

# Samson, What Might Have Been

*Revival*

By Tom Hill

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I remember the day when Diane and I went to the local jewelry store to pick out her engagement ring. I didn't have a lot of money. I attended Wayne State University in Detroit at that time. I worked during the week—as I had time available to do that—to cover my expenses, but I didn't have a lot of money. And we went to the jeweler and we picked out some rings that appealed to Diane and before the person waiting on us would show us the rings she brought out a black cloth, laid it on the countertop and then displayed the rings on that black cloth.

I am sure you have seen this in movies or on TV or perhaps even your own experience, the black cloth in contrast to the diamond and the gold of the ring just makes it gleam and glisten and shows off its brilliance. And they always use a dark cloth to do that as the backdrop.

Well, just like a jeweler would use a black or a dark cloth to show off the brilliance of a diamond, just so in like manner does the dark bleak conditions in Israel show off the brilliance of God in spite of their sin and their darkness.

We have looked over the last few weeks at the conditions described for us in the Old Testament book the Judges. Today we come to the last judge described in that book and it starts out before it reveals to us this last judge we have a startling verse that we have seen actually throughout the book of Judges repeated in verse number one of Judges chapter 13. I will read it for you and it says this.

“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.”<sup>1</sup>

Kind of the same tune over and over again, isn't it? Shown throughout the whole book of Judges and the people of Israel did again and they did again and they did again and they did again. They turned away from God and sinned. They doubted him. They believed a lie, the lie of the gods of the peoples of the land in which they lived. They disobeyed God and turned from him, abandoned him and adapted the gods of the nations that God had

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 13:1.

sent them there to destroy. Bleak, dark times, under oppression to the Philistines, it says, for 40 years. One of the longest times that the children of Israel suffered under their enemies, bleak, dark times. And the pattern of Israel simply repeats the pattern that actually began in the Garden in Eden. It began there, you know, with perfection. God created all things and it says he looked at them and it was good. And he created man, Adam and Eve. And he looked and he said, "It is very good." Without sin, faultless, able to know God, able to understand his will and purpose for them, able to fellowship with him and to walk with him in the cool of the day, able to work with health and strength, without the problems of weeds and unwanted grasses and problem in the soil.

There came a day in the garden when the serpent tempted them with a lie.

"Did God really say that you would die? You will not die. God just knows that if you will eat of that tree you will be like him."

And the temptation came to Adam and Eve to leave what God had provided for them in a vain attempt to become like God. Thus, they left the foundation that God had given them on which to base and to build their lives, God, in his provision and his goodness for them and instead turned inward and based their lives now upon their own lusts and desires and wants. What a disastrous decision they made. It plunged them into sin and death did come upon Adam and Eve for all of the things that they enjoyed prior to their sin died. They no longer knew and understood God. They couldn't. Things changed within them. They no longer fellowshiped with him. And, in fact, the sin that they committed so altered and changed their beings they didn't even want to be with God anymore.

It says when God called to them in the cool of the day, "Adam, Adam, where are you? Where are you?" What did they do? They ran and hid. They didn't even want to pursue and see God anymore, a complete and radical change in their nature.

So the sin that we see described for us in Judges 13:1 simply repeats Adam and Eve in the Garden in Eden, a turning away from God, a rejection of God and a choosing to build their lives and base it upon themselves, their own desires, their own wants.

But as I mentioned in the introduction that sometimes the black cloth can show forth the brilliance of a precious jewel. And that describes the condition here in Judges 13. For we find, as we begin to read with verse number of chapter 13, that God comes and provides in the midst of their hopelessness and despair hope. And he calls out a woman and he meets with her and says, "You will have a son and he will be a Nazarite unto me from his birth. A Nazarite was a vow that God instituted when he gave the law to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. Very simply, someone who took the vow of a Nazarite would not drink any wine or strong drink, would not cut their hair, would not touch anything that was unclean. And unclean things were animals, dead things. There were certain kinds of animals that God described as unclean. Dead things certainly qualified as unclean and a variety of other things. God said, "Those things are unclean to you." And instead the Nazarite was to separate himself or herself entirely unto God.

God told this woman, the mother to be, “This son will become a Nazarite from his birth, separate unto me.”

She quickly told her husband. Her husband prayed to God that the angel of the Lord would come to both of them and confirm to them this truth and this extraordinary event in their lives. For she have not had children up to this point in her life. And the angel of the Lord came to both of them again and confirmed the message that he had first given to the mother.

“Yes, it is true. You will have a son and you will call him Samson and he will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.”

Ah, the appearance, the hope of something beautiful in the midst of bleak, dark despair. And we read in Judges 13 the time and the description of Manoah, the father and his wife coming together and having a child, born just as the angel of the Lord had declared. And they named him Samson.

God promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden in Eden upon their sin that he would provide a champion for them. He would provide a Savior. He didn't name him at that point. He simply gave the initial promise. And throughout Scripture after that time in the garden God progressively revealed characteristics and features regarding this champion who would come.

God provided for the children of Israel a champion, a savior, one who would help them experience relief from the oppression of the Philistines. God had done that many times previously. He had provided Saviors along the way. He provided Moses. He provided Joshua and he had provided judges prior to Samson whom God had used to bring relief to them from their oppressors and their enemies. And now God came in a special unique fashion which he did not do with any of the previous judges. On every previous occasion he took someone already living and said, “This person will become your judge in this instance.” He brought a child into life with the express purpose as serving as judge and redeemer and savior for the children of Israel, a great potential, a great hope for Israel, that they would have someone who would help them and give them relief.

As we begin reading the last verse of Judges chapter 13 we see Samson beginning to fulfill the promise where we read at the very last verse of chapter 13 it says:

“And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.”<sup>2</sup>

The Spirit of God came upon Samson and God began to use Samson in the role that he had designed for him to begin to deliver the children of Israel from the Philistines. From chapter 14 of Judges through the end of chapter 16, three chapters, we read the legacy of Samson, the last of the judges, a sad legacy. It began with such great promise, fulfillment of God's declaration to Manoah and his wife, the son that he promised, Samson. And the

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<sup>2</sup> Judges 13:25.

spirit of God began to work in his life and to use him as God had designed for him. And after that verse though we read that the end of chapter 13, we read of three more occasions when the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and enabled him to do mighty wondrous deeds on behalf of Israel and in defeat of the Philistines.

But those are the only times. Those are the only four times that we read in the whole description of Samson's life of when the Spirit of God came upon him and used him. Samson's life was filled with trouble, because he based his life upon himself and the satisfaction and pursuit of his own lust and desires. For we read very early in chapter 14 of Samson going down into the land of the Philistines and finding a woman of the Philistines that he wanted for his wife, in direct contradiction to the purpose and plan and command of God.

He came to his parents and said, "There is a woman down there that I want."

And they said, "Oh, Samson, isn't there a woman in the children of Israel that you could choose?"

"No, I want her."

And, thus, began the decline in the life of Samson. Oh, God used him a couple of times after this, but he began to steadily decline and to flirt with his Nazarite vow and with the enemy, leaving his dedication to his vow and becoming increasingly involved and associated with the enemy, the Philistines where we soon see him going down, again, into the land of the Philistines and this time he sees a prostitute and he goes in unto her. And the next step downward we see is Delilah. And you all know what happened though the story of Samson and Delilah, how the Philistines came to her and offered her great sums of money if she would somehow find out from him the source of his strength so that they might enslave him, their avowed enemy.

And you read how Samson toyed with her and toyed with his vow as a Nazarite until finally he succumbed to her continuous asking. Only he got it wrong. She said, "Samson, wherein lies your strength?" And what did he say to her? "My hair."

My hair? My hair is the source of my strength? Oh, it is true he had never had a haircut from the time of his birth, but did that form the foundation and source of his strength? Oh, no. The source of his strength began way back at the beginning when the Spirit of the Lord would rush upon him and give him the ability to perform great, wondrous deeds, beyond anything of human ability and strength. And he had declined so far that he didn't even remember the source of his strength. He told her his strength came from his hair.

"I have never had a razor to my hair. You cut my hair and I lose my strength."

It is true. When she cut his hair, he lost his strength. But not because his strength lie in his hair, but because the Spirit of God left him. And we read that very clearly when Delilah said, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you." It said that Samson bestirred

himself off of the lap of Delilah to go out against the Philistines as he did every other time previously. Oh, but what this sad phrase. But he did not know that the Spirit of God had left him.

Now he had to face the Philistines on his own. No match. No match, for the source of Samson's strength came not from his hair, but from the Spirit of God who had come upon him and now had departed and left him.

Oh, great delight filled the camp of the Philistines. They gouged out his eyes and they put him to work doing—and pardon me while I say it—women's work. The slave bound to a grinding mill, walking about in circles grinding the grain of the Philistines. That is what the women did in that day, great humiliation of Samson. But his hair continued to grow.

And he called out to God in the midst of his great depression and said, "God, I need you. Come upon me one last time that I might destroy the Philistines." And God gave him strength one last time to push apart the two main pillars of holding together the temple of Dagon where thousands of Philistines had come to worship and to ridicule and mock Samson their captive.

And as he pushed apart those pillars, the building collapsed and in the collapse of that building, not only did he lose his life, but 5000 Philistines died, more than he had destroyed in all of his life.

What a picture for us. What a picture that God in his sovereign plan and purpose urged by the Holy Spirit Samuel, a contemporary of Samson to write this record and record it for the children of Israel, to remember the depth of their sin and the oppression that they suffered because of their sin and for them to see the effects of evil and of sin not only what began in the garden in Adam and Eve and their lives, but now coming down through generations after generation finding its full bloom, if you will, expressed in Israel. And this time also including the judge. For not only have the children of Israel declined in their sin, progressing worse and worse and worse, but so had the judges. The judges had also declined in their walk with God.

The turning point came with Gideon when he made the golden ephod that the people worshipped until finally we find it epitomized in Samson, the one whom God had designed and given birth to him that he might begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And we see his spiritual decline paralleling that of the decline of the children of Israel.

God had promised a Savior and he had given them hope with the promise of Samson. And we find described and pictured for us so clearly in the life of Samson several truths that, first of all, point to Jesus and then have application to us in our day.

The book of Judges points out several things regarding a savior. First of all, no human savior can do it. It takes more than a human good man, a strong man in order to overcome evil. It points out to us the real true need of the people. They don't just need relief from oppressors. They need a new nature, because their natures derive their

purpose from their own lusts and desires and wants, certainly not for God, but away from God.

The fulfillment of their desires and lusts and wants cause them to reject the authority of God as Adam and Eve did, cause them to reject the authority of God, cause them to reject the Word of God and to, instead, build their lives upon their own lusts and wants. That will not change without a supernatural divine intervention of God.

The record of Judges confirms it. They need a real Savior, not just someone who can come in and defeat the enemy, but someone who can come in and change their nature so that they won't pursue after sin anymore, so that they will walk in obedience with God, that they will desire after him and will fellowship with him, once again, as Adam and Eve, prior to their sin. They needed that kind of a Savior. And these events depicted through the life of Samson and throughout the book of Judges show that to the children of Israel. They needed a special kind of a Savior.

God did provide that special Savior. He did provide one who could change the nature of man and provide to them a new heart with new desires, with a new hunger for God to pursue after him, to seek after him, to want to obey him, an entirely different nature. And Jesus said very clearly, "I am the one the Father sent. My Father sent me. He loved you and he sent me to you and if you will just believe upon me, casting aside yourself and trust me, I will give to you that eternal life that you need, that new nature, that change that will enable you to seek after me, to know me, to worship me. I will give it to you. Just come to me and I will give it to you."

God kept his Word and he provided a Savior. As I mentioned, these events also provide admonition for you and me today. Though they occurred centuries ago, truth, you know, is truth regardless of era, regardless of society, regardless of location upon the globe. Truth is truth is truth.

A very simple statement like two plus two is four is true not only in Michigan, but in Shanghai. It is also true in the Philippines. It is also true in South Africa. It is also true in Venezuela. Wherever you would go on the earth, truth is truth. And the truth of God revealed through these events described in the book of Judges give to us truth that apply to us today as well. We can see it in our world, can't we? We see it in the world about us and how wicked it has become. It is almost like the time of Noah when the thoughts and intents of their hearts was only evil continually. We see it in the news broadcasts on television. We read it in the newspapers. We see it about us in the places where we live in our neighborhoods. We need a savior, just like they needed a supernatural Savior, one who can change the nature of sinners like you and me to conform them to Christ. We need that kind of a Savior today as well.

Samson gives us a glimpse of a faulty leader. All too often in our day we find in what we would call the Christian world and within the professing Church of Jesus Christ we find leaders just like Samson living and walking in sin, trying to walk on both sides of the fence. On one time trying to display themselves as leaders of God as Samson did and yet

along with that continually walking in sin. And too often these kinds of leaders have become top leaders in the Christian world. And we find them within the Church today, men and women of questionable character, supposedly leading the church after God.

Can't do it. No more could Samson do it than they can do it, either. And sometimes that describes you and me, too, doesn't it, when we try to walk just like Samson did.

“Oh, that is just a little thing.”

It began with a very simple thing with Samson. God gave him the power to kill a lion who came at him. With his bare hands he killed him. Oh, but a couple of days later he came back and saw the carcass of this lion. Remember, Nazarites cannot touch dead things. He came back and he saw the lion and saw within the carcass of the lion a bee's nest full of honey. And what did Samson do? Instead of being a good Nazarite and walking away from this thing, no, he opened it up and he took out the honey for himself. A simple little thing.

I have said it previously and I will repeat it again. Big gates swing on little hinges. And what appears to us as just a little sin, just a little thing, can open the flood gates of bigger and more complicated and worse sins and lead us away from God till we end up like Samson, virtually worthless for God.

Where has the Spirit of God spoken to you today? Has he pinpointed in your life that perhaps you might look like Samson to him? Oh, to me, you know, I can't see very far. I can only see the outward and you like nice to me. Oh, but what is inside? What is in there that God sees? Does he see someone like Samson who was trying on one hand to act like he is pursuing after God and yet pursuing increasingly evil practices to fulfill his own wants and desires?

Oh, I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes today to see your need, not only of a Savior to save you from your sin and to give to you a new nature, but a Savior who will also then work within you by the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to resist sin, to walk and pursue after God, to conform your life increasingly after God instead of increasingly after evil and that today the Spirit of God, I pray would revive you, encourage you, spur you on to increasingly seek after God and follow after him. I pray that the Spirit of God will work that in your life today and bring about those changes in you that you might experience that newness of life that only God can bring and give to you.

Let's close with a word of prayer, shall we?