

Judges 14-16 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

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J. Samson Chs. 13-16

Samson's story is by far the longest of all the judges.

And in his story we see a classic example of the way many people live their lives.

That may be why the Holy Spirit shines the light so brightly on him; --

So that we might *learn* from his mistakes.

And take warning from his errors, not walking down the same path.

Samson stands as one of history's all time greatest examples of *wasted potential*.

Here was a man with great gifts & a unique calling – but he squandered it all.

He had the potential to go down in history as one of the greatest men of all time, but because of sin, he's instead written off as a joke, a byword.

Today, the name 'Samson' has become synonymous with *physical strength* rendered useless because of *moral weakness*.

1. Samson's birth Ch. 13

In ch. 13 we read how Samson's parents had been barren, but the Lord appeared to them & told them they would have a son who would deliver Israel from the Philistines.

They were to raise him as a Nazirite; meaning he was to be specially devoted to God from his birth to death.

The Nazirite vow was marked by 3 things;

- 1) He was not to drink wine or touch anything of the vine.
- 2) He was to come into contact with no dead body.
- 3) He was not to cut his hair.

We considered the spiritual significance & application of these 3

things 3 Sundays ago in a message titled “Samson – Wasted Potential” if you want to do some follow-up.

So Samson was born, the end of ch. 13 tells us, & he began to experience the moving of God’s Spirit on him as he traveled around his home region. [Show map]

2. Samson marries a Philistine 14:1-15:8

a. the trip to Timnah 14:1-7

1 Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines.

Knowing that Samson was called to be the Judge & Deliverer of Israel, it doesn’t seem too terribly strange to find him in Timnah, a border town between the region of Dan & Philistine territory.

This was a town that had changed hands several times between Israel & the Philistines.

As a Judge, we can expect Samson to be taking stock of the enemy, scouting their weaknesses, looking for a strategy to attack them.

But that isn’t what he was doing in Timnah.

He was checking out the babes!

What are border towns like?

They tend to be morally bankrupt places where people go to defy morality.

When I was in high school, Tijuana was a place kids went when they wanted to be really raunchy.

There was no law in TJ, and kids would do just about whatever they wanted.

Timnah was a border town where the rebellious people of Israel could go hang out with the godless Philistines and partake of their wicked practices.

Samson wasn’t there to take inventory & bring back a message of rebuke to his people.

He was there to join in with the crowd.

While there he saw a *phillie* he liked.

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.”

As I’ve mentioned many times, we learn a lot about a thing from its *first occurrence* in the Bible.

So we can learn a lot from Samson's *first words* recorded in Scripture.

What does he say? He demands his parents arrange a marriage with this gal who's caught his eye.

There's a stubborn willfulness & lack of parental respect here that's shocking.

Remember, Samson is supposed to be a Nazirite – someone *totally consecrated* to God.

His parents had raised him that way, so he knew well the command of God that Jews were to marry only within their nation & faith.

A heart that was loyal to God would not have sought a union with an enemy of God or His people.

His parents knew this & tried to reason with him . . .

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."

They said, "Son, isn't there someone in our tribe, or at least among one of the other the tribes of Israel that would be a better choice? Why are you going after this godless pagan?"

Samson's reply says it all – "I don't care about what's right & wrong! I want *her!*"

Samson was a man who was governed, not by principle, but by the present desire.

He lived by his eyes rather than by faith, at least at this point.

In Hebrews 11 he makes it into the Hall of Faith.

But it will take a great breaking & many mistakes before he arrives there.

Most of his life was lived as a man who didn't really care about issues of morality or right & wrong.

He was a sensual man who cared only about what pleasure the current moment could bring him.

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.

While Manoah & his wife were heart-broken over their son's lack of wisdom, God was at work behind the scenes to turn Samson's willful foolishness into a platform to begin Israel's deliverance.

Here's the lesson for us –

Samson had a divine calling to be the Judge of Israel.

God gave him remarkable power to fulfill that call.

As a leader, he *could* have been one of the Bible's greatest because he was the kind of guy other men would follow – **IF**, & here's the point – **IF** he'd been faithful to the Lord & obedient to his calling.

But Samson was so dominated by his flesh he couldn't lead anyone, including himself.

Instead of *being* a leader, he *was lead* around by his lust.

It led him *ultimately* -- to death.

Because God had called him, & because God is faithful, God used Samson, even despite himself.

Even while Samson was blowing it, God used him to bring about the deliverance of Israel.

But Samson himself missed out!

Instead of seeking the Lord & surrendering to his calling he went after the pleasures of the flesh & ended up missing out on the very deliverance God was working through him for others.

How many stories have we heard of men & women who were marvelously called & gifted by God to preach & teach & work powerful miracles, who fell to some scandal?

They lived for years with a public image of righteousness & were used to bring great blessing to thousands.

But then it came out that they had been wrapped up in some secret sin for years.

Some of the most powerful preaching I ever heard was by Jimmy Swaggart at the very time when he was secretly wrapped up in sexual sin.

As I listened to those message I was drawn closer to the Lord.

When the scandal around Swaggart became public, I ached over the fact that he had missed out on the very blessing God had used him to bring to me!

This is something all of us need to pay attention to.

Even the great Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor 9:27 –

I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Jesus said that there would be those who would stand before Him saying, “Lord, did we not do all kinds of marvelous things in Your name?” And He would say to them, “I never knew you – depart from Me!”

Jesus didn’t dispute what they *accomplished*; He said they didn’t have a *relationship* with Him.

⁵ So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah.

Wait! Hold on! Where is he?

He’s going down, in more ways than one.

He’s on his way back to the border-town of Timnah, a place of spiritual danger.

And he enters a what? A vineyard!

As a Nazirite, he’s not supposed to *touch* anything to the vine.

If you’ve ever walked in a vineyard, you know that there’s no way to pas through it without the vines brushing you.

Samson is *flaunting* the prohibition. He cares nothing about it.

Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him.

While he’s going down – traveling toward Timnah, passing through a vineyard, a lion attacked him.

It’s not for nothing the Holy Spirit had the writer say that the lion came *roaring* against him.

We’re to link this to Peter’s comment that the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he shall devour.

Because Samson has acted in such defiance of God’s will, he’s opened the door to this attack.

If he’d not gone down to Timnah, if he’d not passed through this vineyard, would the lion have attacked him? NO!

He’d put himself in the enemy’s territory, so the enemy did what the enemy does – attack!

How many of you would like to NOT sin?

Okay – don’t enter places of temptation.

Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

One man replied, “Because we can find the way there all by ourselves.”

Even though Samson is being incredibly careless & willful about his lifestyle here, God graciously comes through for him when this lion attacks.

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.

Now, last time I tore a young goat apart, I found it to be not really all that easy.

It’s messy & it doesn’t just lie there passively while you snap its legs neck.

Don’t get the idea that Samson just picked up this lion & made quick work of it.

There was a bit of a struggle. But the point is, the lion did him no damage.

He killed it rather easily considering that it was a lion.

While there aren’t any lions in the Middle East today, archaeology and the records of history indicate they did range freely over the land of Israel in those days.

While Samson had a lot of other problems regarding his commitment to morality, arrogance & a boastful spirit were not something he had a problem with.

I don’t know about you, but if wrestled a lion & slew it, I’d write a book & start a lecture series: “*Slaying Lions*” by LE Ralston, lion-wrestler.

Maybe the *reason* Samson didn’t say anything was because he *knew* it was the Spirit of God that gave him the ability to kill the beast.

Maybe he was a bit *embarrassed* by his calling & the power God had given him.

7 Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

Watch out Sammy!

b. the trip to the wedding 14:8-9

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.

This looks ahead a bit to after when the marriage was arranged.

This was later when he made the return trip to get her & bring her home.

On the way back, he decided to take a look at what had become of the lion's carcass.

Now, this is something a guy would do.

Women probably think this is pretty sick, but guys do this kind of thing.

They like to return to the place of their conquests & relive the glory of the moment.

So Samson follows the old path to go take a look at this lion.

Which means he has to once again enter the what? The vineyard, a place he's not supposed to be as a Nazirite.

When he arrives at the place, he finds, not a maggot-infested corpse as might be expected, but a beehive.

Then he does something that was another violation of his consecration vow – he touches the carcass.

It isn't enough that he touches it, he EATS some of the honey in an even more shocking violation of the vow.

This was honey made from vines, in a dead body!

If we're playing baseball – regarding Samson's Nazirite vow, he's got two strikes so far.

c. the wedding feast & riddle 14:10-18

¹⁰So his father went down to the woman.

This looks back a bit to earlier when his parents had gone and arranged the wedding.

And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so.

They had *bachelor parties* even back in that day.

You can probably imagine what a *Philistine* bachelor party would be like!

¹¹And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought

thirty companions to be with him.

Because Samson was in a village dominated by Philistines, he didn't have any friends there.

So the bride's parents persuaded some of the young Philistine men to attend his bachelor party.

Samson felt under an obligation to provide some entertainment so he came up with a riddle.

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."

Today, at the rehearsal dinner, the groom is supposed to give his groomsmen a present for being in the wedding party.

That's the idea here – but whereas the gift the groom gives is usually some nice but inexpensive item, a change of clothing in that time was a small fortune.

Most people had only one set of clothes.

A well to do person had 2 sets; 1 for everyday wear & 1 for special occasions.

Samson makes these 30 Philistine young men a huge wager. He will pose them a riddle.

If they can answer it, then he will get each of them a new suit.

If they can't, then they will each get him one.

They take the bait. After all, with 30 guys working on it together, what riddle *couldn't* they figure out?

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.

Samson is thinking back to his little escapade with the lion & the beehive.

In Hebrew, the riddle poses opposites that are nearly lost in translation.

The way this riddle was worded would seem to present a contradiction that would make figuring it out very difficult.

And that's what happened. For 3 days the 30 talked it over & got nowhere in answering it.

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?*"

Putting vs. 14 & 15 together we can assume that when they weren't able to solve the riddle after 3 days, they began to press Samson's fiancé to help them.

When she told them she didn't know the answer, they began to threaten her, saying she had conspired with Samson to rip them off.

When the last day came, they were so desperate, they threatened her saying if she didn't tell them the answer they would kill her & her family.

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.

As soon as he posed the riddle, she had begun to press him for the answer.

When he didn't tell her, she pouted.

But when they threatened her with death, she really turned on the heat.

Samson finally gave in & she went running to the men to give them the answer.

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!"

Samson delivers this great line.

His fiancé has gone from being his prize phillie he can't live without to being a cow.

Samson is ticked. He knows they would not have been able to answer the riddle without cheating.

Now he's on the hook to come up with 30 suits.

How can he, as an oppressed Israelite under the thumb of Philistine domination do this?

d. Samson's reaction to betrayal 14:19-15:8

1) Round 1 - 14:19-20

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.

Ashkelon was a major Philistine city.

Samson left the region of Timnah & went to this wealthy region & mugged 30 men, taking their clothes as trophies.

Then he returned to Timnah, handed them over, & left in a huff without concluding the wedding festivities.

His lust for that Philistine woman has been drowned by the sting of her betrayal.

Yet again we see how while Samson's actions were driven by petty lust & anger, God worked in spite of them to affect His purpose.

2) Round 2 – 15:1-8

¹ After a while,

When his anger subsided & his lust returned -

in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into *her* room." But her father would not permit him to go in.

Samson thought they were married. After all, all he'd done was fail to consummate the marriage.

All the rest of the marriage forms had been met.

He thought this gift of a goat would do enough to heal the rift

between them.

² Her father said, “I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead.”

Now Samson gets the bad news.

When he stormed off & returned home, they thought that was the last they'd see of him.

They thought he had rejected her.

Since that was the case & since she'd been left without a husband, she was given to the guy who had served as Samson's best man.

They'd been living together as husband & wife for months.

The father realizes the error he made in his assumption & tries to offer a solution; the younger daughter's available.

³ And Samson said to them, “This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!” ⁴Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned *the foxes* tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. ⁵ When he had set the torches on fire, he let *the foxes* go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards *and* olive groves.

The word translated 'foxes' is also translated as 'jackal,' and that is probably a better fit here.

Foxes are solitary creatures while jackals travel in packs.

Catching 300 foxes would be a monumental task and require a lot of time.

Catching 300 jackals would have been far easier and could be accomplished in far less time.

If Samson had just tied a torch to one jackal's tail, it would have run to its den.

By tying 2 together, they would have striven against each other & cut a zig-zag all over the fields of the Philistines, which was exactly his plan.

Samson knew one of the best ways to deal with an enemy is to attack his economic livelihood.

So he set large tracts of their fields to the torch, thus devastating them economically.

This was precisely Bin Laden's strategy by flying jets into the World Trade Center.

More than killing people, he wanted to deal a crippling blow to the US economy.

And many would say he succeeded.

The effect of 9/11 on world markets was virtually incalculable.

Tourism virtually dried up for a year.

The airline industry suffered huge setbacks they are still dealing with.

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

The Philistines felt they had to retaliate against this massive act of arson so they struck at the only thing they could since they couldn't find Samson.

They killed his father-in-law & wife.

One has to wonder why Samson attacked the Philistines in this way when it was only his father-in-law who'd messed up.

The Philistines knew the real cause of the trouble was one of their own who treated Samson unjustly. So they went & did his house what they'd threatened to do earlier – burned them alive.

Well, violence begets violence & Samson now retaliates for their killing his wife

7 Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease." 8 So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

To attack someone "hip & thigh" was an idiom meaning a ferocious slaughter.

It's a kind of blood-thirsty, merciless assault where you strike your opponent with a crippling blow, then kill him while he lies there helpless.

How many men Samson killed we're not told, but it was a lot. Once his personal sense of justice was satisfied, he went to a secure hiding place called Etam.

Though we don't know where this was, it was probably close to the border between the tribes of Judah, Dan, and the Philistine territory.

3. Samson is turned over to the Philistines Judges 15:9-20

9 Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi.

Which is in Judah.

While Samson thought the score was even, the Philistines had a grievance they wanted remedied.

They heard Samson was hiding out in Judah so they marched on one of Judah's towns.

10 And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us." 11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." 12 But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves."

This is curious. The men of Judah could mass 3,000 to go arrest one man – one of their **OWN**.

But they couldn't gather an army to repel the Philistines. What's up with that?

Samson agrees to go with them but he asks that they don't attack him themselves.

He doesn't want to be guilty of killing any of his fellow Israelites.

13 So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. 14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit

of the LORD came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. ¹⁵ He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it.

So the men of Judah tied Samson & hauled him to Lehi where the Philistines were waiting.

As soon as they arrived, the Philistines attacked.

But the ropes that held Samson just snapped as easy as you please.

Looking around for a weapon to use against this armed force, all he saw was a donkey's jawbone.

Now, again, as a Nazirite, he wasn't supposed to touch a dead body.

But this was the only thing he found.

How the Lord **MIGHT** have defeated the Philistines that day will remain a mystery because Samson did that which he ought not.

It's interesting that the writer says the jawbone was *fresh*.

An old bone would have been too brittle.

But this was a *formidable* weapon.

It would have been between 15 & 18" in length, with a good handle.

What we don't often see in this story is how Samson's lone figure, slaying 1 thousand Philistines provided a stinging *rebuke* to the men of Judah!

3,000 of them stood there & watched as he killed a thousand men with a humble weapon.

They had complained to Samson that the Philistines dominated them & his actions had endangered them.

They said that because at this time, the Philistines were decades ahead of Israel in military & weapons technology.

The Philistines had iron swords while the few bronze weapons Israel had had been mostly *confiscated* by the Philistines.

All they had left were wooden & stone tools.

So as a thousand Philistines rushed at Samson with their iron spears & swords, he used a humble jawbone to defeat them.

There is in the modern church the idea that *technology* is the key to effective ministry.

You gotta have the

- latest projector,
- sound system,
- computer,
- software,
- gizmos & gadgets.

First it was writing books, then making cassette tapes, then CD's, then video & DVD's.

After that it was MP3's, *now* it's pod-casts.

Man, if you don't have these things then you *can't* minister effectively & the culture will pass you right by.

And if pastors & elders & church boards aren't chasing after the latest technology in *hardware*, then it's the latest technology of *methodology*.

It's all about service design & flow.

It's about

- perceived needs,
- staying sensitive to the seekers,
- providing a warm & friendly nurture environment.

It's about

- being culturally relevant;
- not limiting personal expression,
- defocusing the center,
- embracing new paradigms.

We must remember that technology is nothing but a tool.

The men of Judah were given a sober reminder as they watched Samson with his jawbone that victory goes, not to the one with the latest & greatest technology but to the one God favors.

Our "jawbone" to bring down the enemy is NOT 10,000 watt PA systems, 5,000 lumen light cannons, or pod-casts.

It's the Word & Spirit of God.

16 Then Samson said: "With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men!"

Oops – watch out Sammy! Who slew the thousand? Yeah, you did, but it was only by the power of God, pal!

His past reluctance to boast seems to have been put aside in this

moment of personal glory before the eyes of the men of Judah.

17 And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi.

Or, literally, *Jawbone Hill*. [Lehi – jawbone / Ramath – hill]

18 Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the LORD and said, “You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?”

God has a way of humbling us when we boast.

No sooner had Samson spoken the words of his boast than an overpowering thirst took hold of him.

And he quickly realized how dependent on God he was.

He couldn't even satisfy something as simple as the need for a drink without God's help.

19 So God split the hollow place that *is* in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

En Hakkore means “Spring of the caller.”

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

After the defeat at Ramath Lehi, the Philistines were so humiliated their grip on Israel began to weaken.

A measure of Independence returned to the land.

And for 20 years no one dared attack Samson.

The Philistines realized that he was someone specially empowered by God to protect His people.

Now, this would have been a good time for Samson to travel throughout the tribes & attend to the business of being a judge as the previous judges had.

But instead of staying in the friendly territory, he kept to his old ways of wandering in the enemy's territory.

It was only a matter of time before he once again got into trouble.

4. Samson visits a harlot in Gaza 16:1-3

1 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.

Watch out Sammy!

Once again he's in a major Philistine city. It's from this city that the modern Gaza strip gets its name.

While in Gaza, he saw a harlot that enticed him to do that which he ought not have done.

² When the Gazites were told, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him."

They decided to ambush him when he got up & left.

³ And Samson lay low till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

Samson caught wind of the ambush & got up in the middle of the night when everyone was asleep.

The men of the city had closed and locked the gates thinking he couldn't get out.

So he just yanked them out of the ground & carried them a little over 4 miles on the road toward Hebron to the top of a hill.

There he set them down.

The next morning as the people of Gaza woke up, they found their precious iron gates missing, and as they scanned the horizon, there they were framed against the sky.

Most ancient city gates were made of thick wood, banded with either iron or bronze.

Archaeologists estimate that Gaza's gate probably weighed a couple tons.

Now, there is no way one man could carry such a weight.

On the leg press machine at the gym I can press about 450 lbs.

My max squat weight is maybe 275; weak legs!

I don't care how strong you are, you can't squat 4,000 lbs.

Here's the point – Samson's strength was *not* due to his tremendous physique.

When you picture Samson, do you see some Charles Atlas kind of figure?

Do you picture some guy with big bulging biceps, thick pecs, &

massive thighs?

That's probably *not* what we ought to see. He was a normal looking guy.

Why can we safely assume that?

Think about it –

- 1) The feats of strength he performed weren't human skill – they were the result of the Spirit's empowering.
- 2) Samson has shown a shocking lack of discipline in his life – does he sound like the body-builder kind of guy to you? You realize, don't you, how many hours & how much work those guys put into workouts, right?
- 3) Look at v. 5 –

⁵ And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength *lies*, and by what *means* we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him;

If Samson had been some massive, muscle-bound giant, they would have known where his strength came from. They were baffled for he did what was obviously impossible.

5. Samson & Delilah 16:4-22

Now, Since we'll be covering vs. 4-22 Sunday, we'll just summarize tonight.

Samson was once again where he ought not be when he saw yet another gal who caught his eye.

Her name was Delilah.

When Sammy started hanging out with her, the Philistine leaders offered to pay her a huge fortune if she could discover the secret of his strength.

She agreed and began to press him.

At first, he told her wild tales about how he could be made weak.

When she tried them, they turned out to be lies, and he easily whopped those Philistines who came to attack him.

After 3 such ruses, she complained about how poorly he was treating her!

Imagine that! Here she is trying to betray him, & she complains about him making her look foolish.

You wonder why Samson didn't say, "I'm making you look foolish in front of your Philistine friends? Honey, you're trying to *kill* me!"

But that wasn't his response. No – instead, he gave in and told her the secret was in his vow.

So she cut his hair that night while he slept, and then called in the guards.

Samson was arrested, thrown into a dungeon & his eyes poked out.

So now we have strike 3 on his Nazirite vow.

6. Samson's end 16:23-31

23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!"

Some time passes & the Philistines hold one of their religious holidays.

Their god was Dagon; a god that had the torso and head of a man but the lower half was in the form of a fish.

The mermaid is drawn from the Dagon tradition.

24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, The destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead."

It wasn't Dagon who'd defeated & delivered Samson; it was his own failure & rebellion against God.

But Samson's demise became an occasion for the enemies of God to exalt.

And so it ever is when Christians fall, specially leaders.

25 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars.

Being blind & in an unfamiliar place, Samson didn't know where to go.

By the sound he could tell he was in a vast open area with lots of people around.

But any misstep could send him falling to real hurt.

So he shuffled between the pillars that held up the roof & gallery of the temple of Dagon.
And so he performed for them.
It wasn't the performance of some graceful dancer or the sweet melody of a singer.
It wasn't even the eloquent lines of an actor.
His performance was nothing more than the pathetic shuffling of feet that had once traveled across their land at his will.
It was the sightless stare of a man who'd once looked upon the dead bodies of their choice warriors.
It was the feeble touch of a hand on pillars that had once brought such trouble to them.
That was his "performance."

What a pathetic sight Samson was; this man who had had so much potential!
But let me ask – did Samson have *any more potential* than any of us? Our *greatest potential* does not derive from some unique calling or special spiritual gifts.

Our greatest potential rests in the fact that as human beings we're created in the image of God, & through Christ we can be restored to a relationship with Him as a Father with His children.

Are we appropriating that potential? Are we using it?
Or are we wasting it in the pursuit of the things of this world?

26 Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them."

Just as every building has a chief cornerstone, colonnades have key columns that bear the major weight.

Knock them down and the whole building will fall like a deck of cards.

27 Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. 28 Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take

vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!"

While Samson asks God to hear his prayer, the request is motivated by what?

By a desire for revenge!

He's not convicted of his sensuality that brought him here.

He's not sorry for the way he's given the Philistines cause to mock God.

He's mad he's blind.

There is only one -- a *single* redeeming quality about Samson in all this -- finally, at last, he turns to the Lord.

He now knows that all long his strength was the result of God's favor.

So even though his motive isn't pure, he knows the *source* of his strength is the Lord.

And friends it's based on this lone act of faith in God, misplaced as it is, that Samson makes it into the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11!

If Samson makes it, there's hope for us.

29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. 30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. 31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

We're out of time but probably the biggest lesson of all from

Samson's story is found right here at the end --

When did he accomplish his greatest act of deliverance?

When he died.

When do we get real victory in life? When we die -- when we died to self.

Galatians 2:20 says --

Jesus said that to follow Him we must die to self, daily!

Samson lived a life of wasted potential because Samson lived for

himself instead of God.

The whole reason God had his parents raise him to a life long Nazirite was because God knew Samson's weakness with his flesh.

The vow was meant to keep him close to God.

But Samson rejected it and went his own way – and his way led to a tragic death.

If Samson had died to self when he first went to Timnah all the way back n Ch. 14, he never would have ended up in the rubble of the Temple of Dagon.

If you want to live to *your* potential, then *die to self*.