

Toying with Temptation

Breaking up Stony Ground, Part 8

Judges 16

I read some time ago about 300 whales that were found marooned on a beach. Scientists explained the mystery that these whales had been chasing sardines and became trapped in shallow water when the tide went out.ⁱ

A creature so powerful, so strong – effectively lured into a deathtrap by a creature so much smaller and weaker.

When the average Christian thinks about Samson, they tend to think of several things:

- He was someone who never spent a nickel at a barber shop
- He was Mr. Hercules of the Old Testament
- He was the reigning heavyweight champion of the ancient world

He's more like a whale chasing sardines – forbidden sexual pleasures – which will eventually trap him as the tide of his life passes away.ⁱⁱ

The Lord actually gives us more information on Samson than many of the other judges in Israel's history. The judges were individuals who were to set an example and lead the people in a way that honored God.

But Samson does the opposite. In fact, Samson will serve as an illustration of the sinful state of his nation, Israel.

If you have your Bible with you – turn to the book of Judges. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Revelation, Judges (that was a test).

Judges chapter 13 and verse 1. Here's the national backdrop to Samson's life. ***And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the***

Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

In other words, the nation will be harassed, plagued, beaten, subjugated, and often murdered by this fierce nation. The Philistines will later on produce their own version of Hercules – we know him as Goliath.

The Philistines were Israel's worst nightmare. In fact, other Old Testament passages inform us that at one time or another, the Jewish people weren't allowed to do any metal work lest they make spears and swords; in fact, they weren't allowed to even sharpen an axe without special permission.

Which is one of the reasons you will find Samson fighting the Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey as his weapon.

The days of Samson are the days of Philistine domination. But you need to make sure you understand that this came about because of Israel's apathy and rebellion.

During this time, Eli was the High Priest; his own sons, who served as priests, were given to lust and immorality; the nation as a whole had reverted to apostasy.

It was during this time that God would literally give Israel a visible, tangible illustration of their adultery against him as Lord.

And the Lord gives to all of us – to this day – an incredible illustration of the slide and the collapse of a man caught in the tangle of sexual sin.

The beginning days of Samson had great promise, by the way. Samson's parents are told by an angel that Samson will be dedicated as an infant to live out the vows of a Nazarene – vows of

holiness and purity as a distinct testimony of God's holy purity . . .

We don't have time to dig into the history and meaning of each of these vows – but for now, notice the vow we're most aware of – **verse 5. *For behold you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.***

So far, so good.

But not after Samson reaches young adulthood.

Let me divide the biography of Samson into three chapters – and I'll give you just one word for each chapter.

1. The first word is Sliding (chapters 14 to 15)

Chapter 14 opens with these shocking words – ***Samson sent down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.***

Notice **verse 2. *Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah . . ."***

A literal translation of Samson's statement in **verse 2** is, "*A woman I have seen in Timnah.*" The emphasis is on the word – daughter or **woman**. Had Samson been an American he would have said, "Let me tell you, I saw a **woman** at Timnah . . . now get her for me as my wife."ⁱⁱⁱ

His parents are startled – and upset; rightly so. Samson's first act of leadership should have been to **battle** the Philistines, not **marry** one of them.

But here's the epitome of Samson's problem – and the beginning of his slide into the ravine of tragedy. Notice **verse 3. *But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives (read that – who believes in God), or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines.*** (which is the long way of saying pagan idolaters – now notice – ***But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."***

In other words, she might not love our God, but she looks good to me. She might represent some kind of compromise, but surely God wouldn't want to deprive me of something or someone I want.

Did you notice – the very first words recorded in the life of Samson are the words, "I saw . . . I saw . . . and it's right in my own eyes."

I don't care with God wants . . . get her for me . . . and get her now.

I'll never forget a young lady who had gone through her teenage years in our church – later meeting and falling in love with a young man in college. They dated for some time, got engaged and then made an appointment with me to ask if I would marry them. I was so delighted at the prospect. I knew her parents well.

As I talked with them in my office about their reason for marrying – somewhere in this conversation I want to hear the couple talk about how God brought them together and how they prayed about this decision and how they believe God wanted them together . . . but I heard nothing about God.

In fact, even though I knew this young ladies testimony – I had even baptized her as a teenager – I knew nothing about his testimony and so I asked him questions about the gospel. Within 5 minutes it was clear that this young man knew nothing about the gospel; had no personal relationship with Jesus Christ – he was in my office because she wanted him to be there and she wanted a wedding led by her pastor. By now her head was just hanging down – she was quiet – she knew.

I asked him if he was interested in the claims of Christ – the claims of the gospel – and he openly said he really wasn't. What he wanted, obviously, was to get out of my office.

I looked at her and said, "You know why I can't marry you two – it would be a mockery of the gospel to have a wedding ceremony in a church building when your husband doesn't want anything to do with the church; to entrust your marriage to Christ when your husband doesn't believe in Him. She nodded yes,"

I went further and said, "You realize that you will be disobeying the Bible's clear command not to marry an unbeliever – to be unequally yoked together? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Do you realize you are choosing to disobey the Lord? You are making a choice between following Jesus Christ and marrying this man?"

With tears in her eyes, she nodded that she understood.

I said, "Then right here and now – in my office – the best way I can lead you as your pastor – is to issue a challenge to you – don't disobey Christ; break off this engagement until and unless he

believes the gospel and accepts Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Right now you need to make a decision . . . which one will you choose – the Lord or him? And with tears coming down her cheeks she said, “I choose him.”

Samson effectively says to his parents . . . “I’m choosing her – then he adds – get her for me – arrange the marriage.”

Perhaps you know the heartbreak of hearing a grown son or daughter of yours tell you with grit in their teeth – I’m not buying any of your faith . . . it’s not for me . . . I’m choosing Babylon . . . like the prodigal son to his father – “Give me my money and get out of my way.”

We often run to Samson and Delilah and forget that the story actually begins with Samson and a Philistine girl from Timnah.

By the way, no one runs to Delilah first . . . you don’t start there – you end there. There are other places marking the path as warnings as you slide downward – like a toboggan ride that picks up speed until you crash.

First, in Samson’s slide, there’s a Philistine village where he’s more than willing to trade away his heritage – his family – any semblance of spiritual conviction – all for the sake of sexual attraction . . . that just so happens to be forbidden by God.

The slide downward for Samson will begin and end with what Samson sees.

I saw this woman!

Someone wrote that one of the greatest laws of spiritual victory is simply to look the other way.^{iv}

You’re going to need to do that often tomorrow as you return to your world . . . you’re going to have to look the other way – that’s great . . . those are major victories . . . stay at it.

This marriage, by the way, is doomed from the start – in fact, it never gets past the official consummation date – the 8th day.

For the sake of time, let me simply review that Samson’s bride will betray him to the Philistines by telling them the answer to a riddle Samson had posed to these warriors. It was a riddle Samson intended to use to provide a dowry, more than likely.

If the Philistines can’t guess the riddle, they will have to give him 30 sets of clothes. If they guess the riddle, he will owe them 30 brand new suits.

So the Philistine’s threaten her to get Samson to confide in her the riddle’s answer. But he won’t tell her either.

So she cries for 7 days – during the entire wedding feast – she cries through it all – can you imagine the wedding pictures . . . this is going to make a terrible wedding album.

Finally, Samson gives in and tells her the answer to a riddle and as soon as he does, she tells her people, betraying Samson’s confidence.

Does any of this sound familiar?

This is the prelude to the ultimate betrayal later in life by another woman named Delilah.

In fact, I think this first chapter was given to us in detail because it reinforces the truth about temptation. You don’t fall in a moment . . . by the time you crash, you have more than likely slid past several warning signs along the path. Parents, friends, co-workers . . . the Spirit of God . . . the word . . . maybe this sermon too.

A person who is in pursuit of his passions may not gain any insight from his past.

Look over at ***chapter 16:1. Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. 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 and 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.

This would be like you going out after this service and picking up your automobile and putting it on your shoulders and carrying it home.

These massive city gates were studded with spikes and covered with metal to make them fireproof.^v

I’ve seen a set of gates like these in the British Museum – 20 feet high – the massive iron hinges bearing the detailed drawings of people being cut in pieces for daring to come against the city.

Samson literally pulls the supporting beams out of the ground, hitches the gates – still locked together – up over his head and carries them more than 30 miles.^{vi}

Here’s the real tragedy. Samson appears to be invincible – while at the same time being immoral.

The danger in chapter 16 is the fact that Samson seems to get away with it. Keep in mind that the

nation Israel thinks they're getting away with their spiritual fornication as well . . .

Samson has power without purity; he has incredible strength without any self-control.^{vii}

He is Hercules without holiness – and that's a dangerous combination.

The problem here is that Samson only grows in Israelite legend. The Israelites are thrilled with this latest demonstration of strength by their undefeated Judge. Never mind he's been with a prostitute – look he's ripped the doors off that pagan city.

Everybody's clapping him on the back when he arrives in Hebron and tosses the gates on the ground that shakes and shudders with the weight.

You can just see him standing there by those gates flexing his muscles while the Israelites line up to take his picture. What a great judge. Here Samson, would you sign my Bible? Don't forget to write down your life verse.

Are you something or what?

Listen, Samson has never been more set up to be knocked out than now . . . now!

This heavyweight is about to get into the ring with a featherweight and get knocked down and almost permanently out.

But it didn't start with Delilah. It didn't start with her.

In his book entitled, *The Next Story*, Tim Challies writes, and I quote, "In 2006, American Online made an epic misjudgment. As part of a research project, the company [accidentally] made available to the public a massive amount of data culled from the search history of users over a three-month period. This totaled some 21 million searches online.

Before AOL released the data, they changed all the user names into anonymous user numbers. But it didn't take long before those numbers were linked to real names. AOL realized its mistake and withdrew the data, but the search histories had already been copied and uploaded on the Internet.

Tim Challies offers the following summary based on AOL's mistake: It was possible to reconstruct a person's life, at least in part, from what they searched for over a period of time. What is remarkable about these searches was the way people transition seamlessly from the normal and mundane to the outrageous and perverse.

For instance, one user went from searching for preteen pornography to searching for games to use in a church youth group [outing]; others spurned by

their lovers, sought out ways of exacting revenge, while others [explored ways] to cheat on their spouses.

Challies concluded with some questions: "What [would] your data trail say about you? Would you be willing for your spouse to see it? Your parents? Your pastors? Our searches are a penetrating window into our hearts."^{viii}

The typical question we might ask is this: what would our internet trail say about where we've been?

That's a good question, but I think the more important question – in light of Samson's pattern of life is this – where is it taking you?

Think of it this way – our internet trail is a powerful euphemism for describing the trail we're walking.

It's not just the trail behind us – it's the trail that we're creating just ahead of us.

Where's it taking you?

Maybe it's making or renewing a friend on Facebook that you have no business making. Maybe it's spending hours gaming with soft porn programs that titillate and open the door to other addictions. It's marked – "For Mature Audiences" – what an oxymoron – it isn't for the mature – it's for those who don't want to grow up . . . for those who want to keep sliding downward . . . those who might keep up appearances but really want nothing to do with holiness and purity.

Listen, those activities might not blatantly represent Delilah, but they are taking you down to a Philistine village . . . they are taking you to the town of Gaza . . . the toboggan is picking up speed.

Danger is just ahead.

In Chuck Swindoll's book *The Quest for Character*, he writes these perceptive words, "Life is a jungle. At the most unsuspecting moment we are pounced upon. Treacherous assaults have a way of knocking us off balance as they wrap themselves around us. No wonder an older Solomon would write, "Listen, my son and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path." (Proverbs 23:19). Jay Rathman experienced the danger while hunting deer northern California near Red Bluff. He climbed to a ledge on the slope of a rocky gorge. As he raised his head to look over the ledge above, he sensed movement to the right of his face. A coiled rattler struck with lightning speed, just missing Rathman's right ear. The four-foot snake's fangs got snagged in the neck of Rathman's wool turtleneck sweater, and the force of the strike caused it to land on his left

shoulder. It then coiled around his neck. As he grabbed it behind the head with his left hand, he could feel the warm venom running down the skin of his neck, the rattles all the while making a furious racket. He then lost his footing and fell backward and slid headfirst down the steep slope through brush and rocks, his rifle and binoculars bounding down beside him.

He would later explain to the Department officials of Fish and Game, “I ended up wedged between some rocks with my feet caught uphill from my head. I could barely move. I got my right hand on my rifle and used it to disengage the fangs from my sweater, but the snake still had enough leverage to strike again. He made about 8 attempts and managed to simply hit me with his snout just below my eye – but I kept my face turned at an angle where he couldn’t catch me with his fangs, but it was very close. This chap and I were eyeball to eyeball and I found out that snakes don’t blink. He had fangs like darning needles . . . I was able to finally grab him again and all I could do was hang on until I choked him to death. It was the only way out. I was afraid with all the blood rushing to my head I might pass out before that snake was dead.”

When he finally tried to toss aside the dead snake, he actually couldn’t let go – he said – I had to literally pry my fingers from its neck to let it go.”

Game Warden remembers meeting Rathman, “He walked toward me holding this snake and said with a sort of grin on his face, “I’d like to register a complaint about your wildlife around here.”^{ix}

The danger of Samson’s life is that he’s got a firm grip on sin – and it’s wound around his neck too . . . at this point he isn’t even going to try to pry his fingers loose . . . trouble is, this sin is still very much alive.

“I saw a woman . . . this is right in my eyes . . . I saw!” It won’t be long before Samson can no longer see . . . at all.

The second word in the biography of Samson is about to open – it’s at this point in his biography where we will stop and begin next Lord’s Day, Lord willing.

Whatever you do . . . don’t read ahead.
Valley of Vision:

*Hear me for Jesus’ sake.
I am sinful even in my closest walk with Thee;
It is of Thy mercy I did not die long ago;
Thy grace has given me faith in the cross
By which Thou hast reconciled thyself to me and me
to Thee,
Drawing me by Thy great love,
Reckoning me as innocent in Christ though guilty in
myself.
Giver of all graces,
I look to thee for strength to maintain them in me,
For it is hard to practice what I believe.
Strengthen me against temptations.
My heart is an unexhausted fountain of sin,
A river of corruption since childhood days,
Flowing on in every pattern of behavior;
Satan’s darts quickly inflame me,
And the shield that should quench them
Easily drops from my hand;
Empower me against his wiles and assaults.
Keep me sensible of my weakness,
And of my dependence upon thy strength;
Let every trial teach me more of thy peace,
More of thy love.
Let me walk humbly in dependence up thee,
For Jesus’ sake – Amen.^x*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/16/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i Gary Inrig, Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay (Moody Press, 1979), p. 231

ii Adapted from Inrig, p. 231

iii Dale Ralph Davis, Such a Great Salvation: Expositions of the Book of Judges (Baker Book House, 1990), p. 169

iv John Phillips, Exploring Psalms: Volume 2 (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 294

v Inrig, p. 245

vi Ibid

vii Ibid

viii Tim Challies, The Next Story (Zondervan, 2011), p. 176; citation: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/february/7022811.html

ix Charles R. Swindoll, The Quest for Character (Multnomah, 1987), p. 17

x Arthur Bennett, editor; The Valley of Vision (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), p. 310