



PERSONAL APPLICATION

SLEEPLESS AT SHILOH – 1 SAMUEL 1-3

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“Once again, the Redeemer of the new covenant resembles the Redeemer of the old, and the miracles of God continue through each generation bringing life and hope to those whose only similarity is a trust in the Lord.”



DALLYING WITH DELILAH

As you no doubt have noticed, God’s Old Testament miracles often involved the destruction of Israel’s enemies. We’ve witnessed the destruction of the Egyptian armies in the Red Sea, the holocaust of the city of Jericho, the rout of the Amorite kings, and the massacre of the Midianites. This ongoing destruction of God’s enemies often leads the gentler among us to question God’s methods and means. He is, after all, a good God, but His goodness surely seemed questionable to those who were dwelling in the land promised to Israel. For those slain by God’s people, the Lord of Israel must have appeared warlike and bloodthirsty.

It should be remembered, of course, that many of the battles at which we marvel were initiated as a result of an oppression engendered against Israel. Not all of Israel’s battles were waged against seemingly innocent citizens. The primary teaching of these early miracles involves Israel’s deliverance from her enemies by God’s special intervention. Throughout our studies of the Lord’s miracles, a common theme will revolve around “deliverance.” In the early miracles, this deliverance was overt and clear, involving the physical massacre of people opposing the Lord’s will. As Scripture continues, we will get an understanding of more subtle miracles of deliverance with which the Lord blesses His people, ultimately pointing to the concept of redemption, that is, deliverance from sin, death, and the devil.

Our reading today is an example of a battle of liberation waged by one of God’s chosen: the unimaginably strong Samson. The enemies which had enslaved Israel were the Philistines, and the reason for Israel’s enslavement was, once again, her own wicked ways. God’s Word tells

us that Samson was the son of a man named Manoah, from the tribe of Dan. Like Sarah, who had wed Abraham and found herself childless, Manoah's wife found herself barren. Like Sarah, and Mary the mother of Jesus, Manoah's wife was visited by the Lord and told she would bear a child. Interestingly, Manoah's wife was commanded by God not to drink any alcohol during her pregnancy (13:4), a medically sound suggestion which we follow to our day. She was also told this child's hair should never be trimmed.

Samson grew up strong and healthy, and when he reached the age when a young man's fancy turns to love, his attractions were captured by a young Philistine woman. We can only imagine the sort of horror which raged within Samson's parents because their son was seeking a lifetime mate from outside his own people. But, we get an inkling of Samson's willpower in brushing aside his parents' concerns and demanding they bring her to him anyway. It was, after all, the duty of the parents, above all the father, to arrange for the marriage of his sons. Generally, the parents chose their son's future wife, but Samson demanded his parents follow his selection.

After performing a Spirit-filled display of power by tearing a lion limb from limb with his bare hands, then returning to the lion's carcass where bees had spun a hive filled with honey, and after scooping the honey out of the carcass and giving it to his parents for food, Samson proceeded to his wedding. The remarkable story of the lion's dismembering surely foreshadows Samson's upcoming acts of strength, and suggests the manner by which Samson would one day deliver God's people from their oppressors through raw, brute strength. And by pulling honey from the lion's carcass and feeding it to his parents, Samson was being positioned by God to defeat the Philistines.

Samson's first marriage was a horrible failure,

and yet we understand it was used by God to set the stage for Israel's deliverance (14:4). It was a common practice at the feasts and weddings of Samson's days to befuddle the guests with riddles. The puzzle invented by Samson could not be solved without the clue of the slain lion and the swarm of bees. Those in attendance were to guess the unknown identity of the puzzle's description: "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet," and if the puzzle could not be solved, thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes were to be given Samson. If they could solve the puzzle, Samson would be forced to deliver to his puzzlers the same quantity of goods.

These were high stakes in Samson's day. Those who were engaged in solving the puzzle realized they had no chance of winning their prize unless they forced the answer from Samson's wife. They threatened to burn her and her father's household to death unless she provided the solution. With that incentive, Samson's wife wheedled the answer from her husband. "If you really loved me," she said, "you would tell me the answer!" After seven days of this, Samson surrendered and shared with her the solution to the puzzle. She, in turn, told her people, and her people answered Samson's puzzle correctly.

Samson, enraged by his wife's betrayal and the duplicity of the Philistines, marched down to the principal city of the Philistines, Ashkelon, killed thirty men, took their clothes, and gave them to those who had solved his puzzle. As you might expect, this initiated the feud between the Philistines and Samson which would ultimately lead to Israel's freedom.

When Samson felt his enmity toward his wife lessen, he went to visit her, but discovered that her father, believing Samson could never forgive her, had given her to Samson's friend. This so enraged Samson against the Philistines

(whom his wife's father represented) that he caught 300 foxes, attached torches to their tails and released them into the standing grain in the Philistine fields! Can you imagine the sight of all these animals running rampant through the fields, igniting everything their flopping tails touched? And the Philistines, so enraged that their crops had been consumed by Samson's treachery, burned to death his wife and her father's household. The cycle of violence continued to escalate. Samson began slaughtering Philistines hand over fist, and the Philistines, in turn, organized themselves to wage war, not only against Samson, but all the people of Judah.

Clearly, Samson's personal vendetta against the Philistines was getting out of hand. The people of Judah were terrified at the possibility of Philistine vengeance, so they captured Samson themselves to hand over to their oppressors. They tied him up and delivered him to the Philistines, whereupon Samson broke free from his ropes, picked up the jawbone of a donkey, and began clobbering every Philistine he could find until 1000 had been struck dead. This was enough to convince God's people that Samson was stronger than their oppressors, and they followed him for the next twenty years. But, the Philistines seethed with anger and had thoughts of revenge. They would meet another day. After all, Samson had a weakness for Philistine women!

Samson's tendency to fall in love with Philistine women resurfaced when he met a woman named Delilah from the valley of Sorek. It seems doubtful she loved him, but since he was so attracted to her, she felt comfortable using his attraction to find his vulnerabilities and disclose them to her people. Besides, the Philistine leaders promised to give her 1,100 shekels of silver each if she could discover the secret of his strength (that's 28 pounds of silver each). Do you think money had any influence in her decision to help her people?

Delilah inquired again and again about the secret of Samson's strength, and Samson repeatedly gave her false clues. Once he told her that if he were tied up with seven bowstrings which had not yet been dried, his extraordinary strength would evaporate. But, after arranging with the Philistine leaders to hide in the room, then tying him up, and calling to Samson that the Philistines were attacking, Delilah realized she had been "conned." Samson easily broke free from the strings. Then Samson claimed if he were tied down with new ropes which had never before been used, his strength would dissipate. When Delilah attempted the same method of capture, Samson again broke the ropes as if they were threads of spaghetti. Delilah accused Samson of making a fool of her, and demanded to know the secret of his strength. Samson claimed that if someone were to weave the seven braids of his head into the fabric on the nearby loom and tighten it with a pin; he would be as weak as any normal man. But, this didn't stop Samson either.

Delilah, reenacting the same scene as Samson's former wife, said, "How can you say you love me when you won't confide in me?" And for days she whined and wheedled until Samson told his secret. If someone were to shave his head, he would lose his remarkable strength. While he was asleep, Delilah had Samson's head shaved and called in the Philistine leaders. They gouged out his eyes in order to permanently incapacitate him, led him back to their city of Gaza, shackled him, and made him grind grain. Grinding grain was considered "women's work," too lowly for a man to perform. Thus, Samson was humiliated and shamed, laughed at and ridiculed. It appeared to be a pathetic end to the great warrior and judge.

But, God was once again to intervene and deliver His people. He would perform a great miracle through the death of his servant Samson. The episode begins with a great offering of thanksgiving to a pagan god, and ends in a

holocaust of destruction and death. The Philistines gathered to thank their god for delivering Samson into their hands. Their god, Dagon, was considered the father of Baal, and was worshipped as a grain god. When the Philistines were feeling giddy with victory and pride, they called for Samson to perform for them. He was dragged from prison, brought to Dagon's temple, and forced to entertain before the crowd. Because he had been blinded and could no longer see, he asked for one of the servants to place him where he could lean against the temple pillars.

Samson prayed the Lord would be with him once again, to strengthen him and give him his former power to wreak vengeance on the Philistines for blinding him. The Lord's Spirit returned to Samson one last time, and bracing himself between two pillars, he pushed the wooden pillars from their stone bases. (Interestingly, at one ruin, archaeologists have discovered an old Philistine temple with a pair of closely paired pillar bases. This particular temple was not found in Gaza, but it does suggest the accuracy of the story's details.)

This is the end of the story of Samson. But to his credit, his story ends with the destruction of God's enemies. When Samson pushed the pillars from their bases, the ceiling and walls of the temple collapsed. On the roof were 3,000 men and women watching Samson perform. The temple was crowded with the Philistines, including all their leaders. When the temple collapsed, the Philistines were destroyed as a threat to Israel, and by his sacrifice, Samson had freed his people from their oppressors.

Of all the people in the Scripture through whom the Lord worked miracles, I find Samson the most distasteful. For one thing, he seems a rather ignorant and willful lout, the kind one might find swaggering about a local bar, arrogant and quarrelsome. Considering his stubborn attitude towards his parents, he appears inconsiderate and disrespectful. Whether you agree with my impression of Samson or not, we cannot but marvel at the individuals God chooses to deliver His people. We are witness to their many faults and character flaws, and yet, the Lord selects them above all others to be the instruments through which He works miracles.

The fact that the Scripture writers refused to hide the defects of their heroes is a tribute to their honesty. It is such devotion to the truth that gives the miracles of the Bible an extra degree of validity. And it is reassuring to sinners such as you and me that the Lord can and does use the most flawed among us to work His wonders. He uses the inarticulate Moses, the loutish Samson, and the young David to deliver His Old Testament people from their enemies. And He will choose the Christian persecutor Saul (Paul), the boastful Peter, the lowly fishermen like James and John to implement the Gospel message that frees us from the tyranny of sin and death. Once again, the Redeemer of the new covenant resembles the Redeemer of the old, and the miracles of God continue through each generation bringing life and hope to those whose only similarity is a trust in the Lord.

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Lord Jesus, although I have often wandered from You like a lost sheep, I thank You for returning me to Your fold. Now keep me eternally Yours. Amen.

1. How many wives did Elkanah have, and what were their names (1 Samuel 1:1-2)?

Who else enjoyed the intimate companionship of more than one woman at a time?
Genesis 16:1-2

Genesis 29:26-28

1 Kings 11:1-3

2 Samuel 5:13

What is the Lord's opinion of such behavior? (Exodus 20:14; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 10-11; Matthew 19:9)

What does this say about the spiritual perfection of some of our greatest biblical heroes (Romans 3:23)?

What problem did Elkanah face because he violated God's will (1 Samuel 1:5-8)?

2. How are the following events similar to one another?

1 Samuel 1:21-28 and Luke 2:21-24

1 Samuel 2:1-10 and Luke 1:46-55

1 Samuel 1:25 and Luke 2:24-27

What do you think the Lord is demonstrating by these similarities (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1)?

3. Why were Eli's sons also priests (Exodus 29:8-9, Exodus 27:21)?

What great evil were Eli's sons committing (1 Samuel 2:12-16, 22)?

What modern example can you give of a servant of the Lord abusing his office?

4. What valuable source of guidance and hope was missing during Samuel's childhood (1 Samuel 3:1)?

What is the consequence of God's silence (Proverbs 29:18)?

What is the reason for God's silence (Micah 3:4-7)?

In your opinion, why do so many people claim God is silent today?

Why do we believe God is not silent today (Hebrews 1:1-2)?

Where do we hear God speak (1 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16)?

5. Where was Samuel sleeping (1 Samuel 3:3)?

What rested in the room with him?

What was so special about this artifact (Exodus 25:21-22)?

When God called Samuel, why do you think Samuel naturally thought the voice originated from Eli (1 Samuel 3:2)?

6. When Samuel listened to the Lord's revelation, what promise did God's Word confirm (1 Samuel 2:27-36, 3:11-14)?

How did Samuel feel about telling Eli the revelation of God (1 Samuel 3:15)?

What reaction did the following individuals receive after delivering the revelation of God?

Jeremiah 36:1-3, 20-26

Revelation 11:1-10

Acts 7:54-60

Acts 21:27-32

What reaction might you sometimes expect when you share the Gospel revelation with others (1 Corinthians 1:23)?

7. How would you describe Eli's response to the judgment of God (1 Samuel 3:18)?

8. Do you think parents should be held responsible for the failures of their children? Why?

9. The Lord continued to reveal Himself to Samuel. What was the reaction of God's people to Samuel's prophecies (1 Samuel 3:19-21)?

10. How was Samuel's prophecy about Eli and his sons fulfilled (1 Samuel 4:4-18)?
