

Judges – Part 5

The Human Wrecking Ball – Judges 13-16

After the death of 42,000 Ephraimites, brought on by their arrogance and imagined superiority against the Gileadites, Jephthah judged Israel for six years before dying. Three minor judges succeeded him: Ibzan of Bethlehem judged for seven years, Elon of Zebulun judged for ten years, and Abdon, a Pirathonite, judged for eight years before they died. (Judg. 12:8-15). Very few details are given about these judges. Once again, Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. He delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

I. *A Baby Comes with Instructions*

God's timing is always perfect. He knew how long Israel was going to suffer under the Philistines, so He began preparing for the next judge that would lead Israel. This judge would be groomed from the very beginning of his life to lead Israel. God chose a family from the tribe of Dan for this special task. They lived about thirteen miles west of Jerusalem, on the border of Judah. Manoah's wife had been barren for many years, but now, the Angel of the Lord appears to her with a divine announcement: she was going to have a baby, a son. (Judges 13). She must have been ecstatic...

Although her name is never mentioned, she lives a life with a Godly testimony and can be an example to us. Most of us as mothers can agree that when our children hurt and have difficulties, we feel their pain. We worry about what *will* happen to them and imagine what *could* possibly happen. Each child is so different from the others. Wouldn't it be nice if they came with instructions?

Soon-to-be parents read book after book until they feel they know all about parenting...but then, they have children, and nothing follows the book! Instead of reading books, Samson's parents went to God, the Source of all wisdom. "Teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born" (Judg. 13:8-9). Wouldn't God be the best person to get "How to Rear a Child" instructions? And God did send the Angel to them to give them instructions.

They were to raise their son as a Nazarite, meaning "to separate unto God." During her pregnancy, his mom must live by the same rules. No wine must be drunk or anything likely to produce it. This ensured they would not lose control of themselves through drunkenness. Their hair must not be cut, indicating that the person had dedicated all their strength and powers to the service of God. They must not touch anything dead, emphasizing their state of holiness that their service for God required. (Numb. 6:3-8).

Both parents are portrayed as godly and good people who did their best to respond to God and give their son guidance. They knew the ways of God, so they would "Train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6), in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Many people think that you shouldn't "force" religion on a child; they'll "figure it out" when they get older. But that's not what God says. We can't leave it to them to decide if they want to know God; they will never know what they are missing! How can you know that you should know God if you've never had the opportunity to meet Him? You

don't have to force it on them, but you do need to model and encourage it. To give them a thirst for God, you need to walk that way yourself. We insist on the necessity of doing important things, such as going to school, bathing, and eating nutritiously, so why should it be distasteful for us to insist on going to church and learning about God, and how to live for Him?

Samson's mother seems to have been the most connected with God. The angel appeared two times, but not to Manoah as we might have expected, but to his wife. When Manoah felt that they would die because they had seen God, she calmly reasoned with him that, "If the LORD was pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shown us all these things [concerning their upcoming child], nor would He have told us such things as these." God chose a woman who was obedient, faithful, and ready to serve to bear a child that was to be the deliverer judge of Israel.

As good mothers, with God's help, we nurture to the best of our ability, but our children, young and adult, have a will of their own. Whether they do right or wrong, they are responsible for their own actions, just as we are, and will someday have to answer for their behavior to God.

II. Women – the Ruin of Samson (Unholy Women)

Samson will serve as a judge in Israel for twenty years, not as an administrator in the government, ruler, or army commander. His "deliverances" will consist of a one-man wrecking ball against the Philistines that had overrun Judah and Dan (Samson's tribe). His attacks will unsettle the enemy and stir up the people who had become complacent with the foreign rule of other nations. But by his deliverance, Israel will only begin to see the Philistines overthrown. (Judg. 13:5b).

Even though Samson was set aside for God by his obedience to the Nazarite rules, had Godly parents, and "the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan," giving him extraordinary physical strength, morally and spiritually, Samson remained weak. (Judg. 13:24-25). Except for these two verses, the record of Samson's life revolves around his infatuation with three different unholy women. Samson had so much potential that could have been used for God, but his involvement with these women limited it and caused his premature death.

First, there was the woman of Timnath, a Philistine. (Judg. 14). His whole pursuit was bad from start to finish. Samson's choice for a wife was determined primarily by what he saw. The Philistine woman in Timnath was attractive to the eye, and that was all that mattered to Samson. Outward beauty is a very strong attraction that Satan uses to tempt us with, whether it be people or things. Samson told his parents, "I have seen a woman... now get her for me to wife."

If beauty was all that created good marriages, Hollywood would never have a divorce! James 1:14-15 tells us, "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

In pursuing this romance [lust], Samson demonstrated disobedience [sin] to both God's law for Israelites and for a Nazarite. God had made it very plain to his people that they were not to obtain wives from the idolatrous people of the land. (Deut. 7:3-4). For Samson to seek a wife from the Philistines was an obvious violation of the law of

God for the Israelites. The Nazarites were to separate themselves unto the Lord, not mixing with the unclean and unholy. When he told his parents about his desire the woman, they protested and told him to look for a woman among their own people and not one of the uncircumcised Philistines. He showed great disrespect for his parents' wise counsel regarding this marriage he desired and said this woman "pleased him well."

The Bible's position on marriage is the wisest position of all but is certainly not popular with the world anymore than it is today. The world tries hard to convince people that God's position is foolish, ridiculous, and impractical. Evil tries to deceive people by using nice names for sin. These words are no different for marriage than "pro-choice" is for abortion!

Although this was not God's will that Samson marry an unbeliever, God knew the intent of his heart. So even though he was going to sin, God had a plan to use Samson's disobedience to do damage to the Philistines. He would change evil into good. "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that He sought an occasion against the Philistines; for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" (Judg. 14:4). God was going to use this inappropriate marriage to begin delivering Israel from the Philistines. "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Each time that Samson went to visit her, God showed his power. When "a young lion roared against him, the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand..." Again, he went down, and when he saw the lion's carcass, there was a swarm of bees and honey in it. He ate some and took some back to his parents, not telling them where it came from. But Samson broke his Nazarite vows by handling the dead lion, marrying a Philistine woman, and joining in the customary wine-drinking feasts of the Philistines.

A wedding feast was made, and thirty young men were invited. Samson challenged them to answer a riddle to be answered within the seven days of the feast. If they could answer it, he would give them thirty changes of clothes; if they couldn't answer it, they would give him thirty changes of clothes. His riddle: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judg. 14:13).

But after three days, they couldn't answer Samson. His wife whined and begged and cried for the next four days to get the answer after being threatened by the men to burn down her family home. Finally, Samson gave in and told her about the lion and the honey, and she ran to the men to give them the answer. To pay off the bet he lost, "*And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him [Samson], and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.*"

Did you notice the polysyndeton "and?" in verse 19? Like the building of the verse, Samson's anger must have boiled over! Then, with no desire to continue in his marriage, Samson returned home, and his wife was given to his companion.

Once he calmed down, Samson decided he would go back and take his wife after all. (Judg. 15:1-5). When it was time to harvest the wheat, he took a young goat for a present. This indicates that this was a "sadiga marriage," meaning it was contracted; the husband will join the wife's tribe. The name "sadiga" comes from the gift (sadaq)

that is presented to the wife. Rather than go to the groom's home, she continues to live in her father's house, and the husband pays occasional visits. The gift of a little goat was the customary price of marital visits. (cf. Gen. 38:17).

When Samson went to visit his wife, he found out that she had been given to another man, and he was livid! "*And Samson went, and caught 300 foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.*" Notice that angry polysyndeton "and" again?

But that was not the end of the story. The Philistines paid him back by burning his wife and her father with fire since they were the cause of the trouble. Which, of course, caused Samson to retaliate again by killing all of them for what they had done. Not willing to continue the fight, Samson moved to a hideout near one of the towns of Judah. It didn't help. The Philistines attacked the town, demanding Samson be handed over to them. The Israelites told him the problem, bound him with two new cords, and willingly turned him over to the Philistines because of all the trouble he had caused them, promising that they would not harm him themselves.

When the Philistines saw him bound, they shouted against him. "*And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith*" (Judg. 15:14-15). Samson's victory left him weak and very thirsty, and he called out to the Lord. God made a hollow place in the jawbone, and water came out, reminding Samson that God can break through our human limitations; He alone is our strength.

The second unholy woman was a harlot from Gaza. Why he went back to Gaza, near the Mediterranean Sea in Philistine territory, we can only imagine, and why he decided to find and sleep with a Philistine harlot is anybody's guess; it clearly was against God's law of committing adultery. (Ex. 20:14). A Nazarite was supposed to live a holy life, separated to God, but spending the night with a prostitute, well, that wasn't holy!

Maybe Samson thought he would be safe there, but no one is safe when they live in violation of God's Word and will. People found out he was there, though, and thought they could get rid of him once and for all. They decided to surround him while he was with a harlot there and then kill him in the morning. But their plan backfired!

But Samson woke up and decided to leave town early. He didn't leave empty-handed, though. "*And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron.*" (Judg. 16:3). We don't know why; probably just because he could! By doing so, though, he showed that no human defense is more powerful than God.

It doesn't seem to be able to leave the Philistines alone, especially their women. "And it came to pass afterward..." (Judg. 16:4). It wasn't immediately after the harlot from Gaza; some time had passed when Samson went to the valley of Sorek, the last and worst journey of his life, and fell in love with Delilah, although her actions show she obviously didn't return his affection in the same manner.

The lords of the Philistines decided they would bribe Delilah to get Samson to tell her the secret of his great strength. There were probably five lords, one for each of the major Philistine cities (Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, Ekron, and Ashkelon; Josh. 13:3), who wanted to use this information so they could torture him. They were wealthy and willing to give 1100 pieces of silver each for the information she could provide. Samson remained clueless, thinking he was invincible, even after she asked how he “might be bound to afflict him” (Judg. 16:6). What a lover, right?

Samson must have thought they were playing a game or he was too cocky in his own strength, but he obviously didn’t think she was serious. You would have thought the deceit of the other two women would have kept him on his toes, but instead, he went along with her “game” and began giving her false answers. First, he said he would have to be bound by seven green withs (twigs or branches freshly removed from a tree and still green). That was true because Samson only performed great feats of strength when the Spirit of the LORD came upon him and helped him.

Delilah bound him with the withs, but he easily broke them when she gave the alarm, “like a [tow] thread touched by fire.” That didn’t daunt Delilah and the lords. They tried again, after Samson told her they must fasten him with new ropes that no one had ever used. But he broke those like a thread when the alarm was raised. He didn’t realize that these things didn’t happen in his own strength but came only when the Spirit of the Lord helped him.

Each time Delilah tried to get Samson to tell her his secret, he got closer to revealing the source of his strength. Finally, after days of her whining and pleading, he gave in and revealed his heart...and signed his death warrant. Immediately, Delilah showed her “love” by having his hair cut and sent for the lords of the Philistines to come with their payment. She knew she had him where she wanted him. After lulling him to sleep on her knees, a man came in and shaved off his hair. As before, Delilah told Samson that the Philistines were on him.

Samson had paid little attention to the self-discipline demanded by his Nazirite vow, except for allowing his hair to remain uncut. When this last symbol was removed, he was, in fact, separated from God. And while Samson’s strength really had nothing to do with his hair, it had everything to do with his obedience. The Lord who had given him his strength now left him. Although Samson had no clue at the time, His abnormal power was now gone. When the Philistines came to capture him, he was helpless and couldn’t free himself as he had at other times.

“The Philistines took him, *and* put out his eyes, *and* brought him down to Gaza, *and* bound him with fetters of brass; *and* he did grind in the prison house” (Judg. 16:21). This polysyndeton shows how quickly Samson went from deliverer to slave. When we stray from God’s will, we open ourselves to the enemy’s control. So, there he was, paying the price of the Philistines’ revenge for those he had slain and crops he had destroyed, blind, bald, bound in fetters, with no hope of ever getting word to his family or getting back to Israel. The Philistines had him firmly, right where they wanted him.

But Samson was still a chosen vessel of God and, in His mercy, He allowed Samson’s hair to grow. As he ground the grain in misery each day, Samson had plenty of time to think and realize how much he had failed to fulfill God’s plan and the Nazirite vow he had been placed under. *Not being right with God was no way to live!* He had learned that lesson the hard way! It seems he recommitted himself to the Lord in prison.

Scripture doesn't tell us how long Samson remained in prison at hard labor before the five lords of the Philistines decided to have a national religious holiday. They would offer a "great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said: 'Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.' And when the people saw him, they praised their god..." Samson may have been physically blind, but the Philistines were in a far worse condition; they were spiritually blind to the True God.

As the celebration continued and the men became increasingly inebriated, they decided to bring him out of the prison and "make sport" with Samson. When they brought him out, they put him between the two pillars that supported the house. Samson asked the lad to put him between the pillars so he could "lean upon them," and then he called on the Lord to strengthen him so he could avenge the Philistines.

God honored Samson's request for strength, and he bowed himself with all his might, bringing the house down on the lords and all the people in it, about 3,000, giving him a greater victory in his death than he ever had in his life. The sudden death of all the leading Philistine rulers was the turning point that gave Israel its first hope for victory. His father and brethren claimed his body and buried him in Israel.

Conclusion:

There are two critical lessons for us in the life of Samson. As parents, we are required to raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; however, when they become adults, they are responsible for their own decisions. We can continue to encourage right behavior, but they must decide whether they will listen to our guidance. Even though we have done our best, our children may still make the wrong choice! We cannot make that choice for them. We must use our strength to live with those things we cannot change and to have faith in the God who works in all things for our good.

Even though our children may make these disappointing choices, the Bible is full of sons and daughters of Godly men and women who also make good choices and serve God wholeheartedly. Should we blame ourselves? Not necessarily. Should we give up on them? Absolutely not. God still has a plan to use their lives to carry out His will.

But though Samson serves as a warning, he also serves as an inspiration. It shows that anyone can fall into sin and pay dearly if they don't repent quickly. It took until the very end of Samson's life before he humbled himself before God. When he did that, God honored him and used him as he requested in destroying the Philistines who had abused him.

God describes children as "arrows in the hand of a mighty man." They need guidance throughout their life, much like a powerful archer taking a shot. Without guidance, the arrow may miss its mark badly. However, even with proper guidance, once the arrow leaves the bow, there is no guarantee it will hit the target. As parents/archers, we must do our best to aim the arrow in the right direction, ensure its proper release, and then rest the result in the hand of the Lord.

"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth" (Ps. 127:3-4).

Moral Chaos (Judges Part 6)

- 1)** Read Judges 19-21. How does this section (chapters 17-21) show the moral chaos that has come to Israel?
- 2)** Why did the Levite's concubine leave him and go to her father's house?
- 3)** How was her father manipulating him?
- 4)** Why were the old man's daughter and the concubine offered instead of a stranger? What was the ultimate end of the woman?
- 5)** How does the Levite's reaction to his concubine's death reflect the value placed on women at this time? What was God's view?
- 6)** Since they were doing the right action, why did God allow the children of Israel to lose the battle twice? How did this change their attitudes? How can you tell? What strategy do they employ to win the battle?
- 7)** What was wrong with the solution that the Israelites came up with to save the Benjamites from extinction?

8) What phrase(s) point to the problem in Israel throughout this section/

Conclusion:

“In those days there was no king in Israel.” (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This statement is seen at least partially multiple times in Judges, but there are two places where this sentence is completed. Here, in the last verse of Judges, it completes the reason “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” That just about sums up what is happening in our world today, doesn’t it?

This week’s reading has given us one of the ugliest stories in the Bible. The key to it is that, at every stage, men were acting on the basis of what was right in their own eyes. As far as the men of Gibeah were concerned, rape was all right. To the farmer and the Levite in the house, homosexual rape was unthinkable, but other rape was acceptable. The men of Benjamin thought it was right to overlook sin and to defend evil men. To Israel, revenge and retaliation would be justified, and to solve their problems about marriage for the Benjamites, the massacre of innocent people and kidnapping could be condoned.

None of these sins had anything to do with the idolatry or Baal worship, which had led to God punishing the heathen nations. It all began, every last one of these sins, when individuals ignored the laws of God and did what *they* considered to be right and acceptable in their own eyes. It led to a moral collapse of the whole nation. The Israelites didn’t need a judge or a king to lead them away from the Lord or into a battle that should never have been fought. They did those wrong actions without anyone’s help. The more we live by our own desires, the further we slip away from the pinnacle of God’s will. The more normal it feels to us, the easier it is to excuse.

Did you notice that to some, their sin was okay, but the other persons wasn’t? How quick we are to judge others! But how does God see us? Have you looked at yourself today? What did your life look like twenty years ago? Were you living closer to the Lord? Maybe you didn’t know Him then, and you’ve taken Him as your Savior during this time. Are you practicing the ways of His Word, or are you complacent about obeying it? It’s always easier to slide downhill than it is to press upward!

Ask God to show you areas in your life that are not conforming to His will and then ask Him to help you fix it! Only you can control what you are doing with your life. Only you will answer Him for your actions.

“So, then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not, therefore, judge one another anymore: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. (Rom. 14:12-13).