

# “When The Weak Become Strong: Samson (1)” // Judges 13 // Broken Saviors #8

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JUDGES 13... As we move through the book of Judges... we come now to one of the most interesting stories in the Bible... maybe one of the most well-known—Samson.

**When I say, “Samson,” what do you think of?** About 40 years ago psychologists came up with **word association games** to try to identify subconscious thought patterns... They would say things like **“heart”** and if you said “passion” that might reveal one thing, but if you said “broken” it could reveal another. If the word you came up was **always violent**, that might mean you have a problem. **When I say “Al,”** you think “Capone” or “Bundy” or “Mohler” depending on how you entertain yourself, but if you say “-cohol,” then maybe have a problem.

So, at all campuses...turn to your neighbor and say the first word that comes to mind... when I say

- **Night:** Day/Relax/Lonely
- **Church:**
- **Biceps:** I’m sure a bunch of you said, **HM**
- What word or image comes to mind when I say, **“Samson”**?
  - Many of you probably said, “Strong/Long hair/Delilah.”
  - For me, this picture always comes to mind: **Gaynor the body-builder** (That’s my gift to you... Just trying to be a blessing)

**But, you know, there is a question as to whether Samson was well-built at all...** He wasn’t supposed to be a picture of the ultimate male; he is a picture of what God can do in his people through the power of his Spirit. **So he probably didn’t look jacked.** He was probably built more like the actual Chris Gaynor.

Samson’s story **comes toward the end** of the book of Judges. In fact, he’s the **last Judge specifically** talked about. And we get a **lot more material** on him than we do the other Judges—3 whole chapters worth! That’s because Samson’s life sums up the entire message of Judges and points us beyond Judges. God is going to give us the picture of *how* he saves his people...

**By this point in Judges, we can conclude that Israel’s cycle of disobedience is permanent. CYCLE**

- **FELLOWSHIP:** They follow God;
- **IDOLATRY:** Their heart is drawn away to worship other gods...
- **ENSLAVEMENT:** God punishes them by allowing those gods to enslave them...
- **REPENTANCE:** They suffer and repent and cry out to God...
- **DELIVERANCE:** God raises up a judge to save them...
- They go along ok for a while until they **forget** what they’ve learned and the cycle starts over...

At first we hoped they would ‘snap out’ of this sinful cycle, but now we’ve seen this **again and again and again and we’re ready to throw our hands up in despair** and give up on Israel, when suddenly the **narrative structure of Judges changes** and we get this really in-depth story... loaded with symbolism. **Here we go:**

**13** And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for *forty* years.

40 = number of judgment and completion. This is ultimate judgment on sin.

*The Philistines were bad people. Really bad.*

**First, they were extremely sophisticated.** We use the word ‘**philistine**’ today to mean someone uncultured, but the real

Philistines were anything but. Their **weaponry, architecture, and culture** were far beyond any other civilization at the time.

- They were the **first ones to work with iron** and make iron weapons.
- They were the first ones to employ **battle formations** in war.
- Their **art, pottery, and architecture** were all advanced. They were building **multi-story buildings and bridges** at a time when Israel was basically hanging out with their sheep.<sup>1</sup>

### Second, they were really deprived:

- They had built their whole civilization on **piracy and conquest**. They were in every way, a militarized society.
- Their **parties were epic** for their debauchery. They pioneered this thing called the *misteh*, a word that literally means “a week-long drinking feast.” You thought that UNC-CH students invented that...
- They were also **big into pork**, and filled Israel’s countryside with pigs, which were unclean.
- They were **unspeakably cruel**: When they capture a town, they would mutilate or remove the genitalia from the males while they were living, torture them and then impale them...<sup>2</sup>
- **Buccaneering, beer, bacon, and barbarism**. This was the Philistines.

**They represent the enemies of God at their strongest.** Numerically, culturally, economically and militarily they are superior to Israel.

2 There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. 3 And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/29/science/philistines-were-cultured-after-all-say-archeologists.html>

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (vol. 7; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 282. Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth* (vol. 6; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 394; John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.”

*Let me make 5 observations that will teach us 5 crucial things about our salvation from the details of those 2 verses...*

First, what is missing between **vv. 1 and 2**? Between vs. 1 and 2 there is **no cry of repentance!** If these people are going to be saved, it’s not going to be because God waits on them to seek him; he must seek them.

**And check this out... this is the first time a Judge is promised before birth. You see, with every other Judge**, God raised up someone who was already alive. It’s as if God is saying to them that the Savior they need is not someone from among them that he will just make stronger; he’s going to have to start from scratch.

Third, this promise is **given to a barren woman**—who is nearing old age with no kids.

- **I’ve told you before...** barrenness in those days was the **ultimate devastation** for a woman. In our day it is hard too, of course, but back then **all of their hope for their future** was bound up in their kids.
  - **The society was agrarian**: which meant the more sons you had, the more workers you had for the farm, and thus the more income you could generate for your family.
  - This is also an age, remember, **before social security or 401K’s...** so, the more children you had, the more likely you were to be taken care of in old age.
  - **For the nation itself, economic and military health** was completely dependent on many children being born. So women had lots of babies were like **heroes**, but women who couldn’t bear children were seen as useless.
  - Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says this: **“Barrenness in ancient texts symbolized hopelessness, for**

*without children, there was no foreseeable future for yourself, for your family, or for your people.”*

- Of course, today, most people **don't think like this...** we put more hope for the future in where **we graduated from**, what **kind of job** we have. But from this woman's vantage point, she has **no security**; no prospects; no hope.

**Here's a 4<sup>th</sup> detail... we are never told her name.** Which is odd because this story is filled with other minute details... we know the dad's name: Manoah. But Samson's mother is only referred to as, "the woman." The author is **intentionally painting her as obscure.**

And in just a minute, we'll get some clues that she is not a **God-seeking woman.**

**Here is the lesson about salvation, and it is so important...** God brings his salvation to a people who are not crying out in repentance; who have no talents or gifts or righteousness to distinguish them from others; and a people with no hope and no prospects in themselves.

- *God **doesn't love the lovely**; he makes lovely those he loves. He **doesn't save the strong**; he makes strong those he saves. He **doesn't choose the righteous**; he makes righteous those he chooses.*
- Which means **no matter who you are...** or what **circumstance** you find yourself in in life, or what **mistakes you** have made, or what weakness you feel, there is hope for you. But **that hope will not be found by you turning** over a new leaf—by you (to use the metaphor) getting pregnant in your barrenness out of your own strength; it will be found by you receiving God's gift of grace, his choice, of you.

It is one of the most humbling, sweetest truths to me... God set his affection on me "just because."

- In Deut 7, first time God clearly explains this to Israel: [7] It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, You weren't the strongest, or most sophisticated, or even the most moral...

[8] but it is because the LORD loves you (like I love my kids—do I love you because you are beautiful? Etc. ) (Deuteronomy 7:7–8)

And here's the thing: **I know that if God chose me** when I was running away from him, and so he's not going to discard me when I stumble.

- Here's what I've learned after 26 years of following him... I'm **not holding on to him nearly as tightly** as he is holding on to me. And the reason I have hope for the future; the reason I know I'll make it, is his grip on me is tighter than mine on him.

4 **Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean,** (real quick, this is one way we know this woman was not a righteous woman! She shouldn't have had to be told to start avoiding unclean things! She should already have been doing that.)  
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

**Let's talk about the Nazirite vow... Really intense.**

1. **You couldn't cut any of your hair during the vow.**
2. **You couldn't drink anything "from the vine,"** alcoholic or otherwise... which meant no cabernet; no Coronas, no Stellas, no Miller Lite, not even two-buck-chucks from Trader Joe's. Even Welch's unfermented grape juice was off limits. Which is pretty much all they had to drink besides milk or water...
3. You couldn't touch **any dead bodies** of any kind.

Usually, people would only commit to it for a short period of time when they were really seeking God about something because it was so intense...

Samson does this **from birth**. He doesn't cut his hair from birth, which means he would have looked like **Duck Dynasty** means ZZ Top.

This is a symbol of how God's Savior would one day be set apart, holy and sinless...

...and he shall *begin* to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

Begin? That's a weird word. **Who will finish it?** By the way, this is the **last story in Judges**... The book ends with Samson beginning something and the book ends with it not being "concluded." Where is the conclusion? Now you are reading the Bible the right way! This story won't be completed until the NT.

Summarize vs. 6ff: woman told Manoah; he thinks she's been hitting too much of the strong drink herself; he says, "Ask God to send the angel back." God does, she goes and gets Manoah, and one of the first things he does,

15 Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you," but the angel of the Lord won't do it because in that culture, breaking bread with someone was a sign of peace, and there was no peace between God and Israel.

Then Manoah starts to pepper the angel with questions,

12 And Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?" ... and 17 "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?" Instruction manuals? Blogs you've written?

What does he want? Details.

18 And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" That word wonderful means "divine." Used almost exclusively for God in the OT.<sup>3</sup>

- Manoah wants details about what *to do*; God says "this is who I am."

What God does here is so typical in how he responds to people in the Bible... and listen, you are going to have to understand it if you are going to make it in faith.

We typically ask God for greater details... why this? What's going to happen? God instead gives us a glimpse of who he is.

*We want explanation; God gives us revelation.*

So important... If you require answers to the "why" and "what" questions to believe, you'll never make it.

- Many of you insist on detailed explanations... why this happened? Why the world is like this? God, what's in my future? ...before you can trust God or feel at peace. You're not going to make it!

I'm like this... I always want to know more of the why and the what. And God says to me, "Can you see my name? That it is wonderful? Is who I am? Do you trust me enough to follow me?"

And so, many times, in the midst of my doubt, I have had to learn simply to reflect on the wonderful, majestic name of God.

- **Recently... I was in one of those times, and I was reading a scientist who asked the question**, "How much power would it take to generate the matter to create the food necessary to feed the 5000?" In our universe, matter and energy cannot be destroyed, they only transfer forms... And Jesus created that food out of thin air standing on a hillside... which means he took power

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 413–414.

and turned it into matter. Using  $E=MC^2$  (energy, mass, constant – speed of light squared) and the scientist concluded if each ate 8 oz of food, it would take all the electrical power on earth working at 100% output, 100% of the time, for 4 years, to create the energy to create that meal. Jesus did it without breaking a sweat.

- **The sun consumes 600 millions of matter per second**, generating enough energy in 1 sec to supply all US energy needs for 13 BILLION years. God spoke the sun into existence. He said simply, “Let there be light,” and there was.<sup>4</sup>
  - Here’s my question... Am I really in a place to question the ways of such a God?
- **Or I think about God’s compassion for me demonstrated at the cross...** here is a God who not only loves me after I rebelled against him, who not only gave me a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance, but paid the price himself for my disobedience.
- I think about the **beauty of his holiness**: He is the sum perfection of every good thing in the universe. All beauty, all goodness, all love, all justice, all pleasure, flows from him.
- **Can I trust that God with questions I don’t have answers to or a future that seems uncertain to me? I think so, because his name is wonderful.**
  - I say it often... **We want explanation; God gives us revelation.**

19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who works wonders, (instead of dinner, they offer a sacrifice)... 20 And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife fell with their faces on the ground.

22 And Manoah said to his wife, (humor, speaking with his face to the dirt—muffled) “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.” 23 But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have

accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these.”

- **Now, since I’ve trashed Samson’s mom up until now, let me point out something amazing about her.** She responds in a way that puts her among the greatest women of faith in the Bible. She says, simply, “**I trust him, and I’m ready to obey** all that he has said.”
  - **That was better than Sarah, the wife of Abraham**, who laughed when God told her she would a son in her barrenness. (She laughed)
  - **Her response is better than Elizabeth’s**, the priest wife’s, who doubted the angel when he told her she’d have a baby in her old age.
  - There’s only **one or two other women who responded** with that same kind of faith, and one of them was Mary, who, when she heard about her impossible birth, said, “*Well, be it unto me according to your word. I’ll believe what you promised and do all that you have said.*”
- **There is only response that pleases God**: “I believe what you have promised and I’ll do whatever you say.”
- This woman is not very impressive in really any way... she’s obscure; she’s lived a rough life... but **here, she just says, “Yes, Lord.”** That’s all he’s looking for.
- **Have you said that?** That’s all it is: Yes, Lord.
- **The great substitute for that response is religion.** *Religion is built on negotiation: I’ll give you this, and I expect you to do this.*
  - But Jesus doesn’t negotiate. He owns it all, including you, already, and you can only be one of two postures with him... faith and surrender or rebellion.
    - **He doesn’t come to try to influence bad people to be better people.** He comes to rebels and demand: they lay down their arms.
    - **He doesn’t come to influence and help.** He comes to take over. The old bumper sticker, “God is my co-pilot.” That’s terrible theology. If God is your co-pilot, somebody’s in the wrong seat. When God

<sup>4</sup> John 6, MacArthur, True and False Disciples, T4G

comes he says, “Your life—that’s my car. You stole it. Get out. And you get into the back seat of your life and say, “God, it all belongs to you. Where are we going?”

- **Who would have known Carrie Underwood got it right, “Jesus take the wheel?”** is the right response to Jesus?
- **This relationship**—Lordship—is the kind of relationship where you either are or you aren’t. Like faithfulness in marriage. 96% faithful?
  - **And, by the way, you don’t have anything to negotiate with, anyway.** We are barren; unrighteous; worthy of condemnation.
- Religion is the great counterfeit to true faith and surrender, and busy-ness in religion keeps a lot of people deceived into thinking they are right with God when they are not. *“Oh, I go to church a good bit; I try to give a little; I try not to break too many of the commandments.”*
  - You’ve either said to Jesus, “I believe all that you’ve said... that you have done everything necessary to save and accept me... and I’m ready to follow you with my whole life,” or you haven’t.
- Religion negotiates. That’s what Jephthah did—remember? Faith just surrenders.

24 And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him.

But, right here, we see an indication of trouble. Samson’s name—Sam-son, is a tribute to the Sun god. Samson is going to live a life filled with compromise.

Let me give you **4 problems that will plague Samson’s life**... these are a precursor for the next couple of messages...

1. **Compromise: he’s going to break all 3 provisions of the Nazirite vow** (remember, no **wine**; no **dead bodies**; and never **cut hair**.)
  - In chapter 14, Samson falls in love with a Philistine girl, which is obviously a problem in itself, because she doesn’t even share his faith, and then he throws himself a misteh, a week-long keg party
  - A few days before the party, a lion attacks him and **“he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.”** (Judges 14:6 ESV) (That’s one of my favorite phrases in this story... *tore the lion like one tears a young goat?* Was that common in those days? I’ve never torn a young goat. Evidently lots of people did.)
  - Well, a few days later he sees the carcass of the lion he killed and notices a beehive in the abdomen. So he scoops out some of the honey with his hand and eats it, violating the command never to touch a carcass
  - And, of course, he ends up cutting his hair, which leads to his downfall.
2. **Impulsive: Throughout his life, he is controlled by his passions.**
  - **He gets hungry for honey;** he eats.
  - **He wants a woman;** he takes her—doesn’t matter if she is a Philistine or a prostitute or whatever... When Samson tells his parents that he wants to marry a Philistine they object, and he says, **“Get her for me, because she pleases me.”** (14:3)
  - **He gets mad;** he kills people. Every one of Samson’s great feats of strength, except the last, came as a result of being personally insulted or angered. We get the image of guy on roid rage. Give you one quick illustration of this...
    - **After Samson kills the lion and eats the honey out of its belly on the way to his bachelor beer keg party**... he has this idea. He **tells these 30 Philistine guys** at the party, “I’m going to tell you a riddle. And we’ll make it interesting. If you can figure out the riddle within 7 days, I’ll give each of you a suit of clothes. But if you can’t figure it out, you each have to give me a suit of clothes.”
    - **Well, they try to figure out and they can’t**... so they go to **his bride** to be and say, “If you don’t get Samson to tell

you his riddle and you tell us, we'll kill burn down your father's house with fire." So she goes to Samson and asks and he won't tell her so she starts to weep and says, "You don't love me..."

- [17] *She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted* (talk about a miserable bachelor party), *and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. [18] And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, Uhh... Samson, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?"*
- And then, another great verse. Samson says only, *And he said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle."* (Judges 14:17-18 *ESV*)
  - Men, two *obvious* lessons in here for you... (free Father's Day advice) *1. Don't let anyone plow with your wife. 2. Don't call your wife a heifer.*
- Well, Samson is ticked so he goes out and kills 30 other Philistines and takes their clothes off of them and says, "Here are your clothes" (all bloody and torn).
- That is his whole life. His life would be kind of funny, if it weren't so doggone tragic...
- *He's impulsive.*
  - Honestly... I was thinking this week about how much Samson was willing to risk just to have an impulse satisfied, and I thought, "**Who would do that? Who would risk being the strongest man alive for a taste of a little honey?**" **And then I realized: Guys do it every day.** I am tempted do it. We trade God and his promises for the slightest bit of sweetness or pleasure.
    - Guys who throw away marriage for a taste of porn
    - College guys who won't seriously consider the Lordship of Jesus because they will have to give up sexual freedom in college.

- You are willing to trade GOD for the slightest bit of a taste of honey?

3. **Entitlement:** I won't go into this one, but that is his attitude... "I deserve that honey... I am awesome, I'll take it."
4. **Pride:** Everything in his life about him...
  - Read through these chapters and see how much Samson uses **the word "I."**
  - He **leverages his God-given strength** mainly for him, not for God
  - Eventually, he allows **his hair to be cut because he's convinced himself** that his incredible strength comes from himself, not God.

**Let me say this to the guys in here:** These four things are the greatest threats to what God wants to do in your life: when you compromise; become impulsive; live with a sense of entitlement and walk in pride. But that is the next sermon.

**But to bring it back to this message—the end of chapter 13, I want you to see that Samson, from the beginning, is pointing forward, beyond Judges:** *"Samson is the last judge in this book, the last great hope for Israel. We wait to see how he will rescue and rule God's people in obedience to God. And in almost every way, we will find ourselves disappointed."*<sup>5</sup> He points us forward to another.

### **Jesus will complete what Samson 'begins' (13:5)**

- That's the **most important word** in this whole story (13:5). Jesus completes what Samson begins.
- **Jesus' birth and Samson's birth** have remarkable similarities:
  - **They are both promised before birth.** Remember, Samson is the only Judge to come this way; all the others God chose after they were alive. **Samson was giving us a picture** of how the real Savior would come one day.

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Keller, *Judges for You*, 134.

- **The births of Samson and Jesus were both miraculous.** Samson's mom was barren; Mary was a virgin.
  - One big difference though: The birth of Samson brought joy honor in the midst of shame. But the birth of Jesus brought disgrace... Mary and Joseph became embarrassed outcasts because of Jesus' birth because it looked like they had had him out of wedlock. Samson's birth brought celebration and honor; Jesus was born into poverty and shame.
  - Why? Because the real Savior would not save us simply through power—turning our sorrow into joy; the real Savior would have to enter our shame and take it on and die for it.
  - Samson was a NAZIRITE, a respected religious man; Jesus was a NAZARENE, a despised cultural outcast.
- **One more thing: With Samson and Jesus, we are told but a lot about their births but almost nothing about their childhoods.**
- *Samson's story is being told in a way that gives a premonition of Jesus' story...*

**Jesus is the true and better Samson**, who will succeed every place Samson fails...

- **Like Samson**, Jesus' strength would reside not in how he was built, nor in his personal charisma or beauty, but in the indwelling power of the Spirit.
- **BUT UNLIKE SAMSON... Jesus never compromised.** He would keep every facet of God's law, without sin.
- **Instead of being controlled by his impulses**, Jesus would be controlled by God's will.
  - **After fasting for 40 days** in the wilderness, he would rebuff Satan's attempts to tempt him with bread by saying, "I don't live by bread; I live by God's word."
  - **Jesus didn't do things because it pleased himself**, but because it "pleased God."

- **Gethsemane: I don't want this, God!** Nevertheless... not my will but yours!

- **And though Jesus was entitled** to the throne; he would take the role of a servant and submit to the humiliation of the cross.

We stand in awe of the strength of Samson... but I STAND AMAZED AT THE PRESENCE of Jesus the Nazarene!

**Jesus is the real Samson, and knowing his glorious life will enable you to live like Samson should have lived.** *You see, God wants to use you powerfully, like Samson, in the lives of others. But you can destroy and disqualify yourself. You almost always will!*

*The irony of Samson... strong on the outside; weak on the inside.*

*When you see and believe what Jesus did for you... you'll receive the moral strength to live the way Samson couldn't live.*

**When you see that Jesus was the real Samson**, who gave up his life to save you... that he was the **strong who became weak** for you, the **rich who became poor**, the **righteous who became our sin...**

- **Instead of saying "I want it,"** you'll have the strength to say "I want God, and I want to do his will."
- **Instead of saying "I deserve it,"** you'll confess, "I deserve death." And you'll gladly submit in gratefulness to his command.
- **Instead of saying, "My strengths, talents and abilities are all about me,"** you'll say, "Oh Jesus, It's all about you... It's all from you and through you and for you... *Were the whole realm of nature mine...*
- **Instead of saying "I can handle it,"** you'll say, "I can't handle anything without God, but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained to his disciples how everything in the Old Testament, from the book of Moses through the prophets, was all about him. I imagine when he got to the story of



Samson he explained things something like I have... he wanted them to see. He was the real Samson.

The goal of every sermon is worship...

- not just wanting you to learn a bunch of new info about Samson, as if that will help you;
- Don't want to give you some action steps of how to "be like Samson," —you can't and you shouldn't...
- the goal of a lecture is you leave with a page full of notes... goal of a motivational speech is that you leave with action steps... the goal of a sermon is that you leave worshipping.
- A time **when the pen goes down, and the eyes go up...** and you quit saying, "Oh my God, look at how much I have to do for you!" and you say, "Oh my God, look at what you've done for me! **I stand amazed in the presence...!**"

Let's end today by worshipping him...!