

SAMSON'S SECRET TO SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

JUDGES 16:1-22

Have you ever wrestled with a story in Scripture, chewing on it, really sinking your teeth into it to try to get all the meaning out of it, only to come up scratching your head? When I was younger, one of those stories for me was that of Samson and Delilah, in the book of Judges. I just couldn't understand why this so-called man of God would give away his greatest secret?! Was he really that unintelligent? Could it be his love for the woman Delilah really was blind?

The book of Judges covers a period in Israel's history before the kings, describing a cyclical pattern that may in fact be all too familiar, as the people of God would go through extreme swings of the pendulum from "doing what was right in their own eyes" which results in idolatry, slavery, oppression and destruction, to times of crying out to God for deliverance when God would then, in his mercy, raise up a "Judge" to lead the people of Israel out of their bondage; and for a time there would be peace, and the people of God would be faithful. Faithful, that is, until the Judge would die and the swing from one extreme to the other would begin again (see summary in Judges 2:11-19).

Samson was one such Judge during this time. His birth was announced to his parents in a miraculous way, and God revealed that Samson would be set apart for God's service even from his mother's womb, taking what's referred to as a Nazirite vow (much like John the Baptist who comes on the scene just before Jesus in the New

Testament) which included, among other things, that he would never drink wine nor cut his hair. But as he became a man Samson grew to be known for being reckless, self-indulgent and lustful—he was hardly the picture of success in faithfulness to God!

Nevertheless, not because Samson was deserving but because God had graciously appointed him for God's own purposes, time and again the Spirit of the Lord would come upon Samson, and by virtue of his super-natural strength, he would be awesome and formidable when encountering the enemies of God and God's people—such as when he escaped capture by the Philistines and single-handedly killed 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey!

You can read the whole story of Samson in Judges Chapters 13-16. Of particular interest to me was how he famously ends up in a relationship with a woman named Delilah who is conspiring with the Philistines—the enemies of Israel—to find a way to expose Samson's strength and put an end to it. Delilah is instructed to seduce Samson and her methods are anything but subtle. She comes right out and asks Samson to tell her the secret to his great strength and how he could be bound and subdued. Samson invents a story if he is bound in thus and such a way he'll become weak; after which the Philistines try thus and such a way and it fails and Samson breaks free! And this

wasn't just one incident—this happens two more times!

But this isn't yet the part that caused me to scratch my head. Delilah, in now a fourth attempt to get Samson to reveal the secret to his strength, pulls out all the stops and says to him "How can you say that you love me when your heart is not with me?!" and she presses and effectively nags him in this same way for days until "his soul was vexed to death." So finally Samson caves in and tells her no razor has ever touched his head. He tells her that he has been a Nazirite to the Lord from his birth and if his hair is shaved his strength will leave. Now in reflecting on this I used to get stuck on this fourth and rather shocking scenario! After all, Samson has to know full well that the Philistines are going to do exactly the thing he has told Delilah—that's how this has played out fully three times before! Why oh why did he tell her the truth? Even if she had worn him down with her nagging, he still had to know that they would attempt whatever it was he would describe!

It wasn't until the Lord highlighted one verse in this text that I realized how significant Samson's fall actually was. Yes, they cut his hair just as he'd described and when Samson tried to defend himself he found his strength was gone. But here's the revelation—the end of Judges 16:20 says, "...but he did not know that the Lord had left him." The secret that apparently even Samson himself didn't get was that his strength was never in his hair. To put it another way, Samson's relationship to and power from God wasn't merely wrapped up in the external trappings of what it meant that he was keeping his Nazirite vow. **Samson's strength was in the Spirit of the Lord who would come upon him and empower him to bring about God's deliverance for the people of God** as with every other Judge before him.

Ultimately Samson was technically proved right and he was captured, became a slave, bound,

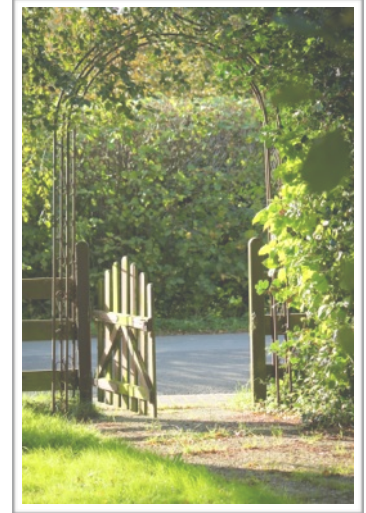
blind and grinding a mill in a Philistine prison. That is, until **he eventually repents to the Lord (16:28) and finally acknowledges that his strength only comes from the Lord**. Thereafter the Lord gives him one last success, which by itself was greater than the sum of all his previous successes.

For the people of God—believers on this side of the cross of Jesus Christ—our relationship to God is a New Covenant relationship. Our experience of intimacy with God by His Spirit looks a bit different from that of the people of God who lived before the cross and were looking forward to the coming of that one, final and decisive salvation.

The whole promise of the New Covenant that would be put into effect with Jesus is the giving of His Spirit to abide in the hearts of every one who believes, and He does indeed seal and keep and preserve His own, bringing to completion every good work He has begun (Phil. 1:6). But could it be that we suffer from the same fixation as did Samson? Could it be that we are more caught up in the external trappings of what it means to keep our vows to God, that we may not even notice that we aren't experiencing the presence of God in our midst anymore? This does not mean that He leaves us, for He has promised He will never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5); but He also says that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8); and the Apostle Paul thought it important enough to shake the Galatians, and make us aware that it was to our great harm if we would again burden ourselves with a yoke of slavery (see Gal. 3:1-6 and 5:1) getting caught up in religious externals as though that is the sum of our salvation!

Our secret to success is the same as Samson's was: It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord (Zech. 4:6). That is a story worth wrestling for! **So draw near to the Lord, and entrust your whole heart to Him.**¹

Open It?



1. Did you have any secrets as a kid—perhaps something you did that would have gotten you in trouble or treasured information from or about a friend or confidant?
2. What type of food has a way of tempting you? What is it about that particular food that is so alluring to you?

READ IT: JUDGES 16:1–22 – Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

EXPLORE IT

1. Looking back to the beginning of the story of Samson, how many women have been in his life? Which ones were helpful and which were harmful?
2. What command did the Philistines give to Delilah in verses 4-6? What would she get in return?
3. What response does Samson first give Delilah when she seeks the answer to his secret?
4. What tactics does Delilah employ to finally get the answers to her questions?



GET IT

Gaza was an important seaport town located about forty miles from Samson's hometown of Zorah. We aren't told why Samson went there, but it's not likely he was looking for sensual pleasure. Once again the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh (1Jn 2:15, 16, 17, Jas 1:14) combined to grip Samson and make him a slave to his passions. It seems incredible to us that a servant of God (Jdg 15:18), who did great works in the power of the Spirit, would visit a prostitute, but the record is here for all to read.²

1. Name as many places you can where people go today to engage in sinful activities? How does society view such places and those who frequent them?

2. Judges 16:1 shows us that after all the trouble his passion has gotten him into so far, that Samson has failed to become wise in his defense against such temptation. Why do we have such a difficult time dealing with temptations?

What should Samson have done to protect himself from future threats?

3. Is there a sin you tend to dabble in thinking you're strong enough that you won't let it consume you?

What are some of the ramifications that may come of your continued dabbling?

4. With the promise of a very handsome reward Delilah sets out to find out Samson's secret. The plot fails three successive times. Why do you think Samson fell for the same line four different times?



The four-fold exchange underscores Samson's foolishness. We are not told whether Samson was blind to what was so obviously going on (our lusts have the tendency to impair our judgments) or whether he was fully aware of what was going on and lost anyway (lusts also have a way of enticing us to do very stupid things). Regardless of the explanation, the story is a devastating critique of the effects of lust on a man. If love is blind, then lust is blind, stupid and reckless. Samson is a fool.³

5. Does sensuality ever blind you? When did your lusts last make a fool out of you?

Read Romans 6:1-2 and 8-14 before proceeding to the questions below.

6. What truths from this text should motivate us to die to sin?

Paul thinks of the members of the Christian's body as weapons to be used in the Christian warfare against evil. The saint, counting upon the fact that he has been disengaged from the evil nature, does two things: he refuses to allow it to reign as king in his life, and he stops putting his members at its disposal to be used as weapons of unrighteousness.⁴

7. If we are dead to sin how is it that we still do sinful things? How do we become weapons of righteousness?
8. What encouragement does Paul give to believers in this passage when it comes to their sin?
9. In Judges 16:10 and 16:15 Delilah uses nagging and guilt trips to manipulate Samson. In what ways can bad company cause God's people to give up their commitments to their God?
10. For what possible reason might Samson have given up his secret to Delilah?
11. Samson would learn that with one decision all his spiritual strength would be gone. What things drain believers of their strength?
12. Reread the chapter making notes regarding the mistakes that Samson made. Then take each of those bad decisions and replace them with positive and spiritual decisions. What would have changed? In what ways can you apply these negatives and positives to your area of weakness this week?

¹ <http://wondersword.wordpress.com/2012/03/18/samsons-secret-to-spiritual-success/>

² <http://www.preceptaustin.org>

³ Seward, James, *Studies on Judges*

⁴ Wuest, K. S., *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids)