

Come Follow Me
An Elo Viz Production
Week 23
Judges 1-21

At the end of the Book of Joshua we see a change in how the Children of Israel are led. Joshua was their last central ruler. After he dies they divide up into their own tribes and we see rulers emerge from each tribe. Now when we hear the title “judges” we tend to think of courtrooms and juries, but these are not that kind of judges. Think of them more as special chosen men, and women that are called to do a great work among their people, blessed individuals. There are 13 of them, some believe there are 14 but we are going to stick with 13, 12 men and 1 woman.

The book of Judges covers a span of 350 years from the reign of Joshua to King Saul. Because the span of time is so great we see clearly the pattern of the pride cycle in the children of Israel. One great writer once said “The average age of the World's great civilizations is 200 years. They all follow the same sequence: Bondage to spiritual faith, faith to great Courage, to liberty then abundance, followed by leizur to selfishness, then Complacency to apathy, then they always come back around to dependence, weakness then again to bondage.” If we look closely we can see this pattern in our own lives as well, and only we are able to stop this cycle and keep ourselves humble and submissive to God.

This week I would like to focus on one specific judge and point out some of the lessons that we can learn from his life. It is the story of Samson. Such a blessed and amazingly gifted person that threw it all away because he couldn't quite conquer the demons that he was meant to face. And I'm not speaking of the Philistines, I'm referring to the demons inside of him.

His story starts in chapter 13 where his birth is foretold by an angel. He says to Samson's mother in verse 5:

“For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no [razor](#) shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to [deliver](#) Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”

There are some important things to point out in this verse. First off we see that the children of Israel are in the bondage phase of the cycle and they are starting to have faith in God again. We see this at times from Samson's parents. And secondly. Samson is to be a Nazarite from the womb for his whole life. This is a bit unusual. In ancient times Men of faith would take a vow, called the Vow of a nazarite. It would usually last for a short time, anywhere from 30 days to 3 months. Very few in history that we read about were life long Nazarites. Some believe that Jesus was, which is not Doctrinal. We know for sure that John the Baptist was. It was a vow that had 3 major parts, number one: they would not cut their hair, and at the end of their vow period they would shave their head and offer their hair as a sacrifice to God. It was a sign of willing humiliation. The second part was that they would abstain from any intoxicating drink. Meaning any fruit of the vine. No grapes, raisins, alcoholic drinks of any kind. This also meant, which is important to point out that they would not go near or into vineyards or any place where grapes were grown or harvested. And third, they were not to touch or come close to a dead corpse. This was especially hard during the death of a family member, where they would not

participate at all in any fashion with planning or preparing the funeral, or participate in any way the memorial for their loved ones. These were the main points of the nazirite vow. And Samson was to be a lifelong nazirite. The blessing that God gave him from taking this vow was that he would have superhuman strength. For example he kills 1000 philistines with the jaw bone from a donkey.

But Samson has a weakness, some would say that his weakness was Delila. I believe that his weakness was that he didn't recognize where his strength or power came from. This is the lesson we can learn from Samson's life.

Now, just to set the scene. The Children of Israel were commanded by God to go in and destroy the people that lived in the promised land. He warned them several times not to mingle or live with them, because he knew that if they did that their influence would cause the Children of Israel to fall back into their Idol worshiping ways and they would turn away from God. And of course they didn't listen. The tribe of Dan moved in right next to the Philistine people, less than 4 miles north from their city. Chapter 14 verse one starts our story:

“And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.”

Now, this may sound a little strange to us, but at that time arranged marriages were how people were married. But it was usually the parents that would arrange the marriage for their children, what is strange here is that Samson is demanding from his parents to arrange this marriage, and he couldn't care less about their council. In the next few verses we see how they feel about it.

“Then his father and his mother said unto him, *Is there* never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a [wife](#) of the [uncircumcised](#) Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.”

This was against everything that the children of Israel were supposed to do. And the only reason that he wanted to marry this woman was because of the way she looked. At this point he hadn't even talked to her. That comes in the next few verses when he actually starts to have a relationship with her. What is hard to rationalize in our minds is the next verse. This may leave you stretching your head: verse 4:

“But his father and his mother knew not that it *was* of the [Lord](#), that he sought an occasion against the Philistines”

What we learn from this is that the Lord does and will accomplish his own work in spite of us and our weaknesses. Here Samson is making a bad choice, but God is able to use that bad choice to bring about his will. Now if Samson were to make a good choice and God is still able

to bring about his work in another way. But it's important to understand that his work is never frustrated.

I believe that Samson could at any point chose a better path, but as we will see next he seems to turn away from those things that bring true joy and strength in to our lives. Verse 5:

“Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and *he had* nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.”

It seems that Samson and his parents went separate ways as they came near to Timnath, and instead of staying on the path did you notice where he went? Through a vineyard. This is not a place for a nazirite to be going. What I see happening here is the same thing that happens in all of our lives. We get off the path and do something that we shouldn't be doing or going to a place we shouldn't be going and something happens. In Samson's case a lion came upon him. In your case it could be anything; a flat tire, a spilled drink, maybe something worse, but something usually will happen. I love what happens next to Samson and the same thing can happen to you. “The spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him” and he defeated the Lion. When things happen in your life do we crumble and feel defeated or do we take strength from the Lord and Samson and defeat whatever it is that is happening to us. In the original Hebrew translation of this verse the word the Lion “roaring” against him is the same word used when it describes the spirit of the Lord coming upon him. I love that imagery of the adversary coming to get us and in the last minute the Lord sends his spirit instead and we are able to conquer the adversaries loin with nothing but our bare hands and the mighty spirit of the Lord, even when we have made a mistake or a mis step, He is still there to help and protect us.

But perhaps we can recognize the Lord's hand and repent and remain humble. Samson doesn't do that. He thinks it's his own power, and gives no credit to God. In fact he continues to make bad choices. First he travels through a vineyard breaking his nazirite vow, then he passes by the corpse of the lion on the way back and pulls honey out of the inside again breaking his vow, then he participates in the 7 day wedding feast; which in Hebrew means a drinking party. He is not taking any of his spiritual covenants seriously. So far he has broken 2 of the 3 nazirite vows and we all know that soon he will break the 3 vow and his hair will be cut releasing him from anything tying him to God and his power. Not to long later he dies with the philistines as a blind slave. But I hope you will notice something and you read this tragic story this week. You will never find Samson praying until the very end of his life when he finally realizes where he was getting his strength from the entire time. In chapter 16 when the philistines had taken everything away from him including his wife, his hair, his pride, and his eyes. He is chained between 2 pillars and at the very end his cries out in verse 28:

“And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.”

What a tragic ending, but it didn't have to be that way. God wanted Samson to slay the Philistines, he also wanted Samson to be happy and have a life filled with joy. God's work was accomplished, but Samson's choices led him to misery. Can you imagine how this story would have been different had Samson made better choices? How much stronger he could have become? What a special young man that wasted his talents on worldly lusts. I hope that doesn't happen to us. Maybe we are not called to have superhuman strength like Samson or called to perform mighty miracles like Moses and Joshua. But you have a calling, God has given you blessings and talents that you are asked to use to accomplish his work. I pray that you don't waste them, but use them for good. That you recognize the source of your power and you humbly give all praise and honor to Him. Stay in that zone, on that path and you will find that your enemies have no power over you. That you are in fact mighty even as Samson could have become. May God bless you in your quest.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.