

Samson and Spiritual Strength

Judges 16

Introduction

As Christians - - - we are told in the Bible that we are in a spiritual conflict / battle

Paul says in Ephesians 6:10-12

'Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.'

Satan would love to ruin the Christian's testimony / he would love to cause you to stumble into great sin - - - or even deny the faith

For that reason - the Christian needs the armor of God

In the Christian blogosphere - - - it seems that everyone has weighed in on a defection from the faith by Christian writer and pastor - - - Joshua Harris and the waffling of a Christian musician named Marty Sampson [of Hillsong]

Even Franklin Graham weighed in on an interview with Todd Starnes of Fox News:

'For whatever reason, they have decided they're going to turn their back on God, and God's standards. And I feel sorry for them. They're in a very dangerous place. .

[And] Why are they making it so public? I think they just want publicity . . . And I'd just say, "shame on them," and you'll stand before God one day and give an account to Him.

Heath Lambert wrote these words

The author of Hebrews warns, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God" (Heb 3:12). Think about this verse, and consider that Joshua Harris—the man who summoned an entire generation to purity—has now left his wife, publicly rejected Christianity, and embraced the LGBTQ+ agenda.

Let that sink in, and be sobered. If this can happen to Joshua Harris, how much more do I need to heed the warning of Hebrews, and take care to avoid an evil, unbelieving heart? How much more care do you need to take?

Denny Burk: ‘No one plans on apostatizing when they come to Christ. Life happens. Troubles come. Faith is tested. The soil is eventually revealed for what it is (Matt. 13:20-22). What will time and trouble reveal about you? About me?’

A reference there to the parable of the four kinds of soils - - - and their responses to the gospel

As shocking as such situations are - - - Jesus told us such would occur - the word being choked out by sin / deceitfulness of riches / worries of the world / etc.

I’d like to look at an OT character this morning - - - for some very modern day lessons on temptation / sin - - - the fall of a spiritual hero of the faith

When we look at the life of Samson -- - we see someone with tremendous gifts given to him by God - - - literally the gift of strength - which he will use to defend Israel from their enemies - - - but we also see him riddled with great weakness in the moral realm - - - and it is there where Satan fires his deadly arrows

In Greek mythology – **Achilles** is taken by one of the gods and dipped in the waters of the River Styx. The mythological waters were to make Achilles invulnerable all over his body – with one exception - the part of the body he was held by – his heel

Hence the phrase – ‘Achilles heel’ – an area of weakness of vulnerability

And of course – Achilles would later be struck by an arrow at this point of his body – defeated in that manner

Samson – in spite of his great strength – had an Achille’s heel – we see it particularly in the story of Samson and Delilah

All people have something like an Achille’s heel - - - a place of vulnerability to sin - - - for some it is the lure of money / pleasure / materialism / sex / alcohol / temptation to selfishness or proneness to anger or pride - - - there are sins that easily entangle

It is in such places where the Christian is particularly in need of applying biblical truth - - - so that he can be ‘strong in the Lord’ - - - rather than crashing under Satan’s attacks

I. **Samson and Delilah - 16:4-9**

We drop in on the Samson narrative - - - the most famous story involving Samson

A little background - - - Samson was one of the Judges of Israel - - - that served the nation just before the period of the kings

He served as a Judge for 20 years

Israel at this time was being oppressed by the Philistines - - - and God raised up Samson to bring a measure of deliverance for them

This was a low period spiritually in the nation - - - we are told in the book of Judges: ‘in those days there was no king in Israel - every man did what was right in his own eyes.’

Into this situation comes Samson - - - born to Manoah and his wife who been barren

And - they were told that Samson was to be a Nazirite - - - dedicated unto the Lord

The Nazirite vow included three elements:

- 1) No drinking alcohol
- 2) No touching dead bodies
- 3) No cutting one’s hair

That third aspect figures prominently in our account

As a judge - - - one of Samson’s primary functions was to deliver Israel out of the hands of an oppressive enemy - - - the Philistines

Because of that - - - he very quickly became a ‘wanted man’ by the Philistine leaders

If you walked into the Philistine post office - - - there on the ‘most wanted’ board was Samson’s picture

They desperately wanted to take him out of commission - - - but he always seemed to elude their capture - - - sometimes walking off with the city gates!

*** One of Samson’s great errors was his failure to recognize that his strength was a gift from God

Take away his gift - - - and Samson is like other men

As Christians - - - our strength lies in our connectedness to Christ - making use of our spiritual armor

Shield of faith / word of God / prayer / breastplate of righteousness / etc.

Peter learned this lesson the hard way - - - in the Garden of Gethsemane - - - Jesus warned the disciples that they were going to be tested

He said to them: ‘Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.’ [Mark 14:38]

People don’t always get out of bed in the morning with the intention of sinning on any given day - - - but they succumb to weakness / human folly / deceitfulness of the world / flesh / the devil

Peter had no intention of denying Jesus that night - but he did

If you reflect upon some of your sins – you may see that it wasn't what you planned on doing that day – but circumstances / events escalated or led you into a path where you found yourself going against your better judgment

Why is this so?

Answer: 'The flesh is weak' - - - that is what we are apart from God

But – Jesus gives us the divine remedy to the weakness of the flesh – **watch and pray**

Take away our armor - - - we are just like other men - we need to abide in the vine / stay connected / etc.

The Philistines know that they cannot match Samson strength for strength - - - he has beaten them and outwitted them time and time again

So - they enlist Delilah in this scheme to reveal the source of Samson's strength

Here we are reminded of Samson's weak moral character

This was a pattern in his life - - - that will play a major role in his fall

Samson has two different threads running through his life

There is the thread of a great deliverer for God's people - - - Israel

Then - there is the thread of Samson's follies with women

He just doesn't seem to make good choices here

There are three women in the Samson narrative:

- The girl at Timnath
- The prostitute at Gaza
- Delilah [who may or may not have been a prostitute]

Ch. 14:1-4

He returns home from among the Philistines and asks his dad [tells his dad] to get this girl for him as a wife

It's obvious that mom and dad are not thrilled about this idea

They object – v. 3

What about Israelite girls?

He didn't meet this girl at a Bible study! / or church?

But - - - he does have one criteria: 'she looks good'

With that kind of approach - - - not surprising that he runs into trouble

That marriage never took place - - - but led to some conflict and bloodshed with the Philistines - - - and Samson began to show the Philistines that Israel has a new deliverer in town

By the time we get down to the Delilah narrative - - - we know Samson does not have a good track record with women

The Philistines make Delilah an offer she will not refuse - - - just find out where his strength comes from

Delilah can be bought - - - and they pay the right price - - the trap is set for Samson

Of course - - - as we see this scene play out - - - and the progression of attempts made by Delilah - - - we want to yell at Samson - - - 'Samson - get out of there - - - you fool'

Samson was physically strong - - - but morally weak - - - and that left a gaping hole through which he could be attacked

If we are to be strong in the Lord - - - we need to embrace God's moral principles - be men and women of character - we have to make those choices as followers of Christ

John Maxwell: 'Talent is a gift but character is a choice.'

Character is the sum of little choices to resist sin here / to do what is right when nobody is looking - - - to hold ourselves accountable to God's standards

Sometimes the erosion of character takes place over time

J. Vernon McGee: 'No man falls suddenly into sin - he does it gradually.'

He tells of a man in his church - who was a bank president - - - he was a very upstanding guy - involved in all kinds of Christian service. Then one day - - - he disappeared. He had gone on vacation and had not come back. The bank began to notice that money was missing. A full investigation followed - - - and it showed that he had been taking money over years.

He neglected character - - - and crashed

Gary Thomas: 'We are easily led astray, often because we want to be led astray. . . . We rationalize [our sin]. We pretend the situation we face is ambiguous . . . we run a hundred red lights and then wake up surprised that we have crashed.'

Samson was running a lot of red lights - - - it was inevitable that sooner or later he would crash

Delilah asks Samson: 'what is the secret of your strength?'

Samson just sort of toys with the question – 7 fresh cords!

This is a game to him – he sees no danger here

If we expressed concern to Samson here - - - he would probably laugh at us – 'oh I know what I'm doing – I'll be fine'

Sin and danger do not always look like sin and danger – it may be attractive – appealing – or seem harmless at the least - - - and then . . . it's too late

II. Samson Gives in - vv. 10-22

Delilah continues to press him for the secret to his strength

*** This whole series of attempts by Delilah reminds us that Satan does not let up. Just because he doesn't get you one day - - - does not mean he won't try again

Henry Drummond: 'sin is a ceaseless, undying power in our life. A ceaseless undying power must come against it. And there is only one such power in the universe - only one, which has a chance against sin; the power of the living Christ.'

There is a key to victory - that key is the indwelling Christ - Eph. 3:17

Spiritual battles need to be fought every day

You may have victory one day - - - and feel pretty good - - - and then the next day you are hit with much greater force

The enemy does not let up - that points us to our ongoing dependence upon Christ and the grace of God

With Delilah's questioning - - - Samson gives answers that progressively move towards compromising his vow before God

Bind me with seven fresh cords

Bind me with new ropes which have not been used

Weave the seven locks of my hair

Then finally - - - he does the unthinkable and reveals to her how his strength can be taken away

Samson's strength - we often associate with his hair - - - but his hair represented his Nazirite vow to God

His hair was an outward symbol of his dedication and commitment to God

By allowing his hair to be cut - - - he in a sense - denied God's ownership of him - - - and so it is not surprising that the spirit of God left him

If we are Christians - we cannot lose the Spirit - - - but we can grieve Him - - - and lose much of His benefits by choosing willful patterns of sin / invite his discipline

For the first time in his life Samson is bound by the Philistines and can do nothing to break free

They gouged out his eyes / and reduced him to a grinder of grain

Who was Samson's biggest enemy? [the Philistines / Delilah?]

Samson's biggest enemy was Samson himself - he brought destruction upon himself

Our biggest spiritual challenges are not the Delilah's of the world / or the Philistines - - - but our own heart

Prov. 4:23 - 'Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.'

Puritan Thomas Brooks says this about Satan

Thomas Brooks: 'He may tempt us, but without ourselves he cannot conquer us; he may entice us, but without ourselves he cannot hurt us. Our hearts carry the greatest stroke in every sin. Satan can never undo a man without himself; but a man may easily undo himself without Satan.' [Precious Remedies, p. 235]

If we are to win spiritual battles in our lives - - - we need to win the battle of self

III. Samson's End - vv. 23-31

The enemies of Israel are giving credit to their god for this great victory they have achieved over Samson

Even though Samson fell - - - God was not through with him - - - and his hair began to grow again

Now it's time for the Philistines to be overconfident

They have no idea that Samson could still be a threat to them

Samson had fallen victim to pride and lust - - - but now he displayed humble / dependent faith

Samson - in the end - seemed to be wise enough to recognize his mistake - - - and return unto the Lord in humility

Samson - in this state - -- prays - - shows that he has perhaps learned something from his experience

He brings down the pillars of the pagan temple

Samson proved to bring about a greater deliverance in his death than he had during his life

Conclusion

One striking example of faithfulness to Christ comes to us from church history - 155 AD

The Bishop of Smyrna - - - Polycarp was arrested and told that if he wanted to live - - he simply needed to satisfy their demand

What did they want?

They wanted him to say: 'Caesar is Lord'

i.e. - deny that you belong to Christ - - - but rather that you belong to Caesar

They threatened to burn him at the stake if he wouldn't

Polycarp's response: 'Eighty and six years have I served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?'

Is Jesus your Lord and Savior?

Keep confessing Him as Lord - - - and keep submitting to the lordship of Christ in your life - - - and you will continue to find that He is a great Savior

Phil. 1:6 - '. . . He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.'