

THE GOD OF SAMSON

Judges 13:1-16:31

Key verse: 13:18

He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding."

In today's passage we learn how God uses spiritually young and unpredictable man named Samson to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. Samson was spiritually weak and had many shortcomings. He tried to marry pagan woman and wasted his talent and incredible physical strength, which God gave him for small things. But God chose him, bore all his weakness and sins, and used Samson to deliver his people from the Philistines. Our God, who preciously uses sinners like us in his redemptive history, is beyond our understanding.

I. "THE BOY WILL BE A NAZARITE " (13:1-25)

Look at verse 13:1. *Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.* The Israelites again did evil in the eyes of the LORD. But this time they did not even cry to God for a deliverer. They were content to be influenced by paganism through commerce and intermarriage. But God chose to intervene even though the Israelites did not cry to God.

God chose an ordinary family to bear an extraordinary child to become an extraordinary deliverer. Look at verses 2 and 3. *A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Samson was chosen by God from birth to do great things. What did the angel tell Manoah's wife? Look at verses 4 and 5. "Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."* The angel told her that her son was to be a Nazirite. That word comes from the Hebrew word Nazir which means "to set apart."

A Nazirite was someone who took a vow to be set apart by God for special service. From Numbers chapter 6 we learn that this vow was voluntary. It was a vow motivated by love and faith. A man or woman could take it for six months, a year or longer. It was to help someone devote himself completely to the Lord. Also, the person was to abstain from anything that was alcoholic; there was to be nothing in his mouth that was of the fruit of the vine. Nothing was wrong with wine in itself, but he or she was to find joy in God and to be led by the Spirit of God. Finally, the Nazirite was not to touch a dead body. God wanted to teach Israel that death was the result of sin. We are to have nothing to do with the old life. As Paul said, our old lives have been crucified with Christ. We have a new life, a resurrection life. Now if your neighbor took the vow you would want to know about it. You would want to spare yourself the embarrassment of offering him a

glass of wine when he came for a visit. So the outward symbol of this vow was that the person would let his hair grow long. In the case of Samson, his vow was not voluntary. His mother took the vow and Samson was to be a Nazirite from when he was born until he died. This is not what Samson chose; God made that choice for him.

When his wife told him about the angel, Manoah prayed that the angel would reappear to give them wisdom regarding this child. He said, "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." (8) He was a man of prayer and faith. He saw that rearing this child was a sacred responsibility for both of them. God can give us wisdom for all of the tasks of life. If we commit our life to him and live according to his word, he will guide us and teach us.

God heard Manoah's prayer and sent the angel to them. What was the instruction that God gave them? Let's read verses 13 and 14 together. *The angel of the LORD answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her. She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her."* Why did God tell the mother to also take the Nazirite vow? God knew that Samson needed to have an example of commitment. If he saw his mother drinking wine, it would have been much easier to rationalize his own lifestyle. God knew that the influence of the mother during those formative years would be greater than that of the father. When God wanted to prepare the Wesley brothers to bring revival to 18th century England, he used their mother Suzannah Wesley preciously. She was a godly woman who, though she had 19 children, gave each of them religious instruction each week. God prepared Samson by preparing his parents.

Manoah invited the angel to eat with them, but he refused. When he was asked his name, the angel said, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding." (18) In fact, this was not an angel of the Lord, but rather the angel of the Lord, that is a manifestation of Christ. When we study the life Samson, we often wonder why God chose and used him. He doesn't look like a faithful and holy man of God. But God's wisdom, mercy and love are beyond our understanding. We must not insist on our own ideas or fixed views. Rather we must be humble and become a new wineskin. Manoah then offered a sacrifice to God, and while the flame was burning, the angel disappeared. Manoah and his wife now knew that they had "seen God." Look at verses 24 and 25. As he promised, God gave Samson to the family and blessed him.

I. GOD USES SAMSON AS A DELIVERER (14:1–15:20)

Look at verse 14:1. One day young Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. He fell in love with her. What did he ask his parent after returning? Look at verse 2. *When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife."* Timnah was a little town about four miles from where Samson was living at Zorah. He went into the territory occupied by the Philistines. Then he fell in love with a pagan woman and asking his parents to allow him to marry her. How did his parent respond? They said, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go

to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"(3) His parents counseled him. They wanted him to follow the commandments God had given his chosen people not to intermarry with the pagan nations around them. Deuteronomy 7:3 clearly says, "Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for you sons." Especially from the fact that Samson was a Nazirite and chosen by God from his birth, his parent couldn't allow that marriage. But Samson didn't listen and insisted on having his own way. He said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me" (3b). He was more interested in his feelings than in God's will. More interested in his plans than God's.

Then why did Samson insist on marrying the Philistine girl. Look at verse 4. *His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.* Samson wanted to marry the pagan woman because of her beauty. His motive was not pure and spiritual at all. But the author says that *this was from the LORD.* What does it mean? Was God approving all of this? No, God never condones our sins and disobedience. It means simply that God would overrule Samson's disobedience. God chose Samson as a Nazirite and deliverer, but he didn't deserve such honor and privilege. But in spite of his many sins God used him to deliver his people from the Philistines. Men are weak but God is strong. Men are unfaithful, but God is faithful. In spite of our weaknesses and failures, God puts his hope on us and fulfills his good will through us.

Samson and his mother and father went down to Timnah to arrange the marriage. In those days, the family of the groom paid a dowry to the parents of the bride. While in Timnah, Samson went on a walk near the vineyards of that region. A young lion pounced and came roaring against him. Look at verse 6. *The spirit of the Lord came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done.* In the midst of that incredible crisis the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and gave him powerful strength to kill the lion.

When Samson returned to Timnah, he turned aside to see the carcass of the young lion. A strange thing had happened; a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion. Samson's vow was broken because Nazirite should not go near a dead body. He treated his Nazirite vows very lightly.

There in Timnah Samson and his father gave a feast in honor of the marriage that lasted seven days. On the first day of this party, he asks to pose a riddle and gave them the remaining days of the feast to solve it. If they did, he would give them thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. On the other hand, they would have to pay him if they failed to solve the riddle. The Philistines being agreeable to the bet, Samson said, "Out of the eater, something to eat, and out of the strong, something sweet"(14). They studied the riddle for three days but could not explain it.

After three days of head scratching and beard pulling, they still couldn't solve the riddle. So they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's house to death" (15). They weren't going to lose

this bet even if they had to play dirty pool and use extortion. So Samson's wife threw herself on Samson and turned on the tears. Young women's tears always works on men. She said, "You hate me! You don't really love me! ...you haven't told me the answer." He told her that he had not even explained to his mom and dad, but it didn't matter. She moaned and cried for "seven days." Finally, she pressed him so much that he told her about the honey in the lion. Then immediately she explained the riddle to her people.

Just before the end of the feast on the seventh day, the men of the town gave an answer. He knew immediately how he had been betrayed. He said, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle!" (18b) Again, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily. Our sovereign God used Samson's great anger because of the betrayal as an occasion to move against the Philistines. Samson immediately went to a neighboring village, Ashkelon, and there killed thirty of their men. He took their clothing back and gave it to those who had explained the riddle. Because of his anger, Samson did not stay in Timnah and he did not take his new bride away. He went back up to his father's house.

After a while Samson wanted to return to his wife. He went to her father's house with a young goat to visit his wife. But Samson felt betrayed by his father-in-law who had given his daughter to another man. In his great anger Samson went out and caught three hundred foxes. He tied their tails together in pairs and put a torch between each pair of tails. After he set the torches on fire he let the foxes go in the standing grain. It was the time of the wheat harvest when the grain was dried out and most vulnerable to fire. The flames burned up both the shocks and the standing grain as well as the vineyards and the olive groves.

When Samson heard they had burned his wife to death he said, "Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you." Therefore he attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. While Samson hid in the cave, the Philistines sent out a search party to find Samson. They announced to the Israelites that they were seeking to bind Samson to get revenge for all the damage he had done to them. And now Samson's own people, three thousand strong, joined the Philistines to find one man. They asked him, "Don't you realize that the Philistines are ruling over us? What have you done to us?" (11) The people of God had become content with their slavery. Their fear of offending the Philistines was greater than their desire to trust God and assert their own independence. They should have been glad that Samson was doing something to weaken their enemies.

The Philistines had assembled on a broad valley called Lehi. When they saw the mighty Samson being led like a lamb to the slaughter, they let out a shout. They intended to torture him to death. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. "The ropes with which he was bound became like burned flax (16:9). Grabbing a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he hacked away at the Philistine ranks. He made donkeys of them and killed 1,000 men. Afterward Samson was thirsty, then he cried out to the Lord like a child. God graciously provided water. Samson drank and was satisfied.

Samson wanted to marry pagan woman, disobeying his parent and God's will. But God not only stopped this marriage at the last moment, but also used Samson's anger to deliver his people from the Philistines. In spite of our disobedient and stubbornness, God always accomplishes his will. Sometimes we do our things in our own way. But God just turns our whole lives around in his way and his plan is accomplished. When God has a plan he uses good men and disobedient men to accomplish his overall purpose without violating his character of righteousness and holiness. So wise men are people who don't follow their sinful and selfish desires but live according to God' word.

II. SAMSON'S LAST ACT OF FAITH (16:1-31)

One day Samson went to Gaza and met a prostitute. When the men of the town tried to capture him, he carried the gateposts to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. Then he loved a woman of Sorek whose name was Delilah. The Philistines knew Samson's weakness for women so they bribed her with eleven hundred pieces of silver to entice him and find out where his great strength lay. She began to press him, asking the secret of his strength.

First Samson tolerated the temptation. He thought he was in charge. He thought he could determine the outcome of this situation and say no when he had to. He said, "If I were tied with new thongs, I would be weak." It was a lie. Delilah tied him with new ropes, but his strength did not leave him. He tore them to shreds. Next he toyed with the temptation. Now notice what he says, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man" (13). He was getting closer. He was telling her that his strength has something to do with his hair. Finally he tried the temptation. In spite of many failures, Delilah did not give up. "With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death" (16). Finally Samson explained that he had been a Nazirite separated to God from his birth. If his head was shaved, he would become weak like an ordinary man. She knew that this time, he finally told her all. She sent for the lords of the Philistines saying, "Come back once more he has told me everything" (18).

Having put him to sleep on her lap, Delilah called a man to shave off the seven braids of Samson's hair. When he awoke, he saw a room full of Philistines. He thought he could count on his strength again but he did not know that the LORD had left him. The Philistines gauged out his eyes and he now ground corn for them in prison. The Holy Spirit does not leave us today as He left Samson. His ministry is different. But this much is alike: the blessing of the Lord will depart. The peace of the Lord will depart. The guidance of the Lord will depart when we play with sin.

The Spirit departed, but God did not abandon Samson. He ground corn for the enemy, but his hair began to grow back. And with the hair came his previous power. There was spiritual development. He would be used again. His hair grew but his eyes never had their sight restored. The consequences of his disobedience were still there, but he would be used again. When the Philistines had a ceremony to honor their god Dagon, they began to shout, "We want Samson! We want Samson! We want Samson!" He was

led out to amuse them. When they saw him, they praised their god, saying “Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain” (24) He prayed, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes" (28). Leaning against the pillars that supported the whole building, he brought the whole house down. “Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived” (30b). The beginning of restoration is repentance. What Samson didn't do when he could see, he did when he was blind. He repented his sin seriously. His act of faith cost his own death. But because of his act of faith, he is included in Hebrew 11 as one of the heroes of faith.

In today's passage we learn that the God who used Samson was beyond our understanding. We also have many weaknesses and shortcomings like Samson. But the God who was with Samson is with us. Let us praise God who using even weak and spiritually young people like us in his redemptive history preciousy.