

THE SAD SITUATION OF THE SUPERNATURALLY STRONG SINNER

Presented by

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As Blake explained to you in his sermon on Moses, when it came time for the Israelites to enter the Promised Land after having wandered in the wilderness for forty years upon leaving Egypt, Moses was not allowed to go with them because he had sinned against God. Moses died alone on Mount Nebo, and was buried by God in a grave “where no man knows” (Deuteronomy 34:6).

At Moses’ death, God appointed Joshua to take his place. Consequently, it was Joshua, not Moses, who ultimately led the Israelites into Canaan. Eventually, as Joshua 24:29 informs us, Joshua died at the age of 110 years old. At that point, there was not just one person who replaced Joshua as he had replaced Moses. Instead, the Israelites entered into an era known as “the period of the judges.” Judges 17:6 describes this section of Israel’s history as a time when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Without a faithful human leader like Moses or Joshua to guide them, the people tended to rebel, and often fell into worship of the false gods that the pagan Canaanites worshiped. To punish the Israelites, God frequently allowed foreign nations to oppress them because of their wicked ways. When the Israelites once again found themselves in a type of slavery similar to what they had experienced in Egypt years earlier, they cried out to God for help. When the Israelites repented, God, as Judges 2:18 explains, “raised up judges for them...and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.”

These judges were intended by God to be deliverers who could lead the Israelites out of oppression at the hands of their enemies, and return God’s people to faithfulness before Him. The judges—as God’s agents of justice and deliverance—acted decisively to free the Israelites from oppression, and to rally them to defeat their enemies. Invariably the Israelites would repent, yet later enter another stage of rebellion and idolatry—and then repeat this cycle of oppression and deliverance all over again. Regrettably, at times even some of the judges themselves fell prey to the ways of the pagan people around them—to the detriment of both the judge and the people he was intended to protect and help. In fact, my sermon today is about just such a judge—a man who, while physically strong, was spiritually weak. Here is his story.

During the times of Israel’s rebellion against God, there were faithful Israelites scattered throughout the land of Canaan who still revered God. Two such people were a man by the name of Manoah, and his wife, whose name the Bible does not reveal. This couple, who had no children, loved God and wanted to do what was right. Judges 13 tells us that one day when Manoah’s wife was alone, an angel of the Lord appeared to her to tell her that she soon would have a son. The angel instructed her to rear her son as a Nazarite—which meant that he would have to vow never to do three things. First, he could not use wine or any other type of strong drink. Second, he could not eat any unclean food or touch any dead body. And third, he could not cut his hair.

Within a year, the angel's promise came true, and a son was born to Manoah and his wife. I suspect that by this point in my lesson, you already know what they called him. His name was **Samson**. Judges 13:24-25 tells us that "the child grew, the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him." One of the blessings that God bestowed upon Samson was supernatural strength. In fact, Samson was the **strongest** man to ever live on the Earth.

As we soon learn from the biblical text, however, Samson definitely was not the **smartest**! As Samson grew and matured, he struggled with whether to be godly or worldly. Unfortunately, all too often Samson's selfish desires trumped his dedication to God. We see a good example of this in Judges 14 when Samson saw a pagan Philistine girl in the city of Timnath, and on the spur of the moment decided to marry her. Considering who Samson's parents were, he undoubtedly knew about the commandment God had given the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:3, which specifically forbade them from intermarrying with the pagan Canaanites. Yet Samson was determined to do what **he** wanted to do rather than what **God** wanted him to do.

Later Samson fell in love with yet another Philistine woman who is quite well known to most Bible students. Her name was Delilah. Unfortunately for Samson and the Israelites whom God had set him in place to protect, Delilah was as treacherous as she was beautiful. As events unfolded, she proved to be far more devoted to her pagan Philistine friends than she was to Israel's judge who professed his love for her. Judges 16:5 says that "the lords of the Philistines came to Delilah and said, 'Entice Samson, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.'" Three times Delilah tried to entice Samson to reveal the source of his great strength.

On the first occasion, Samson told her that if he was to be bound with seven new bowstrings that had never been placed on bows, his strength would become as that of any other man. As Samson slept, Delilah bound him with seven new bowstrings and then yelled, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But, as Judges 16:9 reveals, Samson "broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire."

On the second occasion, Samson told Delilah that if he was to be bound with new ropes that had never been used to do any work, he would lose his strength. So, while Samson slept, Delilah bound him with seven new ropes. She then shouted, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" Judges 16:12 tells us that Philistine men "were lying in wait, staying in the room. But Samson broke the ropes off his arms like a thread."

On the third occasion, Samson told Delilah that if she wove "the seven locks of his hair into the web of the loom," he would lose his strength. So, while he slept she did that, and then screamed "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But, as Judges 16:14 notes, Samson "awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom."

Finally, Delilah persuaded Samson to tell her the **real** secret of his strength—the fact that God had forbidden him to cut his hair. The Bible says in Judges 16:19-20 that Delilah then “lulled Samson to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then...she said, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ So he awoke from his sleep, and said, ‘I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!’ But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.”

The Philistines immediately took Samson captive, put out his eyes, and led him in chains to their city of Gaza, where he was forced to grind meal in the prison house every day from then on. Samson—the “great judge” of Israel—was doing work normally reserved for criminals, slaves, and oxen! The phrase, “how the mighty have fallen” comes to mind, does it not? The once-mighty Samson—the strongest man on Earth—had been reduced to doing menial slave labor. Why? It was because, to use the words of the Bible, “the Lord had departed from him.”

As Samson’s captivity continued, he prayed to God, “O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me just this once that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines” (Judges 16:28). The Bible tells us in Judges 16:29-31 that God granted Samson’s request while he was on display at one of the Philistines’ feasts. Samson pushed apart two pillars holding up the ceiling of the building in which the banquet was being held, and the entire building came crashing down—killing Samson and more than 3,000 of “the lords and people of the Philistines.”

What a tragic end to a potentially valuable life! Samson **could have** been remembered not only as the strongest man ever to have lived, but also as one of the greatest judges in the history of Israel. Yet, because he chose to follow his own selfish desires instead of obeying the commands of God, we remember him instead as the judge of Israel who died blind in captivity and shame because of his sins.

God brought Samson into this world for a purpose—and then gave him the tools he needed to fulfill his purpose. The Israelites needed him, and God needed him. But Samson let them both down—**badly!** God has a purpose for each one of us as well. In Isaiah 43:7 God spoke of “everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory.” Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 12:13, “Let us hear the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

It is obvious that we were created “for God’s glory,” and that our task while we are on Earth is to respect God and keep His commandments. Samson failed in both of those areas—which begs the question: How do **we** measure up to those same two standards? Considering what happened to Samson, that is something about which each of us needs to think, wouldn’t you say?