

## Samson And The Christian (Part 1)

### Introduction: Philistine Oppression

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Today, I am going to start a series. Martin Collins asked me the other day, "What are you going to speak on?" And, I replied, "I don't know." I had not quite decided then, but I told him that I was thinking about doing something with Samson. And, the more I looked into it, the more there was. So, here goes.

Have you ever known someone who seemed to have it all? Looks, intelligence, personality, talents, athleticism, money, position? You name it, they had all the goods, and yet this person never seemed to reach his potential. Have you ever known anyone who, when opportunities presented themselves, usually failed to grasp them, and make the most of them? They just always seem to be right underneath their potential. Or maybe, the potential was glaring, and they never even came close!

Many men out in the audience could probably tell you stories of athletes, who in their early years of their career, looked to be the next Babe Ruth, or the next Michael Jordan, or the next John Elway, or whoever—name your own sports superstar. Yet, there was something at the beginning of the career—a horrible mistake, or an unanticipated misfortune—that cut the career short, and they could never quite come up to the potential that they had.

A few years ago there was an Ohio State University running back who had a wonderful freshman year. But, he stupidly decided to go to the NFL, but the NFL had a policy of not drafting freshmen. His name was Morris Clarette. He tried to go to court to force the NFL to draft him. And the court said no, that they were within their rights to not draft him.

Then he started to getting into trouble (and I think that he eventually was drafted), but there is no way that he can live up to his potential. He lost three years of college experience, and is now struggling.

My dad would tell you about Ralph Keiner. He has told me in the past that when Ralph Keiner hit the major leagues back in the late 1930s, or early 1940s, he had the potential to be the next Babe Ruth. He was a wonderful home-run hitter. You could just expect him to hit one out just about anytime. However, he had back problems, and it kept him out of the lineup a great deal of the time. But, when he was in the lineup, he would hit home runs left and right. There were several years where he hit more than fifty home runs in a fairly dead-ball era, but his back kept him from his potential.

NASCAR fans might immediately think of Tim Richmond, who was a wonderful race car driver. But, he was the "sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll" type, and eventually died of AIDS.

You might also think of youngsters like Adam Petty, who died at age 19 in a race car practice accident. Who knows what he would have been. Would he have been another Richard Petty? But, his life was cut short early on.

Such failures are not confined to sports. They could be brilliant scientists, talented writers or artists, gifted craftsmen, savvy businessmen, or what-have-you. People tend not to fulfill their potential. It

could be little old you and me failing to take advantage of blessings and breaks, and opportunities because of fear, or a lack of motivation, distrust, uncertainty, false humility, unwillingness to sacrifice, and other defects of character.

These sorts of failure to reach our potential happens to us all, and it happens all the time it seems, and it just ends up leaving disappointment and regret, and wonder, and a lot of "what-might-have-been."

The Bible (as I have already given it away) contains the story of such a man who for his day seemed to have it all. He had been specifically chosen by God before his birth, even before his conception. He was chosen to do a work for God. He was placed in a loving and faithful family environment, with his father, Manoah, and his mother (who is not named). And, knowing the character of these two, from the little information we get, he was probably lavished with wise parental guidance and a great deal of affection while he was growing up, being prepared for his God-given task. Scripture even says that as he matured God blessed him, evidently, beyond most of his contemporaries.

Yet, in the end, most people judge Samson a failure, more or less.

Samson was one of the last judges of Israel before Saul was anointed king. The four chapters devoted to his career contain many lessons for us in our salvation today at the end of the age. And this is what I want to talk about in this new series. Perhaps, by considering Samson's career, we can have what it takes, at least the knowledge and understanding, to avoid the pitfalls that plagued him.

What I want you to understand as we go through this is that Samson is very much like us. This will come out as we go along. He is very much like *specific* ones of us. Maybe by the end of this sermon you will get an inkling of what I mean. And, if you do not have that inkling by the end of this sermon, I will tell you!

Turn to the book of Hebrews because we need to establish right as we begin that Samson is among the heroes of faith. And, he will be perfected in the first resurrection. That is what this section tells us. So, I want to establish that first so that you understand that we are talking about a man who is going to make it, but we have to see that in contradistinction to what he actually did in his life. And, it really gives you a great deal of appreciation for the grace of God.

**Hebrews 11:31** By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

I went to this verse just to show you that this is the faith chapter, and Paul has been going through various individuals up to this point in history—by faith he did this, by faith he did that.

**Hebrews 11:32-40** And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah [all judges of Israel], also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted,

tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

So, it is clear from verse 40 in the way Paul went through this that God promises that these will be made perfect with us. They will rise in the first resurrection with the saints. Samson is among those of the first resurrection. And, I think Samson's exploits may have been quite far in the forefront of Paul's mind in going through this. If you try to match what happened in Samson's life with the things mentioned here, Samson actually went through many of these things.

Samson obtained promises. He was the promised son, and did those things that God said he would do. He stopped the mouth of a lion, he escaped the edge of the sword several times, he was made strong out of weakness a lot—that is basically his whole career. He became valiant in battle taking on 1000 of them at once. He turned to flight the armies of the aliens, which the Philistines were (as we will see). He was tortured—his eyes were gouged out. He was made a slave to grind grain in Gath. He endured mocking and scourging, and chains, and imprisonment. And we will find in one place that he lived in a cave (verse 38). And of course, he died among his enemies. I will not say that he died at the hands of his enemies, but he certainly would not have been where he was except that his enemies had him as a prisoner.

So, Paul says at the end of all this, thinking of the many things that Samson had done, and it is incredible in light of what he had done, he says (in verse 38), "of whom the world was not worthy." You think of Samson and the things he did as being so much more worthy than the rest of the world. But there is a reason for all this. There are explanations for these things, which we will get to; and, definitely explanations of Samson's character, and how everything all ended up working out in the end.

What we find, what we see in all of this, is that Samson did make quite a witness for God during his time as judge in his fights against the Philistines. But on the other hand, his dalliances with women, and his carousing, and his unfaithfulness to his Nazarite status, leaves a great deal to be desired.

So the question is: how do we reconcile this? Here Samson has three flings with Philistine women. He mocked his Nazarite status that had been given to him by God from the beginning. He was a very self-willed man and did whatever he wanted and what was right in his own eyes. Yet, he is going to be in the first resurrection.

He is a "worthy"—a luminary among the people of the Bible, and among the whole world. But, how do we reconcile this?

Turn to I Corinthians 3. I will not say that this is a particularly complete explanation. I just want to throw it out there as a partial explanation. Paul says beginning in verse 11:

**I Corinthians 3:11-15** For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work,

of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Like I said, this is not a complete explanation for the status of Samson, but I think it gives us a little bit of insight into God's judgment of him.

Samson was a faithful man—that is what we saw in Hebrews 11. He was a servant of God—a judge of Israel. But, he had serious flaws and failings. He was not a man of character like you would expect of an Isaac, or an Abraham, or a John the Baptist, or a Samuel, or a Joseph. I mention these particular names for good reasons.

Samson seemed to have a particular problem with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> commandments—the 7<sup>th</sup> prohibiting adultery, and the 9<sup>th</sup> prohibiting deceit, lying, and other false witness. These problems, we will see, surfaced very early in his career, and again very late in his career. But, nevertheless, it seems that at the end of his life, he repented of these particular sins during his Philistine imprisonment when he was a slave.

As for his works he evidently did what God asked of him, which is surprising because he was such a self-willed man. But, that is part of the enigma of Samson. Because even though he did what God asked him to do, he did not do it as God would have chosen to do it. Not necessarily. But this is part of the enigma. Samson's story shows and illustrates that God is sovereign in the affairs of men despite Samson, despite us. God is sovereign, yet not in the sense that God overrides a person's choices necessarily.

What the Samson story shows is that God accomplishes His will despite us using the circumstances of our lives to move His purpose forward toward His end. Samson *was* self-willed. But, God was able to use that self-will to accomplish what He wanted to get done.

Now, Samson's work may have been wood, hay, and stubble from the standpoint that God was judging it in terms of its perfection along the lines of how He would have had it done. You could say that Samson's work was wood, hay, or stubble compared to Abraham's or Isaac's gold and silver. But, he will be saved, yet as through fire.

Samson, of course, did not go through a fiery death, but he did go through severe trials and death.

So, the story of Samson should give us great hope. God can work with us, and change us even though we are chock full of character flaws, and stumble often, just like Samson. Perhaps its main lesson is that if God could work through Samson, He could work through anyone!

But, there is a caveat.

I do not want to leave it there, because that would seem to give people a reason *not* to follow God. The caveat is to notice the personal toll it took on Samson. God would have been much better pleased if Samson had been more obedient and cooperative. Much more could have been accomplished for God's purpose, and Samson's reward would have been far greater.

Now, he will be in the first resurrection, and that is a great reward in itself. But, Samson did not live up to his potential. He could have had works of gold. He was certainly equipped to do so. But, he produced wood, hay, and stubble; yet he will be saved.

So, it is not necessarily a good thing, even though it can give us some hope.

The story of Samson takes place in Judges 13-16.

**Judges 13:1** Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

What a sad opening to this story! But this single verse sets the stage for all the events in the next four chapters. So, we will spend some time here in verse 1 of chapter 13. Right away, we are faced with the fact that we are reading about an age that was a time that was in opposition to God. The people in Israel were in opposition to God. They had rejected Him, and had rebelled again, like they had time and time again in the 350 some odd years of the Judges.

The story of Samson begins with a downer. Israel has once again denied the Covenant and relationship that they had with God.

We cannot be exactly sure of the time of these events, but the best estimate that we can figure out from history and archeology is that Samson was born at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC. This would be somewhere around 1095 BC, near the end of the period of the Judges. In fact, Saul was anointed king about 1050 BC. So, this was within 45 years or so before Saul's reign.

His term as judge probably began about 20 years later as he reached his majority, and began to be an adult. So, that would bring the beginning of his judgeship to about 1075 BC. His judgeship, as we will see as we go through here, lasted about 20 years, which brings down to about 1055 BC, which is only about 5 years before the beginning of Saul's reign.

Now, we will try and throw some contemporaries in here.

Jephthah and his judgeship began around 1100 BC. So, Samson was a contemporary with the end of Jephthah's life. And if you go back just a bit into chapters 11 and 12, you will see the story of Jephthah.

This means, also, he was almost an exact contemporary of the prophet and judge, Samuel. Samuel was probably born around 1100 BC, and his judgeship is almost exactly parallel with Samson's. They were in different parts of the nation. Samson was primarily over only the tribe of Dan, but Samuel had a much larger area, and was from Ephraim. (But, he was a priest as well, so he may have been also a Levite—I am not sure—do not quote me on this.)

Something that Beth said she noticed, was that Samuel was also a Nazarite. Hannah said that when she devoted him to God, she would not have a razor touch his head. Which means, that at the same time God arranged for two Nazarites at the same time. Very interesting. Hold on to that thought.

Samson and Samuel—and they both judged Israel at the same time, both during the time of the Philistines. Samson ruled 20 years, and Samuel for 40 years.

This brings us into some kind of an idea of what was going on in the nation. We have Jephthah, Samson, Samuel, and a very young Saul all alive at the same time.

The Israelites, as it says here as we begin chapter 13, had again rebelled against God. And, God, it says, *delivered*—He did not just let it happen—them into the hands of the Philistines. He allowed them to oppress Israel for 40 years. Forty years is one of those time periods that mean trial—a time that they need to endure and overcome during which there are things thrown at them that they have to face and conquer.

This forty year period of the oppression by the Philistines is the longest of the oppressions during the time of the judges. God saved the worst for last. And of course, the oppression by the Philistines actually worked to bring about the kingship of Saul, and later of David.

Not only was it the longest, it was also, perhaps, the worst of the oppressions. It lasted the whole of Samson's judgeship, the whole of Samuel's judgeship, and it lingered on into the reign of Saul. Saul's main enemy for his whole 40 year kingship was with the Philistines, and it took the might and work of David to subjugate them. This was something that went on for about one hundred years; that the Philistines were a thorn in the side of Israel.

I mentioned that it was perhaps the worst oppression. I do not want you to get the wrong impression. It was certainly a time of severe trial for Israel. I do not want to pussyfoot around this oppression of the Philistines. But, it was not a severe trial in the way that you might expect.

When we think of nations conquering other nations we sometimes think that they were cruel, and oppressive, and mean; and ran Israel like an armed camp. But, it does not seem, from the information that we have, that the Philistines were like that. They were certainly warlike. They would not have conquered Israel otherwise, because Israel is one of the most warlike people on the face of the planet. So, they had to have been at least Israel's equal in that regard.

Certainly the Israelites were subjugated. They were under the heel of the Philistines. But, the Philistines did not run Israel like an armed camp. It was not like a concentration camp. There was not a Philistine in every village who ran the place like the Gestapo might have.

If you want a comparison to what it *might* have been like, perhaps we can think of America's occupation of Iraq. That may be kind of shocking, but if we think of it in those terms we may have some insight into what the problem was; what the great concern was from God's point of view.

Just like America, the Philistines of that time were very strong militarily. They were the military, technological bigwigs of the region. They had iron, and controlled the iron trade and manufacture, whereas the rest of the people, including Israel, were still fighting with bronze weapons, which were not as strong or enduring; and whoever had iron weapons could usually beat down those with bronze. It would be the difference of having a machine gun on one hand and a rifle on the other.

There were certain advantages that the Philistines had, but they were also very smart. They wanted to subjugate Israel, but they did not want to make them their enemies, if you know what I mean. This is very much like we are doing in Iraq. We want to rule them, but we do not necessarily want to run their every action, totally taking away their liberties so that they were just frozen, and could do nothing.

You could say that by comparison to some of the other oppressions that Israel experienced, like the Midianite oppression, that the Philistine oppression was quite light. And, despite certain deprivations and restrictions (which always happen with occupying forces) the people of Israel could have lived fairly peacefully, and somewhat prosperously.

And this was the problem.

While the Philistine lords were certainly not benevolent dictators—they were harsh in many ways—they were not really cruel task masters. They acted as overlords, and seemed to have a policy of military conquest, but this was followed by relatively peaceful assimilation of the vanquished. Now, we are getting close to the problem. This was the chief danger to Israel which God saw taking place.

Let me put this plainly. I have been going around it through this whole explanation. The Philistine oppression threatened not to annihilate Israel, which many others might have tried to do, but to dilute and to eventually dissolve Israel's distinctiveness as a people. The Philistines wanted to stamp out Israel as a culture, as a separate people—to do away with their difference from the nations around them. And, this is what got God's attention.

The Philistines were an enemy unlike all the others. The Midianites, the Ammonites, and some of these others who came into Israel during the time of the judges, just wanted Israel's prosperity. They would come in, and take the crops, or they would take their flocks, or they would knock around a few heads, and kill some people, and put them into subjugation. Eventually Israel would rise up and throw them off because there was a great distinction between the two peoples—conqueror and conquered. But, the Philistines wanted to make Israel Philistine. They did not want to leave them as Israelites.

So, this last oppression was worse because as it went on, Israel began losing their separateness—their set-apart-ness (if you will) from the worldly cultures around them. They were becoming less and less consecrated and devoted to God, and more and more like the Philistines.

Turn to Judges 14 to pick up a phrase here, to give you an idea that this is part of the theme of Samson's life.

**Judges 14:3** Then his father and mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"

It is the "uncircumcised Philistines" that I am concerned about here. And, the fact that Samson himself was going right along with this assimilation process. He wanted a wife of the Philistines.

The Philistines are oftentimes called "uncircumcised Philistines" to highlight the fact that they were not part of the covenant that God made with Israel. The sign of the covenant that God made with Israel was circumcision. Every male was to be circumcised on the eighth day, and the Philistines were not circumcised. They were not part of the covenant. And, because the Philistines were the current rulers, whose culture would have won out? The uncircumcised culture. God was afraid that in a generation or two, everyone would be uncircumcised.

So, Israel was in danger of total absorption into the Philistine/Canaanite culture, and thus, totally losing her relationship with God—of being sanctified to God. That is the problem. That is what Samson was called to keep from happening. And, he did not do a very good job, as we will see.

Who were the Philistines?

I have talked a lot about their oppression, but I have not talked a lot about them—what kind of people they were. It is kind of interesting, looking at it now during this time, is that many people who study the Bible, and especially the ethnicity of biblical people, think that the Palestinians, especially those around the formerly Philistine city of Gaza, are descended from these same Philistines. It would be interesting if that were the case because here these Palestinians are a great thorn in the side of another tribe of Israel—Judah.

I do not know. It is a possibility. The name, Palestinians, certainly derives from Philistine, which is the name the Romans gave the area. (Palestina—back when they had conquered that territory and it just hung on, and even today we are calling that the land of Palestine.) The Palestinians, then, picked that name for themselves as well. It would be actually quite interesting if some of them are actually descended from the real Philistines.

Whether or not this is so, the Philistines, we will see in Genesis 10 from whence they came. Genesis 10 is the table of nations, and it talks about the Philistines.

**Genesis 10:6, 13-14** The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. . . . Mizraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, and Casluhim (from whom came the Philistines and Caphtorim).

So, the Philistines were of Ham through Mizraim. Now, anybody remember who Mizraim is? Mizraim is the Hebrew name for Egypt.

The Philistines are descended from Ham, through the father of the Egyptians, but they were a different tribe, and ended up in an entirely different place, as we will see in a minute. That is why, if you go back into history and put together some of these names, it is interesting how they all work together on the same side. And, sometimes how they all work in opposition to each other.

Anyway, the Philistines were a Hamitic people who had migrated to the southern coast of Canaan from Crete. In ancient times Crete was called Caphtor, which is the place where are the same people mentioned in Genesis 10:14. It just simply means the people of Caphtor, or Cretans.

So, the Cretans, and the Philistines are a related peoples. They had migrated from Crete or from north of there in the Aegean Sea, and the coast of Asia Minor, down to what we now know as Palestine now, to the Canaanite seacoast.

They were Hamitic by race, and they were Greek by culture. The Greek civilization of Minoa, which was in the Aegean Sea, was the foremost influence on the Philistine people. Their name in Hebrew is Pelishtim. It means wanderer, or migrant (which is what they were). They were known for this fact that they went all over the place.

They were trying to do two things. (1) Because they had left the Aegean Sea area they were looking for a home to settle. And (2), they were looking for places to trade with. In many ways, they were in direct competition with the Phoenicians, who at this time were doing the same thing; they were colonizing, and setting up trading posts throughout the Mediterranean Sea area.

Historians call them (if you should ever run across this) a portion of the "Sea Peoples." You may have seen that here or there, if you have read commentaries about some of these things. They are called the Sea Peoples. And, the reason is that they were quite attached to maritime trade routes. And of course, they had come from the region of the Aegean Sea.

So, throughout this time they were looking for new lands to conquer, to settle, and to set up shop.

They were essentially Greek, however, in language, thought, religion, tradition, and war. As an interesting sidelight, do you remember when the Philistines came up against Saul's troops at the battle where David slew Goliath? Remember the situation? They sent over a runner and said, "If your champion will come out to meet our champion, we will decide the whole thing by the outcome of their fight." They did this for 40 days, with Goliath himself shouting at them, and the Israelites quaked in fear—until David came and was able to say, "I'll do it. God is with me." And he kills Goliath.

That whole scenario is entirely Greek.

If you noticed when the Israelites—David—killed Goliath, they did not say, "Oh great! We won! Our champion beat your champion! Bye, see you later. We'll have a barbeque next week." They did not say that. What did all the Israelites do? "Hey, we won! Let's go kill the Philistines!" And they chased them down the valley and killed thousands. They were not used to Greek warfare.

Greek warfare was—remember the Iliad? Homer? The war at Troy? What did they do? Hector comes out from Troy, Achilles comes out from the Greek forces, and they have a battle, and that should have been the end of it. Except for stupid Paris, he does not keep the rules, and shoots Achilles in the heel, Achilles dies, and so they have reason to stay and keep the fight going. But, under normal Greek rules of war, that should have ended things. Had Hector beaten Achilles, Troy would have won. But had Achilles beaten Hector, which is what happened, the Achaeans should have won the war without having to use the Trojan horse.

That was Greek warfare. And that is why I say that the Philistines were primarily Greek in language, thought, religion, tradition, and war. They were really among the cultures of Canaan a curious, wholly different element in the mostly Semitic and Canaanite land of Israel. They were an enigma. They were different.

They were a foreign culture.

The best way I know to try and describe this would be as if a huge colony of Chinese people moved into the Los Angeles basin, and started influencing the area about them in Chinese ways which are so radically different from the American ways. The two cultures just do not get along very well.

That was the same way that the Philistine culture was influencing the Israelite culture. But the problem is that Israelites *liked* the Philistine culture, and they were beginning to assimilate to it quite

quickly. As we see as we get into chapter 14, Samson himself wanted a Philistine wife. There was something alluring about the way the Philistines did things.

And Samson himself never got over this. He was attracted time and time and time again to Philistine women. That was probably only the tip of the iceberg. There were other things about the Philistine culture that were attractive.

What is interesting too is that the Philistines met the Semitic/Canaanite culture halfway. They assimilated to the Canaanite and Israelite cultures fairly readily themselves. They borrowed things that they liked, and incorporated them into their own Philistine way of life, which made it even more difficult for the Israelites to resist. Because now, there are these exotic people, these Philistines, who are now a little bit like the Israelites. There is a meeting of the minds in some areas. One of the things that most readily comes to mind is that the Philistines adopted the Canaanite deities. But, they worshipped them in a kind of Greek way.

And now, the Israelites who were never all that faithful to God, especially at this time, who probably worshipped the Canaanite deities along with Yahweh said, "Hey. We've got something in common. We both go to the same church on Sunday." These types of things made it all the more difficult for them to resist.

So, while they retained their distinctive and more exotic differences, particularly in terms of their form of government, and their arts and crafts, and their military tactics and technology, they were just enough like the rest of them in Israel and Canaan that they were very attractive.

The first Philistines had come to Canaan during Abraham's time. Do you remember the encounter Abraham had with Abimelech? That Sarah was his sister? He had done this at an earlier time, but he also did this with Abimelech. Abimelech was ruler of the land of the Philistines it says back there in Genesis, and it mentions Abimelech (which is a Semitic name meaning "father of the king," a title of rulership). However, the military commander who we hear about is named Phicol, and that is a Minoan/Greek name. It is not a Semitic name. So, we know that they were already having an influence during the time of Abraham. And Isaac, of course, met another Abimelech, probably not the same king, because it was many years later; it was a title that each of the kings of this particular area, Gerar, had—father of the king—of course, the father of the next king in a dynasty.

Gerar at the time of Abraham and Isaac was probably just an outpost, a trading post where the Philistines had set up shop in order to trade with the Canaanites and Abraham and the Egyptians down the road. But, their main host did not arrive in Canaan until around 1200 BC, which puts it about one hundred years before the events in Samson's life.

It is interesting why they decided to come to Canaan, and that is because they got into a fight with their cousins, the Egyptians. It seems that what had happened was they decided that they were going to leave their area in the Aegean Sea, and Crete en masse, and they decided to go down to conquer Egypt. It seemed to lay open to them, and they thought Egypt was weak, and they would take over. Well, Egypt was *not* weak. Egypt beat them soundly in a naval battle off the delta, and they had to go somewhere. The first friendly territory they came to was southern Canaan. So, that is where they beached their boats, and decided to settle.

Of course, at the time, 1200 BC, the Israelites were not very strong. This was just about the time of Deborah and Barak in the period of peace that came after their great victory. Israel did not want war.

They just had a very costly battle, and so it was land ripe for the taking for the Philistines. So they took it pretty much unopposed and they set up shop where their kin had already established their foothold.

So, in the hundred years between the battle with the Egyptians, and the time of Samson, the Philistines had settled in, conquered surrounding territories, a very significant area; they had assimilated to the language and religion of Canaan, and become a major power in the region.

Their strength lay in their five cities of their federation—Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. If you look at a map of Palestine, you will find all five of these city-states (Greek governmental form) in the southwest part of Palestine all grouped together, along the coast.

A lord ruled each one of these city-states, which was another Greek thing. But, they had banded together and expanded their control northward toward the Sea of Galilee, and then had gone toward the Jordan River, and even southward along the Jordan valley. So, they started in the southwest, but they went up north and followed a clockwise encirclement of the hill country of Ephraim and Judah. So, they had Israelites penned up against the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and the Dead Sea. It was not a complete encirclement, but it was enough to subjugate them.

Israel at the time of Samson was a vassal state to the Philistine federation.

**Judges 13:2-3** Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son."

Right away, once we read this, we find that Samson was from the tribe of Dan—a Danite from a family who had remained in their allotted territory. If you know anything about the history of the tribe of Dan, you will know that most of Dan at one point said, "Forget this! We're caught between Judah on one hand and the Philistines on the other hand. We're going up north and find our own space and conquer Laish."

So, they get together and take most of the tribe of Dan up there, and conquer Laish, rename it Dan, and live up there out of their tribal allotment. If you look on a map, Laish is way up there. In a sense they were saying, "Forget the rest of you Israelites, we're going to go where we want to go!" So they did.

But, Manoah's family and ancestors decided to stay and be faithful. They were faithful to the command of God to remain in their ancestral, allotted land.

The land of Dan was a small area. They were a big tribe, but received only a small area to settle. It was directly west of Jerusalem, and went to the Mediterranean Sea. Their line began just north of Joppa on the coast, then went inland to Ekron, and then over to Beth Shemesh (which means "house of the sun"), then back towards Gezer, and then back to the Sea. Just a small, little area there to the west of the tribal allotment of Benjamin, underneath Ephraim, and just above Judah. And the Philistines were right under them, and they were squeezed.

Just from the fact that Manoah and his wife were still there says something about them. They were Danites who were faithful, unlike the rest of the Danites who got their own priest, and went up north, and established their own area under their own power.

Manoah and his family were faithful in remaining where God had placed them, which is an interesting little principle. God chose someone who had remained faithful to His command where He had placed them, in Zorah.

A lot of the things that happened in Samson's life, in fact the entire story takes place in this small region, mostly around the valley of Sorek, which runs right through this area. Of course, he made short-term forays into the land of the Philistines as well.

That is the area of Palestine that we are talking about here.

So, they were Danites. Genesis 49 records some of the prophetic character of the tribe of Dan. This, perhaps, is the most curious of all the prophesies that Jacob gave, because Dan is a curious people.

**Genesis 49:16-18** Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward. I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!

Just on the surface, here, it seems that the people of Dan make good judges. "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel." That, perhaps, is a fairly good interpretation of this. However, even though they may be good leaders, if we take it to mean that, they have a knack for trickery, guerilla warfare, underhandedness, not playing by the rules. That is what a snake does. A serpent by the path that jumps up and bites the horse's heels so that the rider falls backward—that is underhanded. That is like striking out of ambush. Even though they may be good leaders, they have this underhanded tendency to do things not by the book, to go around the rules.

There is another way of looking at verse 16 and that is that Dan, his people, will judge as one of the tribes of Israel, which is another way of turning the syntax around, meaning that Dan himself, will judge himself to be one of the tribes of Israel. He will consider himself to be one of the tribes of Israel, but he will do things his own way. That is another way of looking at it. We should think of these things in terms of Samson as we go through his life. Samson certainly thinks of himself as a faithful Israelite, but he is going to do things his *own* way, just like the tribe of Dan decided that, yes, they are a part of Israel, but they would go their own way.

Now, we have always talked about the 'serpent by the way' being their tendency to name things, regions, and cities and towns by their own name: Danube, Dneiper, Denmark, Dan this, Dan that. That is certainly a one way to look at this. But, I think that we have to look at this also in what Jesus said about the wisdom of a serpent. That is how they tended to be; wise, but sometimes wise in a tricky way.

Now, what about, "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord," which is tacked on to the end of this? Is this a plea from Jacob, "God! Save my son, Dan!?" Perhaps. Revelation 7 does not list Dan among the tribes of Israel in the 144,000. Their place is taken by Manasseh. Joseph is given two, and Dan is

the one that is dropped. Could it be that Dan takes himself so much away from the rest of the tribes of Israel that God hardly considers him one of the tribes of Israel anymore but allows his place to be taken by the half-tribe of Manasseh. Perhaps.

We have said in the past that of all the Israelite nations, the Danites of Ireland tend to be the most Catholic. I do not know. That is certainly a possibility. But, it seems that Danites are the least Israelite of all the tribes. The tribes tend to all express Israelite characteristics. But, Dan is kind of the black sheep. He does not go according to the tendencies of the other tribes.

Samson, it seems, is a typical Danite. He seems to share many of these same characteristics. He is a good judge. He is a good leader. But, he tends to do things underhandedly, or in a tricky sort of way. He goes out of his way to be different from other people. He is also one who waits until the very end to really grasp a hold of the salvation that God offers him.

It is very interesting.

Back to Judges 13:2-3. It says that Manoah's wife is barren. This is the same theme that we see in many other biblical stories; Sarah and Isaac; Rachel and Joseph; Hannah and Samuel; Elizabeth and John the Baptist. These are all women who had sons promised to them even though they were barren. This gives you an idea of some of the things that we have to think about in terms of connections with other people in the Bible. Thus, we can in some ways connect Samson to Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, and John the Baptist. That is a pretty illustrious group. These are some great men! Jesus said of John the Baptist that there was no one greater born of women.

And Samson? How does he fit in this quintuplet? Is he anywhere in the same league as Isaac, and Joseph, and Samuel, and John the Baptist? He certainly had the *potential* to be in that league. By far, he is the least of these according to his works, and his faith. And it is very obvious to me that a great deal more was expected of him than he accomplished. If he was given the same circumstances to start out with as Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, and John the Baptist, and look at what *they* accomplished, was God not disappointed by how little Samson actually accomplished? I think He was.

He was, as alluded to in the beginning, full of potential. And he did not reach it. Not by a long shot. But, he did what God asked of him, at least the minimum. Maybe I am selling him too far short. But, we can see from I Corinthians 3 that he had the potential of gold, silver, and precious stones, but he produced wood, hay, and stubble. What could have been? What might have been?

We are going to finish in Hebrews. I know I did not get very far into it. But, this was the introductory message where we had to get a lot of these facts set, and out of the way. It is a set up for the stories which will follow because you cannot really understand the story of Samson unless you see him in context.

**Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

**Hebrews 4:1** Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

Remember, Samson, in the end, proved that he had faith in God. That is the reason I started the way that I did. Samson is in the honor roll of faith in Hebrews 11. But, most of his life, he showed that

though his physical strength was mighty, he was quite *weak* in faith. He had faith. He reminds me of Revelation 3 where it says that the Philadelphia church has a little strength—enough to do the job.

Samson had great physical strength, but his faith was quite weak despite having God's Spirit rushing into him at times to do those great works. We will see that in the sermons to come. And he came disastrously close to failing completely, as we will see in chapter 16; to falling short, as it speaks of here in Hebrews 4. He did this by not taking heed to God's instruction, and to His will. He did not obey. That was his problem.

But, God willing, and He is, if *we* continue in His way, we will avoid Samson's pitfalls, and produce better fruit to glorify God, and we will see this as we go through this story.

I promised you that by the end of the sermon I would give you a hint as to where I am going with this, at least in part. So, I will give you an assignment. I do not speak again until November 11, so that gives you three weeks. I want you to read these four chapters about Samson's life, chapters 13 through 16. I want you to consider that Samson was a son of faithful parents. He was, in essence, ***a second-generation Christian*** .