



Samson – God works through failure

Judges 13-16 – Leader's version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. What was the main lesson about Jesus you learnt in the study about Jephthah?

If no-one mentions it, remind them that Jephthah points forward to Christ as our Saviour and our King. Jesus' kingdom is the Kingdom of God, which is in the hearts of believers.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

*2. Read Judges 13 v 1. Who are the Israelites subject to this time, and why?

The Philistines (western neighbours), having 'done evil in the eyes of the Lord' (followed other gods) again.

*3. An angel of the Lord appeared to a man and his wife and told them that they would have a child. What would be special about this child? (Judges 13 v 3-5)

He would be born to a couple who had been sterile. His mother was to drink no wine or fermented drink, nor eat anything unclean. No razor would be used on his head, because he would be a Nazirite, meaning he would be set apart for the Lord, and Israel would be delivered from the Philistines by him.

Explain that Numbers 6 v 1-21 tells us that a Nazirite was someone set apart for the Lord, for a certain amount of time. They did not drink anything from the vine or shave their head during the period of the vow, nor go near a dead body, including of a close family member because it would make them ceremonially unclean.

Samson did not make this vow of his own choosing; it was made for him before he was conceived and was for his whole lifetime. Therefore his mother kept the vow of not drinking wine etc. while pregnant.

4. Read Judges 13 v 24-25. What do we know of Samson as a child and young man?

He was blessed by God and the Holy Spirit was stirring him for his future role.

*5. God was raising up the next judge in Samson. Have you noticed what has not happened in this Judges cycle, but has always happened before? Why do you think it hasn't happened?

The Israelites have not repented, or asked for God's help. It seems the Israelites have got so used to living under oppressive neighbours, that it doesn't occur to them to seek God's help this time. God makes the first move.

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Can you identify any areas of your life where you have got so used to living out of sync with God, that you haven't thought to ask him to forgive you and change you? What do you need to do?

Questions 6 is a **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTION**. You need to write it on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

*6. **SDL** Samson was physically strong but morally weak. Read the following to find out what two of his weaknesses were v

- Judges 14 v 1-2 / 16 v 1 / 16 v 4 *Women (sexual addiction?)*
- Judges 14 v 3 / 14 v 6 / 14 v 8-9 *Disobeying God and his Nazirite vows to God (14 v 3 – he wants a foreign woman, 14 v 6 he kills an animal and therefore touches a dead body, 14 v 8-9 – he ate honey from the lions carcass, again contacting the dead body)*

His other weaknesses included violence, temper, emotional immaturity, pride and being unteachable.

You need to explain a bit of background, that we've skipped over. Samson marries the Philistine girl he had his eye on, and bets 30 sets of clothes that the Philistines couldn't figure out his riddle. His wife nagged and nagged until he explained the riddle, and she gave the answer to her people.

7. Samson made some bad decisions in his time. What does God do in Judges 14 v 19?

God's spirit comes on Samson 'in power' and Samson attacks 30 Philistines. This seems like odd tactics for God... But, if we think that God can only work through good people, we limit God, and deny grace (Keller 2013, p145). God doesn't wait for us to become acceptable before he saves us; he made his move 'While we were still sinners...' (Romans 5 v 8)

As we've said with other judges, God would not approve of Samson's methods – brutal violence and impulsivity - but does use the outcome: a bigger stand-off with the Philistines is being provoked...

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Does it reassure you that God can bring good out of our bad decisions? Have you ever seen that happen, in your life, or in someone else's?

Try to keep the focus on events where God can be seen to be at work, rather than on 'lucky breaks'!

A bit more background v Samson stormed off after the incident above, and his wife was given to his friend. Sometime later (i.e. not in much haste) Samson comes back, wanting his wife, finds this out and gets really angry. He ties foxes together by the tail and sends them into the Philistine's fields of corn with fire brands between their tails. In revenge, the Philistines burn the wife and her father to death. In retaliation for this, Samson launches a vicious attack and kills many Philistines. Again, a greater confrontation is brewing.

8. Read Judges 15 v 9-11. What is the attitude of the men from Judah (Israelites) and why is this strange?

They're asking Samson why he's attacking the Philistines – they are defending their enemy! They're so settled in following foreign gods and living under an oppressive regime, that it has become normal for them and they don't want Samson to rock the boat.

9. Read Judges 15 v 12-15. What happens when the Spirit of the Lord comes on Samson this time?

He kills 1000 men single-handedly, armed only with a jaw-bone!

10. Read v16. Who does Samson give the credit to? What does this tell us about him?

He thinks he's done this himself. Not only is he a terrible decision maker who doesn't keep his vows to God, has a weakness for women and is violent, he's also arrogant and unaware of God's presence. It doesn't sound like a great qualification for a judge, but v20 tells us he led Israel for 20 years.

*11. Next, Samson falls for Delilah, another Philistine woman, who is paid by the Philistines to find the secret of his strength. Read 16 v 17. What does he think the secret of his strength is? Why is he wrong?

He doesn't think it's due to his long hair (or he wouldn't have given that secret to Delilah) or even due to his Nazarite vow. He thinks his strength is his own. He's wrong because his strength is only from God.

*12. Read Judges 16 v 18-21. What happens after his hair has been shaved off, and why?

He loses his strength and is over-powered. He told Delilah that his strength was in his hair because he thought that having his head shaved would make no difference to his strength, thus he felt safe to fall asleep on her lap. But this rejection of the Nazirite vow (remember, he's already killed an animal, gone back to it's dead body and made his parents unclean with the honey too, handled a jaw-bone, thrown a party...) is his final rejection of God. He's so far from God now, that he thinks his amazing strength is his own, not a gift of God. In fact, v20, 'the Lord had left him'. The Philistines blind him, tie him up and take him prisoner.

*13. Read Judges 15 v 25-30. What happened in the Philistine temple and who was the source of power?

God restored Samson's strength for one final blow, pulling the temple down from inside, with all the rulers of the Philistines plus about 3000 men, killed. This crippled the Philistines.

*14. Think back over the account of Samson's birth and his death. In what ways do you see pointers to Jesus?

- *A special birth – an angel reveals to his infertile parents that the child will be born. The angel comes to Mary and Joseph*
- *Samson gains honour and glory, whereas Jesus loses his honour and glory by becoming a child*
- *For both their death is their most important moment. Samson dies because of his own sin, Jesus dies for our sin.*
- *In his death, Samson begins the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines. In his death, Jesus definitively saves his people*
- *Both died after being betrayed by someone close to them*
- *Both were tortured, mocked and asked to perform (Samson complied, Jesus refused)*
- *Both died with their arms outstretched*
- *Both appear defeated in death. But Samson, in his death, kills many Philistines including rulers and presumably priests and so the downfall of the Philistines begins. And, Jesus in his death and resurrection, defeats the power of sin and of death itself*
- *Both are solitary saviours. In the past, God used mighty armies, and then 300 men with Gideon. Now he uses just Samson. It seems there is no-one else left to help. Israel has completely given itself to idolatry*
- *Both had to become weak to become strong*

(Keller 2013, p123-165)

*15. The history of the judges is summed up in Judges 21 v 25. How were the people behaving?

Everyone did as they saw fit – although they repeatedly did 'evil in the eyes of the Lord', they were not doing evil in their own opinion. They rejected God's authority.

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What's the problem with everyone living according to their own version of morality? What consequences has this had in your own life?

16. What makes something a sin, rather than a moral choice?

A sin is something that is 'evil in the eyes of the Lord' – something that rejects God's authority on the matter. So something can be sinful and yet personally or socially acceptable.

*17. What is the moral compass in your life and how do you know it's trustworthy?

Try to use this question to bring the discussion around to living under God's authority when we believe and trust in him. God has shown us in the Bible what his ideal for us is, and Jesus said that if anyone loves Him, they will obey his teaching, John 14 v 23.

Check out – ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

Samson
Judges 13-16

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