

# "Samson: Hollow Hero"

(PART 2)

## Judges 16

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### Introduction:

»PPT» If you were here with us last week then you might remember that we started looking together at a hero from the Old Testament by the name of Samson. We discovered that just as Superman was known for his cape, Samson was known for his long hair, and yet we also learned that Samson was basically a hollow hero. In other words, he was not really a very nice person; in fact, he was not nice at all. And yet in spite of his many faults, »PPT» Samson is listed in Hebrews 11 as an example of faith.

We discovered that Samson is rather unique as a judge because even though he was not a very righteous person, he still was not too bad when compared to everything else that was going on in the nation of Israel. »PPT» The key verse in the whole book of Judges is the last verse in the whole book—Judges 21:25, "***In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***" And so when compared to that, Samson was not so bad after all.

- I. **We learned that HIS LIFE GOT OFF TO A VERY GOOD START.** »PPT» An angel appeared to his parents, Samson was dedicated to God even before he was born, and the purpose of his life (according to Judges 13:5) was that he would, "***...begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.***" With all of this as background, we might expect Samson to be a great leader, and yet in the next two chapters, we discover that he actually ends up as a powerful, threatening, out-of-control and self-centered man. He runs into trouble almost right away, because in Judges 14, we find that...
- II. **...Samson is LUSTFULLY ATTRACTED TO AND MARRIES A BEAUTIFUL PHILISTINE WOMAN.** »PPT» His mission in life is to defeat the Philistines, the Philistines are the enemies of God's people, God's law specifically prohibited marriage to those outside of Israel, and yet as soon as he is old enough, Samson goes directly to the Philistines, sees a woman who looks good, and orders his parents to go get her for him. And once again, Samson is merely reflecting what was going on in Israel at the time. A lot of times our heroes are those who are a lot like us. This past week I was reading the *Isthmus Annual Manual*, and I found it interesting that they had a category for the most popular "**Local Public Hero.**" According to the *Isthmus*, at least, our favorite local hero is a woman by the name of Felicia Melton-Smith—a local AIDS and gay rights activist who was murdered during a trip to Mexico. And so perhaps just like ancient Israel, our

city has chosen a hero who merely reflects the morality (or perhaps I should say “immorality”) of the culture in which we are living. By the way, Number 2 was Mayor Dave, and Number 3 was Russ Feingold—two local leaders who are also very supportive of the gay rights movement. Nevertheless, Samson reflects the culture of the time by doing something that God had specifically forbidden. In the process, he kills a lion with his bare hands. And then, through an interesting series of events, Samson seems to violate the Nazirite vow several more times, he torments the Philistines, the marriage is never consummated, and his new bride is given to the best man. That brought us to **Judges 15**, because in **Judges 15** we found that...

- III. ...**Samson’s life spirals into a cycle of almost CONSTANT REVENGE—** **»PPT»**—back and forth, back and forth, and the revenge against the Philistines escalates very quickly. It even gets to the point where Samson takes a donkey jawbone and uses it to kill a thousand Philistines.

We used all of this information to conclude that God is able to use even those of us who are flawed, that God can use us in spite of our faults. Certainly it would have been much better if Samson had gone along with God’s plan, it would have been much better if Samson had cooperated with God, and yet even in his lust and revenge, Samson was able to terrify the Philistines just enough where he was able to successfully judge Israel for a period of 20 years. The conclusion last week was that we are to use our God-given talents and abilities and resources for the glory of God and that we are not to waste our lives as Samson did.

This morning, I would like for us to jump back into the book of Judges, only this morning we pick up at the end of that 20-year period, and our text for this morning is found in **Judges 16**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 418**.

- IV. **And unfortunately, Samson jumps right back into it where he left off 20 years earlier, because at the beginning of Judges 16, we find that SAMSON GETS INVOLVED WITH A PHILISTINE PROSTITUTE. »PPT»**

Please look with me at the first three verses of **Judges 16**...

***<sup>1</sup> Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. <sup>2</sup> When it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him." <sup>3</sup> Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.***

Right at the beginning of **verse 1**, we find that Samson is headed for trouble once again, because the passage says, ***"Now Samson went to Gaza..."*** Now

remember, Gaza was in the land of the Philistines. In other words, Samson should not have been there. But when he gets there he sees a prostitute, and then he goes in to see the woman. But this was not even a quick visit, because as he is in her house, the locals find out that Samson is there, and the Bible says that they waited and kept quiet ***“all night.”***

And so after twenty years, Samson falls back into the same sin that got him into so much trouble in the first place! As we think about this, we need to let it soak in a little bit as we realize that all of us have certain weaknesses. Sometimes we sin in new and different ways, but sometimes we keep going back to the same thing over and over again. We keep on getting sucked into it. We trip and we fall, and we may do it once, twice, a thousand times. Samson's weakness was lust. This morning, we need to be aware of our own personal weaknesses. We know that Satan knows, and if Satan knows, then we need to get ready for it, because (as we have learned from the book of Job) Satan is our Adversary. Satan is against us, and Satan will use every tool—Satan will take advantage of every weakness.

Even after twenty years, even as a man who had been through it before, even as a man with some experience, Samson gives in again and again. Consider the grip that this particular sin had on his life. He had to know that if he went to Gaza he would be noticed—he had to know he would get caught, and yet as we pursue sin we do not always think straight—we do not always reason things out as we should. And so it is with Samson. He does not seem to care.

The Philistines notice, they surround the house—hoping to catch Samson when he leaves in the morning. You know, if we were in God's position here, we might be tempted to remove Samson's strength and simply let him suffer the natural consequences of what he had done—we might just allow Samson to be captured and killed. And yet once again God is able to use Samson's weakness to irritate and embarrass the Philistines. Samson gets up in the middle of the night, he pulls the city gates and the posts out of the ground, he carries the whole thing for a distance of up to 40 miles, and he plants the gates on top of a mountain opposite Hebron! How embarrassing that must have been for the Philistines! The gates of a city were big and strong, the gates were secure, the gates were built to withstand the attack of an army, the gates symbolized the strength and safety of the city and would have weighed hundreds if not thousands of pounds. The Philistines, therefore, were humiliated. I mean, Samson could have just knocked the gates over, he could have quietly snuck out the back way, but he pulled the posts out of the ground and he planted them (set them up) in the middle of Israel. Samson was saying, ***“I can do anything I want to you people!”*** Even in his lustful arrogance, Samson continued to fulfill the prophecy concerning his life, that he would, ***“...begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines”*** (**Judges 13:5**). Unfortunately, the sin in this man's life continues, and we come to the next phase of his turbulent life as we find that...

#### V. **Samson gets involved with a woman named DELILAH.** **»PPT»**

If you will, please look with me at **Judges 16:4-22**...

<sup>4</sup> After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. <sup>5</sup> The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and see where his great strength lies and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." <sup>6</sup> So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you." <sup>7</sup> Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any other man." <sup>8</sup> Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. <sup>9</sup> Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered. <sup>10</sup> Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound." <sup>11</sup> He said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any other man." <sup>12</sup> So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread. <sup>13</sup> Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web [and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man." <sup>14</sup> So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web]. And she fastened it with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web. <sup>15</sup> Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is." <sup>16</sup> It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. <sup>17</sup> So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man." <sup>18</sup> When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. <sup>19</sup> She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. <sup>20</sup> She said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep

*and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.<sup>21</sup> Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.<sup>22</sup> However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.*

In **verse 4**, once again, Samson falls for a Philistine woman! In **verse 5**, we discover that the rulers of the Philistines have finally figured out Samson's weakness, and so they approach the woman of the hour, and each of the five rulers promise Delilah 1100 pieces of silver if she can discover the secret of Samson's power. By the way, this is nearly 200 times the amount of silver that was given to Judas for betraying the Lord and would have been millions of dollars in today's economy. To me, this whole situation gives us at least a little insight into Samson's physical appearance. Sometimes we may picture Samson as this muscle-bound freak of a man, and yet we find here that people knew there was a secret. In other words, it was obvious that the key to Samson's strength was not simply in eating right and working out! But the Philistines knew that there must be something else, they wanted to know Samson's Kryptonite, and so they bribed the latest woman.

Each time she asks the secret, Samson lies to the woman, and each time she tries it out. We think to ourselves, "**How could Samson be so dense?**" I mean, she's doing everything he's telling her! But the amazing thing is that he keeps on going back to this woman. Have you ever had a relationship like that? Where you know someone is bad for you, but you keep seeing them anyway? Samson understands. Perhaps Samson thought that he was strong enough to resist this woman, that he could turn her away at the last possible moment. But Samson was wrong! She whined, she nagged, she pestered him every day, and finally Samson tells her the truth. For all of Samson's strength, he was too weak to do the right thing. One of the saddest statements in the Old Testament comes at the end of **verse 20**, "**But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.**" Sadly, this could also be said concerning many Christians even today. It happens slowly, over time, and they eventually wake up one morning not knowing that the Lord has departed.

Why did Samson trade his great strength for the love of this woman he hardly knew? You know, isn't that the way it is with sin? This was not a decision Samson made overnight, was it? But rather, this all began with a long series of compromises with the word of God—each one led to another, and each compromise ultimately led to Samson's defeat. Samson had finally violated the only part of the Nazirite vow that he had not yet violated.

We find in **verse 21** that the Philistines seized Samson and gouged out his eyes. They brought him to Gaza (he had been there before—he had been there to visit the prostitute at the beginning of this chapter), they bound him with bronze chains, and they made him a grinder of grain in the prison. Twenty years earlier, Samson had burned their grain (by tying the torches between the foxes)—now he was grinding their grain. For more than 20 years, Samson's wandering eyes had gotten him in so much trouble—now those eyes are gone. Samson finally understood what King

Solomon would write many years later in **Proverbs 7:21-23**. Concerning the adulteress, King Solomon said, *"With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him. Suddenly he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it will cost him his life."* And with no more distractions, with time to think about his life, with time to think about God, we find in **verse 22** that Samson's hair starts growing again.

**VI. With that, we come to the last section in Samson's life as we consider SAMSON'S TRAGIC DOWNFALL. **

If you will, please look with me at what happens next—**Judges 16:23-31**...

<sup>23</sup> *Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands."* <sup>24</sup> *When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us."* <sup>25</sup> *It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us."* *So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.* <sup>26</sup> *Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them."* <sup>27</sup> *Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them.* <sup>28</sup> *Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."* <sup>29</sup> *Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left.* <sup>30</sup> *And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.* <sup>31</sup> *Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.*

As we look back at **verse 23**, we find that the top rulers Philistines were praising their pagan god, and yet it went beyond this, because we find that they were praising their god for giving Samson into their hands. In other words, the purpose of their ceremony was to say, **"Our god is better than your God!"** And as they worship their pagan god, the leaders of the Philistines call to have Samson brought out for

their entertainment. These people were amused by Samson's captivity, they were thrilled by Samson's blindness, and yet these very foolish people did not know that as they were mocking God, Samson was calling out for God's help. We notice the prayer that he offers in **verse 28**, ***"O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."*** Even here, we have the slightest bit of selfishness—asking God to be avenged for his two eyes. And yet it is interesting that (in contrast to the only other prayer he prayed in his life), at least he said ***"please."*** You might remember from the end of **Chapter 15** that he was basically yelling at God—demanding that God give him something to drink. But this prayer here at the end is different. It is significant that he uses (in this one very brief sentence) three different words for God—***"Yahweh,"*** God's personal and covenant name; ***"Adonai,"*** a term referring to the Lord's sovereignty over mankind; and ***"Elohim,"*** a word referring to God's great power. Samson finally understands that God is in charge, that God is the Lord. As far as I can tell, this is Samson's defining moment—this is the one act that put him in the great Hall of Faith in **Hebrews 11**.

And with that, Samson braces himself against the pillars and literally brings the house down, killing all of the Philistine leaders along with roughly 3,000 who were looking down from the roof. Earlier this week as I was reading through this account again, I laughed out loud when I realized what had happened here: At a point when things could not have looked worse for the Israelites, we find that the entire ruling class of the Philistines were wiped out by a blind man! Not only that, but their pagan god is apparently also buried in the rubble. God is so good! And this was a major setback for the Philistines—this was a turning point. From this point on, the Israelites start to gain the upper hand. Samson completes his mission as he, ***"...begin[s] to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."*** And again, we can hardly imagine what Samson could have done if he had only submitted himself to God twenty years sooner than he did. As it was, Samson accomplished more in his death than he did in his entire life. If he had only turned to God sooner, how differently things could have turned out! Let us not make the same mistake.

### **Conclusion:**

This morning we need to ask ourselves whether we are fulfilling God's mission, or are we being sidetracked by some kind of sin or distraction? If we are being pulled off the straight and narrow path, God would encourage us to turn away from sin, He would encourage us to ask for help. One thing I noticed about Samson's life is that he did everything alone. He never rallied an army, he never fought side-by-side with a friend, but Samson was out there on his own. Let us not make that mistake! We need each other. We need to get together to study, and sing, and pray.

But even if you are not yet a Christian, the amazing thing about this story is that God was there all the time. Here is a man who was blinded, and chained—he got there because he had rejected God—and yet when he turned back to God, God was still there! The Bible teaches that the Old Testament was written for our instruction, so that we can learn from it, so that we can be encouraged by it (**Romans 15:4**). Will we listen to the story of Samson? Will we learn to turn back to God sooner rather

than later, or will we turn away? As we learned in our Scripture reading this morning (**Hebrews 3:12-13**), ***“Take care, brethren, that there be not in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*** If you are ready to turn your life back toward God, the Bible teaches that we repent of our sins, we publicly confess our belief in Jesus as God’s Son, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you would like all of us to pray together about some kind of challenge in your life right now, you can write it down right now and pass it to the front. We’ll pray about it. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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