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The Strong Man Who was Never Strong

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Judges 16:16-31

When you hear the name Samson, what's the first picture in your head? Every picture of Samson is a picture of what is on the exterior (His hair, his wars). But what is happening internally, spiritually, is the question today. What we will see is a life lived on a downhill slope, not a life of continual sanctification. There is no chapter where he gets better. He ends blind, shackled, and grinding grain in an enemy prison, and yet the New Testament puts his name in the faith chapter (**Hebrews 11:32**). To understand the significance of Samson's life, we must deal with this paradox.

I. What was Samson Supposed to be?

Who Samson is and how much God actually promised

- A. **Samson did not take the Nazirite vow...he was born into it. (Judge 13:5, Numbers 6)** Samson's vow was neither voluntary nor temporary. His status was consecrated before it was ever his choice.
- B. **Samson gives us an illustration of two aspects of holiness**
 - 1. Holiness as assigned to God (vessels, the camp, a Nazirite).
 - 2. Holiness as actually like God (lifestyle, decisions)
- C. **God only ever promised a beginning** (David would be the one to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He finishes what Samson started).

II. What was the Spirit Doing? (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14)

- A. **Rushed upon; not dwelt within** (The Spirit being upon a person is contrasted with the New Testament, where the Spirit now indwells a person permanently as the "*earnest of our inheritance*." **John 14:16-17; Ephesians 1:13-14**)
 - 1. The Spirit's presence was episodic – He came and went.
 - 2. The Spirit's purpose was functional – tied to his office as a judge.
 - 3. The Spirit's power was not sanctifying in Samson's life. Every time the Spirit rushes on him, he kills somebody. It never makes Samson holy.
 - a) Gifting is not godliness. Power is not a fruit of the Spirit.
 - b) Usefulness proves nothing about our sanctification. You can be used by God on Sunday and be rotting on Tuesday.
- B. **The behavior of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament**
 - 1. He could withdraw from a person (**Judges 16:20, 1 Samuel 16:13-14, Psalm 51:11**)
 - 2. His leaving was not about losing your salvation (this was about a person's function rather than their salvation).

III. How Does a Strong Man Fall (Judges 16:16-21)

- A. It's gradual, rather than sudden (**Judges 16:6, 10, 13, 15, 16**)
- B. The hair was the sign, and not the source (**Judges 16:17-19a**).
- C. The cruelest thing sin does is anesthetize the sinner (**Judges 16:19b-20**).
 - 1. After four attempts, Delilah had now captured her prey.
 - 2. Samson was unaware the Lord's power had departed.
- D. Gaza reclaims what Gaza lost (**Judges 16:21**)
 - 1. The place of his greatest display of strength became the place of his humiliation (**Judges 16:1-3**).

IV. Who is Actually at Work? (Judges 16:22-31)

Samson was set apart from the womb and never became holy in his life choices. We need to see that being marked for God is not the same as being made holy. The first is by birth; the second is a work God does, and in Samson's life, God was doing it at the Philistine grindstone.

- A. Symbolically, the narrator tells us God is not finished. Grace appears (**16:22**). Samson had nothing to do with his hair growing back; he did not pray or repent, yet God still showed His grace.
- B. Ultimately, the battle is between God and Dagon (**Judges 16:23, 24; 1 Samuel 5**)
- C. The only recorded prayer of Samson, and God answers a broken man with mercy (**Judges 16:28-30**)
- D. The quiet epitaph (**Judges 16:31**) (*Samson perseveres. But, he does not finish strong; he finishes being held by God. If perseverance meant an unbroken upward line, his name would not be in Hebrews 11.*)

The point is not that saints always improve. The doctrine is that God never lets go of His own.)

1. Note: How we live day by day matters. When it mattered most, Samson had nothing to offer God but a prayer, and the Lord accepted it.

V. What is the Contrast the Text Gives Us?

- A. Samson broke every vow he made. Christ kept every promise He gave.
- B. The Spirit rushed upon Samson and departed / The Spirit rested on Christ and remained (**John 1:32**)
- C. Samson was set apart and never became holy. Christ was set apart and was holy (**John 17:19**)
- D. Samson's strength was on loan, and he lost it. Christ laid down his life, and nobody took it.
- E. Samson prayed to be avenged. Christ prayed, "Father, forgive them."
- F. Samson stretched his arms between two pillars and killed his enemies. Christ stretched out his arms on a cross and saved his enemies.
- G. Samson only began. Christ finished His work.

VI. The Light for our Path

- A. Samson was a strong man who was never strong – God, You are our strength.
- B. Samson was not "needed" by God – God, You are our deliverer.
- C. Samson was used as a beginning – God, You finish all You begin.
 1. We have no boast before God.
 2. We stand in His grace alone, undeservedly and unearned.
 3. We are delivered by Him and His power, not our own.