

Samson and Delilah

Judges 13-16

David H. Roper

This morning we are going to study Samson together. Believe it or not, Cecil B. de Mille didn't invent this character. The account of his life is found in the book of Judges. I would like you to follow along with me because we will not have time to read all of the account but will make observations at various key points.

A principle that is found throughout Scripture can be expressed this way: If there is any area in our life where we are resisting the Lordship of Christ, and if we continue to resist, then we will discover that, in other areas also, our life will begin to fall under the dominion of the flesh. If God is speaking to you, for instance, about a resentful spirit, or an unforgiving heart, or lustful thoughts, or whatever, and if you are unwilling to deal with that, then you will find yourself falling back into sins that you felt had long since been vanquished in your life, slipping back into habits from which you have been delivered for years. Perhaps your old jealous spirit returns, or your former bad temper comes back, and, whereas once you had complete control in this area, now you find that you've lost control.

Samson's life is a clear illustration of this principle. Old Testament people are so fascinating because they show us, in such a realistic way, the principles laid out in the New Testament. Let's start at the beginning of the thirteenth chapter:

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

Judges is a very interesting book. It is structured in seven cycles, each cycle complete in itself, and each basically the same. The nation of Israel would sin, would begin to worship idols, and so God would place them under the dominion of one of the neighboring nations. They would be in bondage to one of these enemies for a period of time. They would then repent of their sin and call upon Jehovah for deliverance. He would raise up a deliverer, in the person of one of the judges, and set them free. For a while there would be peace and prosperity -- until the judge died. As soon as he was gone the children of Israel would apostatize again and go back into idolatry, and the cycle would begin all over. The story of Samson occurs in the seventh and last of these cycles.

It is recorded that, because of their evil, the Lord gave the Israelites into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. The Philistines were a very warlike people who traced their origin back to the land of Egypt. They had migrated from Egypt to the island of Crete and then had tried to return to Egypt but had been repelled and so had invaded Canaan, or Palestine, just before the entrance of the nation Israel into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. They had settled along the Mediterranean coast and had been impossible to dislodge. So they remained as an enemy of Israel for centuries.

In Old Testament symbolism the Philistines represent the flesh in our life. They were related to Egypt which symbolizes the world. As the flesh they constitute the enemy of the Spirit of God. The flesh is that principle of evil which gained entrance into man at the fall of Adam and Eve. It is responsible for our tendency to go our own way and to try to live our lives independently of God. It is an alien intruder; it has no right to reside in our life. And yet it has taken up residence there and is constantly at war there with the Spirit of God. Paul says in Galatians 5 that the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, to keep you from doing what you would. So these Philistines, as we see them in this book, will be portraying the activity of the flesh in our life.

The story continues with the angel of Jehovah, the pre incarnate Lord Jesus, who appears to Samson's mother before Samson is born. He promises that Samson will deliver Israel, at least partially. Two very interesting

things emerge from their conversation. One is that Samson was to be a Nazirite from his birth.

We need to distinguish between a Nazirite and a Nazarene. A Nazarene is someone who lives in the vicinity of the town of Nazareth. Jesus was a Nazarene, but he was not a Nazirite. A Nazirite was a person who took a vow of separation for service to God. There was a provision under the Mosaic covenant by which a Jew could vow to set himself apart for a period of time in order to accomplish some particular purpose. The word comes from the Hebrew verb "nazar," which means to separate, to cut off.

There were three conditions a Nazirite had to observe: 1) He could not touch a dead body of any kind. 2) He was not allowed to drink wine or strong drink, or even to have any contact with the fruit of the vine. 3) He was to let his hair grow long. That sounds very contemporary.

These Old Testament provisions, again, are symbolic snapshots of things which are true of our life today. A Nazirite in the Old Testament symbolizes sanctification in the New, "Sanctified" means "set apart for a particular purpose." Those of us who know Jesus Christ as Lord are said to be sanctified, to be set apart to serve him. And the same three conditions which obtained under the Nazirite vow are true for us in the spiritual realm:

1) We are not to touch anything dead, either. We are to have nothing to do with the old life. Paul says, "You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." We are not to go back and attempt to resurrect the old life, the flesh which has been crucified with Christ, and try to live out of that resource. We have a new life, a resurrection life, which Paul says is life indeed.

2) We are not to attempt to derive our joy in life, and our sense of well-being, from wine or any other natural source, but rather, from the Spirit of God.

3) The provision regarding long hair is very interesting. In the Scriptures long hair is said to be a shameful thing for a man. It is a sign of weakness. This refers, of course, to excessively long hair-- longer than the accepted length for women at any particular time. It is a relative judgement, depending upon culture. I'm not against long hair; I just wish mine would grow at all. But excessively long hair is a sign of weakness. A Nazirite would put himself under that condition in order to indicate his weakness, because his strength would grow out of that weakness.

The same is true for us. The Scriptures say that where we are weak that is where we are strong. If we sense our need for dependence upon another resource, if we are not counting upon our own credentials, our own strength, our own abilities--that is proper recognition of our weakness. It is in weakness that we discover our strength in our dwelling Lord. So, just as a Nazirite was to fulfill these three conditions of separation, so we as sanctified individuals, set apart for the particular purpose of serving the Lord, are to operate on the basis of these same three conditions.

It is interesting that Samson was called to be a Nazirite from his birth, which was unusual. Ordinarily a person would take this vow later on in life, generally for only a short term. But Samson was to be one from his birth. We, as well, are Nazirites from our birth, our new birth. From the time we are born into God's family these conditions become applicable to us.

The second thing of interest is the statement by the angel of the Lord that Samson "will begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." "He will *begin* to deliver . . ." As we go through the story we will discover that in reality he never did deliver them, because he never delivered himself. There was frequent partial victory, but never a complete victory and final, total domination of the enemy, because he could never deal with one particular area in his life--at least, he never *would* deal with it. So he only began to deliver Israel.

Verse 8 contains a good prayer for parents:

Then Manoah entreated the Lord, and said, "O, Lord, I pray thee, let the man of God

whom thou didst send come again to us, and teach us what we are to do with the boy that will be born."

That is a prayer which all we parents have uttered from time to time. "God, what are we to do with these boys, or these young people, as the case may be?" The interesting thing is that the angel of the Lord didn't really tell them what they were to do with the boy. His response was, "Do what I have told you. You are to observe everything that I have commanded you." That is, as parents our priority is to obey the Lord, to exhibit before our children the reality of the indwelling Lord in our lives. Now let's go on into chapter 14, where we pick up the story of Samson's life as a young man:

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. 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." But his father and mother said to him "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your kinsmen, 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 pleases me well."

Timnah was a little town about four miles from where Samson was living at Zorah. Now we get the first indication of this man's spirit, and of the problem which plagued him throughout his life. He was a very willful young man, particularly in the area of sex. He was never willing to deal with this issue in his life.

Three things were wrong about this relationship:

1) It is evident from this paragraph that he really cared nothing for this girl as a person. He simply saw her and wanted her. She was an object to be used, to be possessed. There was no recognition that she was a person with needs, a person of worth and value.

2) The Old Testament scriptures, which Samson possessed, were very clear about God's prohibition of intermarriage between the Israelites and surrounding pagan nations. This provision stemmed from God's love. He knew that if they married into these idolatrous peoples the nation of Israel itself would become idolatrous. Heathen wives would pollute the households with their idols. And God knew that wives chosen out of these nations would be miserable as well. To be unequally yoked in this way would result in a relationship which would chafe both parties. So because he loved his people, and because he loved the world, God had commanded that they were not to intermarry with unbelievers. But Samson cared nothing for this. He saw the girl and he wanted her.

3) He disobeyed his parents. Again, the Scriptures which Samson had were very clear. Children were to obey their parents so that they might live long in the land which the Lord had given to them. God never stuttered at that point. That was Standard Operating Procedure. It is clear that these parents were interposed by God between this girl and their son in order to save Samson from a disaster. But he would not listen he disobeyed. He insisted on having his own way. So he said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well." His passions reigned. This was the area of his life which ultimately brought him to defeat, because he would not deal with it. Verse 4 seems strange:

His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord; for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

But the writer is not implying here that God condoned Samson's rebel lion. He is saying that God was going to overrule in this situation for a good purpose. God never condoned the sins of this young man.

Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and he came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion roared against him; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion asunder as one tears a kid; and 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. And after a while 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. 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 taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.

Having begun his rebellion against Jehovah, he now appears to treat his Nazirite vows very lightly. It seems from this account that he broke two of them. First he went alone into the vineyard at Timnah. His father and mother were not there because they knew nothing of the incident with the lion. One wonders why he would even go near it because as a Nazirite he was forbidden to have any contact with grapes, which are difficult to avoid in a vineyard.

It is also clear that he violated a second condition of his vows. He handled a dead body; the carcass of the lion. And not only did he break the vow himself, but he also caused his mother to break it. She too was a Nazirite, according to chapter 13, and she consumed some of the unclean honey taken from the body of the dead lion. So you can see the process of degeneration in his life starting to set in. In fact, it is significant that the account says "He went down to Timnah." Although it is talking about the geographical location of Timnah with respect to his hometown, it is clear that this is a reference to the beginning of his decline. From this point on, the slope is away from the Lord.

The appearance, in this story, of the lion is very significant. God was trying to teach Samson something about the degree of power that he possessed. We read that the lion charged him and he tore it apart as one would a lamb. They must have been a lot stronger back in those days than we are. I'm not sure we could even accomplish that with a lamb. Now, what was the Lord trying to teach him? Just this: that he had adequate power to live in victory over his passions. His desires, his drives, were not beyond his control. In the Spirit of God there was available to him adequate authority and power to live in victory over every area of life, whatever it might be.

There is a lion in our life, as well. Peter writes in his first letter that our adversary, the devil, goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is our lion, seeking to tempt us, to draw us away from obedience to Jesus Christ. But in John's first letter John says that, in Christ, we have already overcome that lion. We have already had our encounter with him and he has already been torn asunder. Twice John says, "I write to you, young men, because you have [already] overcome the evil one." When we chose Jesus Christ, we chose a complete victory in him. The cross has already dealt with the lion in our life. He has been put away; he is no longer a threat. We have everything we need to stand against his pressures and the temptations that he throws against us.

In John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" there is an incident recorded in which Christian is walking down the road toward the Celestial City. As he is going through a mountain pass he sees a pair of lions crouched beside the path. He is frightened and intimidated by them, immobilized, unable to continue his journey. Standing there in fear he hears a man calling to him from farther down the trail. The man tells him that the lions have been chained. At first it is hard for him to believe, but as he ventures closer to them he sees for himself that this is true. The lions are shackled. And although they are right by the road, ready to spring, they are restrained so that they can't harm Christian as he makes his way on toward the Celestial City.

God has done that for you in Jesus Christ. Satan has been dealt with. The lion in your life has already been torn asunder and there is adequate power to live in victory over any area of your life. I don't care how deep-seated, how long-term the bad habits may be in your life. It doesn't matter. There is adequate power to subdue them. Jesus Christ has done that for you. Let's go on with the story of Samson:

And his father went down to the woman, and Samson made a feast there; for so the young men used to do. And when the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you; if you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments [these were very expensive items of apparel. A man might expect to own one in his entire lifetime. Now he is obligating himself to give each companion

two such garments, a total of sixty, if he should lose]; **but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments.**" And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it." And he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." And they could not in three days tell what the riddle was.

On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, "You only hate me, you do not love me; you have put a riddle to my countrymen, and you have not told me what it is." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted; and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard.

This was his weakness. He could overcome lions. He could overcome philistines. But, in the modern idiom, he couldn't overcome the Philistine chicks.

Then she told the riddle to her countrymen. And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a Zion?" And he said to them; "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle.

One wonders what the result of this whole story would have been had he not plowed with *their* heifer. He had no right to her because she was part of an alien nation. And yet in willful disobedience he had determined to have her. But notice what happens:

And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty men of that town, and took their spoil and gave the festal garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

Ashkelon was a seacoast town about thirty miles away, far enough so that news would not travel back right away and they would not connect this event with Samson. Do you see what the Lord did for him? He bailed him out. He intervened miraculously so as to save Samson from destroying himself. Have you ever had that experience? I can think of times in my life when I have been *determined* to rebel against God, have just been insistent upon going my own way, knowing full well what the Word of God says but determined to do it anyhow. And God has supernaturally intervened in such a way that I could not proceed any farther in that direction. He will do that for us out of love, because he cares for us. And this is what he did for Samson.

Chapter 15 records Samson's vengeance. He went back to reclaim his wife and discovered that her father had given her to his best man. Reading again at verse 4:

So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches; and he turned them tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards.

There is a very significant omission here. It does not say that the Spirit of God either moved him or empowered him to do this. This was not divine judgment, it was the venting of Samson's personal resentment and anger. It grew out of his pique and had nothing to do with God's will. It was a very cruel and inhumane thing to do. But it evened the score: Samson, 2; the Philistines, 2.

Then the Philistines said, "who has done this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

How ironic. That is what they said they would do if she did not tell them what the riddle was.

And Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged upon you, and after that I will quit. And he smote them hip and thigh with great slaughter; and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

That evened the score at 3-all.

Then the Philistines made a raid against the Israelite city of Lehi. Samson was camped in the mountains behind Lehi. Because the nation of Israel was so completely dominated by the Philistines, the men of the city agreed to take Samson captive. I am sure they were frightened half to death but they agreed to bind him and bring him down to them if the Philistines would spare their city. Samson willingly permitted this, and they carried him down to the Philistine host. Continuing at verse 14:

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the ropes which were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of an ass, and put out his hand and seized it, and with it he slew a thousand men. And Samson said, "With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of an ass have I slain a thousand men."

That is an interesting expression because it is a play on words. The Hebrew word for "heaps" also means "asses". He is saying, "with the jawbone of an ass, I made great heaps of asses."

When he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand; and that place was called Ramath-lehi [or the mound of jawbones]. And he was very thirsty, and he called on the Lord and said, "Thou hast granted this great deliverance by the hand of thy servant; and shall I now die of thirst, and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and there came water from it; and when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived.

And verse 20 says,

And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Ah, if the story had just ended there it would be a story of triumph, because Samson learned at this point that God was adequate to meet any need he had, that the Spirit of God could be to him a well of water springing up to eternal life, satisfying every desire giving him the capacity to slay the Philistines right and left. After he learned this principle, he judged Israel for twenty years, and these were days of prosperity and peace, and the Philistines were held at bay.

And so it will be in our own life if we discover the principle that God is adequate, that he is slaying the Philistines in our life, that he has dealt with the lion in our life. He is adequate for every desire, every drive, no matter how strong or deep-seated it may be. And there will be peace and prosperity and victory over the enemy.

But unfortunately, although there was a period of time during which Samson reigned, he later fell back into the old sin. We can chart the progress of his decline in chapter 16:

Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a harlot, and he went into her.

The same problem! Twenty years of victory.. and in one night he fell. This ought to remind us that the proclivity to sin never dies of old age, that our weaknesses never go away; they are always there. We can always overcome them in the power of the Spirit of God, but they never leave us. We are always weak in the area of these old sins. As some one has said, "Old flesh never dies; it just smells that way." So after twenty years of victory he is tempted in this area and he immediately succumbs, because he is unwilling to turn to the Lord in his time of need and to draw upon him.

Now again the Lord delivers him miraculously. He escapes through the midst of the Philistines at night and rips the gates off the city walls and carries them on his back all the way to Hebron, which is 38 miles from Gaza--again an evidence to him of the immense strength that was his in the Lord. But note verse 4:

After this he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

After this, after all of this, after God again had delivered him miraculously, he loved another pagan woman'. Her name in Hebrew means "weak", and how interesting that Samson, the strong one, could be totally dominated by Delilah, the weak one. Again, it is not the strength of the flesh which overwhelms us; it is our unwillingness to lay hold of the strength of Jesus Christ.

And the lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, "Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.

That was fifty-five hundred pieces of silver in all, an immense amount of money. She agreed to discover the secret of his strength. Three times Samson deceived her. Once he told her that if they bound him with fresh bowstrings he would be helpless. But he burst the bow strings and was free. Then he said that if he were bound with new ropes he would become weak, but again he broke these bonds. Finally he said that if the seven locks of his hair were woven into a web he would be helpless. So while he slept she tried it, but when she woke him he just ripped the loom right off the wall and walked out the door. Finally she said to him,

"How can you say, 'I love you, ' when your heart is not with me?"

And of course she was right! Here is a case of a man of God being rebuked by a pagan. He was telling her that he loved her, but his heart *wasn't* with her. He had never shared the secret of his life. He had never let her see the hidden things of his spirit. He couldn't, because she could not have shared them. She would have used them against him. And so finally he gives in to the pressure that she exerts on him:

And he told her all his mind, and said to her, " razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I be shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

At that point he gave up the last of the conditions of his Nazirite vow. He succumbed completely to this girl and his covenant relationship with the Lord was severed.

When Delilah saw that he had told her all his mind, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up this once, for he has told me all his mind."

They came and brought the money. And she caused Samson to sleep her knees and had a man shave off the seven locks of his head.

Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. 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." And he did not know that the Lord had left him.

How tragic! But you see, this is how the Lord deals with rebellion in our life. He will warn us through his Word. He will woo us through his Spirit. He will intervene supernaturally to keep us from destruction. He will counsel us through other people who love us -- through our parents and members of the body of Christ. But if we insist on going our own way, he will take his hands off and let us go. And we fall into the dominion of the flesh.

But, you see, it is because he *loves* us. If we insist on going our own way, he loves us enough that he will let us. In the words of the Psalmist, "He will give us our request, but he will send leanness into our souls." And notice what happened to Samson:

And the Philistines seized him, and gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze fetters; and he ground at the mill in the prison.

What a degrading, humiliating experience for this great warrior. They put out his eyes, interestingly enough -- the instruments which had caused him to sin so frequently before. They bound him with shackles and put him to work pushing a great millstone round and round -- labor that was usually reserved for oxen. And they laughed at him and humiliated him.

And that is what happens to us. God will give us up to the passions of our own life, if we insist on it. This picture of Samson grinding away at the mill is such a vivid illustration of what happens in the inner man. There is a blinding -- a loss of a sense of moral perspective and vision. There is a binding -- a loss of our freedom and liberty and mobility in the Spirit. And there is a grinding -- a sense of futility and boredom and purposelessness about life, of just going around and around and around inside.

There is a way out, though. And if this is where we are this morning because of some sin we are harboring, we need to *know* there is a way out. The next section records the celebration the Philistines had, a great feast and sacrifice to their god, Dagon. They brought Samson out to make sport of him. Verse 26 says,

. . . and Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." Now the house was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women, who looked on while Samson made sport. Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged upon the Philistines . . ."

And of course the Lord did remember him. God never forgets us. When he takes his hands off us and lets us go, he is still right there available to us. He never utterly abandons us, and he didn't in the case of Samson. He was there, standing ready to respond to his entreaty. And I am sure that in the months of grinding at that mill Samson had brought his life to mind. He realized what had happened to him. He realized that his strength lay in his Lord, and so now he calls upon the Lord to set him free.

And Samson grasped the two middle pillars upon which the house rested, and he leaned his weight upon them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines."

That was the only way out of his bondage. A death had to take place -- his death. It was only through his death that the Philistines could be brought under subjection. And this is also true in our life. The only way out is to go back to that area of our life where we are resisting the Lordship of Jesus Christ and die, right there. In his letter to the Romans Paul says that those who have died are no longer under the dominion of sin. To look that area of sin squarely in the face, to call it what God calls it, and to put it away in the strength of Jesus Christ and lay hold of his life, will result in victory and freedom. God will bring you again into conquest over the areas of your life that have been conquered by the Philistines. Notice what happens:

Then he bowed with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people that were in it. So the dead whom he slew at his death were more than those whom he had slain during his life.

And you will find that to be true in your life. If you are willing to go back to the place of disobedience and face it, and die, right there at that point, the result will be a greater victory than ever before. God will rout the Philistines in your life. He will restore the sense of peace and prosperity and mobility in the Spirit, and give you the accomplishment that you desire.

Father, thank you for this great story. We thank you for the truth that is revealed in it. We pray that it might be truth which we enter into personally. We ask that we would be strengthened in the inner man to face, honestly and squarely, the issues in our life which we have been unwilling to submit to you, and to put them away in your power, and thus experience the sense of liberty and freedom in the Spirit which comes as a result. We ask that in Jesus' name, Amen.

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