

SAMSON

The Man Who Tried to Serve Two Masters
Judges 13:1-7 and Matthew 6:24

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Throughout history there have been many men who were noted for their great strength. One of the earliest was a man by the name of Milo Croton who lived in ancient Greece. He supposedly carried a four year old bull around the stadium at Olympia. Another was a Roman Emperor named Maximinus Thrax, who crushed rocks with his bare hands and pulled heavy wagons all by himself. He was supposedly eight feet, six inches tall and ruled between 235 and 238 A.D. A more recent strong man was Louis Cyr. He was born in Canada in the late 1800's, and was noted for lifting a horse off the ground and pushing a train car up a hill. Here in America Brian Shaw is considered one of if not the strongest man in the world. At 6'8" he eats a dozen eggs for breakfast, weighs around 400 pounds and has won the World's Strongest Man Competition in 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2016. He's called the "Gigantor." On one occasion he bench pressed 525 pounds. None of these men, however, can compare to Samson, the Bible's mightiest strongman. His story is found in Judges 13:1-16:31. It's a story which began with great promise, but which sadly ended in tragedy. Together let's examine his life and see if we can determine what happened, and what if any lessons we can apply to our own lives.

If you have read the story of Samson's life, you know that it had a marvelous beginning but a very sad ending. As had taken place on other occasions, the Israelites had forsaken the Lord once again, and were now being assailed by another legion of enemies. This time it was the Philistines, a warrior race that lived along the Mediterranean seacoast. They were known as the Sea Peoples and at one point were so strong that they had almost conquered Egypt. They were a worthy adversary and to make matters worse they knew the secret to making tools and weapons out of iron. They had ruled over the Israelites for 40 years, especially the tribe of Dan whose territory was located right next door to their major cities along the seacoast. Israel was in need of a deliverer and God was about to provide them with one. His name was Samson. The story of his life can be divided into five chapters or episodes. Let's take a brief look at each of them:

1. **A Miraculous Birth**—Judges 13:1-24—The Angel of the Lord visits Manoah and his wife and promises them that they will be the parents of a son who is to be a Nazirite, a man dedicated to the Lord. This son, who was named Samson, which means "Sunny," would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to deliver the Israelites out of the hands of the Philistines. His uncut hair would be the source of his God given strength and would identify him as being a Nazirite, a man completely and wholly dedicated to the Lord.
2. **A Messed Up Marriage**—Judges 14:1-20—Samson falls in love with a Philistine girl, much to the chagrin of his parents. On his way to visit her, he kills a young lion which becomes the inspiration for a riddle at the bridegroom's feast. His bride reveals the

answer to the riddle, angering Samson who pays off his wager in blood and departs for home.

3. **A Vengeful Warrior**—Judges 15:1-20—Samson goes to visit his wife and discovers that she has been given to another man. In response to this perceived insult, he captures foxes, ties their tails together and burns the Philistines' crops. They retaliate, killing his wife and father-in-law. Infuriated, Samson vents his anger, killing a multitude of Philistines. Marching into Judah, the Philistines demand that Samson be turned over to them. The men of Judah comply, but when Samson is released into their custody, he breaks the ropes which bind him and using the jaw bone of a donkey proceeds to strike down a thousand Philistine warriors.
4. **A Fatal Attraction**—Judges 16:1-22—Samson's lustful desires get him into trouble, first with a harlot in Gaza and then with amorous woman named Delilah. Employed by the Philistines, she eventually discovers the secret of his strength. She shaves his hair and betrays Samson to his enemies. They gouge out his eyes, bind him with bronze shackles, and imprison him at a grindstone threshing grain.
5. **A Tragic Victory**—Judges 16:23-31—The Philistines decide to host a great celebration at their temple dedicated to the god, Dagon. Samson is brought into the temple to entertain them. His hair, representing his Nazarite vow, has regrown. Grasping the two supporting pillars of the temple, he pulls down the building upon himself and 3,000 worshipers who have gathered there, ending both his life and his twenty year ministry as a judge of Israel.

Well, as stated earlier, Samson's life started with great potential and promise. You could even say that it began miraculously. Unfortunately, it didn't end that way. Samson had become an object of ridicule and mirth, brought before the crowds at Dagon's temple so that people could make fun of him. But even then, realizing that his miraculous strength had returned, Samson was clueless as to why God had chosen him to be a judge. Take a look at the prayer he prayed standing there between the two pillars of the temple, "O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes" (Judges 16:28). The entire focus of Samson's prayer was not upon his people and their needs, nor was it upon the Lord and what God still might accomplish through his life. It was focused solely and utterly upon himself, a desire for revenge because he was blind. How did Samson arrive at such a low point in his life that his last words were, "Let me die with the Philistines" (Judges 16:30)?

The answer can be summed up in what Jesus had to say in Matthew 6:24. Speaking to the multitudes during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." In other words, it's impossible, to serve two masters. Somebody or something is always going to claim your ultimate allegiance. You

cannot bow before God and the things of this world all at the same time. Nevertheless, that's precisely what Samson tried to do and he failed. He was supposed to be a Nazarite, living a life dedicated to God, abstaining from alcohol, never touching a dead body, and refraining from the cutting of his hair as an outward and visible sign of his devotion to the Lord. He could have been a giant of the faith, serving his people as a righteous judge and delivering them from the oppression of their adversaries. But he forsook that way of life. In so far as we know, he never held court as a judge and never asserted himself as a religious leader among his people. In fact, he never even led an Israelite army in combat. He was essentially a "one man band," who enthusiastically embraced the wayward life style of the Philistines. Even though he was supposed to represent God, his way of life was just the opposite. He was vengeful and violent, consumed by carnal desires, unwilling to protect and really care for his people. Yes, he killed a lot of Philistines, but in the end his actions brought no peace. In fact, just the opposite took place. Eventually his tribe, the people of Dan, were so completely overwhelmed by the Philistines that they forsook their homeland and moved north. Samson is a perfect illustration of Jesus' admonition, "You simply cannot serve two masters, because no matter how hard you try, you'll end up loving one and despising the other." And the same is true for all of us if we try to live the same way. Like Samson, eventually our lives will end in tatters, a hollow shell of what they could have been if we had only remained true to the Lord.

So how does all of this apply to you and me? You may have already guessed. Modern day Christianity in America is following in the footsteps of Samson. God's people want to straddle the fence between godliness and worldliness. They want to enjoy all the sensual pleasures that this world has to offer while still being considered loyal followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's not just the folks in the pews. Sometimes it's the people who stand behind the pulpits. We've all heard the stories about nationally recognized religious leaders, both men and women, who have fallen from grace. In many instances, both they and everything they stood for was shattered, like pieces of broken glass. While living in Hampton Roads, I learned of a large, fast growing church with a charismatic pastor. Unfortunately like Samson, he pursued an immoral relationship which not only ended his pastoral ministry, but which so disrupted the life of the congregation that they had to file for bankruptcy, losing their multimillion dollar facility.

Over and over again, those who write about the Christian church in America report, "There is no discernable difference between the life-styles of those who claim to be Christians and those who do not." In other words some, perhaps many, of God's people have become like Samson. They have bought into the ways of the world, our modern day secular, godless society, and they have embraced its standards instead of what the Bible says about the way in which we are to live. In fact, a recent study has determined that only a minority of Christians in America today possess a biblical world view. They see the world and interact with it and one another by today's standards, most of which have nothing in common with the Scriptures.

That's way we need to remind ourselves of what Paul had to say to the Christians in Rome. Writing in Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 he said, "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which

is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” He then goes on to illustrate throughout the remainder of that chapter what this kind of lifestyle looks like. In other words, he is saying that we need to live like Christians, not like the rest of the world around us. What we say and what we do should reflect the values of our faith and not the attitudes and actions of the current society in which we live.

And that my friends will be a challenge. Some groups like the Amish and the old order Mennonites have simply withdrawn from modern day life, living in their own distinct and separate communities. That’s one alternative which we may be forced to adopt. But there are also some other possibilities that we need to consider, alternatives which Samson could have adopted which would have created a more positive outcome for his life. Let me share three of them with you.

1. Renew your allegiance to the Lord and His Word. What if Samson had listened to the wise counsel of his parents and married an Israelite girl of his own faith background instead of a Philistine lass? What if he had spent time really listening to and absorbing all of the accounts of what God had accomplished through his ancestors? What if he had truly embraced and then put into practice the faith of his fathers? His life would not have ended in a prison grinding grain for his captors. Now as never before we must become totally committed to the Lord and the Christian way of life as revealed in the Scriptures.
2. Become aware of what is happening around you. What if Samson had really understood the schemes of his supposed Philistine acquaintances and friends? What if he had truly realized that Delilah only wanted to utterly and completely destroy him? What if Samson had not been so gullible? He would have retained his strength not only physically but spiritually as a leader among his people. The same is true for us. We need to carefully scrutinize current events and cultural trends from a Christian point of view. That’s why I belong to the Family Foundation which addresses issues in Virginia and the Family Life Council which addresses issues in Washington. I want to know and if necessary take action about what is really happening in my state and my nation.
3. Withdraw from the influence of today’s secular society. What if Samson had decided that he was no longer going to be influenced by the Philistines? What if he had committed himself to spending more time with his fellow Israelites, instead of living at times all alone in a cave? What if he had learned that we need to love and work with one another instead of being lone rangers? He would have been an uncompromised champion of the God of Israel. We too must limit the impact of what is transpiring around us, whether it is what we watch on TV, what we view on the internet, where we send our children to school, or what kind of company we keep in our everyday lives. We also need to spend more time with fellow believers. There is strength in an alliance of liked minded believers with whom we can find guidance and support to face the challenges of life.

Have you ever tried to straddle a fence, walking down the middle without falling off on either side? It can be quite difficult and very painful when you fall. Samson tried and even with his great strength he failed. Jesus said, "You cannot serve two masters!" His words of warning are just as true for us as they were for Samson. So let's stop tittering on the precipice of disaster. Instead, let's jump down on the side of the Lord!