

FOLLOWING HIS OWN PASSIONS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God is able to bring salvation to His people, even through the weaknesses of His chosen deliverer.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Judges 13–16

+ SETTING:

During the time of the judges, the Israelites repeatedly sinned and faced God's judgment. In the midst of their suffering, they cried out for help, and God raised up judges to deliver them: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, to name a few. God empowered these people to deliver Israel from their enemies. Yet these judges were flawed, just like the people they were sent to rescue. Gideon was afraid. Jephthah made a foolish vow. And Samson was much like the Philistines he was raised up to defeat. The judges were flawed "heroes," but God, the true Hero, used them despite their weaknesses.

DAY 1

READ:

Judges 13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 13:1-5

NOTES

In *The Phantom Menace* (the first *Star Wars* prequel), the Jedi knight Qui-Gon Jinn discovers a young boy on the planet Tatooine named Anakin Skywalker. Anakin possesses extraordinary strength in the force, and Qui-Gon believes he is “the Chosen One” who will bring balance to the Force. According to Anakin’s mother, his birth was miraculous, which strengthens Qui-Gon Jinn’s belief that Anakin is the Chosen One. Yet Anakin’s miraculous beginning leads to a tragic ending, as he becomes the infamous Darth Vader, a dark Sith lord committed to eradicating the Jedi Order.

Judges 13:1-5 recounts the beginning of the Samson narrative. Samson’s mother was unable to conceive and had no children, but God opened her womb and allowed her to have a son. Her son was to be a Nazirite, meaning he would be devoted to the Lord and not allowed to drink wine, touch dead bodies, or cut his hair. The story of Samson, which begins with a miraculous birth and a promise of salvation, however, ends in tragedy as Samson is blinded, enslaved, and killed in a final attack against the Philistines.

In the New Testament, we find another prominent miraculous birth. A young virgin named Mary conceives and gives birth to Jesus, the true Chosen One. Like Samson, Jesus too dies tragically. Although innocent, He is crucified for the sins of the world. But unlike Samson, He did not stay dead. Jesus rose from the grave in victory, fulfilling many of the promises of salvation made in the Old Testament and securing the others. Jesus died and rose again to save sinners, and all who repent of their sin and trust in Him alone for salvation receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

What are some ways you will express your gratitude for Jesus’ miraculous birth, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection?

DAY 2

READ:

Judges 14–15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 14:1-4

NOTES

One of the most famous plays of all time is *Romeo and Juliet*, written by William Shakespeare. The drama focuses on Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, the two star-crossed lovers about whom the play is written. Sadly, the moving romance of this fateful play ends in tragedy.

Samson's pursuit of a young Philistine woman from Timnah was also tragic. Samson asked his parents to get him the young Philistine woman as his wife. His parents tried to persuade him to marry an Israelite, but Samson refused to listen to them. He pursued the young lady and threw a customary feast. At that time, Samson posed a riddle that thirty Philistine men were unable to solve. The Philistines then pressured Samson's wife to give them the answer to the riddle, which she did. Samson lost the wager he had made with the men, was forced to pay, and stormed off in a rage. Consequently, Samson's wife was given to one of the Philistine men. When Samson discovered this, he was angry and burned the grain, vineyards, and olive groves of the Philistines to the ground. To retaliate, the Philistines burned Samson's wife and her father to death. It's truly a tragic story with more to follow.

Samson made numerous poor choices that furthered this tragedy. But at the same time, God was working behind the scenes, even using Samson's self-absorbed desires to accomplish His will for the salvation of His people.

The tragedies of life are never easy to deal with, perhaps especially when they are the direct result of our sinful choices. But while difficult times can wreck us, we ought never to lose hope because our God is in the business of redeeming people and circumstances for His glory and our good. We should not become complacent in our sin, presuming upon God to clean up our messes, but neither should we write ourselves off from usefulness to God because of our failures.

What are some ways God has used you in spite of your flaws?

DAY 3

READ:

Judges 14:5-9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 14:5-9

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."¹

-Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

At the beginning of Disney's original animated movie Aladdin, a disguised Jafar sends Aladdin into the Cave of Wonders to retrieve a magic lamp. Aladdin is given one simple instruction: Don't touch the treasure! While Aladdin follows this command, his pet monkey, Abu, does not. As a result, the cave entrance collapses, and Aladdin and Abu are trapped inside. The temptation to touch the magnificent treasure was just too much for Abu to resist.

Like Abu, Samson was unable to resist touching something he shouldn't have touched. Samson was a Nazirite, which meant, among other things, that he was not allowed to touch dead bodies so he would remain pure and holy to the Lord (cf. Num. 6:6). But Samson was a man driven by his appetites. When he found honey inside the corpse of a lion he had killed, he could not resist. He scooped the honey out of the lion and ate it, giving some to his parents as well. This meant that Samson and his parents were defiled and should have offered sacrifices to God, but Samson did not mention one word to his parents about the unclean origin of the honey. Samson was an undisciplined man who was unable to obey God's command and resist his sinful desires.

Christians are tempted to disobey God's commands and give in to their sinful desires as well. In the moment, the pleasure may seem worth it, but there are always spiritual consequences. For Samson, it was defilement. For us, we experience guilt, shame, and maybe a lack of assurance of our salvation, not to mention the numerous natural consequences that often come with our sin. We need to remember that God's commands are not only right, they are good and for our good (see Deut. 6:24)!

In what ways are you being tempted to disobey God's commands and yield to sinful passions? How will you fight these temptations?

DAY 4

READ:

Judges 16:1-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 16:19-21

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #43:

ENSLAVED TO SIN

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, all of humanity has inherited a sin nature that inclines them toward sin and rebellion. Human beings are enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:17), continually living with the propensity to transgress God's commandments whenever possible. It isn't until one experiences salvation through the work of Christ that he or she is able to overcome sin's enslavement through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

The Enron scandal is one of the most public scandals of the last several decades. The Houston-based energy company engaged in questionable business practices and financial slight-of-hand that resulted in the company declaring bankruptcy. The company's auditor, Arthur Anderson LLP, was also dissolved. Many of the executives at Enron were convicted of various crimes and spent time in prison for their roles in the scandal.² While their unethical practices provided temporary financial gain, the executives of Enron did not benefit from their business practices in the long run.

Samson lived a life of pleasure, giving in to his passions whenever they arose. He married a Philistine woman even though God had forbidden His people from intermarrying with idolaters. He took honey from inside a lion's carcass even though he was a Nazirite and was supposed to avoid dead bodies. He slept with a prostitute. And he shared the secret of his strength with Delilah, who had his head shaved. In the end, his life of pleasure did not pay off. When his hair was cut, the Spirit of the Lord left Samson, as did his strength. The Philistines then captured Samson, gouged out his eyes, enslaved him, and mocked him. As old preachers used to say, "Sin will blind you, bind you, and grind you."

Christians should pay close attention to Samson's story. His life reminds us of the devastating consequences of sin. When we yield to our sinful passions, we may receive satisfaction in the moment, but in the long run, we will always experience pain and suffering. There is a better way: train yourself for godliness (1 Tim. 4:7), resist sinful desires (Jas. 1:14-15; 4:7), and pursue Christlikeness daily (Luke 9:23).

What are some of the consequences you have suffered on account of your sinful choices?

DAY 5

READ:

Judges 16:16-31

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 16:26-30

NOTES

In the 2018 College Football Playoff National Championship game, the Alabama Crimson Tide played the Georgia Bulldogs, facing off in one of the most memorable championship games in recent years. Entering the third quarter, Georgia led Alabama 13-0. In the second half, Alabama eventually tied the game and sent it into overtime, when freshman Tua Tagovailoa connected with future Heisman trophy winner DeVonta Smith for the winning touchdown. Although they trailed much of the game, the Alabama Crimson Tide came from behind to achieve a championship victory.

Although Samson's final victory may not be considered a comeback, it was certainly a reversal. His sin had resulted in his humiliation, as he was paraded in front of and mocked by the Philistines. At his lowest point, Samson asked God for a second chance. He asked God for strength to avenge himself. Then Samson pushed over the pillars of the temple of Dagon (the Philistine god) and collapsed the building, which resulted in his death and the deaths of thousands of his enemies. The narrator of Judges noted that Samson killed more Philistines at his death than he did in his life.

God is able to use anyone. Even Samson, with his sinful flaws and uncontrolled passions, was used by God to judge Israel and punish the Philistines. Christians should take comfort in the fact that God is able to use anyone for His purposes. We ought not think that the directions and choices of our lives don't matter, but neither should we obsess about our shortcomings. We do not have to be perfect. We do have to be available, and we must rely on God's grace. But if God can use Samson, He can use us too.

What opportunities for faithful obedience has God placed before you this week? How have you obeyed? How will you obey?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: God will save His people through a promised deliverer (Judg. 13:1-5).

True to form, the Israelites repeated their sinful cycle and did _____ in the Lord's sight, but they did not cry out for _____ this time. And still God showed them _____ through a promised deliverer.

? How might this scenario in Judges foreshadow God's actions related to the gospel?

Samson would be a Nazirite, and he would begin to save his people from the Philistines. These details reveal the _____ of God to keep His promises and the _____ of Samson as a judge.

POINT 2: God will save His people through a flawed deliverer (Judg. 14:1-9).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #43: ENSLAVED TO SIN

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, all of humanity has inherited a sin nature that inclines them toward sin and _____.

Human beings are enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:17), _____ living with the propensity to transgress God's commandments whenever possible. It isn't until one experiences _____ through the work of Christ that he or she is able to overcome sin's enslavement through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

Samson was led by his self-centered passions and appetites in _____ of rather than _____ to the Lord, and still the Lord would use him.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us no longer live in this world as we have been; in fact, let us no longer live to ourselves but let Christ live in us. When he has been restored to the honor of the head, the house of the devil will fall, and all our enemies will die with our sins in eternal destruction."³

-Caesarius of Arles
(c. 470-543)



What are some ways God has used you in spite of your flaws?

POINT 3: God will save His people through a vengeful deliverer (Judg. 16:21-22,26-30).

Samson's pursuit of his sinful desires resulted in the Lord leaving him, but the Lord _____ abandoned Samson. God's _____ remained.



What are some consequences we may face by pursuing our passions?

Samson was more concerned about avenging _____ than defending _____, but God graciously used this vengeful judge to _____ His people.



How does Samson's death compare and contrast with Jesus' death?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced victory over sin through Christ's humility and sacrifice, we live humbly before others as we call on them to turn away from their sins and turn to Christ for deliverance.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways your life should be affected because God cannot lie and He always keeps His promises?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you find yourself being self-centered, and how will you address those with the Lord?
- **HANDS:** How will you serve God this week because He is faithful and forgiving?

NOTES

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."⁴

-Michael Williams