

SAMSON SERMON NOTES:

Growing up I was right into superhero comics. I got introduced to batman, Superman, Wonder Women and more. A nice fantasy world to belong to. Today, I am talking about a real-life superhero. He tore lions apart with his bare hands. He would take on 30 men, barehanded, like it was child's play. He caught 300 jackals, tied them together in pairs of two by their tails, tied torches to where he tied their tails, and turned them loose to destroy a nation's entire harvest.

When tied with ropes, he broke them like string. He picked up the jawbone of an ass and used it to kill 1,000 warriors. He tore up a city's entire iron entrance gate from its walls. Literally, tore it from its buried foundations and carried it over thirty miles, along with the posts and parts of the wall it was attached to. He carried it up on to a hill overlooking the city. These were gates meant to demonstrate the city's defences and strength against attack. He did it just to make a point, it was no defence against him. I think it worked.

His last, and perhaps greatest deed, was single-handedly tearing down the foundations of an entire fortress, killing thousands of his enemies in the process. His is the most legendary name of all when it comes to raw strength. You may have guessed that name is Samson.

Not only was he the greatest superhero of history but he was also probably the most flawed person God ever used, I'm not sure who else came close. He was a womanizing, short-tempered loner who was disrespectful of his family and disloyal to his God. In fact, by the time he was done, he had broken every vow he ever made to God. So much so that in the end, God left him and when God left, so did his strength. Which makes him one of the most important lives to learn from in the entire Bible. Not for his successes, but for his failures, and for what could have been.

We find the story of Samson in Judges chapters thirteen to sixteen in the book of Judges. The book of Judges follows a pattern of Israel crying out to God for help and God providing a deliver or Judge. At the beginning of the Samson story the people have ceased to cry for help. Also, Samson's parents Manoah and his wife have not even asked for a child in their barrenness. Yet, God is still preparing a deliverance. Both for Israel and this barren couple.

In this miraculous part of the story an angel of the Lord appears to this couple. They will have a son, and the angel commanded that he must be a Nazarite from birth. 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."** Judges 13:2-5.

The Nazarite vow meant that you were separated in three ways. Firstly, they may not eat or drink anything that comes from grapes. No wine, no strong drink, no grape juice, no fruit, no

seeds, no skin and no vinegar. Grapes are associated with celebration and feasting but the Nazarite is not to feast until after their vow is completed.

Secondly, Nazarites may not cut their hair until their vow is complete. Upon the completion of the vow, the hair is cut and offered up at the Tabernacle. This makes the status of the Nazarite public and communal. Third, Nazarites are to avoid anything unclean. They cannot encounter corpses of any kind. Samson regularly breaks his vow.

Now here's what was unique about Samson. Samson didn't make this vow for his life. God did. God set him apart from birth. God called him to a special dedication. To be the liberator of the people of Israel from oppression. That's what makes Samson's life so fascinating. Samson had the choice of whether to live out God's special dream for his life, or not, but the calling was there – so his life was all about potential.

This brings us to the second dynamic of his life. When you read about Samson's life, and particularly his great deeds, there's a little detail that would be easy to miss. Something happened right before every great act, every great feat of strength. Let me see if I can show it to you: This is what we read about his killing of the lion:

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. Judges 14:6.

¹⁹ Then the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of everything and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he returned to his father's home. Judges 14:19.

¹⁴ As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. ¹⁵ Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men. Judges 15:14-15.

See the pattern? Before every great act of strength and power, the Spirit of the Lord came on him. Why? Because that was the source of his strength and power! If a team of top scientists and physicians could go back in time and analyse Samson for the secret to his great physical strength, they wouldn't find it. There'd be no clues, he wasn't a genetic fluke, there was no special training, no Under Armor, no Air Jordans, and no performance enhancing drugs. This Strength was a God-thing.

The very first thing that Samson says in the book of Judges is to his parents. **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." Judges 14:2-3.**

This is significant as his story begins with the sighting of a woman. We will find out that Samson's desire for women is a driving force throughout his life. Further Samson's parents do not want Samson chasing after a Philistine woman. Intermarriage with the people of Israel is forbidden for the people of Israel. This was the start of Samson giving into his desires rather than following God's plan for his life. A lot of wasted potential.

The final dynamic of Samson's life is critical. He broke every one of his vows and lost everything, he squandered his potential. I won't take time to walk you through every verse on this, as the story of Samson covers multiple chapters in the book of Judges, but here's the Wikipedia version: He went to drinking parties, so he broke that vow. He ate the wrong foods, so he broke that vow. He touched dead carcasses of animals, so he broke that vow. I won't even go into the prostitutes he slept with.

He broke every vow associated with his relationship with God. All but one. But then he set himself up to break that one with callous indifference. Which brings us to one of the more famous stories related to his life. If you've heard of Samson, you've probably heard of Delilah. Let me read what happened sometime later when Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah.

⁴ Sometime 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."

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. 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. Judges 16:4-5, 18-21.

So, firstly let's talk about Samson and his physical Presence. I am sorry if I tear down a few great Sunday school images of Samson. He is often portrayed as a hulk, a man of incredible size with huge muscles. If this were true, then the Philistines would have been able to guess where he got his strength from. However, clearly in Delilah's story that they haven't a clue how he becomes so strong.

So, Samson was probably an average man in height and weight, His strength is in God who works through his special Nazarite status. It took four attempts by Delilah to subdue Samson. So, Samson, called by God is completely undone by a hired gun named Delilah. Probably one of the most tragic parts of this story is in verse twenty, **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. Judges 16:20.

The Holy Spirit is no longer empowering him. God put up with a lot from Samson. Despite all his short comings, his failure to keep his Nazarite vow and acknowledge God in his life, God stayed by him and invigorated him when he needed it. I like how K. Lawson Younger Junior puts this in his Commentary on the books of Judges and Ruth, **“He now suffers the consequences for the flippant revelation of his special giftedness and status with Yaweh”**. He finishes his life as a blind slave.

God being God, he isn’t finished with dispensing mercy and grace to someone who arguably does not deserve it. So, the Philistines are rejoicing in capturing Samson and worshipping their God. Then they bought Samson to entertain them. They completely humiliate him. He requests to be placed near the pillars that support the temple. The temple is very crowded.

²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the Lord, “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.” Judges 16:28.

At first, it appears as though Samson is acknowledging God and returning to his Faith. Sadly, the next part of the verse reminds readers that Samson is still egocentric. Self-interest rules his life and his final prayer. He is preoccupied with himself as an individual.

He has no thought for Israel whom he is supposed to be delivering. Samson is not concerned about God’s reputation only his thirst for personal revenge on the Philistines for his eyes. God answers his prayer, and he regains his strength, and he destroys the Temple of the foreign God of the Philistines. In doing so, he is killed. His family come for his body, and he was buried in the tomb of his father Manoah.

God’s way is to let the Holy Spirit guide you, not your desires. We all have desires, but we need to keep them in check. Here’s the way it works. The more you follow the Holy Spirit, primarily through His Scripture and promptings, the more you are filled. The more you follow that lead, the more you are filled. The more you are filled, the more you will be led. That’s how you unwrap the Holy Spirit in your life. You put ever increasing territory of your life under His control. This is how character is built! Which is why right after listing the fruit of the Spirit, we read these words, **²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25.** Also, **¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19.**

All the spiritual potential in your life rests on the presence and power, the ministry and work, of the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit but are you filled? And the answer to that is simple: Are you following? Because that’s what determines your capacity to be taken by God, used for God, and look more and more like Jesus. Samson gave up on his mission from God. He wasted his life.

Let me pray. Holy Spirit come. Into the will of God for our lives. Help us to be more and more like Jesus. Protect us as we seek to live for you. Help us to find you as we read the bible, your word. Help it to go deep into our very being. We long to follow you and we say this morning that we love you, Lord. How your way in our lives. Amen.