

## **Judges 16:4-9, 15-31**

### **“Samson: Secret of His Strength”**

#### **Introduction**

Today we will focus on a warrior, or judge, named Samson. In a nutshell, there is no other person who is more unlike a prophet or other worker of God than him. He was the one who caused many problems between the Israelites and the Philistines that could have led to war. He is depicted as promiscuous and could be regarded as a sex addict.

Why did God choose this man, Samson, and appoint him as one who would accomplish His will? He was a special man, consecrated and dedicated to God from the time he was in his mother's womb. And the Holy Spirit was often poured out on this arrogant man. Why?

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<sup>4</sup> After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

<sup>5</sup> And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver.”

<sup>6</sup> So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you.”

<sup>7</sup> Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”

<sup>8</sup> Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

<sup>9</sup> Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

<sup>15</sup> And she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies.”

<sup>16</sup> And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.

<sup>17</sup> And he told her all his heart, and said to her, “A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.”

<sup>18</sup> When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up again, for he has told me all 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 she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.

<sup>20</sup> And 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 left him.

<sup>21</sup> And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

<sup>22</sup> But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

<sup>23</sup> Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.”

- <sup>24</sup> And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us."
- <sup>25</sup> And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars.
- <sup>26</sup> And Samson said to the young man who held him by the 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. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.
- <sup>28</sup> Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."
- <sup>29</sup> And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other.
- <sup>30</sup> And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.
- <sup>31</sup> Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

Let's begin by stating the three points of today's message. First, let's look at why Samson became a judge. What are the reasons God used Samson, a tyrant and sex addict. Second, let's look at the weaknesses and sins found in his life, for we too will fall away from God and rely on our own strength, which will lead to our destruction. Let us repent. Thirdly, let's look at the secret of Samson's true power. Many people would like to know the secret of his strength. We must humble ourselves before the God of grace and receive His strength!

### **1. The Meaning of Samson's Life**

According to the Bible, Samson was a "Nazirite" by birth. A Nazirite, when making a special vow, must not drink strong drink or wine, eat grapes or grape products, or shave his hair. They must also maintain their holiness by not touching a dead body (Numbers 6). Samson was actually made a Nazirite by God before he was born, meaning that he was dedicated to God for life.

Judges 13:5. ". . . for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

At that time, Israel was suffering at the hands of the Philistines, who were based in the coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea, and had been invading and controlling Israel for 40 years. Samson was appointed as a Nazirite to deliver Israel from the Philistines. The Lord blessed him, and it is written that the Spirit of the Lord was poured out on Samson (13:24-25).

However, his history with women is deplorable. He selfishly tells his parents that he wants to find a Philistine woman and marry her. In those days, Jews were supposed to marry Jews. It was not because of ethnic discrimination. It is because it is important for a couple to live together serving the Lord with the same faith and common fundamental values. This is where true peace, joy, and God's blessings come from.

Therefore, the Bible strongly teaches that Christians should marry Christians. Otherwise, your faith will surely be weakened and compromised, and the most important thing in your life will be something other than God. This is idolatry—even if that “something” is a thing that is good in this world.

Nevertheless, when Samson goes to Gaza, the capital of the Philistines in chapter 16, he sleeps with a prostitute (16:1-3). Then, he met a Philistine woman named Delilah and fell in love with her. For Samson, being loved and sexually satisfied by a woman seems to have been a source of joy, security, and confidence.

As evidence of this, when Samson meets a woman, he shows off his power by getting into a fight with the Philistines. When he meets the woman of Timnah, he strikes down the inhabitants of Ashkelon (14:19), binds two jackals by their tails with torches, and burns the Philistine fields (15:4-5). He also killed 1,000 Philistines in the town of Lehi with the jawbone of a donkey (15:14-20).

Samson's history with women and his inclination towards violence is very unlike a holy Nazirite dedicated to God. However, the Bible says in Judges 14:4.

14:4. His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

Samson's troubling behavior led to bickering and skirmishes between Israel and the Philistines. However, even this was the will of the Lord. How could that be? For example, in chapter 14, when Samson wanted to take the Philistine woman of Timnah as his wife, he made a feast and invited Philistine guests. The Philistines and Israel had become close in their relationship of domination and submission.

Also, in chapter 15, Samson burned the fields of the Philistines, so they in turn, attacked the Jews. Samson's fellow Jews bound him and presented him to the Philistines, saying,

15:11. Then, 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?”

In other words, the Israelites were willing to be dominated by the Philistines. They found their peace there, and as a result, they compromised and merged with Philistine religion, politics, economy, and culture. In doing so, Israel left God. They forgot God and worshipped the idols, the false gods of the Philistines. They lost their unique identity as God's people and forgot God's grace.

Therefore, God wanted to shake and move Samson by the Holy Spirit to create problems and separate Israel from the Philistines. This was the key purpose and meaning of Samson's life.

## **2. Samson's Success and Destruction**

However, Samson can't find even the slightest hint of faith to seek the will of God. In fact, he is full of self-confidence. According to the first verses that we read today from chapter 16, it seems that he went into the middle of the Philistine region. He found a woman named Delilah and lived with her. And yet, Delilah was planning to learn the secret of his strength and tip off the Philistine leaders.

Whenever Samson was asked by Delilah about the secret of his power, he would lie to her, but every time he did, the Philistines would come at him again and again. No matter how insensitive he was, surely it was obvious to him that he was in danger.

Indeed, Samson had been a successful savior, defeating the Philistines time and again through the power God had given him. But, he turned this into confidence in his own power and became more and more confident that he could overcome the greater danger that was coming his way. So, even though Delilah's snitching incidents were repeated over and over again, he never became cautious. Each success brought him more joy, satisfaction and confidence.

This is a true story from the "bubble era" here in Japan. A certain man worked for a major construction company. The more he worked, the more he earned. He was blessed with trips abroad, a house of his own, and marriage. He lived a life of smooth sailing, full of joy and satisfaction. He even stayed at the office to finish jobs that were beyond his power. In doing so, he earned even more money. But in the end, all that money, success, and satisfaction finally led him to develop severe depression.

Ironically, Samson forgot all about God, the very source of his power and success. This is where we find the pattern of sin. In other words, in the very power, success, and gifts that God has given us, we turn away from God and use them against Him. When we succeed, we have joy and satisfaction, so we think, "I can do this," and God becomes irrelevant. In order to obtain greater joy and satisfaction, we take on more and more dangerous challenges.

Therefore, what the story of Samson makes clear is that a sinful heart that is separated from God will bring destruction to itself through success. Delilah's persistent begging caused Samson to lose his patience, and he finally revealed the secret of his power and was captured by the Philistines.

The amazing thing was that Samson stayed with Delilah despite the fact that she had revealed his secret. He wanted love and sex in spite of the danger. If he stayed with Delilah, he would be in danger, but, at the same time, he would be able to enjoy the thrill of success and satisfaction (love).

Perhaps Samson and Delilah had a codependent relationship. Each was using the other to get what they wanted. A true love relationship is one in which you give yourself to love the other person and help and serve them in their growth and maturity. But, in a codependent relationship, the two people can never leave each other because they seem to be able to get what they want, even though it is dangerous and could lead to their destruction.

It seems all that Delilah wanted was wealth and fame. The Philistine leaders promised her a lot of money. Delilah was a prisoner of money and fame. (She could be Jeanne d'Arc, the woman who rescued the Philistines from Samson!) Both Samson and Delilah were rather passionate, but in the end, it was all for their own betterment, strength and satisfaction.

Like Samson and Delilah, we have a tendency to seek out marriage partners and friends in order to achieve our own success and satisfaction and to enhance our self-image. We do this to get what we need and to have the life we want. The only solution to

overcoming this pride and self-centeredness is to realize that only God can fulfill what you are looking for. And, God has already provided it through Christ!

### **3. The Secret of Samson's Strength**

It was not until Samson was captured by the Philistines and defeated by having his eyes gouged out that he realized where his strength came from. It is not until we make mistakes, fail, and experience our own helplessness that we are willing to admit that we have been protected and helped by God's grace and mercy.

Samson was a Nazirite by birth, but he did not believe that his strength came from his faith as a Nazirite. In celebrating with the Philistines, he disregarded the Nazirite vow not to drink wine or strong drink. Even though he was asleep, and his hair was cut by Delilah, he assumed that he would still have the power that he always had. There is one scripture in particular I want you to focus on.

16:20. And 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 left him.

"He did not know that the Lord had left him." It doesn't say that he "lost his strength." It says, the Lord had left Samson. You may have different abilities, gifts, and strengths. There is only one way for those strengths and gifts to work in a healthy and wonderful way. It's the result of an inner condition, so to speak, a relationship with God in the heart.

All of your gifts and abilities come from God. Therefore, God's power only works abundantly through us when we love, trust, and serve Him. Otherwise, like Samson, we will use our strengths, gifts, and abilities only for ourselves. They will cause us to forget God. And, they will destroy us.

But while Samson was defeated and in prison, his hair began to grow again. This is an amazing display of God's grace. Despite Samson's disobedience and lack of faith, God had not forgotten His promised grace, the promise that Samson would be "a Nazirite dedicated to God until the day of his death." Samson threw it away, but God did not. This is grace.

If you look at the story of Samson, you will see that he only prayed twice. The first time was when he beat 1,000 Philistines to death in the city of Lehi, and he asked for prayer because he was dying of thirst. The second time was when he was defeated by the Philistines and forced into slavery, during which time his hair grew long and he was taken to the temple and made a spectacle of.

16:28. Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."

I believe this was the first time that Samson exercised faith. He learned to trust God's grace. And he repented. He humbled himself before the Almighty God and prayed, asking not in his own strength, but in the grace of God.

He found a new identity. Because of his identity as a child of God, he received God's promises and love, and he was transformed into one who used his strength to thank God and bless others. In Hebrews 11:32-34, Samson is portrayed as a man of faith who was

“made strong out of weakness.” For the power of God works in those who humble themselves and trust the Lord and not their own strength.

Samson's death points to the death of Jesus. Because of his obedience to God, Jesus brought salvation through his death. On the cross, Jesus broke the power of idolatry and success that we rely on. Just as Samson gave his life to show his obedience to God, Jesus revealed his trust in the Father and his eternal love for us on the cross. Don't hesitate! Today, replace the craving for power and success to which you are prone, with trust in and love for the grace of Jesus.