

Judges 13-16

Samson: Fallen Hero

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(This story of Samson is told in his mother's voice.)

My son, my beautiful son! He is dead now. He died as a prisoner of the Philistines. He died so we could live, his people. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let me tell you the story of Samson, my son. Some have said they would rather forget his story. Others say that in the end he was a fallen hero.

His miraculous birth

My husband Manoah and I were not blessed to have children. We tried to have children but to be parents was not in the stars for us. But then to our, well, more my surprise, an angel of the Lord visited me with the promise of a child, a son. I was so stunned that I forget to ask any questions of this angel. Not that I had any chance. The angel gave me/us instructions of how to raise this child. This birth promise came with instructions, like a manual:

1. Don't drink any wine.
3. Don't eat anything unclean.
4. When he's born, don't cut his hair.
5. He's going to be a Nazirite.
6. Never shall he touch anything dead.
7. He will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

This child was God's idea. He would be set apart from birth by God and he would begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

When my husband came home, I told him what had just happened. He would not believe me. So he had his own talk with the Lord.

When he got his confirmation, it finally it sunk in: we were going to have a baby. We were going to raise him as a Nazirite. He will begin the delivery of his people from the oppressor's hands.

It was such a precious moment when Samson was born. He was a healthy, strong baby. We could not have been happier. We loved him with all our heart. We did our best to raise him according to God's instructions.

His untimely wedding

We knew that the spirit of God rested on him from the very beginning. From birth he was chosen to do great things for God and us, his people. When I think about it he had it all: smarts, looks, strength, and God's blessing.

And yet, this is the difficult part of the story, he squandered it all because of his insatiable need for getting what he wanted. The troubles began when he went into the enemy's territory to Timnah and fell in love with a woman, a Philistine woman.

We thought it was just a fluke but no, he wanted to marry her; he said that he loved her. We tried to talk him out of it: you just don't go into enemy territory. You don't marry someone you don't know. What is her name? Who are her parents? Can she cook or keep a house? Does she have any brothers or sisters? Is she musical or mean or mousy or messy? Is she free to marry? We tried to dissuade him, believe me. But Samson would not hear any of our pleading. He just said: "Get her for me!"

We had no choice. And maybe it was God's plan, I don't know. Manoah made the arrangements for the wedding, a feast that would take 7 days. As we traveled to attend to the wedding, Samson went ahead of us.

We found out later that on the way, he killed a young lion – because he was attacking him? For fun? We don't know. But he broke Nazirite rule no. 6: Don't touch anything dead! Well, he did.

Then a few days later, he came to us bringing us honey. It was delicious. But later we came to find out that bees had made a nest in the carcass. Again he touched this dead thing, violating God's rules set up for him. But he did not seem to care.

At the wedding he gave his wedding guests a riddle: "Out of the eater, something to eat; Out of the strong, something sweet." He said if they could solve the riddle he would give them 30 outfits. And if they could not, they owed him.

They tried hard but could not figure it out. Then the philistine groomsmen put the pressure on his soon to be wife that she needed to coax the answer out of him, and if not they would kill her and her family. Out of fear she tried every trick in the book until he told her the answer which she relayed to her countryman, and Samson lost the bet.

And what does he do? In his anger and humiliation, he goes down to Ashkelon, strikes down thirty Philistines, stripped them of their belongings and gave their clothes to those groomsmen. What had happened to my sweet boy?

After he paid off the debt, he left the wedding and returned to our house, leaving his wife behind. After he cooled his heels he went back to claim his wife but he finds out that her father has given her in marriage to the best man.

That was the last straw for him. Samson wanted revenge. He could not think straight in his anger. To make a long story short: in his wrath he single-handedly destroyed the Philistines' fields and vineyards, livestock and everything else in the way. The Philistines were seething with revenge and in turn killed Samson's wife and her family. In retaliation, Samson killed as many Philistines as he could – some say as many as 1000, others say more.

Nothing good comes out of violence. It seemed that one violent act caused another more violent act. In the end everyone lost. Granted, we lived in violent times, but it was even harder to watch my own son in the midst of it. We also knew that God had chosen Samson to begin the liberation of our people from the Philistines. I can't help but wonder: was it meant to go this way?

After Samson had killed all those Philistines, he retreated to a cave until life returned to normal, and he followed his calling – to be a judge of the Israelite. He did so for 20 years. And we thought, well, maybe now we can live in peace. But peace was not yet meant to be.

His Tragic death

Over the years the Philistines never stopped trying to kill my son. But because of God blessing resting upon him and God had given him immeasurable strength; he was no match for them. He foiled many of their plans to kill him.

But then, once again, he fell in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. It would be his last love and the one that would take him down. She was bribed (or pressured) by the Philistine leaders to find out where his strength came from. And she tried in ways only a woman could. Eventually, he told her that no razor was to touch his head ever. He said that, “if my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me”. Knowing his secret, she notified the Philistine leaders. Then she lulled him to sleep and summoned a barber. Once his hair was shorn, she woke him, and the Philistines finally captured him. And he realized that his strength has left him. They bound him, gouged out his eyes, and imprisoned him at Gaza. There they use him as a beast of burden to operate a grain-grinding mill.

We could only watch helplessly from afar. There was nothing we could do for him.

We were told that some time later, the Philistines decided to exhibit Samson at a festival in honor of their god, Dagon. They wanted to show off their great catch, their mortal enemy. But not realizing that Samson’s strength had returned with the growth of his hair, they foolishly chained him between the pillars that support the temple. At the height of the festivities, when the temple was filled with thousands of people, Samson pushed the pillars with all his might. The temple collapsed, killing all the Philistines and my son.

Some time later, we were able to recover his body and bury him in our family’s tomb which gave us a little comfort in the midst of our grief.

In the end he sacrificed his own life for us. That part is true. But I still wonder: was all this violence necessary? Was this truly God’s plan? I don’t know but here is what I know:

When we lost sight of God, when we turned our backs on our faith, it cost us dearly. Many a time we, the Israelites, lost our way because we lost sight of our God and God's commandments. We broke our commitments to our God too many times and we ended up in chaos and heart break.

But deep down we knew that God loved us and wanted our best. But it always takes 'two' to make this work. I hope that generations to come will remember this: be faithful and know that God loves you.

And I want to say something to the parents who might read this story and wonder what we could have done differently with Samson. Manoah and I were wondering if people would judge us because some of things that our son did. We raised him to the best of our ability and according to God's plan. We followed the manual that he came with being raised in Nazirite fashion. But in the end he went his own way. We did the best we could. All our children will go their own way. If they chose a path that we don't like – there is little we can do about. There comes a time when we have to let go.

Our son was a bristly bundle of contradictions:

He was a man of faith with a weakness for women. He was a man of prayer given to uncontrollable fits of anger. He was a leader of Israel who kept very loose boundaries when it came to his enemies. He was a man of God who at times lacked common sense.

By no means was he perfect. But then, who is? People will always find a way to get what they want. And in that we all make mistakes. But it is never too late to take responsibility for our actions. It is never too late to return to God and follow God's ways.

It just dawned on me: our son was empowered by God from the very beginning, but he was not controlled by God. That is not God's way. If God were in control, then none of this would have happened and we would not be in this mess, I think. I guess what I want to say is that our decisions matter. We are still responsible for our actions. It took Samson some time to figure this out.

In the end, my son Samson remembered his God. His last words were spoken in prayer to God, "Lord, remember me and give me strength!" It is true: it is never too late to return to God.