

When the Deliverer Needs Deliverance

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God works even through the defeats of sinful leaders to bring about His plan.

If you were to put together a team, what kind of people would you select? Perhaps you would look for the biggest, strongest, fastest people, giving you a physical advantage over your opponents. Maybe you would choose the smartest and quickest thinkers to give you the mental upper hand. But when you look through Scripture at the team of people God uses in the unfolding of His plan, His team seems a collection of unlikely people. All of the characters in Scripture are sinners in need of a Savior.

? Why do you think the Bible's storyline consistently highlights the flaws and failures of its heroes?

? What significance does this theme have for us today?

The reality is that we walk in the footsteps of our fathers. Israel's story is our story. Like them, we are prone to chase after empty, lifeless things. God tells us how to find life and freedom, but still we do what is right in our own eyes (see Judg. 21:25). None of the judges in these stories solved Israel's ultimate problem—sinful, wayward hearts. The judges are but a shadow pointing to the final Judge—Jesus Christ.

In this session, we see how God sent Samson, one of the last of the judges, to rescue the people of Israel from the Philistines, even when they didn't cry out for deliverance. God, in His extravagant mercy, chose a deliverer for them. In the life of Samson, we see God working through a flawed and sinful man for the good of His people and the glory of His name.

Voices from the Church

"The ultimate deliverer, Jesus Christ, has no flaws. So his rescue of those who believe in him is complete and everlasting."¹

—Michael Williams

1. Samson's impulses led him to break his vows (Judg. 14:1-9).

Samson was a Nazirite from birth. Nazirites dedicated themselves to God by keeping three vows:

1. **Never defiling themselves by touching a dead body.**
2. **Never drinking alcohol or eating fermented foods.**
3. **Never cutting their hair.**

Unfortunately, as he grew up, Samson wavered in his commitment to worship and love the God of his ancestors.

¹ Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. ² Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife."³ But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

⁴ His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

⁵ Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. ⁶ Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. ⁷ Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.

⁸ After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. ⁹ He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.

A few miles from where Samson lived was the town of Timnah, where Samson found a Philistine woman whom he wanted to marry. By pursuing this woman, Samson abandoned the clear teaching of God (Deut. 7:3) and said, “She is right in my eyes.” The problem with this relationship wasn’t because of racial or ethnic differences but because of the difference in their faith. Samson was not “missionary dating” and trying to convert this girl; he just wanted what he wanted.

But the Bible teaches that what matters isn’t what *we think* is right but what *God says* is right. God’s Word is final, and He determines right from wrong. So to “follow your arrow” (as popular culture advises) or to “do what is right for you” (like every humanist philosopher preaches) is not the message of the Bible. This is merely our culture striving to be god. The mantra is “We decide what is right in our own eyes,” and the mantra rings with pure idolatry.

 What are some desires that we appeal to in order to justify our disobedience to God’s commands?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

41. *Guilt and Shame*

Guilt refers to the objective status of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10). Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.

The story of Samson’s encounter with the lion reveals the level of his strength. He was impulsive and powerful, and the strength that led him to sin was also the strength that could protect him. Samson tore this lion apart like a sheet of paper! His incredible strength came from his obedience to the Nazirite vow. His strength came from God.

Once the lion was dead, to keep his vow, Samson should have gone and washed his hands with a ceremony, but he didn't. He didn't tell his parents what happened. Instead, on his way back home, he followed his impulses yet again and chose to eat honey out of the lion's carcass. He then shared it with his mom and dad, even making them unclean with his actions!

Like Samson, compromise creeps into our hearts. The story of Samson is not given to us so that we can feel more or less righteous than he was. Samson's story is showing what Israel's heart was at the time. His life was a microcosm of the people walking in rebellion and lusting after things other than God. When we read this account, God is speaking to us, warning us as we look at these compromises, challenging us not to "do what is right in our own eyes."



Why is it not right just to "do what comes naturally" in every situation?



What are some consequences of living this way?

2. Samson's success led him to behave irresponsibly (Judg. 16:4-5,15-20).

⁴ After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. ⁵ And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver."

Here we find God's chosen deliverer with yet another woman he should be nowhere near. Maybe you want to defend poor Samson and blame mean, old Delilah for deceiving him, but we see that both these characters wanted the same thing—their own glory. Delilah wanted power and wealth. The Philistine leaders would give her wealth and power if she helped them. Samson wanted the thrill of the chase and sexual fulfillment.

So Delilah and Samson played this cat-and-mouse game. Three times she asked him where his strength came from, and he lied to her, defeating his would-be captors each time.



Samson's sin in this story is irrational. In what ways do our own sinful choices fail to make sense rationally?

¹⁵ And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies."¹⁶ And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.¹⁷ And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands.¹⁹ She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.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.

There was weakness in the strength of Samson. In the midst of his triumphs, Samson forgot that "the victory belongs to the LORD" (Prov. 21:31). Samson's personal strength became the basis of his trust rather than trusting in the source of that strength.

It's the same way with us. We tend to forget the Lord when things are going well. We become so comfortable that we fail to remember that every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father of lights (Jas. 1:17). We put our trust in our bank accounts, our relational network, or our role in the church. We overestimate our importance and forget that it is God who both lifts us up and humbles us.

One benefit of church small groups is knowing people and being known well enough to warn each other when we see these patterns. We call people who feel defeated by sin to turn to God in repentance. We help each other wrestle against self-sufficiency. It is in biblical community that we remember there are no self-reliant Christians.



What successes in our lives might we put our trust in rather than in God?



How can we maintain a strong sense of our dependence on God?

3. Samson's defeat led him to turn back to God (Judg. 16:21-30).

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. ²⁶ And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them."



Voices from Church History

"So a heart that is hardened into a lump of sin is good for nothing, but when it is dissolved by repentance, it is useful. A melting heart is fit to pray."²

—Thomas Watson
(1620–1686)



²⁷ Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.

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.

Here we find strength in Samson’s weakness. It is through man’s brokenness that God puts His glory on display. This is the only time in Samson’s life we see him praying. He has run after sexual conquests, he has walked in violence and vengeance, he has been foolish, he disobeyed his parents, and he has done everything he has known to be wrong.

Now he’s a different man. Samson is at the end of himself. The Philistines captured him, plucked out his eyes, and turned him into a slave that ground grain. Oh, how the mighty have fallen! And this was the moment Samson found true strength in his weakness.



It took humiliation and weakness to finally get Samson's attention. What are some circumstances God can use to get our attention and draw us back to Him?

You might wonder if Samson actually believed in the Lord. I think if this were the only account of Samson we had in the Bible, we might have reason to wonder. But guess who shows up in Hebrews chapter 11? Samson (Heb. 11:32). Along with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David is the name of Samson, who walked by faith in God. Though it took Samson years for God to strip him of his pride, eventually this giant of a man was clothed in God's mercy.



What hope does it give us to see Samson mentioned as a man of faith in Hebrews 11?

Conclusion

Jesus is greater than Samson. He is the Judge who never breaks His Word, the Judge who never operates out of impulse or for self-gratification. He only does the works of the Father, and in His death, many—including us—become sons and daughters of God.

In the story of Samson, God says to Christians: “I love you. Before you were born, I chose you. I am your rescue. The gifts I’ve given you I gave because I’m a good Father. So when you look at your gifts and your personality and the blessings in your life, let worship run its full course back to Me.” Let’s not dare trust in ourselves.

To our friends who are not Christians: look at the life of Samson. Look at how God loved the womanizing, angry killer. Look at His mercy on display. There is no sin that God cannot forgive. There is no end to His mercy. But today, choose to believe in God, and trust Jesus to forgive all of your sins.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Samson’s downfall was the result of his own disobedience, and yet God used his death to begin the deliverance of His people. Jesus’ death was the result of His perfect obedience and our disobedience. God used His death to bring deliverance “once for all” for His people.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: We are to call people who feel defeated by sin and evil to put away their sins by turning back to God for deliverance.

1. Make a list of your own struggles with sin and evil that remind you of your need for the Deliverer—Jesus Christ.

2. How can our group/church minister to those who feel defeated by sin? Support those who are finding some success over temptation?

3. In what ways can your experiences of defeat and deliverance serve to illustrate the good news of salvation in Jesus?

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