

10. God's mighty wimp - Part 1

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There are not many biblical characters as well known as Samson. Somehow since our childhood Sunday Schools, we had an idea that Samson was a big man's man with bulging muscles on his arms, legs and chest. I am sure that the U.S. Department of Defense would love to have soldiers like Samson who can improvise a jaw bone of a donkey as a lethal weapon to kill 1,000 enemy soldiers.

But the problem is that Samson was unpredictable and undependable because he was double-minded.

Bold before men, Samson was weak before women and couldn't resist telling them his secrets. Empowered by the Spirit of God, he yielded his body to the appetites of the flesh. Called to declare war on the Philistines, he hung around with the enemy and even tried to marry a Philistine woman. He fought the Lord's battles by day and disobeyed the Lord's commandments by night. Given the name Samson, which means "sunny," he ended up in the darkness, blinded by the very enemy he was supposed to conquer.

Four chapters in the Book of Judges are devoted to the history of Samson. In Judges 13-14, we're introduced to "Sunny" and his parents, and we see the light flickering as Samson plays with sin. In Judges 15-16, the light goes out and Samson dies a martyr under the ruins of a heathen temple, a sad end to a promising life.

A. THE CHILD WITH UNBELIEVABLE PROMISE FROM GOD

Judges 13:1-7 Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. 2 Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family 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, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. 5 For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." 6 So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name. 7 And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

Few babies have come into the world in such favorable circumstances as Samson. Like John the Baptist and Jesus, Samson's birth was divinely announced, he was consecrated from birth and was given a unique life mission by God.

Yet that solid start was no guarantee that Samson would accomplish his mission without breaking his stride. In fact, several hurdles appeared along the way to trip him up.

Judges 13:15-25 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You." 16 And the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord." (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord.) 17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" 18 And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" 19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Lord. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on-- 20 it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar--the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. 21 When the Angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the Lord. 22 And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" 23 But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time." 24 So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Before we go any further, we must know who these Philistine people.

The Philistines were among the "sea people" who, in the twelfth century B.C., migrated from an area of Greece to the coastal plain of Canaan. The Jews weren't able to occupy that territory during their conquest of the land. Their national life focused around the five key cities of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. The land between Israel's hill country and the coastal plain was called the "Shephelah," which means "low country". And it separated Philistia from Israel. Samson was born in Zorah, a city in Dan near the Philistine border and he often crossed that border either to serve God or satisfy his appetites.

Like John the Baptist, Samson would be a Nazirite from his mother's womb. The word Nazirite comes from a Hebrew word that means "to separate, to consecrate." Nazirites were persons who, for a stated period of time, consecrated themselves to the Lord in a special way. They abstained from drinking wine and strong drink; they avoided touching dead bodies; and as a mark of their consecration, they allowed their hair to grow. The laws governing the Nazirite vow are given in Numbers 6:1-8.

B. THE MAN WITH UNRELIABLE CHARACTER

Judges 14:1-4 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." 4 But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord--that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

The first words we hear from Samson are, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

He focused only on the woman's physical appearance and on pleasing himself. Twice we read in this account that the Philistine woman pleases him well. He gave no thought to her character or even her name. Her sexual appeal was all that caught his eye like many American men.

Satan and his cohorts know this weakness of any man and they target men with visual sexual appeals through movies, advertisements, TV sitcoms and whatever they can get their hands on.

Knowing these kinds of schemes from the devil, we, men, must guard our hearts with the Word of God and do not put ourselves into the position of temptations.

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

"Love at first sight" sounds so romantic, but it is a very dangerous thing. It is entirely possible for Christians to fall in love with someone that we have no business falling in love with – which was exactly the case with Samson here. "Love at first sight" may feel wonderful, but doesn't last forever. We can be attracted more to the feeling of love itself than the person we focus upon – whom we don't really know at first sight.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

A Christian really has no business dating a non-Christian. It is simply because to be a Christian means Jesus Christ is the most important thing in a person's life. And when a Christian and a non-Christian get together, we have two people who disagree on the most important things in life.

C. INCREDIBLY STRONG, BUT PATHETICALLY WEAK

Judges 14:5-9 So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. 6 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. 7 Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. 8 After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion. 9 He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

When God isn't permitted to rule in our lives, He overrules and works out His will in spite of our decisions. Of course, we're the losers for rebelling against Him. But God will accomplish His purposes either with us or in spite of us. Samson should have been going to a war instead of to a wedding, but God used this event to give Samson occasion to attack the enemy.

It appears that Samson left the main road and his parents and went on a detour into the vineyards. There a lion attacked him. A vineyard was a dangerous place for a man who was not supposed to have anything to do with grapes and wine.

Did God send the lion as a warning to Samson that he was walking on the wrong path? Yes, the Holy Spirit gave Samson power to defeat the lion, but Samson persisted on his path of disobedience into enemy territory and an unlawful wedding.

When Samson ate the honey from the lion's carcass, he was defiled by a dead body. And that part of his Nazirite dedication was destroyed.

Though Samson flirted with compromise – both with his impending marriage and the vineyards of Timnah – he still had miraculous strength because the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.

Significantly, Samson did this stupid thing after he was remarkably filled with the Holy Spirit. This shows that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit does not automatically make us godlier. It gives us the resources to be godlier, but it doesn't "do it for us." A person can be wonderfully gifted by the Holy Spirit and yet very immature spiritually. A prime example would be the church of Corinth. The Bible tells us that they were gifted people by the Holy Spirit, but they were carnal to the core according to Apostle Paul in 1 Cor.

Samson also is a good example of a carnal Christian who has a form of godliness, but denying its power according to 2 Timothy 3:5.

The Holy Spirit of God wants to come upon us and give us power. But that power is something far more important than ripping apart lions. The Holy Spirit comes upon us for the empowering to live for God as we should and for the power to tell others about Jesus effectively.

D. THE BAD MARRIAGE ENDS UP BADLY

Judges 14:10-20 So his father went down to the woman. And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so. 11 And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12 Then Samson said to them, "Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. 13 But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing." And they said to him, "Pose your riddle, that we may hear it." 14 So he said to them: "Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet." Now for three days they could not explain the riddle. 15 But it came to pass on the seventh day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? Is that not so?" 16 Then Samson's wife wept on him, and said, "You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained it to me." And he said to her, "Look, I have not explained it to my father or my mother; so should I explain it to you?" 17 Now she had wept on him the seven days while their feast lasted. And it happened on the seventh day that he told her, because she pressed him so much. Then she explained the riddle to the sons of her people. 18 So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down: "What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?" And he said to them: "If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have solved my riddle!" 19 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who

had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father's house. 20 And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

Sad to say, Samson constructed the riddle out of the experience of his sin. He didn't take seriously the fact that he had violated his Nazirite vows. It's bad enough to disobey God, but when we make a joke out of it, we've sunk to new depths of spiritual insensitivity.

First the Philistine woman enticed him in v1, then she manipulated him and betrayed him in v17, which is a typical way the world treats the compromising believer.

The Lord used this turn of events to motivate Samson to decide to fight the Philistines instead of entertaining them. If Samson had sought God's leading, the Lord would have directed him. Instead, Samson went his own way, and the Lord had to overrule his selfish decisions.

Psalm 32:8-9 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. 9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you.

If we're looking by faith into the face of the Lord, He can guide us with His eye. But if we turn our backs on Him, He has to treat us like animals and put a harness on us to guide us back to His way. Samson was either impetuously rushing ahead like the horse or stubbornly holding back like the mule, and God had to deal with him.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) When the Holy Spirit comes upon us, He empowers us to live for God and bring glory to Him, not to show off the power we receive from Him as if it is our own.

2) It is better for us to lose what we think precious than walk away from the relationship with our God.

3) If we're looking by faith into the face of the Lord, He can guide us with His eye. But if we turn our backs on Him, He has to treat us like animals and put a harness on us to guide us back to His way.