

People of Faith: Samson (Judges 13-16)

If I was to say the word *Samson* what would you think of?

Male	Weak
Muscular	Headstrong
Strong	Loner
Blind	Womaniser
Delilah	Beard
Long hair	

But was Samson all of these? Was he some of these? Let us have a closer look. The story of Samson can be found in Judges 13-16. Turn to Judges 13, page 256.

We are told about a man called Manoah, a member of the tribe of Dan who lived in a town called Zorah. Then an angel appeared to his wife, who is not named and she is told that she is to have a son whom they are to raise as a Nazirite. For a Nazirite they were to

- Avoid all contact with dead bodies
- Drink no alcohol
- Not take a razor to their head

This is the beginning of Samson and I love the prayer of Manoah to God in Judges 13:8

“...”O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.” (Judges 13:8 NIV)

A prayer that should be on the lips of all prospective parents.

Samson grows up and we read, verse 24

“The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.” (Judges 13:24-25 NIV)

But it did not take long for his true personality to show through. Judges 14:1

“Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me.” (Judges 14:1-3 NIV)

Samson is wrong on several counts in these few verses

- Why was he marrying a Philistine woman when it was forbidden for the Israelites to marry outside the nation?
- Why was he marrying a Philistine when they were the rulers of Israel. Judges 13:1

“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.” (Judges 13:1 NIV)

- He shows no respect for his parents, so going against the fifth commandment
- But he did not go against himself being a Nazirite
- Avoid all contact with dead bodies

- Drink no alcohol
- Not take a razor to their head

But then we get the intriguing words in verse 4

“(His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.)”
(Judges 14:4 NIV)

So God was behind all this? Did Samson know this or not? We are not told. It is going on my list of questions that I am asking when I get to heaven.

But Samson does break all three of his Nazirite conditions.

1. Avoid all contact with dead bodies

Firstly we read that Samson kills a lion, so comes into contact with the dead body, but does not tell his parents. But then later we read this

“Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion’s carcass.” (Judges 14:8-9 NIV)

He had contact with the dead body, but does not tell his parents anything about it.

Later on in his life Samson killed one thousand Philistines with jaw-bone of an donkey, Judges 15:15

“Finding a fresh jaw-bone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men. Then Samson said, “With a donkey’s jaw-bone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey’s jaw-bone I have killed a thousand men.”” (Judges 15:15-16 NIV)

And so again he used something from a dead body and it was fresh!!

2. Drink no alcohol

The second prohibition was not to drink alcohol. Did he break this? We will see. One thing that Samson liked was his riddle and pithy saying. We have seen one this evening

With a donkey’s jaw-bone I have made donkeys of them (Judges 15:16 NIV)

That was probably the joke of the day as it was against the hated Philistines.

Earlier in his life we read

“Now his father went down to see the woman. And Samson made a feast there, as was customary for bridegrooms. When he appeared, he was given thirty companions. “Let me tell you a riddle,” Samson said to them. “If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. If you can’t tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes.” “Tell us your riddle,” they said. “Let’s hear it.” He replied, “Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet.” For three days they could not give the answer.”
(Judges 14:10-14 NIV)

Now when a feast was held for some seven days it seems, there would be drinking, but maybe Samson abstained, although I am not so sure. Why?

Firstly he tells them the riddle with the bet attached, the wager, these thirty garments. The thirty companions would get one garment each if they could get the answer to the riddle, he would get 30 garments if they did not. Would he have made the bet, stone cold sober because he could not afford the garments if he lost.

Also at this time what came out was his main weakness – women. The companions cannot get the riddle which can still be seen to this day on Lyle's Golden Syrup, and so the help of his wife is sought and got. And we know that Samson caves in to her pleadings, using blackmail and tears

“Then Samson’s wife threw herself on him, sobbing, “You hate me! You don’t really love me. You’ve given my people a riddle, but you haven’t told me the answer.” “I haven’t even explained it to my father or mother,” he replied, “so why should I explain it to you?” She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people. Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him, “What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?” Samson said to them, “If you had not ploughed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle.”” (Judges 14:16-18 NIV)

She rats on him. Was Samson worn down as well by alcohol? Did he really have a feast for seven days and not indulge? At times we have a rose-coloured view of our heroes. We could believe that Samson was strictly teetotal, all the time, but I have my doubts, at least at this stage in his life when he is so arrogant, so up himself, as they say today.

So Samson lost the bet, but just went off and killed 30 Philistines for the garments to give to the companions and gave away the wife to a friend and was then surprised when later he wanted her back, but her father said ‘Tough, no way.’

3. Not take a razor to their head

But at least he is keeping condition number 3. However, eventually that goes as his weakness for women rears its head again. We read that he has a prostitute and then she settles in with Delilah. She is in the pay of the Philistines and they want to capture Samson, but every time they get near him, he kills them. By now he is a judge, but never seems to judge anyone, never seems to lead an army, but is this constant thorn in the side of the Philistines.

She asks about his strength – from where does he get it? That is why I think that I could have a body that looks like Samson. Old and decaying because he is dead now! No, no. It is because if he was built like Mr Muscle, then the question is irrelevant, so he must have looked quite ordinary in the muscle department. He give her a pack of lies twice and a few more Philistines die, then we read in Judges 16:15

“Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.” With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. (He falls for it again) So he told her everything. “No razor has ever been used on my head,” he said, “because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.”” (Judges 16:15-17 NIV)

And his head is shaved and he is captured because his strength goes.

What a waster Samson is, ...but during all this time we read the phrase **the Spirit of the LORD came upon him** 3 times and once **Spirit of the LORD began to stir him.** 13:24.

“The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.” (Judges 13:24-25 NIV)

So when growing up, God was with him. But let us look at the other incidents. 14:6

“The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done.” (Judges 14:6 NIV)

He kills the lion in the power of the Spirit. Then 14:19

“Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he went up to his father’s house.” (Judges 14:19 NIV)

This is when he lost his wager and had to get the thirty garments to pay the bet.

“As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came towards him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands.” (Judges 15:14 NIV)

And this is when he lets himself be handed over to the Philistines and he kills 1000 of them with the jaw-bone of the donkey.

So even though Samson messed up, God was still with him, still using him and the Spirit of God was there with him. Confused, I know I am because how can God use such a person. I don't know – but he does. And he can use such today – why not. So it means that none of us here are too bad to be used by God for his purposed.

So I can do what I like? No, because as Paul argues in Romans 6:1

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:1-2 NIV)

He then goes on to talk about baptism. But God can use us in spite of ourselves. When we sin, we do let God down, just as Samson did, but that does not tend our usefulness to God. We repent and he forgives and we continue to work for him. What happens to Samson? 16:22

“But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands." When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, "Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain." While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform.

Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "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."

Then Samson reached towards the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived. Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel for twenty years." (Judges 16:22-31 NIV)

Samson has a change of attitude here, a change of heart. He is humble and he does die in his greatest victory, and funnily enough we do not read **the Spirit of the LORD came upon him** because maybe God no longer had to override Samson's personality to work through him, Samson was now an open channel.

But just one more thing for us this evening as part of the church from this story. Samson's hair was shaved off and so he lost his strength. The church has been losing strength because at times it seems

- It morals have been shaved – there is little difference at times with the morals of Christians and non-Christians.
- Its message has been shaved - at times the church is afraid to give the message of the gospel because it may not be PC

But there is one phrase that should give us hope –

"But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved."
(Judges 16:22 NIV)

And for the church I believe its hair is growing, but we must not shave it off or allow it to be shaved. We need to let it grow and so know the strength of God within us to witness, to stand up for Christian morality, for God's way of life. And even though we may have failed God, just as Samson did, God can still use us.