

Judges:1-22 – “Samson: Entrapped”

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Intro: Was Samson “too big to fail”? He seems to have thought so. He seems to have considered himself a special case: too important to God to have to keep the rules. Why else would he fall so easily into Delilah’s trap? One commentator reminds us that, “The sin to which men incline after God has brought great blessing upon them is the sin of regarding blessing as obligatory and perpetual.”¹ The sin, in other words, of presuming that one is “too big to fail.” We’ve seen it over and over again in our own generation, haven’t we? Men we’ve respected as spiritual leaders, men who seemed so used of God that they were often considered “too big to fail” - too important to be kept in check by those who should have called them to account – those men are suddenly exposed as sinners for all the world to see. Why does it happen so frequently? The answer is that some men get so big in their own eyes and in the eyes of others that they feel free to disrespect God. Samson’s sin was *that* sin: Samson disrespected God, so God publicly, humiliatingly stripped Samson of the Holy Spirit’s power, leaving him in the hands of his enemies. It could happen to any of us. We need to learn that...

Proposition: When God’s people don’t respect Him, He withdraws His Spirit’s power, though He never abandons His people altogether.

Samson Disrespected God:

Billboard:	(vv.1-6)	Samson Ignored His Weakness
	(vv.7-14)	Samson Played with Fire
	(vv.15-17)	Samson Learned Nothing from Experience
	(vv.18-22)	Samson Overstepped His Boundaries

(vv.1-6) Samson Ignored His Weakness – Everyone knew what Samson’s weakness was. Samson’s weakness was women, and most particularly, Philistine women. **Judges 16:1–6 - 1** *Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. 2* *The Gazites were told, “Samson has come here.” And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, “Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.” 3* *But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron. 4* *After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 5* *And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver.” 6* *So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you.”* Samson could hardly have been ignorant of his weakness. His interaction with Philistine women had been typical behavior since the beginning of his judgeship. Samson knew his weakness and so did his enemies, the Philistines. Samson knew that God prohibited both intermarriage with Philistine women and going to prostitutes for sexual favors. Samson’s proclivity for these sins was not a secret from anyone, let alone Samson. The Book of Proverbs makes it clear that these things are not only sin, but foolish to engage in. Samson was foolish, and like all foolish men, he probably chose to deny that his actions were sinful. At the very least he ignored his weakness in this area. Choosing to disregard what God had said about these things, Samson fell right into Delilah’s trap.

¹ Elwood McQuaid, “Not to the Strong.”

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[DOCTRINAL POINT] Whenever men refuse to acknowledge their weaknesses, they disrespect God and invite disaster.

[ILLUSTRATION] On April 15th of 1912 the Cunard Liner, Titanic struck an iceberg during her maiden voyage from England to New York City. The ship was state of the art construction for its day, with sixteen watertight compartments, and was believed to be unsinkable. Because of this, it was not thought that lifeboats for all passengers were needed on this “unsinkable” ship. But there was an unacknowledged weakness and within hours after striking the iceberg, the “unsinkable” Titanic went down, taking 1500 passenger with her. A failure to understand her weakness led to overconfidence and disaster for the Titanic’s crew and passengers.

[APPLICATION] This same overconfidence and failure to acknowledge weakness has led many to spiritual disaster through the centuries. Those who take the things of God lightly refuse to acknowledge their weakness and need of God’s wisdom. Many people who call themselves “Christians” seem to have very little interest in the things of God. They have Bibles, but seldom read them. They have churches, but their commitment to the Body of Christ is at the lowest decent level. They have friends willing to talk about the things of God, but they avoid such conversations, remaining quiet or quickly changing the subject when spiritual matters come up in conversations. What is going on? Such people feel no sense of need beyond the most basic desire for salvation. Like Samson, they are ignoring their weakness, not recognizing their need. We all have weaknesses, and that is one reason God has given us His Word, His Spirit, and His Church. A sense of satisfaction and self-sufficiency in the Christian life can lead to a crash. We are made by our Creator to be ever thirsty, while drinking deeply; ever longing for more, while being satisfied; comforted by His presence, yet never feeling we know Him well enough. We are made to sense our need of Him, and when we do not sense this, we have a weakness causing us to constantly tremble on the precipice of disaster. What should we do? Drinking deeply, thirst for the living water still. Acknowledge your weakness and ask to be made strong. Never stop chasing the One who already holds you in His hand. The cost of ignoring your weakness is witnessed to in the life of Samson.

(vv.7-14) Samson Played with Fire – Delilah and Samson played a “lover’s game” – Samson played for amusement; Delilah played for keeps. **Judges 16:7–14 - 7** *Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”* **8** *Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.* **9** *Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.* **10** *Then Delilah said to Samson, “Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound.”* **11** *And he said to her, “If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”* **12** *So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.* **13** *Then Delilah said to Samson, “Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”* **14** *So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web. Samson toyed with sin. It strains credibility to think that Samson didn’t realize what Delilah was up to. How could he not have known? Three times she tested the lies Samson told her by putting into practice what he had said. Her little “lover’s game” was*

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touching the most serious threat to Samson and to Israel – “*Samson, the Philistines are upon you!*” Samson’s third lie, “*weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin,*” came perilously close to revealing the secret of his strength. Samson was making a game out of that which was serious.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] When men make a game out of that which is serious, they disrespect God and invite disaster.

[ILLUSTRATION] If you watched TV in the past, you might remember the classic comedy bit from the Mary Tyler Moore Show – the funeral of Chuckles the Clown. It’s a hoot. Everyone is trying to be serious because they are at a funeral. But everything the speaker is saying in seriousness can be taken two ways – not the serious way he intends it to be taken, but in a second sense that causes people in the congregation to stifle, suppress, and then finally explode in gales of laughter. Of course, we laugh along with them because it’s a TV show. But what if that same thing happened at a real funeral? We might be embarrassed by our flippancy, as well we should be. There is a time for laughter, and a time to refrain from laughing.

[APPLICATION] One sign of spiritual immaturity is flippancy with the things of God. God’s Word, God’s gifts, and ministry in God’s name – these are serious matters deserving serious handling. Certainly no one enjoys humorless Christians. Considering all the blessings we’ve received we ought to be the most joyful people on the planet. Laughter should fill our mouths whenever appropriate, but when the things of God are being handled, respect for God’s things shows respect for our Creator. Samson, gifted as few others have ever been, had no fear of God – He didn’t respect God. He played around with serious matters and got badly burned. Laugh when it’s time to laugh; be sober when it’s time to be serious. Don’t disrespect God by handling His gifts with flippancy.

(vv.15-17) Samson Learned Nothing from Experience – God speaks to His people through the experiences of our lives. Samson refused to listen to God’s providential voice. **Judges 16:15–17 - 15** *And she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies.”* **16** *And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.* **17** *And he told her all his heart, and said to her, “A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.”* Delilah entrapped Samson using virtually the same words with which Samson’s Philistine wife betrayed him in chapter 14’s story of the riddle. Surely Delilah’s words provoked a memory of this in Samson, but he refused to learn from experience. The Philistines of chapter 14 entrapped Samson by using his wife against him. Wouldn’t you expect that the hair on the back of Samson’s neck would have stood up when Delilah “*pressed him hard,*” just as his wife had done? Either Samson was too dim to notice, or more likely, he simply concluded that he was “too big to fail.” Was he assuming that this time, as with that one, God would turn his flippancy into a nightmare for the Philistines? Presuming you have God in your pocket is the height of folly.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] When men refuse to learn from experience, they disrespect God and invite disaster.

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[ILLUSTRATION] A wise man once observed, *“Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, [and] the lesson afterwards.”*²

[APPLICATION] Samson took the same test twice and failed miserably both times. Because Samson did not learn the lesson of chapter 14, he experienced the disaster of chapter 16. God is providentially at work in our lives every day. The things that happen to us, the struggles we go through, the pains, afflictions, and joys, are all meant to teach us something about God and ourselves. If we, like Samson, refuse to learn from experience, we are doomed to face the same tests repeatedly with the same miserable results. God wastes nothing. Everything in our lives is meant for our good if we are believers (cf. Roman 8:28). Not everything we experience is *pleasant*, but everything is *useful* – but it only becomes useful when we reflect on it in God’s presence. Pray through the difficult things that happen to you in life. Go to God with them, asking for understanding. Pray through the victories, too. Wisdom doesn’t grow on trees – it’s earned through the ups and downs of life. Don’t be a knucklehead like Samson. Learn from the experiences God leads you through in life.

(vv.18-22) Samson Overstepped His Boundaries – In the end, the last of Samson’s Nazirite vows was broken because of Samson’s flippancy. This was more than God was willing to permit. **Judges 16:18–22** - **18** *When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. 19 She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. 20 And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him. 21 And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. 22 But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.* Delilah knew that she had finally found out “*all his heart.*” Callously, she sent word to the Philistines, “*Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.*” She probably added, “*And bring the money bag, fellas.*” Luring him to sleep on her lap, perhaps after having given him a sleeping potion as Josephus suggests, she cut his hair. In his lifetime, Samson seems to have crossed every boundary God put around him for his protection. When the last boundary was crossed, God withdrew His Spirit’s power from Samson. Samson could easily have predicted Delilah’s actions. Each time before she had put his deceptions to the test. Why would she not try again when he finally told her the truth? Notice the details in verse 20: **Judges 16:20 - 20** *And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him.* Samson presumed that God would bail him out again. The most surprised man in the room when he woke up weak, was Samson.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] When men violate God’s boundaries, they despise God and are destined for disaster.

[ILLUSTRATION] “You made your bed hard, now lie in it!” How many mothers have shouted that at boneheaded children, we cannot say. But we understand its meaning: When men act like fools, they can expect to suffer the consequences of their poor choices. God withdrew His Spirit’s power from Samson because Samson was clearly playing the part of a “knucklehead” – he stepped across the boundary that

² Vernon Sanders Law.

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God had set for his protection. That, we can understand. What may surprise us is what came next: grace.

[APPLICATION] *“But the hair of his head began to grow again.”* God withdrew the power of His Spirit from Samson, but He didn’t abandon Samson altogether. God puts His wandering children through pain as part of His plan for their eventual recovery. C. S. Lewis spoke of this when he said, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Conclusion: Samson disrespected God. In this, he is a picture of Old Testament Israel. When men are given every gift from God, yet refuse to fear Him, to respect Him for who He is, God withdraws His Spirit’s power from them for a time, but He never altogether abandons those who are His, and that is His grace to us because of Jesus’ sacrifice. His withdrawals are His disciplines, His invitation to return to faithfulness. Would Samson hear that invitation? Did God’s megaphone work? We’ll find out next week, Lord willing.