

Samson, A Strong Man Against the Philistines

(Judges 13-16)

By

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When you think of strong men in the Bible, who do you think of? Why Samson, of course! Now, I've talked about Samson before, haven't I? Yes, that was when I told you about some other judges, about Ehud and Deborah and Gideon. But the Bible tells more about Samson than I told you then. That would have made it way too long! So I thought it would be fun today to go over that exciting, true story of Samson again and tell you the parts that I'd left out before.

But in a way, the story of Samson is sort of hard to tell to children, because sometimes Samson sounds spoiled, selfish, and proud, and he wanted to get even with people. And that's not a good way to be, is it? So we don't want to be like Samson in those ways, do we?! But God used Samson with all of Samson's faults to carry out God's plans. Also, the Bible says that Samson had faith in God, at least in some of the things he did. And having faith in God is good. We should always have faith, trust God in everything we do. But let's now look at the story of Samson, okay?

All right, then. We find the story of Samson in the book of Judges in the Old Testament part of the Bible. It takes place after the children of Israel (that's the Jews) had left Egypt, then wandered in the wilderness for 40 years with the Lord leading them, and then had conquered the land of Canaan and were settled down there. And this was before the Jews had a man for a king; the Lord was their King. But the children of Israel would forget about the Lord who had taken such good care of them and would worship idols. (Can you imagine that?!) Then the Lord would send an enemy to bother them so that they would remember that only the Lord is God, that idols can't help them, and that they should only worship the Lord God. Then after a while the children of Israel would be sorry for worshipping idols, and they would pray to the Lord to help them. So then the Lord would send a judge to lead them in driving out their enemies.

Well, at the time of the story of Samson, the children of Israel were worshipping idols again. So to get the Jews to think about Himself, the only real God, again, the Lord had the Philistines come and conquer the Jews and rule over them. The Philistines were very wicked people. They didn't worship God; they worshipped idols and did other terrible things. And the Philistines were ruling over the children of Israel at the time of Samson. So now let's talk about Samson.

The story of Samson starts with his father and mother. We aren't told his mother's name, but his father's name was Manoah. Well, before Samson was born, Manoah and his wife didn't have any children at all, though, of course, they wanted some. But one day the angel of the Lord came to Manoah's wife. The angel of the Lord said to her, "You haven't been able to have any babies, but you're going to have a son. And you are to do what I'm going to tell you."

The angel of the Lord kept on talking to her and said, "Don't drink any wine or alcohol and don't eat anything unclean. When you have this son, you aren't to cut his hair, either. He is going to

be special, a Nazarite from even before he's born. And he's going to begin to deliver, to save, the children of Israel from the Philistines."

Now why is the angel of the Lord telling Manoah's wife not to do these things? And what does that mean about being a Nazarite? What is this all about?

Well, the rules that the angel was giving her meant something. You see, a long time before this, the Lord had told the Jews that if any of them wanted to make a special kind of promise to God, they could take a vow, make a promise, and then they were not to do certain things until they had kept that promise. This was called a Nazarite vow.

"Nazarite" means to be separate. If they took a Nazarite vow, they were to make themselves sort of separate from other people by not doing certain things; they weren't to be like everyone else during the time that they were keeping their promise, their Nazarite vow, to God. What were these things? Well, during the time that they were under their Nazarite vow they weren't to eat anything from the grape vine (no grapes or raisins or wine or wine vinegar). They weren't to drink any alcohol. They weren't to touch anything that was dead. And they weren't to cut their hair. They weren't to do these things until they had finished doing whatever they'd promised the Lord that they were going to do. (Now, there is nothing wrong with grapes or raisins, is there? This just happened to be one of the rules God had made for anyone during the time they were keeping a special promise, a Nazarite vow, to the Lord.)

Usually a Nazarite vow was only taken for a short time. But here the angel is telling Manoah and his wife that their baby was going to be under a Nazarite vow all of his life. He was going to be special, and, as the angel had told the woman, their son was going to start delivering the Jews from the Philistines who were then ruling them. So now let's go on with the story.

Well, that was good news that the angel had given Manoah's wife, wasn't it?! They would have a baby! So Manoah's wife went to Manoah and said to him, "A man of God came to me! He looked like an angel of God; it was scary! But I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name."

It sounds as if she didn't know it had been an angel, doesn't it? It sounds as if she thought he were just a man who was a prophet of God.

Then Manoah's wife told Manoah, "But he told me that I'm going to have a baby boy! And he told me not to drink any wine or alcohol nor to eat anything that was unclean, because our baby will be a Nazarite to God all of his life."

Well, Manoah then prayed to God. He prayed and said, "O my Lord, please let the man of God that you sent come again to us and teach us how to raise this child that we're going to have."

And God listened to Manoah's prayer, so the angel of God came to Manoah's wife again. She was out sitting in the field. And again Manoah, her husband, wasn't with her. So she got up

right away and ran and told her husband, "The man has come again, that same man who came to me the other day!"

Then Manoah got up and followed his wife back to where the angel was. And Manoah said to him, "Are you the same man who talked to my wife before?" It sounds as though Manoah thought the angel was just a man who was a prophet, too, doesn't it?

And the angel said, "Yes, I am."

Then Manoah said, "Oh, I hope what you've said will really happen!" He meant that he hoped they'd really have a son.

Then Manoah asked the angel, "How shall we raise this child?"

The angel of the Lord answered Manoah and said, "Just have your wife do everything I told her before. She must not eat anything from the grape vine nor drink wine nor strong drink nor eat anything unclean. Let her do everything I told her to do."

Then Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "Please stay here a while until I get some meat ready for you."

The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Even if you have me stay, I will not eat your food, and if you are going to offer a sacrifice, you must offer it to the Lord." You see, Manoah still didn't know this was an angel!

Then Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "What is your name. Tell us, so that when we what you promised happens, we can honor you."

But the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Why do you ask my name? It is a secret."

Then Manoah took some meat and some bread, and he put them on a rock and he burned them as an offering to the Lord. And what do you think the angel did as Manoah and his wife were watching? Why, as the flames of the fire of the offering were going up toward the sky, the angel of the Lord went up toward heaven in the fire! And they didn't see the angel of the Lord again!

Then Manoah and his wife were scared! They fell on their faces to the ground. They knew then that this hadn't been just a man; they knew he had been the angel of the Lord! And Manoah was sure they were going to die. He said, "We're surely going to die, because we have seen God!"

But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had wanted to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted our offering. Besides, He wouldn't have told us what was going to happen to us." She meant about having the baby boy. After all, if they died then, they wouldn't be able to have a baby as the angel of the Lord had promised them, would they?!

Well, after a while, Manoah and his wife had a baby boy just as the angel had told them. I know they must have been very happy! They named their baby Samson. (In their language, "Samson" means "sunlight".) And the Lord blessed Samson as he grew up, and the Lord made Samson to be very strong.

Now, even though the Philistines were ruling the Jews there at that time, it seems that the Jews would sometimes go into the Philistine towns. And one day when Samson was grown up into a man, Samson went down to a Philistine town. And there Samson saw a Philistine woman, and he liked her. Samson wanted to marry her, so he went back home and told his father and mother, "I've seen a Philistine woman. So now get her for me so I can marry her."

You see, in those days usually the parents would arrange the marriages. But Samson's parents didn't like this, and they said to Samson, "Aren't there any Jewish women? Why do you need to marry a Philistine?" (Remember, the Philistines worshipped idols instead of the Lord God.)

But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. I really like her."

Now, what Samson's father and mother and even Samson didn't know was that this was a plan that the Lord had. The Lord was going to have something happen that would make Samson start making the Philistines not so strong. Remember, the angel has told Samson's mother that Samson would begin to deliver, to save, the children of Israel (the Jews) from the Philistines. (Of course, it would have been better if Samson had just trusted the Lord and delivered the children of Israel instead of being pushed into it when he was doing something wrong, wouldn't it?!)

Anyway, so then Samson and his father and mother started walking back to the Philistine town to arrange for Samson to marry the Philistine woman.

But on the way there as they were walking, evidently Samson wasn't right with his parents. And a young lion attacked Samson! But the Spirit of the Lord came very strongly on Samson, and he just grabbed the lion with his hands and killed it by tearing it apart! But his father and mother didn't know about this.

Well, they went on to the town, and Samson talked with the Philistine woman, and he really liked her, so they arranged for a wedding and then went back home.

When it was time for the wedding, they were going back to the Philistine town. When they came to the place where he'd killed the lion, Samson went over and looked at it. And what do you think was there? Why, a swarm of bees had made a hive in the dead lion's body and had made honey there! Samson took some of the honey in his hands (I'll bet that was sticky!) and he ate it. He also caught up with his father and mother and gave them some of the honey, too. But he didn't tell them that he'd gotten it from a bee hive in the body of the dead lion!

Well, the wedding day came. But in those days a wedding wasn't just for one day; it would be for several days. The bridegroom (that would be Samson in this case) would throw big parties

for the men who were going to be with him at the wedding. And the bride's parents had chosen 30 young Philistine men to be with Samson.

On the first day, Samson said to the 30 young Philistine men, "I have a riddle for you. If you can guess the answer to the riddle, I will give each of you some clothes. But if you can't guess the answer to my riddle in 7 days, then you will each have to give me some clothes."

Clothes were a good gift then. After all, they didn't have stores then as we do now, so they couldn't just go and buy some clothes. They had to make them all by hand.

So the 30 young Philistine men said, "Tell us your riddle."

So he did. And this was Samson's riddle. He said, "Out of the eater came food, and of the strong came sweetness."

Now, you can guess the answer to this riddle can't you?! Yes, Samson was making a riddle out of the lion he had killed. Samson was saying that honey had been gotten from the lion, wasn't he? After all, a lion eats other animals and a lion is strong. And honey is sweet food.

But, of course, the 30 young Philistine men wouldn't know about the dead lion with the bee hive in it, would they? And the 30 young Philistine men couldn't guess the answer to the riddle, and that made them mad. They didn't want to have Samson win the riddle game! And they probably didn't want to have to give him any clothes, either!

So what do you think these men did about it? Why, they got hold of the Philistine woman, Samson's wife, and told her, "You find out the answer to the riddle from your husband, or we will kill you and your family." Wow! The Philistines were not very nice people, were they?!

Well, then Samson's wife begged Samson to tell her the answer, and she cried and cried. She said to Samson, "You don't love me! You told my people a riddle, and you didn't even tell me the answer!" Of course, she was trying to save her life and to save her family's life, but Samson didn't know that. (I think she should have told Samson what was happening; after all, he was her husband then.)

So Samson said to her, "Look, I haven't even told my father or mother. Why should I tell you the answer?"

But for all 7 of the days of the feasting for the wedding she kept crying and asking him to tell her the answer. Finally he got so tired of her crying that he told her the answer to the riddle -- and then, of course, she told the Philistine men.

So then on the last day of the feasting the young Philistine men said to Samson, "What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?" They had the answer, didn't they?!

Well, Samson knew that they must have gotten the answer to the riddle from his wife. They had cheated! And now he had to get 30 changes of clothes for these cheating men, didn't he?! And Samson was angry!

Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Samson again, making him extra strong, and he went down to another Philistine city, and he killed 30 Philistine men and took their clothes and went back and gave the clothes to the 30 young men who had answered his riddle! And he was so mad that he just went back to his father's house and left his wife at her father's house!

And what do you think her father did then? Why he had Samson's wife marry one of the 30 young Philistine men who had cheated Samson! But Samson didn't know this.

Well, a while later Samson decided to go back and see his wife and try to make up with her. So he went there, and he said to her father, "I will see my wife now."

Then the father said to Samson, "Oh, I thought you didn't want her anymore, so I had her marry someone else. But you can marry her younger sister. Why, she's even prettier! Please marry her instead."

Well, Samson was really mad now! (Of course, now, he wouldn't have been having all this trouble if he'd married a nice Jewish girl instead of an idol-worshipping Philistine girl, would he?!) Anyway, it was wheat harvest time then. And Samson went out, and he caught 300 foxes and tied them together by their tails, two at a time, tail to tail. Then Samson took 150 torches, and he tied a torch to the tails of each of the pairs of foxes. Then Samson turned the foxes loose in the fields of the Philistines. And the foxes ran and ran. Now what do you think would happen as those foxes with the burning torches tied to their tails ran through the fields? That's right! The torches set everything on fire! The crops in the fields, and the vineyards where the grapes grew, and the olive trees all burned.

Of course, the Philistines didn't like this at all! And when the Philistines found out that it was Samson who had done this, they killed Samson's wife and her father. (I told you the Philistines were wicked people!)

Well, that made Samson mad again. He said, "Because you've done this, I will take my vengeance one more time, then I'll stop."

So Samson went out and killed a whole bunch of Philistines. Then he went up on top of a big rock or hill.

Well, then the Philistines took their army and went into the Jewish part of the country called Judah. But the men of Judah said to them, "Why have you brought your army out like this?"

The Philistines answered, "Because we want to tie up Samson and do to him what he's done to us."

So then 3000 Jews, men of Judah, went up to where Samson was and said to him, "Don't you know that the Philistines are our rulers? What have you done to us?" You see, they were afraid the Philistines would get mad at all of them.

Samson said to the men of Judah, "I just did to them what they did to me."

Then the other Jews said to Samson, "We've come here to tie you up and give you to the Philistines."

After all, they didn't want to get in trouble with the powerful Philistines who were ruling them.

Samson said to the men of Judah, "Just promise me that you won't kill me yourselves."

So they said to Samson, "All right. But we will tie you up carefully, and then we'll give you to them. But we promise we won't kill you."

They had two new ropes with them. (New ropes would be stronger than old ropes.) And they tied Samson with these ropes. Then they brought Samson down from the top of the big rock and took him to where the Philistine army was camped.

Well! When the Philistine army saw Samson, they shouted out against Samson! But what do you think happened then? Why, the Spirit of the Lord came greatly upon Samson and gave him extra strength again. And Samson just broke those strong new ropes as if they had been threads! So he was loose! And he saw a fresh jawbone from a dead donkey. Samson grabbed that bone and began killing the Philistines soldiers with it! He killed 1000 of those wicked Philistines with that jawbone!

Samson was doing as God had said he would do before he was born, wasn't he? He was beginning to deliver the children of Israel from the wicked Philistines by killing lots of their army.

And when he was finished killing them, he threw the jawbone away.

Well, then Samson was very thirsty. And he prayed to the Lord, saying, "You have made it so I could do all of this. But now am I going to die of thirst and the Philistines get me?"

So God did a miracle and made water come out of a hole that was there (Now, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the Hebrew word that is used here is a little confusing. So I'm not sure whether it was the hole that the water came out of was a hole in the donkey's jawbone or whether it was a hole that was in a rock that was there. But whichever it was, it was a miracle!) Anyway, Samson drank the water that God had made come for him, and he felt better. And the Bible tells us that Samson was a judge, a leader, of the Jews for 20 years. But that isn't the end of the story of Samson, so let's go on.

Well, it seems that Samson hadn't learned his lesson about Philistine women! And one day Samson went to another Philistine city and went to visit a Philistine woman there.

Well, someone told the Philistine men in the city that Samson was there. So they surrounded the place and then waited by the gate of the city. They said, "We'll wait here and then in the morning when he tries to get out of the city, we'll kill Samson." You see, in those days many cities had big walls around them to protect them from their enemies. The only way people could get in or out of the city was to go through the gate that was in the wall.

But in the middle of the night Samson got up and went out to the gate. Of course, it would be closed and probably locked some way. Now, for some reason the men didn't see him. Maybe they were sleeping and just waiting for morning. The Bible doesn't say. Anyway, Samson went up to the big city gate, and what do you think he did? Why, Samson took down the doors of the city gate, and he took the two posts that were attached to the gate, and he put all of this on his shoulders! Then Samson carried that heavy gate and posts about 35 miles away and left them up on the top of a hill there by the Jewish city of Hebron! Wow! I'll bet the Philistines were embarrassed when they saw their city gate was completely gone!! And they'd have to go to a Jewish city to get it all back!

Later Samson fell in love with another Philistine woman. Her name was Delilah. Then the leaders of the Philistines went to Delilah and said to her, "Some way get Samson to tell you why he is so strong and how we can take his strength away from him. We want to capture him. If you do, we'll give you a lot of money."

So Delilah decided to do that. She said to Samson, "Please tell me why you are so strong and how you could be tied up and not be able to get away."

Well, you'd think that Samson would have had sense enough to go away and not see Delilah anymore, wouldn't you?! But he liked her, so he told her a lie. He said, "If I were tied up with 7 thin ropes that aren't dry yet, then I would be weak and be like any other man."

So the Philistine leaders brought Delilah 7 fresh, thin ropes. Then the men hid in another room. Then when Samson was with her, Delilah tied him up with these ropes and said, "Samson! The Philistines are here to get you!"

Well, of course, Samson just broke the ropes as if they had been threads. Then Delilah said to Samson, "Look, you're making fun of me and lied to me! Now please tell me how you could be tied up and not be able to get away."

And Samson lied to her again. He said, "If they tied me up with new ropes that had never been used for anything before, then I would be weak and be like other men."

So again some Philistines hid in another room, and Delilah took new ropes and tied him up and then said to him, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Well, again, Samson broke the ropes just

like they'd only been threads.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "You keep making fun of me and lying to me! Tell me how you could be tied up and not be able to get away."

Now, remember, the angel of the Lord had told Samson's mother that he was never to have his hair cut; he was to be a Nazarite. So Samson had very long hair. And he had it fixed some way into 7 long locks of hair. I don't know if it were braided or just what. We aren't told. Anyway, this time Samson said to Delilah, "If you were to take a loom and then weave the 7 locks of my hair into the loom, that would do it."

So one day when Samson was with Delilah, he fell asleep. And Delilah took a loom and wove Samson's hair into the loom and fastened it in the loom. Then she said, "Samson! The Philistines are here to get you!" Samson woke up and jumped up and started to go away with the whole loom attached to his hair!

Then Delilah said to Samson, "How can you say you love me? You've made fun of me 3 times and haven't told me why you are so strong!"

You'd think that Samson would be suspicious of Delilah by now, wouldn't you?! But he wasn't. Instead, he'd visit her all the time. And Delilah kept nagging at Samson every day, until finally he was sick and tired of it. So finally he told her the truth. Samson said to Delilah, "I've never had my hair cut, because I have been a Nazarite to God from the time I was born. If my hair were all cut off and my head shaved, then I wouldn't be strong anymore. I'd be weak and be like any other man."

Well, this time Delilah realized that Samson had told her the truth. So she sent for the leaders of the Philistines saying, "Come up one more time, for he's really told me the truth."

Then the leaders of the Philistines came to her and brought the money with them. And when Samson was with her, Delilah got him to go to sleep with his head in her lap, and then she called for a man and had him shave off Samson's seven locks of hair. Then Delilah said, "Samson! The Philistines are here to get you!" And Samson woke up and he said, "I'll do like I did the other times." You see, he didn't know that the Lord had taken his great strength from him. Samson didn't know that he wasn't strong anymore.

Now, of course, the long hair wasn't by itself what made Samson strong. He was strong because the Lord had made him strong, wasn't He? But the Lord had said that Samson was to do certain things, and one of the things was to not cut his hair. For some reason God made it so that Samson's hair had something to do with his strength.

But this time, since Samson's hair had been all cut off, when Samson got up, the Philistines were able to capture him. They took Samson and made him blind and tied him up with chains and put him in prison and made him grind grain.

Well, after a while Samson's hair began growing again, but the Philistines didn't think about that. And one day the leaders of the Philistines decided to have a big sacrifice to their false god to celebrate that they'd captured Samson. Thousands of Philistines came, and they praised their false god and said, "Our god let us capture Samson! He was our enemy and ruined our country and killed lots of us." (Of course, a false god isn't real, is it? So a false god couldn't do anything, could it?!)

The place where this celebration was taking place was very big and was probably the temple of their false god. The whole building was full of Philistines. And all of the leaders of the Philistines were there, too. The building also had a flat roof on it where there were 3000 more Philistines, both men and women. They could look down from the roof and see everything that happened.

Well, the Philistines decided as part of their celebration to have Samson brought out of the prison so they could make fun of him. And all of them in the building and all of them on the roof of the building would be able to watch while Samson was being made fun of.

So poor, blind Samson was taken out of prison, and a boy led Samson by the hand into the temple of their false god, and they had him stand between the pillars that held the building up. And all those thousands of Philistines had fun watching as Samson was being made fun of.

Then Samson said to the boy, "Please let me feel the pillars of the building so I may lean on them." And he did.

Then Samson prayed to God. He said, "O Lord God, please remember me and make me strong again just one more time so that I can get even with the Philistines for making me blind."

Then Samson took hold of the two pillars and prayed again, "And let me die with the Philistines."

Then Samson used all of his strength that God had given him, using it on those pillars -- and what do you think happened? Why, the pillars fell down! And the whole temple of this false god fell down! And it fell onto all of the Philistines and the Philistine leaders. And it killed all those thousands of Philistines who had been making fun of Samson. In fact, Samson killed more of the Philistines when the building fell down than he had ever killed before in his whole life.

And Samson died there, too. And Samson's family came then and took his body home and buried him.

Now, at first it may not sound good to us that Samson had killed so many Philistines. But, remember, the Philistines were the enemies of the Lord God. The Philistines were also the enemies of the Lord's special people, the children of Israel (the Jews). And the Philistines worshipped idols and were very wicked to people, too. And the Philistines had conquered the children of Israel and were ruling over them. And remember, that the Lord had told Samson's mother that her baby would

grow up and begin delivering the children of Israel from the Philistines who were ruling them. And when so many of the wicked Philistines died and their leaders died, this made the Philistines not so strong. So in this way Samson had begun delivering, saving, the Jews from their enemies, the Philistines.

Now, at least at first Samson was a proud man, and he was selfish, and he didn't respect what his parents wanted (they wanted him to marry a Jewish girl and stay away from the Philistines who worshipped idols), and he wanted to get even with his enemies. These things brought a lot of trouble for Samson, didn't they? But the Lord was able to use Samson's faults to carry out His plans. Now, we shouldn't have those faults, should we? No, we shouldn't be selfish or proud, and we shouldn't try to get even with people ourselves. (God tells us in the Bible that He will get even for us.) The Lord doesn't like those things. Instead, we should trust the Lord and follow God, and He can use us in good ways to carry out His plans. Now, God did use Samson in a great way. But it would have been better for Samson if instead of doing things he shouldn't have done (like wanting to marry a woman who worshipped idols), if he had just trusted the Lord and followed Him in carrying out God's plans, wouldn't it?

But we did see from the story of Samson that Samson did sometimes have faith in God. In fact, in the New Testament Samson is listed along with Abraham, Moses, and David as an example of men whom God had used for His purposes because of their faith in God. So Samson had something that we should have. Samson had faith in God.

Yes, we should have faith in God. And the Lord God has plans for us, too, and for the world. And God can use both good and bad people to carry out His plans. In fact, God's greatest plan was carried out by bad people. What do I mean by that? Well, remember, God loves us so much that Jesus (the Son of God) came to earth as a human to make a way for us to be able to go be with God some day. And how did Jesus do that? Yes, by allowing bad people to put Him on the cross so He could die for our sins. (Of course, they didn't know that they were carrying out the Lord's plan.)

But did Jesus stay dead? No! Of course not! Three days later Jesus was alive again. And lots of people saw Him alive. Then after 40 days Jesus went back up to heaven where He is still alive. And the Bible tells us that if we trust Jesus to forgive our sins, He will. He will save us; He will deliver us from our sins. Then He will be our King, and someday we can go be with Jesus. And we know that God always keeps His promises, don't we?!

Yes, God uses both good and bad people to work out His plans -- but it's better if we are the good people, isn't it? So we should trust God and follow Him. I hope you enjoyed hearing about Samson today. Did you?