

Dark Times. Broken People. FAITHFUL KING.

Week 9

Judges 15-16

In the study of Samson, a man given to pride, impulsiveness, and rampant sensuality, we see God overruling his actions and using them to fulfill His Kingdom purposes. If only Samson had sought the counsel of the Lord and walked in obedience to it. His story would have been written differently!

Warren Wiersby notes:

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. 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" (Psalm 32:8-9, NKJV). If we're looking by faith into the face of the Lord, He can guide us with His eye, the way parents guide their children. But if we turn our backs on Him, he has to treat us like animals and harness us. Samson was either impetuously rushing ahead like the horse or stubbornly holding back like the mule, and God had to deal with him. (*Be Available*, p. 113).

I. Revenge – Judges 15:1-20

The previous chapter closed with the painful account of Samson's wedding feast with his Philistine bride. Samson, having returned home in a rage, did not actually consummate his marriage. Samson's anger cooled and he returned for his wife only to find she has been given to another man. Her father offered him the younger sister. Samson felt justified in his response. He burned their fields and devastated their food supply. In retaliation, the Philistines burned Samson's intended bride and her father for their role in Samson's treachery. Samson promised revenge. Acting alone, "he struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter" (Judges 15:8).

The Philistines sought after Samson who had retreated to Judah. Their retaliation threatened Israel who had neither weapons nor an army. The men of Judah gathered 3000 men to capture Samson (gives us some idea of Samson's strength) and turn him over to the Philistines. The men of Judah did not view Samson as a God-appointed deliverer (see Judges 13:5) but as a liability. This indicates the sad state of affairs within the nation of Israel. The only time during Samson's leadership the Jews mustered an army was to capture Samson and hand over their God-appointed leader to the enemy! They found him and bound him with new ropes. We can assume Samson complied to prevent Israelite deaths in the impending showdown. As they approached the Philistines camp, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him" (Judges 15:14), his bindings fell off and he singlehandedly killed 1000 men with "a fresh jawbone of a donkey" (Judges 15:15). Samson, the appointed judge of Israel, had now killed over 1000 Philistines, without in any way leading Israel towards freedom and obedience to the Lord. All of his actions against their collective enemy have been self-serving following his decision to have a Philistine bride.

Four times in the story of Samson we read “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him” (Judges 13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14). The Lord manifested His power in a unique way by giving Samson superhuman strength. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on men temporarily, enabling them to accomplish a specific task but not necessarily remaining indefinitely. After Pentecost (see Acts 1-2), all believers are indwelt by the person of the Holy Spirit. What a gift we have received!

God had placed Samson under a special set of regulations, including the provision that he “shall not go near to a dead person” (see Numbers 6:2-8). Some commentators think this included dead animals as well. Samson persisted in ignoring these rules. Nevertheless, our Faithful King fulfilled His purposes using Samson in spite of his faithlessness.

Exhausted and in need of refreshment, Samson prayed to the Lord for water. “God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it” (Judges 15:19). Samson “judged Israel for twenty years” (Judges 15:20; 16:31). If only Samson had beseeched the Lord as fervently to meet Israel’s spiritual needs as he did for his physical needs, God would have responded.

II. Revelry – Judges 16:21-22

Samson goes to Gaza, one of the five Philistine cities. He “saw a harlot there, and went in to her”(Judges 16:1).

Wiersbe writes:

It seems incredible to us that a servant of God (Judges 15:18), who did great works in the power of the Spirit, would visit a prostitute, but the record is here for all to read. The Lord certainly didn’t approve of such behavior, especially on the part of a Nazirite; and the experience was for Samson one more step down into darkness and destruction (*Be Available*, p. 119).

Samson repeatedly indulged “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16). Seemingly, he did not feel accountable to anyone and allowed his passions to rule his behavior. Hearing of his sexual liaison, the Philistines planned to ambush him when he left his tryst at daybreak. Prior to that time the city gates would be closed and bolted, making his departure impossible. Or so they thought! Samson, leaving at midnight, found the gates to the city locked. He ripped off the gates, posts, and bars and carried them away, some 40 miles.

The remainder of our story turns on the hinges of Judges 16:4. “After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek (enemy territory, my insert), whose name was Delilah.” It appears that each of the 5 major Philistine cities were willing to contribute 1100 pieces of silver, bringing the price of treachery to 55,000 pieces of silver for Delilah if she could get Samson to give up the secret of his strength. Delilah agreed to betray him. Delilah’s greed was only matched by Samson’s lustful desire for her. Three failed attempts to discover his secret left her frustrated, and Samson seemed to be oblivious to her treachery. “It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death” (Judges 16:16). Delilah nearly nagged

him to death, so to speak, so Samson caved and revealed his secret. This revelation, forced by his desire for a woman (it is possible she was withholding sexual favors because he would not tell her the secret), reveals his spiritual detachment from the God who had guarded and empowered him from his mother's womb. Samson awoke, not realizing his hair had been cut, and struggled against his captors "not knowing that the Lord had departed from him" (Judges 16:20). This indicates Samson had no intimate relationship with Him. He did not even recognize the departure of the Lord's presence! Samson was as weak as other men. Samson's strength was not directly tied to his long hair. Rather his hair was an outward symbol of his own submission to the Spirit of God. The Philistines seized him, gouged his eyes out, and put him to forced labor as "a grinder in the prison," a job typically reserved for women.

Wiersbe explains,

But there was one ray of light in the darkness: Samson's hair began to grow again. His power was not in his hair but in what his hair symbolized—his dedication to God. If Samson renewed that dedication, God might restore his power. I believe Samson talked to the Lord as he turned the millstone, confessing his sins and asking God for one last opportunity to defeat the enemy and glorify His name (*Be Available*, p. 124).

III. Restoration – Judges 16:23-31

A great feast was held to celebrate Samson's capture. Thousands gathered, including all the lords of the Philistines (see Judges 16:27). Samson's pathetic plight was being used to glorify Dagon, the Philistines' god of grain. The Philistines were in high spirits. Their god Dagon had triumphed over the Israelite's God Jehovah.

Samson, led by a young boy, was summoned from the prison to amuse the crowds. They thought Samson was harmless, but they did not factor in the depths of forgiveness offered by our FAITHFUL KING.

During a break in the entertainment, Samson asked his guide to position him between "the pillars on which the house rests" (Judges 16:26). Samson uttered his final prayer. In this brief prayer Samson referred to the Lord by three different names: Yahweh, Adonai, and Elohim. During his time in prison Samson had deepened his relationship with the Lord. The fact that God honored his prayer request indicates he has fully repented of his sins. Psalm. 66:18-20 says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear; but certainly, God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Blessed by God, who has not turned away my prayer nor His lovingkindness from me."

Samson's story highlights this truth. Regardless of the depths of our sins, God will respond, redeem and restore the contrite sinner who comes to Him in repentance and faith. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 2:9). Beloved, it is not too late to return to the Lord! Our God is a God of mercy, a God of forgiveness, the God of a second chance. Does that give us license (see Romans 6:1-2) to sin? Absolutely not! In fact, it should cause us to be all the more faithful to Jesus, our FAITHFUL KING!

Samson pressed hard against the uprights. The house fell killing a multitude of Philistines along with Samson.

Samson's life demonstrates the consequence of indulging the lusts of the flesh rather than crucifying the flesh and walking in the Spirit. Samson violated his Nazirite vows and flagrantly disobeyed many of the Lord's moral laws. Yet the Lord used him, at times overriding his shortcomings and sinful behavior, to begin the overthrow of the Philistines. However, his effectiveness was greatly diminished by his own sin and selfishness. Yet at the end of his life, Samson repented and turned back to the Lord. We can only ponder the impact his life would have had for the glory of God had he come to the place of repentance and surrender early on in his life.

The book of Judges is full of complicated men and women, most of whom have stories that are difficult to reconcile with what we know of the Lord. On this side of the cross, we have the benefit of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the full revelation of God's Word. We can see how God was working through the lives of His people, surrendered to Him or not, to display His faithfulness and accomplish His Kingdom purposes. As the Israelites approached the Promised Land Moses said, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and length of your days, that you may live in the land" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). So "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). As for me and my house, we have decided to serve the Lord! Hallelujah! What a Savior!