

Samson and the Christian (Part Six)

Finale and Lessons

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 10-Feb-07; Tape #813

I want to begin this sermon with a bit of background information. This time I would like to look briefly at Philistine religion, because Judges 16, starting with verse 23 through the end of the chapter, has quite a bit to do with Philistine religion. The setting takes place in that atmosphere.

Of course, most people know that the best-known Philistine god is Dagon. We probably remember the fish god pictures by Basil Wolverton in *The Bible Story* book. That is what Dagon supposedly was. He was the father of Baal in the local mythology, and he was then the brother of El, one of the Canaanite gods.

Dagon was an old Semitic god originating in Mesopotamia long before the time of Abraham, and his ancient name was similar, Dagan. In the Philistine local lore, Dagon had come up out of the sea at some point. He was in the form of half man, half fish and had taught the primitive peoples in the use of letters, arts, religion, law, and agriculture. You can see he was an important god to them. We know that the Philistines glommed on to Dagon for some reason, probably because he was a fish god and they were sea people. It appealed to them that their god would come up out of the ocean. So they began worshipping him.

They had temples in Gaza, we know for sure, and Ashdod, one of the five cities of the pentapolis. We think that Dagon worship was probably more widespread through the whole Philistine people. He was their national god and that set them apart from the other peoples nearby. Canaanites were known for worshipping Baal and Asherah; others were known for Moloch and other gods. Philistines were known for their worship of Dagon.

Originally, Dagon was known for having taught agriculture; back in Mesopotamia he was known as a grain god. This is easily seen because his name there was Dagan, and it meant corn or kernels of grain. (The word "corn" comes from "kernel.")

It is thought that he started out as a grain god, Dagan. But over the years as it spread from one locale to another, he changed into the fish god because the word "Dagon" means "little fish." It is believed that it morphed from a grain god into a fish god, because of the etymology of the word. It was an easy thing to happen.

As I mentioned, the Philistines, being a coastal sea people, would probably prefer to believe that their god was a fish, rather than a land god of grain or corn. That is what the scholars think may have happened.

We do not know much about Philistine ritual except from the things that had been dug up in various sites. They seem to have mixed their own Aegean rituals with the normal Canaanite rituals. There was a bit of syncretism between the two types of religions. They probably worshipped Dagon in much the same way as any other heathens—they gave animal, grain, oil, and wine offerings, they offered prayers, and they would sing and dance in front of the idol.

Perhaps there were some sexual practices also, because the fish, in ancient times, was another fertility symbol. Even as the grain god, Dagon, fish were also known as a fertility symbol. So, I am sure that these things occurred.

We know from another place that they had priests. Again, I am sure that it was very similar to Canaanite religion; just switch the names, and modify a couple of rituals.

In Judges 16: 24, we see part of a hymn that the Philistines sang to Dagon as the one who delivered Samson into their hands. We will get into this a bit more later. Elsewhere, as in I Samuel 5 and I Chronicles 10, it is clear that they gave Dagon credit for their military victories. He was their all-around god that they praised and worshipped most of all.

I have given you a bit of a backdrop to the events which occur in the latter parts of Judges 16. Today, I would like to get through these last nine verses and then pull a few lessons together from the life of this hero of faith whom we have been studying. He was a hero of faith, just not a very good one—he was converted, but quite carnal.

Recall from last time that Delilah had done her dirty lowdown deed. She had used her feminine wiles to get Samson to tell her all his heart (which he stupidly did), including the secret of his strength, showing that he was physically strong, but mentally and spiritually he was quite weak. He did not have what it takes to resist temptation or persuasion. He said that her nagging was so bad that it vexed him unto death. It could not have been that bad, but it seemed so to him, and it was the means by which he died, ultimately.

Once his head was shaved, the Philistines came in, bound him, bored out his eyes, and then sent him off to prison to grind grain for the rest of his life. As I said before, grinding grain was probably at a single mortar and pestle type setup—it was menial woman's work or slaves work. By gouging out his eyes and making him grind grain in prison, they were humiliating him.

Yet over time, as is natural, his hair began to grow back. The Philistines knew this—they could see. But they seemed to have thought nothing of it. Why? They thought of Samson's strength and invincibility in terms of magic, and not in terms of a real God behind it. They believed that their gods performed spells, incantations, and such. They probably thought that because they had shaved Samson's hair off, they had broken the spell and his strength would never come back.

Whether or not he had hair did not faze them. It was not something that mattered to them anymore. He was supposedly no longer capable of doing the deed that he did before because the spell had been broken.

We read in Numbers 6 as we closed last time that if the Nazarite vow was broken, it had to be restarted from scratch. All the time that had been spent in the vow before this was lost and counted as nothing. We have to assume that because Samson was humiliated to such an extent—brought very low without his great strength or eyesight and unable to do anything for himself—that sometime during this captivity, Samson rededicated himself to God.

I think that it is a pretty good assumption that he repented. He expressed his sorrow before God and said that he would do whatever he could to make up for it. He wanted forgiveness. He wanted to be right in God's eyes again. And if God would allow the opportunity he would work for Him in righteousness this time. I am assuming all this, but I think it is correct by the results

shown later in the chapter. That is now where we are in the Judges 16.

Judges 16:23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!"

You get the idea that this little saying at the end was like the note on the end of an invitation that they sent out to all the people to come to the great sacrifice. "Samson has been defeated by Dagon. Come to the temple and we will all rejoice!" I mean the capture and humiliation of Samson was a big deal to the Philistines. Remember he had been judging Israel for twenty years, and for that time he had held the Philistines at bay single-handedly. He had stood there in the highlands above the valley of Sorek and said, "I am here, and you are going no further so long as I am here to stop you."

The things that happened at the beginning of chapter 16 made them recognize that even though twenty years had past, he was still as strong as ever. He could carry the gate, the beam, and everything else up the hill that faces Hebron. But now, he was in their hands. The time of Samson's oppression of the Philistines was over.

That is how they looked at it. He had kept them down. He had inhibited all their ambitions for national glory. He had killed thousands of their soldiers. He had kept them from becoming more dominant and prosperous—regional hegemony. He has squashed them like bugs whenever they decided to rise up against him. But now, he was under their control. This was something to rejoice about. It was now time to drink, party, and live it up!

And so they did. They gathered all from the very top—the lords of the Philistines. Everybody was invited to this great feast. The wording here suggests that the rulers of the Philistines, not just the five lords of the Philistines, but all of them from all the cities, small and great, plus the minor lords, plus all the mayors of the towns, and anybody who was anyone was invited to this great feast at the temple of Dagon in Gaza. To them this marked the beginning of their return to dominance and power. This was something to celebrate!

I want you to note the Philistine's attitude toward Samson's capture. For one thing, it was a matter of national commemoration. And secondly, they credited their god Dagon with delivering him into their hands. Not only was this a national-political-military victory, they also considered it a religious victory.

They believed that by putting Samson down, Dagon had proved himself stronger, and not just stronger than Samson, but stronger than the God of Israel, Samson's God. If you know God at all, He does not stand for being humiliated. It is not something that He enjoys. It is not something that He will put up with. When you or anyone else puts God down, He reacts! He is jealous for His Name's sake. He certainly does not like to share glory, especially with a god like Dagon who is nothing but an idol carved out of wood to appear like half a fish and half a man.

Notice what God says through Nahum:

Nahum 1:2-8 God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges

and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies; The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked. The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, And dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, And the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, And the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, And the rocks are thrown down by Him. The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him. But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place, And darkness will pursue His enemies.

That all started with the idea that God is jealous. He will not be put down. He will not be made low. He will not be thought of like other gods. And He promises to take vengeance for such things.

There is another occasion, in I Samuel 5, when the Philistines sought to humiliate God. You will remember this one. The Philistines gloated over God when they won a military victory and captured the Ark of the Covenant.

I Samuel 5:1-4 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod [the place of the other temple to Dagon]. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the temple of Dagon and set it by Dagon [standing over the ark]. And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD [bowing in obeisance to God's presence]. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands *were* broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it.

God said, "They did not get the point." So Dagon goes over again. This time it crashes to the ground. The head falls off. The hands fall off. All that is left is the fish body. God had dismembered Dagon—drawn and quartered, in a way.

I Samuel 5:6-8 But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors [possibly bubonic plague], both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god." Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of

the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath."

We do not need to go any further right now. They carried it to Gath. They got the tumors too. Then they sent it to Ekron. And they said, "Do not send that thing to us!" So they came up with another alternative—send it back to Israel with a guilt offering.

God did not take this gloating over Him and his servant lightly. With this situation with Dagon and the Ark of the Covenant, He reacted immediately. The first night it was there, Dagon falls over and shown to be far less than what God is.

With this attitude that the Philistines were showing toward Samson and his capture, and that this was a triumph of Dagon over Samson's God, you can get an idea that something is building here. God's anger is not going to be pent up for very much longer. If you want to, write down Deuteronomy 32: 36-42, which is another section where God talks about how jealous He gets when His people chase after foreign gods.

Judges 16:24 When the people saw him, they praised their god;

The "him" here is probably Dagon, not Samson. Samson does not come in until the next verse. Probably what happened was that, as part of the ritual, they paraded the image of the god. Here Dagon was paraded and surrounded by his priests so that everybody could see their god.

Judges 16:24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "*Our* god has delivered into *our* hands *our* enemy, The destroyer of *our* land, And the one who multiplied *our* dead." [Bold emphasis mine]

Do you see where the glory is here?—"Our god and us!" They were really challenging God by this chant. This is a song of praise, or a chant. It really does sound like a chant if you read it in English like the Hebrew is written,

*"He has given, the god of us,
into our hands, the enemy of us,
ravager of the land of us,
multiplier of the slain of us."*

If you could hear it chanted by a bunch of priests, it seems to me that perhaps this was something repeated and repeated, getting the crowd all worked up. Whatever and however it was done, it was a boastful victory song of praise to Dagon, giving him all the glory and credit for what had happened. What they are essentially doing is rubbing Samson's and God's noses in

their victory.

They are not just asking for retribution; they are challenging God to act. The song is very defiant and provocative.

Judges 16:25-27 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them." Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines *were* there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed.

Recall early on that I mentioned that the Philistines just loved drinking feasts. That is probably what happened here. It was probably a lot like the Israelites thank offering [peace offering] in which the sacrifice was brought, and the priests kept only some, and the remainder went back to the people, and they had a big dinner. This may have been very similar to that with wine, beer, and strong drink—whatever they brought. It is very clear that their hearts did not become merry with just the food. There was drink that helped to cheer them on. Once they got a little bit tipsy, they demanded to see Samson, and to humiliate him some more by making him play before them all.

I am pretty sure that they did not want to see feats of strength. In fact, they probably thought him incapable of feats of strength because they thought that the spell had been broken. Remember, he was blind and all it would take was just a little poke here, a slap there, chase this, do that, to make a really ridiculous looking man.

They wanted him to be publicly humiliated. Maybe they tripped him, led him around so that he would run into a column, or stumble over somebody's foot, and so on. Perhaps they had some sort of fool to play tricks on him, or beat him up and mock him in other ways. I am sure there are many ways to humiliate a blind man.

When this was over, he pretended to be tired. He really was not tired. It only says that he asked the lad to lead him to the pillars of the temple so he could lean on them.

We do not know exactly how this temple appeared, but we do know a few things from other Philistine temples that have been excavated. What is known is that the two central pillars mentioned at the end of verse 25 were the focal point of the entire temple. There were two pillars, maybe three-quarters of the way back. As you come in the front, the first things you would see were these two pillars about three-quarters of the way down a long hall. There were probably other pillars on the sides, but these two on the end were the ones that were important, because just behind these two pillars was the pedestal, or platform, where the idol was.

What is thought is that this colonnade held up the roof, but the central portion was perhaps

open so just the portico on the side was covered. This would allow for people to be on the roof and look down into the temple. But the two columns at the end were the main supports for the entire edifice. Once those two columns were pulled down, nothing else would stay up because the balance of everything would shift, and the whole thing would implode. Everything would come down toward the center.

Dagon would have been behind these two pillars in a recessed cove in the back and Samson would have performed in that area right in front of these two pillars, basically not only performing for all the people, but, in the type, performing before Dagon—being humiliated before Dagon.

These two pillars were like the keystone in an arch made of stone or brick. The sheer weight of the roof, plus the 3000 or so people up there, would have made the weight of the place just tremendous. And with those two keystone-type pillars knocked out, it would have come down in a hurry.

How big was the temple? We do not know. But, it is very likely that the temple of Dagon in Gaza, where they brought everyone to this great celebration, was the largest one in the Philistine nation. It might have been what we would consider their national cathedral. It was probably a pretty big place. It was not your run-of-the-mill shrine which might have been a small room. Most likely this was a large imposing place.

If we want to compare this to, let us say, Solomon's temple, the dimensions of it were 90 feet long by 30 feet wide and 45 feet high. It was a pretty big place. It was longer than our building by 15 feet. It was just a bit narrower than ours, and certainly a great deal higher.

Solomon's house, his palace, was 150 feet long, about twice the length of our building by 75 feet, which is the width of this building roughly, and it was also 45 feet high. There was certainly the know-how in the region to build such a significant building.

If you consider 150 feet long by 75 feet wide by 45 feet high, that could very easily fit several thousand people. It would be packed a bit, but there were two levels to this building. There was a ground level and the roof level. I think that it is easy to see that there could have easily been 4000 people attending this big celebration, with 3000 of them on the roof.

What probably happened here was that the common people and the less noble were on the roof—the cheap seats. It was the major lords, and certainly the five lords of the pentapolis, plus their families and attendants, that were actually in the temple and having this feast under cover of the roof out of the sun. You can maybe better understand that the hierarchy of the Philistine nation was poised now under all this weight, not only of the structure itself, but the 3000 people up there too.

One more thing on verse 27 where it says near the end that 3000 men and women on the roof watched while Samson performed, "watched" is such a pedestrian word. If we really wanted to understand the gist of this, it would be, "they feasted their eyes on." They had just had a wonderful feast of meat and wine, and now they were feasting their eyes on Samson's humiliation. This gives you an idea of how they were looking at it.

Judges 16:28 Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!"

This was Samson's second truly heartfelt prayer. The first one had been at the end of chapter 15 when he thirsted after killing all those Philistines at Lehi. Now this is the second one, and probably this was the more earnest and sincere of the two.

Commentators who know Hebrew, and understand the feeling and thoughts behind it, said that this is full of fervency and humility. This was a sign of real repentance in Samson. He had to be brought to the very lowest of low estates in order to finally pray a prayer like this. It is also worth noting that he calls God, "LORD GOD" and "God."

Obviously, English hides what the Hebrew is saying. He actually uses three different names for God here. The first one, "The Lord," is *Adoni*. *Adoni* means "master," or "lord," and "ruler."

The second one, "GOD," is in all capital letters, which is shorthand in English Bibles for the tetragramaton, YHWH, which is the word that essentially means, "the one who is" But, it was known among Israelites as the name of their Covenant God. It was the name that God revealed to them in terms of making the covenant with Him. So this was the intimate name they had for God.

Samson called him, My Lord and Master, Husband, the One Who I have made the Covenant With.

The third one, *Elohim*, stresses God's omnipotence and strength—a very good reason for wanting the God of Strength to come to his aid at that time.

We see here that Samson understands his relationship with God in three ways. First, that God is his absolute Owner and Master. God is in control. Secondly, he has a vow. God is the God of his Covenant and that he has legal and spiritual duties and responsibilities under this God. And the third one is that God is the strongest Being in the universe. There was no one else to turn to with more authority and power. He is the Almighty.

This makes us understand that he had finally come to a greater understanding of God. God had become real to him over the past few months since his being bound, made captive, eyes gouged out, and without strength. In his humiliation, perhaps, he finally began to see what God had in mind when He first called him from his mother's womb. Better late than never, I guess.

Now his use of "I pray" twice suggests deep penitence—real repentance. It is the plea of someone who is a worm asking the Great One for a favor; of someone of very low estate asking for his Lord to give him a little bit of mercy. In a way, it is a very strong form of, "Please, I beg of you."

But then Samson cheapens all of this by saying, "Let me do this to get revenge on my enemies for my eyes." With Samson, you always get a little bit of good, and then a lot of bad. He seems to have been a mixed bag in almost everything that he did. Even when he did some of his

greatest deeds, he did it while defiling himself—using the jawbone of a donkey, which he was not supposed to touch; yet he killed a thousand men doing a work for God.

Here he prays this wonderful prayer, first half, and then he does something in the second half of the prayer that is not so admirable.

Is that not all of us, though? I mean, here I am pointing a finger at Samson, but we all do stuff like this. Even our best works are defiled by our flesh, by our carnality; and Samson's is just glaring, whereas we try to hide ours. We cannot fault him too much. God obviously forgave him.

But this indicates that though he had repented, he had not entirely overcome his central weakness, which was that he still lived not by faith, but by sight. He was mourning the loss of his eyes. And those eyes were the things which had gotten him into trouble all of his life. Remember that "saw" is a big theme in these four chapters of Samson. Samson "saw" this and went after it, and got into trouble.

People are always seeing things that other people do not see, and you can go through there and look at it yourself. That is one of the main ideas in the story of Samson. He embodies, you might say, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." That was Samson, but God did His best to use someone with an attitude like that.

I think that Samson felt that the Philistines putting out his eyes had been unfair, and unnecessary, and excessive. The Philistines did not think that at all. They thought it was a very natural guarantee for Samson's docility for the rest of his life. He would not really be able to plan anything, or do anything. Without his sight, he was basically helpless.

But Samson failed to see, even though he thought it was excessive, was that he lacked the spiritual insight to understand that God was the One who had the Philistines remove his eyes, because they were the prime media for his sin. They were what kept him separated from God. They were the ones that always led him away from God. And so, if a thing offends you (or God) pluck it out, cut it off.

God has done this a couple of times. Do you remember Saul of Tarsus? What did he do to Saul? He blinded him before he could use him. And that is what he had to do to Samson; he had to blind him before he could really use him, because his eyes kept taking him away from God.

What I think we see here in verse 27 is a converted Samson—a converted person in the mold of I Corinthians 3—he was still carnal. He was not completely righteous yet. But he was converted. He had a long way to go. But he was converted. He still had a lot to learn, if he had had the time to learn it. But he was converted—finally.

Judges 16:29-31 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. [I get the idea that he paused as if he were taking a deep breath and gathering his strength.] Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had

killed in his life. And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought *him* up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

The end.

Evidently the central pillars that he braced himself on were quite close together, probably less than the length of a man. There was one temple excavated of the Philistines, and their pillars were about six feet apart. Samson was perhaps a little bit taller. We do not know if these pillars were six feet apart, or less. But, they were close enough for him to get between them, and touch them, but also flex and push them apart. They were probably closer together than the length of his arms.

When we think of temples like this, we think of huge pillars like around the temple of Athena, or the Parthenon, or something like that. Huge things made of stone. But these were probably made of wood, and carved, and sitting on a base of stone, perhaps in a small depression. Although, stone pillars are not out of the question. But, more than likely, comparing to the temples found and excavated, they were probably wooden pillars.

Now, the word in verse 30, "...and he *pushed* with all his might..." is the Hebrew word that suggests a twisting motion. Not just that he just pushed them straight out off the base, but rather that he somehow twisted them, or rotated them from off the bottom of the base. And all he needed to do was shift the weight, even just a little bit, so that they began to topple, and the whole structure came down. Great slabs of stone, wood, and brick fell from who knows how high. Remember some of these things found were as much as 45 feet tall. And it crushed everything beneath them—tons of rubble.

And many on the roof probably died just from the fall. That is a long way, forty-five feet. A few thousand died with Samson in his final act as judge of Israel. And that is why the statement is repeated at the end of verse 31; he had judged Israel twenty years. Because the chronicler considered that final act with the Philistines to be his last act as judge; that he had actually brought Israel deliverance through killing all those Philistines in the temple of Dagon.

The deed did work to deliver Israel for a short time. Remember the cream of the crop of Philistia was there in that temple that day, and they perished. What this did was to throw the whole of Philistia into chaos—all their leaders and princes, everyone who was anyone was there. And, we can see that this was the case because the Danites were able to come right down into Gaza, take the body of Samson, and bury him back in Israel.

If you think about it, here was Samson, the enemy of Philistia—you would have thought that they would have denied the Israelites his body just out of spite. But, they did not have the wherewithal after this happened to do that. They had no one to call out their militia. They were devastated.

Who knows how long this period of chaos lasted. It gave the Israelites enough time to, perhaps, shore up their defenses, have a little breathing space, who knows. But it says something too

about the weakness of Israel. None of the tribes, and no one in the tribes, it seems, tried to take advantage of this, and recoup some lost territory. This would have been the perfect time to come in and take back some of the land that they lost to the Philistines in earlier battles.

But no, they just sat there, waiting.

God did not raise anybody up immediately. They ended up having to wait for Samuel who would rally them a decade or two later, and start their slow climb from this nadir that they found themselves in.

What lessons can we draw from the life of Samson?

I want to tell you, as I begin this new section, that I do not feel that these are the only lessons. They might not even be the best lessons, but they are the ones that I came up with. And, they are the ones that I believe affect, as I stated in part one of this series, that the story of Samson is especially useful for second-generation Christians.

My reasoning is based in a large part on I Corinthians 7:14. Please turn there. The parallels between this verse and what happened in Samson's life are striking.

I Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

Paul says here that children of church members are holy. They are put into a different category. They are set apart. They are sanctified.

It is as if there are people in the world, then there are church members, and then there are church member's children, who seem to have a special place with God. He puts them into their own category and place of protection. Remember, there is the blessing of little children, and church members go through that. And it is one of those rites—rituals—in which there is a laying on of hands. And in any occasion in which there is laying on of hands, whether ministerial ordination, or baptism, or anointing, or any other case, it implies being put into a different category—being set apart—being made different for a specific purpose.

So, the children of church members are holy and set apart.

We have speculated in times past that this set apart status enables them to be called of God outside the normal routine of calling out of the world. Some have even gone so far as to say that this gives them an automatic calling. I do not know if we could say that for sure, but some have speculated it. It certainly means that they are in a different category; that they are protected; that they are given education; that they are allowed to join us in this way of life, and learn and grow in this way of life, if they choose to.

This is how Samson was, in a way, from birth. He was in his own category. He was a Nazarite. He was the son of two Israelites who had made the covenant with God. In that way, he was like a second generation Christian. He was born in the church. He grew up knowing and practicing the truth as much as Manoah and his wife. And, with Samson in particular, he was preparing for God's use. That is shown in Judges 13. From the very beginning, God said that he would be

consecrated from the womb until the day he died, and that he would be used to begin to deliver Israel.

He had a job, and God was preparing him, and He put him in a separate category—a Nazarite from birth. Only a few people have ever had this—Samuel, John the Baptist, and Jeremiah. (Do we know he was a Nazarite?) There are very few who were in this category. That is where I started to think about these parallels between Samson and the children of church members.

Samson did what a lot of church member's children do. He squandered his opportunity. He chose to flirt with and experiment with what was taboo, rather than taking his calling and purpose seriously.

I will be going back and forth between uncalled children of members, and the one's who finally do come into the church, because this affects them before and after baptism. I might not make that distinction clear all the time. But even those who are baptized often flirt with what is not allowed. And they often do not take their purpose seriously. They often do not realize, I think, just how bad the world is, because they have lived all their lives in their cocoon of the church; maybe they do not see the stark differences between them as well as first generation Christians tend to do.

For Samson even in seeing and doing and hearing about fantastic miraculous things did not make him turn his life around. He continued pursuing what was taboo to him. What happened was that even though God was able to use him—making lemonade out of lemons—Samson's life was a disaster. It was full of deception, destruction, and death by the thousands. Obviously, he was called to deliver Israel at a time when they needed military victories, but certainly death seemed to hang about Samson.

But, he had it in him, had he not squandered his opportunities; he had it in him to bring Israel peace, power, and prosperity; and for himself, to receive favor from God. But he did not seem to be able to do this. He could not bring himself to do the things that he should have done, that he knew he should have done.

To me, Samson is a lot like what is seen in I Corinthians 3: 11-15. I have mentioned this before, I think, but this is where I put Samson.

I Corinthians 3:11-14 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [He is the foundation. We all start from there.] Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; 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.

Notice that Samson's work, in terms of enduring. He only began to deliver Israel. And, it was rather short-lived. Instead of giving Israel peace for many years, like he could have done, it was just temporary.

I Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

I think that that destruction of the temple of Dagon was Samson's fire. He suffered great loss—his own life. And his work, in a sense, was destroyed, but he himself was saved. It was not the best. He did not have gold, silver, or precious stones as his monument. He had rubble.

The first lesson to second generation Christians: Do not squander God's investment in you. We have all been given the same opportunity that Samson had—and even a more spiritual opportunity than he had.

Another glaring error in the life of Samson was his constant flouting his Nazarite vow. It seemed like every time he turned around, Samson was doing something to break that vow. He was either drinking, or in a vineyard, or touching dead bodies, and he even so far as to tell Delilah to shave his hair off. Every part of his vow was broken by the time God broke him. Even some of the great works he did for God was done while defiling himself.

And I have not even mentioned yet his attraction to the Philistine women, which is, in the type, idolatry; that he was constantly attracted to other religions—you might say. He wanted to know how other people worshipped.

Why do we seem to fly like moths to the flame when something is denied us? It is very human and carnal for us to do such things. Notice I Corinthians 10. By the end of this sermon, you are going to say that Samson was a "I Corinthians Christian." They had the same problems that Samson had. And Paul brought them out.

I Corinthians 10:5-12 But with most of them [He was talking about the Israelites] God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

I think a lot of us second generation Christians think we stand, and are not paying attention, not taking heed to the very great chance of falling. The second generation Christians that I have known have a pretty sorry track record for resisting temptation.

Hey! I grew up in the church. I have known many people, my age, younger, older, in similar situations to mine, and most of them have done some very stupid things. Things that they knew

they should not have done. Things that they have been taught since they were quite little that were wrong.

Yet, as mentioned before, like moths to the flame, they decided they wanted to "experience the world," and see what was being denied them. "Have a little fun! Sow some wild oats! It is okay! We can not get hurt. God is protecting us! We are His special people! He has got us in His own little drawer!"

Oh, really?

Remember, Samson's life was full of deception, destruction, and death. And though God used him, he left him as an example [like these Israelites] of things we should not do! Following Samson's example of flirting with the world, of doing defiling things, is so wrong, and it might just get a person in this special category a ticket to the lake of fire.

I know that second generation Christians know what not to do. And they often do very well at avoiding blatantly committing those types of sins that they know that they should not do. But, they give themselves a great deal of permission to cozy up to these things which they should not be doing, without going over the line, which they themselves draw, just this side of sin as they define it. Or, another thing that second generation Christians love to do is, "Well, I cannot play sports on Friday night, and I cannot have sex; so, I think I am going to get this bottle of alcohol, and drink the whole thing, and get myself smashed. Or take a keg of beer, because does not God say that it is okay to drink?"

They will avoid the things that there are taboos about, and then they will take something that is allowable, under certain circumstances, and they will do that lawful thing to excess. "Oh, it does not matter if you get drunk...once or twice a week..."

I think that it is absolutely hilarious, as well as hypocritical and downright wrong, for the kids to sit here in church (I am not talking about anyone in particular) on the Sabbath day, listen to a sermon, sing the songs, pray the prayers, and then as soon as the sun goes down, they are off to a bar, dancing whatever kinds of dances that are danced, guzzling liquor by the gallon, and thinking, "It is okay! We are in the church." Stupid!

Do you know what happens after that? They lose their inhibitions (if they still had any), and then they end up getting some girl pregnant, or getting pregnant themselves, because they are smashing drunk. They do not know what they are doing.

Or, they drive too fast and reckless on their way home, getting into an accident, committing manslaughter, or killing another motorist. Or, they do something else stupid with a bunch of their buddies, ending up in jail, having robbed a store, or roughed up someone, or gotten into a fight.

All this because they did something that was "okay under certain circumstances" in which they have drawn the line so close to the sin, or they have drawn the line over the point of sin that they get themselves into deep, deep trouble. They do all this because they feel that they have been denied something.

How credible is a second generation Christian after doing some of these things that I have just

mentioned? Would you trust that person as far as you could throw them? I doubt it. It takes years for a reputation to be built, and even longer for it to be recovered after destroying it in one night of debauchery because it was "okay under certain conditions."

My second lesson is (to make it general) that self-indulgence in any form is sinful and limits what God can do with you. Keep yourself pure so God can work with you and do great things with you. If you defile yourself like Samson did, it becomes harder and harder for God to make anything of you.

The third lesson, which is the most important, is found in I Corinthians 1:

I Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

I Corinthians 1:26-30 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption

I Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.

We are something special in God's eyes. Yes, we are in a different category from everybody else in the whole world. Just like Samson, having made a vow, having been a Nazarite from birth, he was something special. He is still something special in terms of how few were like him. What did we name, three or four men in the history of the entire world who were called like that, and made a Nazarite to do something great for God.

We are in a similar position. There are only a few in this world who are the temple of God, who are the body of Christ, who have God's Spirit residing in us.

We are holy, chosen to be redeemed from this world, chosen to be given glory, and eternal life, in His kingdom as part of His very family, as the firstfruits of all humanity. What an awesome distinction and honor that it.

But, we second generation Christians take this for granted far too often. And do you know why? Our holy, set-apart status is old hat. It is something that we have grown up with. It is run of the mill. It is kind of second nature to us. It is nothing special

But it is special!

It is very special. The Great God of this universe has taken us out of this world and protected us in his church as the few, like the hairs in Ezekiel's pocket. He has made us different. He has made us unique. He has given us power. He has given us His mind, which is the greatest gift that he could give us. Not to mention, the wonderful future that He holds in front of us, and promises to us, if we will just continue in His way.

There is nothing greater that a human being can have in this life than what we have.

Going back to the Delilah incident for a moment, what did Samson say would happen if his head were shaved? What is the distinguishing feature that made him different from everyone else? Judges 16:17—he tells Delilah, "If you shave my head, my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

He would lose what made him special. He would just be nobody...anybody...everybody.

The same thing will happen to us if we give up our sanctified status before God. If we give it up. I did not say lose it. I said give it up because it is our actions that will cause us to give it up. We will be as weak and common as anyone in this world—unprotected, unable to defend ourselves. We will actually be part of this wretched, evil world, and absolutely exposed to all of its dangers, both physical and spiritual.

I want second generation Christians, and first generation Christians—all Christians—to realize the awesome place that they have been put into. That drawer that I alluded to earlier that God can shut to protect us away from this world. That awesome place of exultation—we do not see it now—but, it is there—God has already exalted us in His own mind by putting us on this pedestal, as it were, saying, "These are My people, My sons and daughters! I am going to keep them!"

We have to recognize that we have this awesome position before God, and remember it day after day, everyday.

II Peter 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

The third lesson is to realize that what makes us different does not make us weird, but it makes us strong like Samson—spiritually.

Hebrews 11:32-12:1 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, 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, sawn in two, tempted, and 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.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.