

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

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What does the Old Testament have to do with us today? A lot of people believe it really has little or no relevance to Christians living today, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. Because we have access to the Old Testament, there is much we can learn. For example, from today's passage we can learn the following:

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When is roadkill not only disgusting to look at, but a major spiritual problem?

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Should a believer ever have to worry about putting raisins on their Grape Nuts cereal?

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Moms, when is it a spiritual disaster for you to trim your split ends?

Believe it or not, this passage will speak to all these highly relevant and current concerns

Many also want to know why the Bible is mostly stories. Why is so much space given to the failures and successes of individuals, especially the people of Israel? The answer is, because their lives are examples to us. There are two ways to learn:

1.

From your own experiences and failures, and

2.

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

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From the experiences and failures of others.

Old Testament characters are helpful because they illustrate principles and lessons found in the New Testament as well as providing examples for our lives today.

1 Cor. 10—1] "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2] They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3] They all ate the same spiritual food 4] and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5] Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. 6] Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7] Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." 8] We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9] We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. 10] And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. 11] These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. 12] So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13] No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Why did the stories of Israel's history get written down? From this passage we see at least three reasons:

1.

Examples--". . .to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . ."--vv. 6, 11

2.

Warning--". . . if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!--v. 12

3.

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

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Reminder that no temptation will be too much for us to bear---v. 13

In addition to the warnings, examples and reminders passed on through the stories, there are other reasons for narratives/stories throughout Scripture, e.g., even in the N.T.

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We are more likely to remember a story than a list of rules or precepts.

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Stories are also a wonderful way to pass on the memories, the values, the principles and the perspectives from one generation to another.

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Human history illustrates how truth, commandments and teachings can be lived out.

With my dad, I am learning to listen to the stories without saying, "I've heard that before," because it's a way to honor him and participate in the transfer of the Stone legacy to the next generation. Families have stories that must be passed on in order to give them a sense of identity, and that they might benefit from the mistakes and failures of previous generations. The same is true of believers.

We have a legacy of stories from our own lives—as well as in the Bible—that are wonderful treasures to be passed on to each succeeding generation. We will be impoverished indeed if we don't take advantage of what previous generations of believers have learned.

Take the book of Judges, for instance. We can learn a great deal by carefully investigating all the judges' lives—especially Samson's. Unfortunately, not all the lessons are positive; Samson's life was largely a failure, but those failures are very instructional to us. Though

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

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Samson was not a consistent model, he was a significant one. More space in the book of Judges is given to his life than to that of any other judge.

What can we learn from Samson? His life illustrates a principle seen throughout Scripture and in our lives, too: if there is an area in our life where we continually resist the lordship of Christ, other areas in our life will begin to fall under the dominion of the sinful nature too. If God is speaking to us about a resentful spirit, an unforgiving heart, lustful thoughts or inappropriate relationships, and we are unwilling to deal with them, we will find ourselves falling back into the sins and habits from which we had been delivered. Once we allow ourselves an area of weakness we won't deal with, other areas that are no longer a problem will also be affected.

Samson's life is a clear illustration of this principle. He had one area of sin he would not deal with, and the result opened up the doors to other problems.

One author has said, "No hero casts such a long and impressive shadow as Samson. His able-to-leap-tall-buildings-in-a-single-bound resume reads like Superman's: killed a lion with his bare hands... slaughtered thirty Philistines who had plotted against him... defeated a thousand-man band of enemies with the jawbone of a donkey... destroyed the city gates at Gaza. But just as Superman was vulnerable to kryptonite, so Samson had a chink in his armor through which his greatness was sapped. He was king of the hill when it came to physical prowess, but when it came to women (sexuality), he was a pawn of his own passions. Charles R. Swindoll, Old Testament Characters, Insight for Living, Fullerton, CA, 1986, p. 1.

Let's look at Judges 13. This chapter opens up with some very depressing words. It is so sad and unnecessary. The children of Israel had every advantage, every instruction, but notice verse 1: "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years." Here we see illustrated something that happens throughout Judges.

The Cycles of the Book—13:1

Basically the book is built around seven cycles. Each cycle is complete in itself, and each contains the same six elements.

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

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1.

The nation of Israel would sin and begin to worship idols.

2.

God would then place them under the dominion of one of their neighboring nations.

3.

Israel would then repent of their sins and call upon Jehovah for deliverance.

4.

God would raise up a deliverer in the person of one of the judges, who would set them free.

5.

There would be peace and prosperity for awhile until the judge died.

6.

As soon as he was gone, the children of Israel would fall back into sin, back into idolatry, and the cycle would begin all over again.

The story of Samson occurs in the seventh and last cycle. God had told the people, "When you go into the land, you must completely eradicate all the idolatry from that land. Completely!" The Canaanites were to be wiped out; no memory of their worship was to be left. Because they did not obey fully, however, the people and religions left in the land became a snare to them, over and over again.

Thus Israel illustrates our main principle as well. Verse 1 says they were delivered into the hands of the Philistines, a warlike people who traced their origin back to the land of Egypt.

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

They had migrated from Egypt to the island of Crete and then tried to return to Egypt, but they were repelled, so they invaded Canaan just prior to Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. They settled along the Mediterranean coast, and were seemingly impossible to dislodge, so they remained the enemy of Israel for centuries.

How did the Philistines overcome the Israelites? They could have overrun Israel by direct attack, because they had great military strength due to their ability to smelt iron. Instead, they used two main weapons to defeat Israel: trade and intermarriage; or **compromise** and **assimilation**

Compromise: if the Israelites wanted a plow or an ax, they had to go to the Philistines to get one—Is. 13:19-21. They were dependent on their enemies, or so they thought. They compromised in order to survive.

Assimilation: if Israel wanted its sons or daughters to intermarry, the Philistines had no objection.

By both methods, the Philistines were gaining a stranglehold on the Israelites, slowly choking them to death. Israel, then, was not being enslaved by military dominion, but by spiritual and cultural seduction. Does that sound any alarms for Christians today, who are often dependent on the world's wisdom, values, and perspective? Christians are marrying non-Christians in increasing numbers.

Look at this picture carefully and ask, "What do the Philistines symbolize?" In Old Testament symbolism, the Philistines may represent the sinful nature in our lives. In the words of 1 Cor. 10, "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did," i.e., the evil things we set our hearts on. Because the Philistines were related to Egypt (which symbolizes the world), they therefore represent the battle that goes on between the sinful nature and the new nature in Christ, between the evil and the good. They represent the possibility of "...setting our hearts on evil things as they did." You can see this conflict in more detail in Galatians 5:16-18: the natural man against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the natural man. They are contrary to one another.

Gal. 5:16--"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

17] For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."

Again in Romans 8:5-14 we see the same thing, the importance of our "mindset."

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6] The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7] the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8] Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. 9] You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10] But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11] And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. 12] Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13] For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14] because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

As we go through this incident with Samson, we will see the struggle that exists between the Christian and the sinful nature. It's also been explained as the white dog/black dog inside of us. The one who gets the most attention and food will be the strongest and will overpower the other.

The question in some of your minds might be, what is the sinful nature? Simply, it is that principle of evil which gained entrance into man at the fall of Adam and Eve. It is responsible for our tendency to go our own way and try to live our lives independently of God. It is an alien intruder. It has no right to reside in our lives, yet it has taken up residence there, is constantly at war with the Spirit of God, and will be until the Lord returns.

So the Philistines are at least a picture portraying the activity of our sinful nature, and the struggle we have with evil. When we come to Christ, we are born again; there is a new Spirit created in us. At that point warfare begins. The old nature is at war with the new Spirit within us, and we now have to choose. What are we going to set our minds on? Are we going to set

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

our minds on what the old nature desires, or are we going to count the old nature as dead in Christ, and put our minds on what the Spirit desires? If we alternate between the two, we will have unbelievable warfare (see Rom. 8:1-13).

Samson's life story begins with the angel of Jehovah, the preincarnate Lord Jesus, appearing to Samson's mother before he is even born. (The proof is in the rest of the chapter if you want to check it out.)

The Conversation with an Angel—vv. 2-5.

2] A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. 3] The angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. 4] Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, 5] because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Two very interesting points emerge from this initial conversation:

Samson was to be a Nazirite from birth--v. 5.

This brings up some confusion in many people's minds between the words *Nazirite* and *Nazarene*, and we need to distinguish between the two.

A *Nazarene* is someone who lives in the vicinity of Nazareth. Jesus was a Nazarene, but not a Nazirite, at least in the strict sense of the word.

A *Nazirite* was a person who took a vow of separation, of service to God. The word comes from "nazar," which means to separate, to cut off. Studying the Old Testament, we discover that the Mosaic covenant had a provision by which a Jew would set himself apart for a period of time to accomplish some purpose; during that period, he would be a Nazirite. There were three significant conditions a Nazirite had to observe.

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

1.

He or she could not touch a dead body of any kind. (What's that about? Most of us are not tempted to touch dead bodies, i.e., road kill!)

2.

He or she was not allowed to drink wine or strong drink, or even have contact with the fruit of the vine or the vineyard itself--e.g., no Grape Nuts or raisins.

3.

He or she was to let their hair grow long. They couldn't even trim their split ends.

How does this apply to us? These are symbolic pictures of life in the spiritual realm today. A Nazirite in the Old Testament symbolizes "sanctification" in the New Testament. (See I Thess. 5:23—"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.") Sanctified means "set apart for a particular purpose." So you can see the close connection between a Nazirite who would be set aside for a particular purpose, and sanctification. Therefore, we have heard a flawed picture of what it means to be sanctified.

1.

We are not to touch anything dead, either. We are to have nothing to do with the old life. Paul says, "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). Paul says, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (Rom. 6:12). We are not to go back and attempt to resurrect the old life... the sinful nature that was crucified with Christ. (See Rom. 6:17-18; James 4:4). Rom. 6:17—"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were committed. 18] You have been set free from sin, and have become slaves to righteousness." We have a new life, a resurrected life (see Rom. 6:8). We are, however, to avoid the extremes of isolationism, which nullifies the command of Jesus to go into all the world. We are not to be hermits, sealed off from people. How do we keep the balance? Surprisingly, we can learn something about what is appropriate separation by carefully investigating the life of Samson. As we said earlier, the lessons are not all positive but, again, the failures of his life are very instructive.

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

2.

In relationship to the prohibition of wine, the simple message is: we are not to attempt to derive our joy in life and our sense of well-being from wine—from any other artificial source, or relationship, or action—but rather from the Spirit of God. Eph. 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." We should be characterized as happy, because we are in fact filled with the Spirit of God, like the Nazirite. Obviously this command was not given because there was anything sinful about wine, or grapes, or raisins. The command illustrates the necessity of setting aside anything for a period of time, or maybe even for our life, if it will deter us from our mission/course/vow.

3.

What about the long hair? What does that represent? Long hair helps illustrate that we are to be totally dependent on God's strength and not on our own. Why long hair? Here's a guess! Long hair seems to be an outward sign the Nazirite carries with him, indicating a special relationship with God, an outward symbol of the Spirit and strength present with and upon him/her even in weakness. What does that remind us about our strength? The Scripture makes it clear that we too are able to do significant ministry and make it through the challenges of our lives, only by our dependency upon the Spirit of God. Sometimes we forget where our strength comes from and willingly put our spiritual lives in jeopardy, by our sinful actions and inappropriate relationships. The mature person, however, comes to recognize he is weak, and will constantly remind himself of Paul's words in 2 Cor. 12:7-10. "I delight in weakness [in the long hair of my spiritual life], in insults, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." If we sense our need for dependence on the Spirit, and evidence that reliance outwardly through our attitudes and actions; if we are not counting on our own credentials, trusting in our own strength, or relying on our own abilities, then by God's Spirit we will do extraordinary things—even greater in impact than Sampson. We may not pull a house down on our enemies, but we'll be able to pull down spiritual strongholds, arguments, and evil practices.

So the Christian can be a Nazirite from birth, his new birth. Samson was called to be a Nazirite from birth, which was unusual. Ordinarily, a person would take a vow later in life and only for a short period of time, but here in Judges it says, "... you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

From the time we are born into God's family, these conditions can apply to us.

A beginning of deliverance

The statement by the angel of the Lord about Samson was, "and he will begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines"

(v. 5b). As we have already stated, Samson never fully delivered the Israelites, because he never fully delivered himself. There was a partial victory, but never a complete one, because he never could, or never would, deal with one particular area in his life, as we will see in a moment.

Another reason Samson never fully delivered Israel, is that Israel never cried out for a deliverer, a judge to release them. (Don't be too hard on Samson; he did better than Israel.) Not once did the people realize their danger and cry out to God to deliver them. Things were going too well for that. It was a time of affluence.

Because there was no national repentance, as had happened in previous times, there was no national deliverer (at least in totality) The people were losing their identity; in fact, they were so ignorant of what was going on that when this imperfect deliverer came along, they were ready to hand him over to death rather than upset the Philistines.

Conclusion

Let's remind ourselves again of the four reasons why Israel was never fully delivered.

Incomplete repentance:

Samson never delivered Israel because he never fully delivered himself. *Does that describe your condition or potential?*

Assimilation:

The Philistines were successful in assimilating the Israelites through intermarriage/inappropriate relationships/unequally yoked partnerships. *Are you aware of the seduction*

Samson: The Man Who Brought the House Down on Himself

Written by Bob Stone

going on in your life?

Compromise:

Israel became dependent on its enemy for survival, e.g., metal tools, etc. *How reliant are you on Christ and the Christian community?*

Apathy:

The Jewish people were apathetic, except Samson and his parents. Samson fought alone, and his battles were personal affairs. Samson exposed the dangers of the Philistines single-handedly, not once joined by another man. We might balance some of our distrust of Samson's behavior with the recognition that he was alone. *Do you care about those you know who are entrapped/ensnared? What is breaking your heart? What is the application?*

The pressure Samson faced makes him a contemporary figure for us. We face the same four dangers, and need to pay attention to the lessons we can learn from Samson's life. How will this be done? We will live a sanctified/separated life only by heeding the prayer of Jesus in John 17:17. Jesus' prayer is: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

The answer is not to separated or isolated from the world; Jesus certainly didn't practice that. The solution is to be set apart by the truth. A separated Christian is a Bible-centered, Spirit-empowered person.

John 17:13] "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14] I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15] My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16] They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17] Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18] As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19] For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. 20] "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."