

Life Lesson 54
Samson Part III: Strength Lost – and Gained
Text: Judges 16

Introduction

Samson was a slow learner. He had a bad experience with his Philistine wife and her friends. God meant that trouble to show Samson that he should remember his vows of holiness and that he shouldn't make friends with God's enemies.

Yet, Samson kept on being selfish and rebelling against God.

The Story

He decided on a girl from the Philistine city of Gaza for his next girlfriend.

The people of Gaza weren't glad to see him – and no wonder. Samson caused trouble for the Philistines wherever he went. They decided to capture him while he was in town. They locked the gates of the city so he couldn't get away.

“We'll wait until morning,” they said. “Then we'll gang up on Samson and kill him.”

Samson was not that easy to kill, however. He got up at midnight and decided to leave. The gates were closed and locked, but that didn't stop him. He ripped up the gateposts and carried the huge gate on his shoulders all the way out of the city and up the hill.

Can you imagine how the Philistines must have felt when they woke up to find that Samson was gone – and so were the gates of the city?

After two bad experiences, most fellows would have given up and looked for a wife in their own country. Not Samson. The next girlfriend he picked out was yet another Philistine girl. Her name was Delilah, and she wasn't any more true to him than his other girlfriends had been.

“We need to find out the secret of Samson's great strength,” the Philistine lords told Delilah. “We'll give you a lot of money if you can get him to tell you how we can defeat him.”

I'm sorry to say that Delilah thought much more of money than she did of Samson. Right away she began teasing him to tell her the secret of his strength so she could betray him.

Samson was tired of hearing her pester him, so he made up a story to tell her.

“If I am tied up with green cords (new ropes) I will be as weak as any other man,” he told her.

She told the Philistine lords, and they gave her green, or uncured, cords and she tied him up while he was sleeping.

“Wake up, Samson,” she cried. “The Philistines are here to get you.”

He sat up and broke the cords as if they had been threads.

“You’re making fun of me,” Delilah said. “Tell me the truth. What is the secret of your great strength?”

“It’s really brand new ropes that have never been used that will defeat my great strength,” he lied again.

She tied him up, and again found that he hadn’t told her the truth. He broke the new ropes as easily as string.

Delilah tried again.

“Quit making fun of me and tell me where you get your great strength,” she begged.

“If you weave the hair of my head with a web, you will take away my strength,” he told her.

She wove his hair into a web while he was sleeping and fastened it to the floor with a stake.

When she woke him up, he jumped up – stake and all.

It shouldn’t have been difficult for Samson to figure out that Delilah was out to betray him. For some reason, he didn’t catch on. When she pestered him and pestered him, he at last told her the truth.

“The secret of my strength is in my hair,” he said. “I have been a Nazarite since I was born. If my hair is shaved off, I will lose my great strength.”

Remember that a Nazarite was one set apart for a holy life of serving God. He wasn't to drink wine or touch any dead thing, or wasn't ever to cut his hair. Those were symbols of his consecration to God.

Do you think Samson lived a very holy, or consecrated, life? No, he touched dead things and evidently drank wine. (He probably couldn't have slept through being tied up and having his hair braided if he hadn't been drunk.) He lived just the way he wanted to live without regard for serving God. His uncut hair was the only remaining symbol of his special call. Once it was gone, God would take away the great power He had given Samson.

When Delilah saw that she had at last found the truth, she called the Philistine lords.

"Come on over," she told them. "And bring your money."

While Samson was asleep she had a man cut off all his hair. Then she called to him as she had before.

"The Philistines are upon you, Samson," she cried.

This time he awoke helpless, not realizing that a horrible thing had happened. The Lord had left him. When the Lord was gone, so was Samson's great strength.

The Philistines were delighted to have the troublemaker in their hands at last. They didn't kill him. Instead they tortured him. They put out his eyes and chained him up like an animal. They brought him to the prison house and made him work grinding grain – the worst of the slave jobs.

How sad that the great Samson, the man who had so much going for him, ended up working like an animal, blind and helpless. He could have done so much good for his people, but he wasted his time playing around. Now it was too late.

While he was working in the prison house, though, he began to get a little of the wisdom he lacked before. He saw that it was God who had given him his strength, and it was God who he should have been serving.

One day the Philistines were having a big party to honor their horrible fish-headed god, Dagon. They decided to have Samson entertain them. They brought him out in chains so they could laugh at him.

“Please, God,” Samson prayed, “Please remember me and let me have my strength back one more time so I can pay these Philistines back for what they have done.”

God heard his prayer and saw that he was at last ready to give God the glory for the abilities God had given him.

Samson leaned against two of the pillars that held up the building. With all his might he pushed against those pillars and knocked them down. The roof of the building came crashing down, killing about 3,000 of the Philistine rulers. It also crashed down on Samson and killed him.

God called Samson to deliver his people from the Philistines, and He gave Samson the strength and ability to do it. Samson used that ability only for his own pleasure and refused to give God the glory.

God at last brought Samson to his knees and caused him to defeat the Philistines, even though it cost him his pride and, in the end, his life.

The Life Lesson

Boys and girls, God has called you to serve Him. He has given you special talents and abilities so that you can do just what He called you to do.

I pray that you won't be like Samson and use those abilities to get fame or fortune for yourself. I hope you'll learn from his mistakes and use the talents God has given you to serve Him. God will see that His purpose is carried out. How much better that it be carried out in a life of happy service instead of in a death of shame!

Review Questions

What happened when the Philistines tried to trap Samson inside the gates of the city?
He ripped up the gateposts and carried the gates away on his shoulders.

Who was Samson's last girlfriend?
Delilah

Why did she tease Samson to find out the secret of his strength?
The Philistines offered to pay her a lot of money to find out why he was so strong.

What was the first lie Samson made up to tell Delilah?
If he was tied up with green cords -- new ropes -- he would be weak.

What story did he make up next?
If his hair was woven into a web and staked to the ground he would lose his strength.

What was the truth he finally told her?
If his hair was cut off, he would be like other men.

Why did cutting his hair make him lose his strength?
Because he had already violated the other conditions of being a Nazarite, separated to God. It was God who gave him his strength.

What did the Philistines do to Samson when they had him in their power?
They put out his eyes and made him work like an animal.

How did Samson get his strength back?
He asked God to give him his strength one last time.

What did he do with his strength?
He pulled down the temple where the Philistines were worshiping their god Dagon.

When did Samson serve God the best?
When he was suffering and dying.