

Samson *and* His Women: The Folly of Passion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Judges 14–16.*

Memory Text: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

The story of Samson presents many challenges to the modern reader. A lot of things just seem hard to understand, which only goes to show that, as Paul said, we see through “a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Only after Jesus returns will we get the full picture.

Nevertheless, even through a “glass darkly” there’s enough there for us to learn a few good lessons from the rather sordid story of Samson and his wife and Delilah.

Delilah was never the wife of Samson, but there are many similarities in the experience Samson had with the woman he had married earlier and with Delilah, the woman he later fell in love with. (1) Both were Philistines. (2) Both were approached successfully by the Philistine elders to snare Samson. (3) The attempts of both were resisted by Samson initially, but in the end he yielded to both. Though he did not marry Delilah, it is her name, rather than that of his nameless wife, that has become associated with Samson.

The Week at a Glance: Samson was a man given great gifts and a calling from the Lord. He was also a man of great passions. It’s a sad story of how these conflicted.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 11.*

The Call of Samson

Read Judges 13. What evidence did Manoah and his wife have of the special calling given them? What conditions came with that calling?

Judges 13 makes it very clear that Samson was to have a great role in Israel, that God planned to use this man to do a special work, to begin to “deliver” Israel from the Philistines (*Judg. 13:5*). The Hebrew word for “deliver” comes from a root word, *ysha*, from which the name “Jesus” and the Hebrew word for “Savior,” *Moshiah*, arises.

Samson obviously had a great calling. Of course, being called of God doesn’t make the one called infallible, or free of sin.

Read Judges 13:24, 25. What do these texts tell us about Samson?

Read Judges 14:1–3 and 16:1. What do these texts tell us about Samson?

Whatever his great calling, Samson showed some dangerous character weaknesses. Samson’s emotions were guided purely by physical appearances. The first time he said to his parents, “ ‘I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife’ ” (*Judg. 14:1, 2, NIV*). Later he saw a prostitute in Gaza and went to spend the night with her (*Judg. 16:1*). At a time when he should have been concentrating on the special mission, at a time when he should have been true to God, he let his passions get control over him, and he then linked himself in an intimate way with the enemies of Israel. How ironic! He’s called to “deliver” Israel from the Philistines, and the next thing we know, he’s marrying one.

What has God “called” you to do? What weaknesses of character are standing in your way of fulfilling that calling? What promises can you claim from the Bible for the victories that will enable you to do whatever God has called you to do?

Samson's Wedding Day

Read Judges 14. What mistakes are we seeing Samson make?

Samson, apparently, frequented the Philistine towns west of his home. He also had no second thoughts, it seems, about forming alliances with the women who caught his fancy there. The Israelites looked down on the Philistines and used the word *uncircumcised* as synonymous with *heathen* (*1 Sam. 14:6*), even though the Philistines were their rulers at the time (*Judg. 14:4*). The alliances of Samson with non-Israelite women no doubt caused his parents a lot of concern, especially considering the special circumstances of his birth and calling (*vss. 3, 4*).

Also, from the time before the Flood, godly men had been attracted by beautiful ungodly women and lapsed into wickedness (*Gen. 6:1–5*). Solomon, too, married many foreign wives who worshiped other gods. They were from nations specifically banned by God (*1 Kings 11:1, 2*). These alliances were not just political: Solomon is recorded as “ [holding] fast to them in love ” (*vs. 2, NIV*). While these wives turned his heart to other gods, Solomon still worshiped Yahweh, though not wholeheartedly (*1 Kings 11:4–6*).

What do the actions of the Philistines say about the nature of those people with whom Samson was uniting?

What we see here is an example of just how dangerous the wrong influences can be. Take someone with inherent weakness and place that person—regardless of his or her divine calling—in a bad environment, and the results can be very painful for everyone.

Look carefully and prayerfully at the influences around you, at least the ones you can control. Are they aiding you in your spiritual life, or are they working against it? What changes must you make?

Samson's Revenge

This marriage seemed to go from bad to worse. Though Samson's wife "betrayed" him, it's not hard to understand her fear. After all, look at what her own kinsmen threatened to do to her and her family (*Judg. 14:15*). Perhaps she should have told Samson what happened and asked for his help and protection. Either way, this ill-advised marriage didn't last long. Samson's anger and then abandonment of his wife set the stage for the suffering that was to come.

What reason is given for Samson's return to his wife? *Judg. 15:1*.
What does this tell us about Samson?

However much one would like to put the best spin on Samson's motives, the text seems to indicate that he was moved more by his lust than by any desire for marital reconciliation. Whatever his motives, he obviously wasn't too pleased to discover that his wife had been married off to another. Marriage seems about as corrupted back then as it is today.

What did Samson's responses here tell us about his character? *Judges 15*.

Obviously, as shown by his actions after his wife was married to another man, Samson had a violent temper. And maybe, too, he really loved his wife and was angered that she was with another man.

Next, his killing of Philistines might have come also out of love for his wife; or maybe he acted out of guilt, believing that his burning of the field led to their murder. Whatever the reasons, a great deal of suffering that could have been avoided occurred because Samson, who should have known better, allowed his emotions and passions to rule.

Samson, angry at his wife, walks out right away. Imagine, however, if he would have shown her some mercy, grace, and forgiveness. How different things might have been. Spend time at the foot of the Cross, and from that understand the forgiveness granted you through Jesus. Now, apply that same forgiveness to the next person who angers you.

The Sad Saga Continues

Judges 15 ended with Samson killing one thousand Philistines. “After his victory,” wrote Ellen White, “the Israelites made Samson judge, and he ruled Israel for twenty years.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 564. Here we see how Samson was to “begin” to deliver Israel (*Judg. 13:5*).

Read Judges 16:1–3. What other leaders in the Bible, despite having great privileges, showed similar weaknesses? What was the cost?

His going to a prostitute was bad enough, but arrogantly going to one in the middle of his enemies? “But not withstanding his sin, God’s mercy had not forsaken him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 565. Samson escaped with his life. But would he learn his lesson?

Read Judges 16:4–6. What does this tell us about the kind of relationship he entered into again?

Unlike the other women he was with, including his wife (at least the one mentioned in Scripture), it says that he loved Delilah. It doesn’t seem, however, that the love was reciprocated.

Read Judges 16:5–20. What does this story tell us about the power of love to blind the eyes? What should have been apparent to Samson from the beginning? Why didn’t he see it?

However foolish it was on his part to get involved with another Philistine woman, he should have seen early on that this woman was not out for his good. So strong, though, was the power of “love” and passion that he persisted in keeping up the relationship, despite how obvious it was that he should have fled right from the start.

How carefully do you guard your emotions and your passions? How many “good” people ruin their lives and the lives of their loved ones by not controlling the emotions? What’s the best way to protect yourself from this trap?

Blinded by Love

Read Judges 16:16–31. If you could derive a moral from this story, one that would be relevant for us today, what would it be, and why?

God made men and women as He did and ordained them to be married as a symbol of the unity and closeness He seeks with His church (*Rev. 21:2*). The ideal relationship should bring each partner closer to God, not drive one or the other away. In this case we can see so clearly how a wrong relationship can separate someone from the Lord.

“What a change to him who had been the judge and champion of Israel!—now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 566.

What irony is found in the fact that Samson was blinded?

In reading the story, we can see that Samson, regardless of the mistakes he had made, hadn't lost his faith, however imperfect that faith was. And God was still able to use Samson to accomplish His goals. How much better, though, would it have been if Samson had been faithful to the truth he knew. That God was able to accomplish His purposes despite Samson's failures doesn't justify those failures. It shows only that God works His will despite us; how much better if He would work His will through us.

Samson is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as a faithful follower of the Lord. What does it tell us about God's grace? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “True Love or Infatuation,” pp. 50–54, in *The Adventist Home*.

“The narrative creates an impression of almost incredible stupidity on the part of Samson. At any time he could have put an end to Delilah’s questioning by leaving her and returning to his home. But Samson’s chief fault was not so much stupidity as sensual infatuation. In the ruin and shame that this sensual weakness brought upon him, and the way in which, step by step, it led him to forfeit God’s miraculous gift of supernatural strength, lies the chief moral of the story.” —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 398.

“God’s providential care had been over Samson, that he might be prepared to accomplish the work which he was called to do. At the very outset of life he was surrounded with favorable conditions for physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral purity. But under the influence of wicked associates he let go that hold upon God which is man’s only safeguard, and he was swept away by the tide of evil. Those who in the way of duty are brought into trial may be sure that God will preserve them; but if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall, sooner or later.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 568.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What can you do to help someone who seems to be allowing his or her passions to overrule better spiritual judgment?
- ❷ What can you do as a church to give folk who are being tempted the help and encouragement of a strong, loving, and understanding congregation? What changes need to occur in the church so that those who need help can find people who care and understand, as opposed to those who will condemn and judge them?
- ❸ As a class, take time together to pray for your church leaders, those given great responsibilities, that they will be protected from making the same kind of mistakes that Samson made.

Summary: Samson’s story is of a strong man brought down by his moral weaknesses. A strong relationship with his God would have helped him control his relationship with women. His experience illustrates the text “Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers” (*2 Cor. 6:14, NKJV*).

The Journey of Faith

by CARMELO GONZALEZ

As a member of another denomination, I loved attending church and Sunday School. I taught the youth class, and my wife, Doris, taught the children. We were a happy Christian family. I loved God, and I wanted to serve Him. Then doubts began creeping into my mind. I wondered whether my beliefs were really based on the Bible.

As I thought about what I believed, I found more and more things that did not seem to follow what the Bible teaches. I asked my pastor about some of these issues, but I was not satisfied with his answers.

A week later, my sister called to tell me she had attended a religious seminar and was amazed by the preaching. I was interested and asked her to send me a cassette tape of the seminar. When it arrived, I eagerly listened to it. The speaker talked about the statue in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and what it meant. This speaker was good, but so much of what he said seemed—well, strange. I jotted down the Bible texts so that I could look them up later. I started looking up every Bible reference, and I could hardly believe it. Every Bible text seemed to prove the man's words true.

I called my sister and asked her to send me more tapes. Soon I received a box containing 30 tapes. As I listened to them, I wondered, *Are these tapes God's answer to my prayer for truth?* I knew that the speaker was a Seventh-day Adventist, and I knew a little bit about Adventists. But I did not know anyone who was an Adventist.

I called the telephone operator and asked for the number of an Adventist church in my area. I called the church and left a message.

The next day a young pastor called and invited me to attend prayer meeting on Wednesday night in a nearby church. I went, and immediately the members made me feel welcome and comfortable.

The next day the pastor called again and told me of an Adventist church closer to our home and suggested I visit there. This little group made me feel very welcome. My family and I started attending the little Adventist church together. We quickly made friends with members of the congregation and decided that God had led us to this church.

I have been a Christian for many years, but now I am the happiest Christian, for I have found the truth of God in a loving new family.

CARMELO GONZALEZ *and his family live in Ponce, Puerto Rico.*



Churches in West-Central Africa

Leaving our canoe we wind through a simple village of small reed houses on stilts. Children play in the dirt, pigs and goats nuzzle in piles of trash. Approaching a humble reed building near the edge of town, we hear the singing inside. Up the narrow ladder of sticks we climb, and into a roomful of smiling faces. Half of them are under 12 years old, all of them are Seventh-day Adventist brothers and sisters.

Witchcraft permeates this area of Benin in western Africa. Becoming an Adventist Christian often means separation from families and community. Loved ones and trusted friends urge believers in Christ to see the shaman priest for "juju," magic to cure their problem. It is so difficult to face such strong opposition and stand true to a God they cannot see.

But these beautiful believers continue on, continue to reach out as a light into darkness. They are in desperate need of a new church building, not made of sticks and reeds, but one built as strong as their faith. I see their dedication, I see the challenges they face, and I want to help them. For me, it's personal.

[This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide 10 congregations in West-Central Africa with churches or evangelistic centers.]

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