



“Samson the Unlikely”
Judges 13-16

Idea: Samson was an unlikely savior reminiscent of an unlikely Savior to come.

Intro: One of the most difficult things to observe is watching someone destroy his or her life. Have you ever known someone whose destructive behavior and poor choices wrecked their life and future? Have you had to watch a person’s irresponsible and uncontrolled actions deeply hurt not only themselves but those around them? Unfortunately, I think we all know someone like that. We have all had to watch that terrible saga play out. These stories hit close to home. We have seen it in our families and in our friends, but maybe the first person you thought of when I asked the question was yourself.

Destructive stories are the stories of life in the real world. It is the reality of living in a fallen and rebellious world. One of the things I love about God’s Word is that this reality is not sugarcoated. The Bible presents a clear and real description of

the sinfulness so pervasive within humanity, and this reality is exactly what we find in the lives of those in Judges.

So far we have discovered in Judges a people who preferred worshiping the idols of their enemies over the God of their fathers. We have seen deception, assassination, fearfulness, gross idolatry, wide scale syncretism, and foolish vows. As we move forward we will see lust, sexual immorality, fits of rage, disregard for God's calling, religious perversion, homosexuality, the dismemberment of a body, and genocide. The stories found in Judges almost make you blush when you read them. These are stories that one would not expect to find in God's Word but rather in a horror novel. These stories, however, are the reality of living in a rebellious world where everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25).

Inquiry: Few periods in Israel's eventful history are as important as the time of the judges. During these centuries the nation took the wrong turn that led to her downfall and near destruction. The apostasy of the later generations has its origin in the early years of the settlement, and there is a clear line between the time when the nation first went after Baal and the dark age when the Jerusalem Temple itself was defiled with all the trappings of the Baal worship, not excluding cultic prostitutes (2 Kgs 23:4-7). There is much in Judges to sadden the heart of the reader; perhaps no book in the Bible witnesses so clearly to our human frailty. But there are also unmistakable signs of divine compassion and long-suffering. It may be that the modern reader of Judges will hear the warning voice of the Spirit saying, "This is not the way, do not walk in it." Or, as the lives of these lesser-saviors are considered, there may be a realization of the need today for a greater Savior, of unblemished life, who is able to effect a perfect deliverance, not only in time but for eternity.

The period of the Judges takes place after the death of Joshua and his contemporaries. Israel has entered Canaan, the land promised to Abraham. Unfortunately, they became content to settle down amongst the Canaanites and lost the incentive to

possess the whole land. Judges records the fact and its effect of mixed marriages (3:5-6), in which the question of the relationship of Yahweh and the Baal gods would become an acute family problem. Whenever two groups of people come into contact there is an inevitable tendency to move toward syncretism. The gods become identified, or, in the case of the conquered country, their gods find an inferior place in the pantheon of their conquerors. This process is not conscious or deliberate, but it is nevertheless real. In the case of Israel there would seem to be a very specious reason why she would give attention to the gods of the land into which she entered. The God of Israel, Yahweh, was to the majority of the Israelites associated with the wilderness in which they had spent the earlier part of their lives. His superiority over the Baal gods had been demonstrated in the victories gained over the inhabitants of Canaan. But the gods of the land controlled the rain, springs and vegetation on which they would depend in their future settlement, at least, so the average Israelite, scarcely removed from polytheism, would argue. There was no conscious forsaking of Yahweh, but mixed marriages, the need to give deference to the forces controlling fertility, and the powerful appeal of Canaanite worship to the lower and more sensual nature, were all factors that led inevitably to an easy-going syncretism. Baal was identified with Yahweh, and Yahweh was worshipped, in degree, with the forms of Baal worship.

As we seek to understand Judges, we must keep in mind that Israel was God's special and chosen people. They were the descendants of Abraham through whom the nations would be blessed. They were to be a light to the world. They were to be the ones through whom the truth of the gospel would be proclaimed. God had promised to Abraham that his descendants would have land to possess. After the Exodus, Moses began to lead Israel to that Promise Land. Then Joshua and Caleb began the conquest of it by destroying the peoples of Canaan.

The Canaanites were an idolatrous, pagan people whose religion was nothing more than a nature cult designed to enlist the aid of the Baal pantheon and ensure the fertility of the land. This took the form of a simulated ritual in which male and female cult-prostitutes were featured, seeking to promote the action of the gods in the wider sphere of nature. The culture of Canaan had been debased to the lowest level, and it is against this background that the command to exterminate the Canaanites must be seen. Israel, with its more austere morals and loftier faith, became the agent of divine judgment upon the Canaanites. But the divine command was also prophylactic. It was designed to safeguard the life of the nation from the corroding influences of Canaanite life. And since the purposes of God through Israel were redemptive, a redemption in which the whole world was ultimately to share, the importance of an Israel dedicated and uncontaminated is apparent. However, what we find in Judges is very much the opposite. The theme of Judges is the Canaanization of Israel. Rather than being and doing what God had set forth, they chose to do what they wanted. They said, "I'll have it my way."

The history of nearly two centuries is presented in Judges, indicating the principles behind the Lord's dealings with Israel. During this period there was a recurring cycle of four phases: apostasy, servitude, supplication, and deliverance. It is this pattern, which is illustrated, in the succeeding chapters. The nation forsook the Lord, a crime that involved disloyalty to their forefathers and a willful overlooking of the mighty works of God on their behalf, especially the deliverance from Egypt. All the evidence of their traditions ought to have ensured their faithfulness, but instead they turned to the gods of the people into whose midst they had come, whose religion seemed more directly concerned with their own prosperity.

Israel was a rebellious people, but the recurring cycle also reveals to us the redemptive heart of God. Judges is a story of redemption in the face of rebellion. In the midst of Israel's rejection of God, He sent them saviors or deliverers to rescue them. In the same way, your story and my story are stories of

redemption in the face of rebellion. We have already studied eight of these judges or saviors (Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, and Jephthah). Three more judges (Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon) are mentioned quickly at the end of chapter twelve. Chapter thirteen begins with the story of the twelfth and final savior in Judges. Four chapters are dedicated to Samson. He is contrasted over and against Othniel, the first judge. Remember that the order in which the narratives are arranged is not necessarily chronological but rather rhetorical and logical, reflecting the downward spiraling of the Israelite condition during this period.

Lets take a look at Samson the Unlikely. We will see in this judge an unlikely savior reminiscent of an unlikely Savior to come. We see in the Samson account:

1. An Unlikely Setting for Deliverance (Judges 13:1)

The Samson narratives have as their background the earlier part of the Philistine oppression. The author introduced the Ammonite and Philistine threats to Israel's existence at the same point (10:7); now, having dealt with the lesser threat of shorter duration, he turns to the greater threat that was to overshadow the remainder of the period of the judges and the early monarchy up to the opening years of David's reign (2 Sam 5:17-25).

The Philistine menace was the greater threat because it was so insidious. The direct and cruel aggression of the Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites, and Ammonites was replaced by infiltration through marriage and trade. The Philistine rule over Israel does not appear at all onerous at this early stage. The two peoples dwelled peacefully together. As a result syncretism fully set in and took hold of Israelite culture. Israel fully embraced co-habitation with the Philistines. This is seen in the absence of a cry for deliverance.

In the earlier servitude accounts, Israel cried out to God for deliverance from their oppressors (3:9). Then God acted by raising up a judge to deliver them. As we near the end of the time of the judges, we can clearly see how far Israel has moved away from God. It was an unlikely setting for deliverance.

2. An Unlikely Savior to Deliver (Judges 13:2-25)

Read Judges 13:2-5.

Since Israel did not cry out for a deliverer, one would not expect God to send them a savior. The people of God seemed content with their situation. In addition to that, Samson was born to a barren mother and into an insignificant Israelite tribe. No one would have dreamed of Israel's next judge coming from Manoah's house. He was the most unlikely savior to deliver for two reasons: a savior wasn't desired and his birth wasn't expected.

3. An Unlikely Story of Deliverance (Judges 14-16)

Read Judges 14:1-4.

Israel displayed little discomfort with the oppression and influence coming from the Philistines. Even Samson, the savior God had sent to deliver Israel, showed little concern for his personal holiness, not to mention the nation's holiness. Instead, he fraternized with the Philistines and disregarded his calling as a Nazirite (Numbers 6:1-21). He sought out a Philistine wife, ate honey from a lion's carcass, visited a prostitute, and cohabited with Delilah.

Both Samson and Israel were a spiritual and moral mess. They were in rebellion against God. It is against this backdrop, however, that God sets the scene for deliverance. The human deliverer might have been a

mess and in reality brought greater oppression upon Israel, but God would deliver them. He used Samson's lusts and fits of rage to provoke both Israel and the Philistines to battle. Samson would be the one who would begin the saving of Israel (Judges 13:5). The people of God did not desire it. They were content to co-habit with the enemy, but God would use Samson to create a rift in the relationship. A greater and better deliverer (King David) would destroy the enemy and lead Israel to worship God in truth once again.

The story of Samson the Unlikely is a one similar to a greater Savior who would come centuries later. In fact we see the same three things in the story of the Lord Jesus.

- It was an unlikely setting for deliverance when Jesus arrived.
When Jesus was born, there was a strong messianic focus among the Jews. Even though those living in Israel longed for deliverance in the years leading to Jesus' birth, the deliverance they wanted was to be freed from Roman oppression. They did not see that their greatest problem in their lives was their own sin. They did not view themselves as slaves to sin.
- He was an unlikely Savior to deliver.
The Jews wanted to be out from under Rome's rule. They wanted a David type leader to lead them into battle against Rome. Jesus, though, was a carpenter not a military leader. He was no one special. He didn't come from a powerful family or from a great city.
- It was an unlikely story of deliverance.
Rather than leading the people to battle against Rome, Jesus offered Himself up as a sacrifice to defeat the greater oppressor...sin. In doing so, the very people Jesus came to deliver nailed Him to a cross.

Conclusion: Samson and those in Judges were a sinful mess. In many ways we are like those we read about in the Judges. We walk in step with the world. The culture around us influences us more than the culture of God. We become our own worst enemy, as our sinful decisions destroy our lives and those around us. And we dare not put our trust and faith in another person for help because they are just as much a mess as we are. No, there is only one Savior that we must look too. This Deliverer is good. He seeks us when we aren't seeking Him. He is our Judge, but took upon Himself our judgment. Two thousand years ago, He offered Himself as a perfect and holy sacrifice upon a cross, taking the punishment for sin that we deserved. His death paid the penalty for our sin, so today we can be forgiven of all. We can come into relationship with the God who created us for Himself because of this Savior. His name is Jesus. Do you know Him?