

A STUDY OF JUDGES & RUTH

FOXES & FIRE

Last Week, we saw Samson's betrothal to a Philistine woman. Samson's pride got the better of him as he sought to trick the wedding attendees with a riddle. His wife pressured him into giving up the answer and he got angry. When he left in anger, the woman's Father gave her in marriage to another.

When Samson returned, he was even angrier and tied 300 foxes together by the tail with torches. The terrified foxes destroyed the food stores of the Philistines with fire. In retribution, the Philistines killed the Philistine woman and her father. Enraged, Samson killed 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey.

This unconventional deliverance for Israel illustrates where Israel was spiritually. God used a multitude of poor decisions and revenge plots to deliver a nation.

JUDGES 16:20–25, 28–30

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.

²³ Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." ²⁴ And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us." ²⁵ And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars.

²⁸ Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. ³⁰ And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Augustine said, "Right is right, even if no one is doing it. Wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it." These wise words remind us that standing for the right thing often means standing alone. It means living in such a way that when the world looks at us, they see Jesus.

Scan the QR code to remind ourselves and worship, "I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody all about somebody who saved my soul." Let that chorus be true of us!



DISCUSSION

How have you seen someone led astray by a member of the opposite sex?

1. What reason was actually given for Samson's defeat at the hands of the Philistines? (20)

2. What did the Philistines do in response to Samson's capture? (23)

3. How did Samson defeat Israel's enemies? (30)

4. How does the statement at the end of v. 30 relate to God's goal for Samson in Judges 13:5?

5. What can we learn about God from this final episode in Samson's life? How can knowing this about God encourage you to serve him?

Sin takes you further than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs more than you want to pay. If that's you, don't give up. Talk to your Coach!

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

STUDY NOTES

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

Samson's story continued even after the statement, *"And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years"* (15:20). With many other judges, this statement accompanied a notice about their death and Israel's subsequent fall into sin. The next verse after this one isn't about Israel's sin, we still focus on Samson—he went and got a prostitute (16:1). With a statement like that, you know trouble is coming.

Samson's lady-trouble continued when he fell for Delilah. His enemies convinced her to get him to divulge the secret to his strength. His infatuation blinded him to her evil intentions. Three times she begged him to tell her the secret of his strength and three times he tricked her. Each of those three times she did the thing he said would make him powerless and immediately the Philistines attacked.

Dating isn't easy. I get it. But there's some definite red flags here. What's worse, she plays the guilt card every time he didn't get killed. She got mad *at him* for surviving because *apparently* he hadn't told her the truth about the source of his strength. And then, *he told her the truth!*

GODLY LEADERS MUST UNDERSTAND THEIR CALLING

After nagging and manipulation, Samson foolishly told Delilah the truth—his hair was the last vestige of his Nazirite Vow (16:17). Like before, Delilah did the thing and cut his hair. Unsurprisingly *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."*

Finally, his arrogance and foolishness caught up to him. *The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles.* In a moment, Samson's whole identity shattered—the powerful, womanizing, warrior now weak, sightless, and forced to do the work of women as *he ground at the mill in the prison.*

The miracle child born to a barren woman, God called Samson as the one who would *"save Israel from the hand of the Philistines"* (13:5). Do you think Samson thought of that great calling while working the mill in prison? God had accomplished much through Samson. But those victories weren't so much *because* of Samson, they were *in spite* of Samson.

The author doesn't leave us without hope for what God might yet do—*the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.*

MISUNDERSTANDING DOES NOT PREVENT GOD'S VICTORY

Celebrating the capture of the Philistine *ravager, the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god... When their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars.*

The humbled Samson prayed to be used by the Lord one last time. *Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.*

What do you want God to do in your life? What do you think you need to do so that God will do what you're asking? Do you think God is more likely to grant a request if you've read your Bible that day, gone to church that week, given money to the poor? If so, you really misunderstand grace.

Samson thought his strength came from his hair. He couldn't have been more wrong. Although Samson's hair was a physical symbol for his strength, Samson was captured because *the LORD had left him.* His hair wasn't magical, and neither is our obedience.

Samson's sin led him down the road where the only thing he could do was to sacrifice himself to defeat Israel's enemies. This victory isn't something to celebrate—it's a tragedy. It's a terrible reminder of how far God's people had fallen.

As we read of Delilah's tricks, we want to grab Samson by the shoulders asking, "What are you thinking?" However, every sin we commit is just as foolish. No sin will satisfy. No sin will fill the void of our hearts. And even our littlest sins cost Jesus his life.

God doesn't want your death. He wants your life. He sent his Son to die so that whoever believes in him shouldn't perish but have life eternally (John 3:16). Every day we have breath is a day he intends to use us. We will still mess up and sin, and thankfully our sin doesn't wreck God using us. When we're weak, he is strong.

Before closing, we want to be clear—suicide is wrong. Samson's story is a descriptive account. Just because God didn't waste it, doesn't mean you should ever consider such an action. If you've had negative thoughts or thoughts of suicide, tell someone. Help is available—dial 988 for the suicide and crisis lifeline or visit 988lifeline.org.