

HEBREWS CHAPTER 11 – HEROES OF FAITH

Lesson #16

SAMSON
Hebrews 11:32

“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....”

When we approach Hebrews 11 we must do so with a set of caveats regarding faith or we will be questioning why some persons are included in this register. Several points will help us understand the operation of faith:

- There are no sinless human in the chapter;
- There is no one with perfect faith named in the chapter;
- Each person mentioned exhibits faith in a different context;
- There are degrees of faith which varies with the individual and the demand.
- God does not require a full-grown faith before He responds.

With these guidelines in mind, let us proceed to consider the faith of Samson. One of the very first Bible heroes we came to know as children was Samson. The stories about the Bible’s strongman were among our favorites. He was the Superman of the Bible. He wasn’t able to “leap tall buildings with a single bound” but he could pull down tall buildings with a single push. At his final show he literally brought the house down!

Why was Samson included in the Honorable Mention section of the Hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter 11? Let us begin at the beginning of his life.

SAMSON’S GODLY FAMILY.

Very few parents are visited by an angel who visibly appears to them and tells them that they are going to have a child. Samson’s unique birth announcement is as follows:

Judges 13:1-4 - “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. 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.”

Judges 13:6,7a - “So the woman came and told her husband, saying, “A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name. And He said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son.’.....”

Judges 13:8-12 – “Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, “O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born.” And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her.

Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the other day has just now appeared to me!" So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?" And He said, "I am." Manoah said, "Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?"

Samson had a good beginning. He was born into the home of God-fearing parents who were informed beforehand of his birth and realized that God had a special work for him to do. That would certainly make the parents both curious and careful in bringing up the child.

SAMSON'S GOD-GIVEN FUNCTIONS.

Samson's father asked the angel, "What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?" (nkjv) Or "What shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?" (nasv) That was a very natural question by the father. In other words, how was the child to be brought up and what would be his life's work. He already knew that God had some special work for him to do, but Manoah was curious to know exactly what that work was to be. He wanted to know more than the angel was willing to tell him. The angel had already told his wife that he would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:5)

Judges 13:25 records: "So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him....." Samson was a special child, with a special mission from God. What were some of the functions he was to perform for God?

A. Samson Was a Judge Over Israel.

"He judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines." (Judges 15:20)

The period of the Judges extended from the death of Joshua to the establishment of the monarchy, a total of over 400 years. In general the different tribes acted independently of each other until the monarchy was established and a single king reigned over all of them. Before that, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

The judges were divinely ordained to maintain order in society. They were not judges as in our legal system but more like the governors in our political system. No judge campaigned for the position but they were raised up by God and had God's authority behind them. They seem to have exercised jurisdiction only over limited areas.

B. Samson Was To Be A Deliverer.

"He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:5)

God raised up Samson to wage war against the enemy. He was not a good leader; he did not organize an army; he tried to do it all himself. He was a lone-ranger. Lone-rangers are prideful and arrogant persons who want to do it all themselves so that they will get all the credit. One of the better characteristics of good leaders is the ability to visualize the solution, organize for work and deputize workers. Samson did neither.

There is no record of Samson leading an army to defeat the Philistines. Yes, he personally menaced the Philistines unmercifully. He was a General George Patton type of fighter – “old blood and guts!” He wrought havoc upon the enemy and kept them in a frenzy! His zeal seemed to know no limits. But he did not deliver Israel. He just stirred up the hornets nest!

C. Samson Was A Nazirite.

Judges 13:4-5 – “Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”

“Nazirite” means “separated unto God.” In Numbers chapter 6 are the strict requirements for one who took the Nazirite vow. The vow was usually for a limited period of time. However, Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist were Nazirites for life. This indicated that they were called to a very special ministry for God.

SAMSON’S GREAT FEATS.

Samson’s physical prowess may have overshadowed his spiritual prowess, but he is included in the Faith Chapter not because of his muscle but because of his faith. We see glimpses of his faith as we study his life.

In the days of Samson, Israel’s arch enemies were the Philistines. His escapades were against them and Samson was the Philistines worst nightmare! His encounters with them are recorded in Judges chapters 13-16. His feats of faith, courage and strength are well documented. Repeatedly we read that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him” empowering him:

Judges 13:25 – “*And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him....*”

Judges 14:5,6 – “A young lion came roaring against him. *And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him*, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he *had* nothing in his hand.”

Judges 14:19 – “*Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily*, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men...”

Then three thousand men of Judah went to Samson and said, “Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?” Mind you, they were his countrymen! The cowardly men of Judah were threatened by the Philistines and they went to Samson and asked him to surrender to them so they could turn him over to the Philistines. That would pacify the Philistines and keep them from attacking them. These men of Judah were supposed to be Samson’s friends. They were cowardly compromisers. Peace at any price was their philosophy.

With tongue in cheek, Samson agreed to be bound with ropes. The men of Judah then took Samson to the Philistines, intending to turn him over to their enemies. When Samson saw them, we read, “*The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him*; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands.

He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it.”

(Judges 15:14,15)

Other exploits against the Philistines include the following:

Judges 15:4-5 – “Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.”

Judges 15:8 – we read that “he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter.”

Judges 16:2-3 – When the people of Gaza tried to trap him, he just picked up the gates and carried them up a mountain! This is the actual wording: “He took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.”

Samson, undoubtedly, performed many other mighty feats which are not recorded. His destructive energies employed against the oppressors of Israel are legendary. But we must remember, that apart from the Spirit of God he was as weak as other men. And, unfortunately, his dalliance with Delilah as well as other of his fleshly flings, prove that, although he had uncommon strength, he did not have much common sense!

SAMSON’S GLARING FAILURES.

Unfortunately, Samson’s failures are famous. It was after he had judged Israel for twenty years and had on many occasions demonstrated his faith in God that his collapse and downfall came. He, like Peter, was impetuous and impulsive, and he went down to ignominious defeat. The strongest of men became a weakling! Samson mastered Philistines, but Samson had not mastered Samson. His undisciplined fleshly passions started a spiritual landslide. This is what happened with Samson:

Judges 16:1 – “Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.”

Judges 16:4 – “Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.”

We do not need Paul Harvey to tell us “the rest of the story.” Scripture details the account, books have been written about the affair and movies have been made about Samson and Delilah. One compromising step in Samson’s life led to another, until finally, lulled to sleep in the lap of an enemy woman, he is shorn of his personal holiness and power.

“So he awoke from his sleep, and said, ‘I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!’ But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison.” (Judges 16:20-21)

The end of the story of Samson is very tragic. Think of it! Samson, the Judge, the servant of God, hair cut, power gone, eyes blinded, grinding at the enemies circus, the laughing-stock of the ungodly! Let his wreck be our warning! He is a warning to all of us of the pitfalls into which any of us, but for the grace of God, may fall. Always remember that the devil is out to rob you of your reward and to rob God of an obedient servant.

Samson was a Nazirite in outward appearance, but he knew little of inward spiritual fortitude. It is so easy for us to profess much with our lips and to possess little with our hearts; to have a form of godliness but not the force of godliness. If Samson had been walking daily with the Lord his faith would not have collapsed. Spiritual decline usually begins very gradually. How important it is to “abstain from all appearance of evil.” (1 Thess. 5:22) Remember, Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife (Gen. 39) to sin against the Lord but he overcame. Let us follow his example and not that of Samson. (Genesis 39) Remember, when fleeing temptation, do not leave a forwarding address!

SAMSON’S GRAND FINALE’.

Samson was restored to the Lord before his death. Judges 16:22 states, “However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.” He regained his hair but not his eyesight. Sin always leaves scars!

After his restoration, his last act of faith is recorded in Judges 16:28-30 – “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!” 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. 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 the story ends with these words: “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.” (Judges 16:31)

CONCLUSION

One of the saddest statements in scripture is in reference to Samson’s unconsciousness of his loss as the result of sin. Judges 16:20 states, “He did not know that the LORD had departed from him.”

There was a gradual diminishing of his God-awareness, an unconscious deterioration of his sense of the presence of the Lord.

Sin has a numbing effect. It numbs our consciousness of the pain of hurting God; it makes us insensitive to the harm to ourselves and others. Have you ever taken an anesthetic? Then you know it makes you numb to bodily pain. Sin is like an anesthesia, the more we sin and the longer we sin the more numb our conscience becomes until, at some point, we feel no more guilt and conviction. A creeping spiritual paralysis has taken over and our lives are powerless for God. Sin first deceives, then defiles and then deadens!

However, restoration may be yours and mine by the grace of God. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)

One last word of warning: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (I Cor. 10:12-13)

We must not lose sight of the fact that Samson was a man of faith even though there were failures in his life. All of us operate in one of two realms: either the realm of faith or the realm of the flesh. Furthermore, all of us, and I repeat, all of us, are guilty of moving back and forth from one to the other. The more mature our faith the less fleshly we are. Let us pray with the disciples: "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke 17:5)

LESSONS

1. It is possible to have a good beginning and yet end badly.
2. To whom much is given, much is required.
3. Responsibility brings with it accountability.
4. Might does not make right.
5. He took the source of His strength lightly and succumbed to his weakness.
6. Failure need not be final.

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