knew about this, and they promised to pay Delilah if she would discover and reveal the secret of Samson's strength.
1. Samson resisted the wiles of Delilah for a time; he seemed to have some idea that she could not be trusted - but he was exceedingly weak in the presence of a charming female.
 2. Even when it became obvious that Delilah was laying a trap for him - Samson still was unable to resist her seduction.
 3. He walked into her temptations with open eyes ..she increased the pressure .. Samson lied, but she didn't give up ... eventually, the NASB says, Samson was "annoyed to death."
- G. So here's what happened - Judg. 16:17 **he told her all his heart**, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, 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 for the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand. 19 Then she lulled him to sleep

on her knees, and called for 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!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" **But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.** 21 Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison.

- H. But even as Samson worked like a beast of burden in the Philistine prison - his hair was beginning to grow back.
 - 1. The Philistines failed to notice this.
 - 2. Of course, there was nothing magical about Samson's hair.
 - 3. His strength came from the Spirit of God.
 - 4. Yet the hair was the symbol of his strength.
 - 5. The repentance which began to work in the darkness of the prison work yard - positioned Samson for one last heroic act.
- I. The Philistine lords assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their god.
 - 1. They were in "high spirits" and in the mood to celebrate - so the crowd demanded that Samson be brought forth into the temple to amuse them.
 - 2. For a time, they entertained themselves by playing a cruel game - what we used to call "Blind Man's Bluff" with Samson.
 - 3. Picture the scene - *Three thousand jeering Philistine men and women, joined with their leaders in heaping abuse upon their once formidable enemy.*
- J. Samson is taking all this torment - but he realizes that he was standing near the main pillars of the structure ... and plan forms in his mind.
- K. Judg. 16:26-31 {Read, NIV}.
- L. Here was a man who was physically strong, but morally weak ... unfaithful and immoral ... and one might ask *How God could choose to use such a person.*
 - 1. He violated his vows, and mis-used his gifts.
 - 2. We see in this man - raw ambition and revenge, without any sense of purity and zeal for God.
 - 3. Who can explain the sovereign choices of the Almighty?
 - 4. Perhaps it just doesn't become us - to evaluate and make judgments about the ways of God.
 - 5. Could it be - what we should do is, simply recognize that **God can use whoever He wants to use, for whatever purpose He has in mind.**
 - 6. I believe that needs to be our faith about all of this.
- M. But now there are lessons we need to learn, from the behavior and choices of Samson ...

VI. Let's Get To Those Lessons - and There Are FOUR I Would Like For Us To Think About.

A. Be Careful Who You Marry, And Why You Marry!

- 1. Samson made a choice for marriage, in regard to the young woman at Timnah - and there is no evidence that he considered anything about her except the beauty he saw! — 14:1 Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." 3 Then his father and mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."
- 2. It appears from the text - nothing was considered, except the beauty he could see. Here was a marital choice based on physical attraction ... and the same thing is said of those who entered into marriages before the flood in the days of Noah ... Gen. 6:2 - "...that the sons of God saw

the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.”

3. Let's think about this - When you see someone who looks good, who is attractive ... WHAT ELSE DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT PERSON?
 - a. Absolutely nothing.
 - b. If a man is extremely handsome - his physical appearance tells you nothing about his habits, his attitude, his character or motives.
 - c. If a young lady is beautiful - her pleasant appearance does not offer a clue as to her ambitions, her values or capacity to care and love a husband and children.
 - (1) My Cousin would not date any girl until her saw her toes — I thought this was strange so I asked him - he said if she took good care of what people don't really see then she would be a good person who cared for others — makes perfect sense to me!
 - d. And when you get married - and you both must find the tools and attitudes to make the relationship work **the difference between pretty and ugly doesn't give you any advantage at all!!**
4. Be careful who you marry, and why you marry --- know that subjective physical appearance HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH CHARACTER AND THE ABILITY TO MAKE A COMMITMENT
 - a. Consider values, habits, behavior, attitude and character.
 - b. Now, it is not my recommendation that you go out on purpose - and try to find somebody who is ugly ...
 - c. But the decision to marry must take into account the person behind the beautiful face.
5. Samson didn't do that - and got into all kinds of trouble.

B. Great Expectations Are Sometimes Replaced By Great Disappointments.

1. Samson had such potential - *born without hereditary blemish ... good parents ... separated unto God at birth ... the child grew, and the Lord blessed him.*
 - a. Such a great beginning.
 - b. When you just read about his birth - not knowing what happened later - *When you just read of his birth, YOU ARE FILLED WITH POSITIVE EXPECTATION ...*
 - c. But it turns out to be a tale of WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.
2. And the same kind of thing happens today.
 - a. A child is born, surrounded by extraordinary advantages -- Good parents, good grandparents, healthy, taken to church services from birth, good role models, the best kind of training ...
 - b. And - just given the great beginning - everybody assumes everything will turn out with great spiritual stature and reward and usefulness.
 - c. But we should know by now - the best and highest advantages still offer no guarantee.
3. People are tempted ... people make choices ... people do not repent ... and people with every good advantage and expectation - **SOMETIMES DISAPPOINT US IN THE CHOICES THEY MAKE.**

C. Moral weakness hinders a man in every aspect of his life!

1. Take some of the our contemporary reports and commentators - send them back into the days of the Judges ... and I can imagine one of them saying something like this:
 - a. Samson has a problem with women, but that's his personal business; that's a part of his personal life - and it has nothing to do with anything else.
 - b. He is a strong man, and he has done a lot of good against the Philistines - so his private sexual life shouldn't matter.
2. Well, that may be the popular, politically correct viewpoint - **BUT IT IS SO FAR FROM REALITY.**

- a. A man who is morally weak IS HINDERED IN EVERY OTHER ASPECT OF HIS LIFE, by his problem - his sin!
- b. Life is not so arranged - so that one aspect doesn't touch another !!
- c. If I'm morally weak - that has impact in my decisions, my plans, my leadership, my captivity to govern and deal with people.
- 3. I'll go this far → **Never in the Bible - Never in Bible history do you read about anybody who was morally weak, without that weakness having consequences in their whole life, work and existence!!**
- 4. Moral weakness is not some sort of private, isolated thing that doesn't matter - IT MATTERS TO GOD, and the devil will use any weakness we have, to destroy any good we might otherwise do.

D. What We Are Attracted To, Can Become Our Downfall.

- 1. If something looks real good ... and we begin to dream about it, and think about how good it would be if we had it - **those may be the first steps away from God and into sin and destruction!!**
- 2. Would you think about this? **The devil came to Eve in the garden, and HE DID NOT CRAM THE FRUIT DOWN HER THROAT!!**
 - a. He simply suggested that it would be mighty fine to eat some of that fruit ... he invited her to eat, AND SHE LOOKED AT THAT FRUIT ... AND SHE SAW THAT IT LOOKED GOOD!!
 - b. She ate it, and in turn - invited Adam to share in that meal.
 - c. NOBODY MADE ANYBODY DO ANY-THING!!
- 3. When I see something that looks good ... when I think about having it, dream about it and become occupied with those pleasant thoughts - **SATAN MAY BE TRYING TO FILL MY HEART WITH THOSE THOUGHTS AND DESIRES THAT GIVE BIRTH TO SIN.**
- 4. That which we are attracted to - can become our downfall!

VII. Conclusion:

- A. We need to let Samson teach us - about **the foolish approach to marriage that is based on physical attraction**; we need to know that **great expectations that end in disappointment**, when young people do not use the advantages they have; we need to consider - in spite of all the political talk these days - there **moral weakness is never an isolated, private thing** ... and that which we are attracted to can become our downfall.
- B. The New Testament says - **If you want to be strong, you can be!**
 - 1. You can obey the gospel, and then be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.
 - 2. You can put on the whole armor of God, and by faith use every provision of God to defeat the devil ... and get ready for a wonderful home in heaven.
 - 3. We can win the battle. Salvation is a reachable goal. Heaven is not an impossible dream. As we sometimes sing, "Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armor on."
 - 4. You can begin today!