

SAMSON - A MAN CALLED SAMSON

The Man Who Might Have Been Judges 13-16

INTRODUCTION

I grew up seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi, a small town in north west Mississippi, made famous by the great country music singer Charlie Pride. The song, Mississippi Cotton Pickin' Delta Town, was written by a friend of mine from high school named Harold Dorman. Harold drove my school bus one year, just as I drove it when I was a Senior at Sledge High School. I actually lived in Tunica County and Sledge was seven miles to our east in Quitman County. I had to walk a mile and a quarter to catch the school bus every morning and back home from the county line store every evening. As I recall, I missed two days of school in the eighth grade, following a tooth extraction in Tunica, Mississippi. Those were the only two days I missed from the sixth grade through the twelfth grade. It was not that I was so dedicated to school - as my high school coach told some friends of mine - it had more to do with the commitment and dedication of my parents. My father once told me, "You will finish high school and college, and you can do what you want after that. But, you are going to high school and college!" He had been orphaned at age 4 and he had grown up with his grandmother and at times with his aunt. He was an intelligent man who could see and do things that would baffle most college graduates, but he knew he missed something important. He did not get the education he was determined that I would get.

As I recall, there was no movie theater in Sledge at that time, so if anyone wanted to go to see a movie they had to go five miles north to Crenshaw or ten miles south to Marks. Many did. We didn't.

One day, when I was in the fifth grade, the teacher announced that the movie, SAMSON, was being shown in a couple of days at a theater in a little town in the south eastern part of Quitman County. Students who wanted to ride a school bus to Crowder to see that movie had only to bring a note from his or her parents stating the student was permitted to go to see the movie. Our classes opened with a Bible reading and prayer every morning and the teachers and principal felt that it would be good for students whose parents wanted their children to see the movie about Samson, starring Victor Mature, to go to see the movie. All I had to do was mention a character in the Bible and my mother would write the note.

That was an experience I would never forget. Samson was one of the judges in Israel, the final judge in fact, and the history books and Sunday School material told us that Samson was the strongest man in the world. In fact, he was the strongest man in the history of mankind. After making that claim years ago I have often wondered how he would compare with the power-lifters we watched competing in the Olympics. Was he stronger than those men who set records in the Olympics? When I was younger I remembering wondering just how strong Samson was, and how he would compare with the most powerful weight lifters of the past century. And then I realized that I knew the answer to that question. There can be no doubt that he was naturally one of the strongest men who ever lived, if not the strongest, but it was only when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him that he was able to do those supernatural things that brought a temporal peace to Israel for glory of the Lord. However, I was interested in what modern men might think of Samson, and to whom we might compare him. My first thoughts were of the Soviet Union power lifter who won the gold medal in several consecutive Olympic competitions. I remember wondering how the Russian would compare with Paul Anderson, the power lifter who demonstrated his power before youth groups and before audiences across America and England.

I Googled Paul Anderson and found the following:

Paul Anderson, weightlifter. Paul Anderson was from a small town in Georgia and he captured the world's attention almost overnight, when he broke all world records in weight lifting. His physique was amazing in that he had a 58 inch chest, 34 inch thighs, 23 inch arms, and weigh around 335 pounds and stood only about 5'10".

I discovered him one Saturday when I was watching television - and since we had a farm it must have been raining that day. Paul Anderson was standing under a platform with a 7500 pound elephant on top of it. Men surrounded the platform to try to keep the elephant in place. Paul Anderson squatted under the platform and stood up with the elephant and platform on his shoulders.

I wondered for some time how Paul Anderson would compare to Samson. Then, I realized that, while Samson was the strongest man who ever lived, his phenomenal accomplishments came about when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. Or, is that so? Did he devastate the Philistines when there is no mention of the Angel of the Lord?

My good friend, Dr. Bill Cooper, of London told me about the time he came over there and lifted 2.5 tons. I asked him if those were English tons or American tons. He is not often surprised by what I write and, as a matter of fact, there are times when I am surprised that he is not surprised. Dr. Cooper's depth, as his three American friends know, is not in the area of physical strength, but in the depth of his mind. Dr. Cooper has written on the Authenticity of various books of the Bible. He has included his three American friend (Dr. Gene Jeffries, Dr. Jim Johnson, and well, believe it or not, this writer under Acknowledgments. He also dedicated one volume to each of us.

Another man, whom I first met at a committee meeting at LifeWay Christian Resources, Randy Kneper of Jacksonville, Florida, knew about Anderson. He worked for a congressman for ten years and he still has a standing invitation to speak at the congressional prayer service when he is in town. I first met Randy when he came to the committee room where I was preparing for the Nomination Committee meeting, knowing that we were to nominate new members for positions on committees. It was my first year as chairman, so I made a point of being there early to prepare for the meeting. Randy came early that day, even though he was not yet attended a committee meeting. He wanted to observe the proceedings. When I realized something of his work for a congressman in Washington, where he was the chairman of a congressional committee, I could understand why he was interested in how we worked at LifeWay.

Randy and I have continued our contact with each other. He provided me with some more information on Paul Anderson:

“Back in the 1960's, Paul Anderson came to First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach with his team of power lifters and amazed all of us. The song they played was, "Our God is an Awesome God" while he lifted enormous amounts of weight. Dr. James Monroe was our pastor who told us to memorize Romans 12:1-2 and then do it.”

I remember reading about Paul Anderson's camp for young people, his commitment to the Lord and his deep interest in the spiritual condition of young people. But how did the strongest men in the world during the past century compare with Samson? You know what I concluded? Samson was just as strong as he needed to be! The Lord saw to that.

For some reason, when I think of Samson I remember the statement some Bible professor made about some other Bible Character. He said, “He was the man who might have been.” In a very real sense, Samson was “the man who might have been.” The following note from Lt. General Jerry Boykin caused me to do some thinking.

From Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin, (Family Research Council):

September 01, 2016

Dear Johnny,

In today's military, persecuting our own Christian troops is more important than stopping terrorism!

STOP the commander-in-chief's assault on religious freedom in the U.S. military.

Every serviceman and woman takes an oath to defend America from enemies "foreign and domestic." When I took that oath over 40 years ago, I never thought I'd see the day when an enemy within would pose such a grave threat to the freedom we enjoy as Americans. But that day has come.

My name is Jerry Boykin. I proudly served our country for 36 years in the U.S. Army and retired as a Lieutenant General. I was honored to command the elite Green Berets and Delta Force in combat. Today I am fighting a different kind of battle.

As the Executive Vice President of Family Research Council, I am on the front lines of the battle to protect the freedom of those who put their lives on the line protecting you and your family. I am writing you today to enlist your help.

The radical Left's assault on the religious freedom of the brave men and women serving our country in uniform -- led by President Obama, the U.S. military's commander-in-chief -- is having a devastating effect on the morale of our troops.

What's happening in the military has not gotten as much media attention as President Obama's other abuses of freedom, but it is just as dangerous. If the truth be told, things are going from bad to worse for Christians in our armed forces.

Tony Perkins recently shared with you some disturbing examples of the persecution that many of our Christian servicemen and women now face. Chaplains are punished for sharing their faith, which by the way, is their sworn duty as military ministers of the Gospel. Enlisted personnel are being court-martialed for displaying Bible verses. And now, military veterans are being physically assaulted!

At a recent retirement ceremony, Air Force veteran Oscar Rodriguez Jr. was forcibly removed from the proceedings because he was about to conclude the traditional flag-folding speech with these words:

"It is this one nation under God that we call, with honor, the United States of America. God bless our flag. God bless our troops. God bless America."

No service member -- or veteran -- should ever be forced to deny the freedom to believe that he or she is sworn to defend. It is essential to the heart and soul of our military.

Before I led our troops into combat, it was my custom to pray that our mission would be successful and that God would protect us in battle.

I can personally attest to the power of those prayers. On one mission I was hit with a .50-caliber bullet. The doctors said that they would have to amputate my arm. As a result of God's miraculous healing power and a lot of prayer, I still have my arm. Prayer works. In today's military, I could be brought up on charges for publicly leading my men in prayer.

Is that the kind of military you want? I certainly don't. Those serving our country in the military risk life and limb to keep America free. Now it's up to us to protect their ability to live their faith in these dangerous times. Our troops should never have to give up their freedom of religion and speech when they don our country's uniform.

If you truly care about the well-being of our troops -- and I'm sure you do -- please let your voice be heard by supporting the work of FRC. No other organization does more to protect the First Amendment freedoms of our active duty military, our reserves, and our veterans. That's why I chose to be a part of the FRC team.

Whether it's keeping the importance of religious freedom in the military before Congress and the Pentagon or rallying public support for our troops suffering persecution for their faith, FRC is always on the front lines...

On behalf of our men and women in uniform, thanks for standing with us.

Sincerely,

Lt. Gen. (US Army-Ret.) William "Jerry" Boykin
Executive Vice President

BREAKING POINT DAILY, 9-9-16

It does not take too long for one who is reading from the Book of Judges to see a pattern of behavior that required the appointment of Judges to deliver Israel from one pagan force or another. The Israelites has been chosen as the Lord's people in His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12), and that covenant had been kept alive under the most challenging of circumstances. There was the betrayal of one brother by ten of his eleven brothers, who sold him into slavery. Joseph was blessed by the Lord with wisdom that brought him from a prison cell to become the second more powerful man in Egypt and for that matter, in that part of the world.

The Lord had revealed to Joseph that there would be seven years of prosperity, followed by seven years of intense famine. Yahweh revealed to Joseph what was to come. And the time was right. Had the Lord not revealed to Abraham that his descendants would live in a foreign land for 400 years? It was the intense famine, in addition to the decision by a new Pharaoh to enslave the Israelites and have all male babies killed that let them know they had no future in Egypt. It took this kind of poverty for them to even consider moving out of the fertile land of Goshen in Egypt. The Lord had Moses prepared to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but it was Yahweh who miraculously delivered His Chosen People from slavery, suffering, and death.

The Lord sent ten plagues to attack everything of which the Pharaoh could boast, including ten horrific plagues that hit the Egyptians, but not the Israelites. Moses led the Israelites, possibly two million in number, out of Egypt and across the Red Sea on dry ground. As I have noted in other studies, the Bible reveals that Mt. Sinai was not located in what is now known as the Sinai Peninsula, but in Arabia. Paul was inspired to reveal this fact: "Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. (Gal 4:25, HCSB. Bold added by this writer). Every phase of the Exodus was made possible by the power, mind and will of Yahweh (the God of Israel). The ten plagues demonstrated forcefully and convincingly that Yahweh was superior to all man made gods that pagan peoples worshiped - gods which did not exist, had never existed, and could not exist.

The sad thing is that from the beginning of the Exodus - that is, after crossing the Red Sea, and seeing the bodies of the Egyptians washed up upon the shores - they still questioned the Lord and threatened Moses. He had provided food for them in the wilderness and water for some two million people, plus their livestock, in the middle of a desert. He gave them water from a huge rock. The Lord would never let His Chosen People forget that rock or the water that flowed from it:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, (2) and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (3) They all ate the same spiritual food, (4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert. (1 Cor 10:1-5, HCSB, bold added by this writer)

We see the presence and work of God the Father in the Exodus, and we read that "That rock was Christ." But where is the Holy Spirit during this time. After all, Paul was inspired to write: (16) "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, (17) so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Some today do not believe in the Trinity. In fact, one of my professors in seminary was teaching an Intensive in Revelation when he was asked if he believed Satan really existed he said, "Satan is simply the personification of evil." He spoke at a pastors' conference a few years later and said, "I wish people would stop using the word Trinity! The word does not appear in the Bible." What is my response to that? Well, I am sitting at my desk typing on a keyboard, looking at words appear on a monitor, saving them to a disc, and printing sending them through the electronic media to Dr. J. Mike Minnix so that they will be added to a very wide collection we may read on a website called www.pastorlife.com. I don't seem to recall reading in the Bible about a monitor, computer, Internet, or many other things we use every day. Do you ever use a cell phone while driving down the highway? Moses never saw a cell phone!

Another of my seminary professors was standing in my study with me when he began telling me about the student who was writing a paper on the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. After telling me about the paper he practically shouted, "There is no Holy Spirit in the Old Testament!" Well, if you believe in the Trinity you must believe He was

present, whether he is mentioned by name or not. Can there be any doubt that we read about the pre-incarnate Christ in the Old Testament? I have no doubt at all, especially since Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and in John 1:1-2, the Scripture tells us that the Word (Logos) denoting Jesus, did all that the Father had said. The Father said, "Let there be," and the Son made it happen. Where was the Holy Spirit? Is it possible that He is revealed in these words, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. (Gen 1:2). I am not making that claim, but I am convinced that the Holy Spirit was a member of the Trinity then, and at all times. "The Holy Spirit was making it clear that the way into the holy of holies had not yet been disclosed while the first tabernacle was still standing" (Hebrews 9:8).

But back to the Children of Israel in the wilderness. God protected them against the intense heat of the desert with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Why the fire? Can you imagine hundreds of children crying for water or to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, if there had been no light. But what about the pillar of cloud? Can you imagine the survival of all those people (two million?) who were marching in intense heat (possibly 128 or 129 degrees)?

The Lord had given His Chosen People food, water, and protection from all threats, but when the time came for the conquest of the land flowing with milk and honey, the people rebelled against Joshua, God's choice to lead them in the conquest. Only Joshua and Caleb, of the twelve spies, believed they could conquer the peoples of the land of Canaan, and because of their rebellion against the Lord they were forced to stay in the wilderness until all those twenty years and older were dead. He then used those who had survived to follow Joshua in the conquest of the Land of Canaan.

Once they were in the land of which would be called The Land of Israel, the people repeatedly turned to pagan gods, in part because the men could go to the temple of Baal or some other god - religions that had temple prostitutes on hand, to entertain the men of that tribe and others who came to take advantage of what these pagans had to offer as fertility cults. The Lord condemns the immorality and infidelity of his people in the wilderness and He would still be condemning it during the days of Amos and Jeremiah. When the people would not repent and follow the Lord, He sent, on several occasions, an enemy force to conquer and enslave the Chosen People. They followed a deadly cycle - over and over. The cycle goes like this:

1. The people rebelled against the Lord.
2. The Lord used a foreign power to enslave and punish the people.
3. The People would repent and call on the Lord.
4. The Lord would send a Judge to deliver His people.
5. They followed the Lord until that Judge died and then they began the cycle all over again.

We ask, how could those people have been so foolish?! How could they rebel against the Lord Who had delivered them, protected them, and blessed them? Maybe if we see that pattern in effect in America today we can understand it a little better.

Today, some so-called "sexual progressives" claim to be ushering in a "brave new world" of freedom. But their "new" morality is as old as the hills. It was very much alive in the days of Samson, as it was hundreds of years later during the time of Amos. The Lord declared through His prophet Amos:

"They trample the heads of the poor on the dust of the ground and block the path of the needy.

"A man and his father have sexual relations with the same girl, profaning My holy name. (8) They stretch out beside every altar on garments taken as collateral, and they drink in the house of their God wine obtained through fines." (Amos 2:7-8)

This was especially despicable! Did you follow these two verses all the way? A man of wealth takes the cloak of a poor man as collateral for enough money to buy bread for his family that day. According to the law, when one took as collateral one's cloak, he must return it to him before night, even if he has not paid off the debt. Why? So he would have it to cover himself while he slept that night. Then, he would return it the next morning. Instead of returning the cloak to the poor man he takes it with him - and with his son! - and goes to a temple of Baal and they both have sex with temple prostitutes on that poor man's cloak.

That is horrible, but today they are so called “sexual progressives” who claim that those of us who hold to traditional sexual morality and marriage are “on the wrong side of history?” But as one new book points out, it’s the proponents of the sexual revolution who are embracing a sexual morality that history left behind millennia ago—in the dusty ruins of the ancient Philistines, or the Greek or Roman empires.

Matthew Rueger’s new book, “Sexual Morality in a Christless World”, declares, “Yes, today Western civilization is undergoing a dramatic cultural shift.

“In just a few short years our society has fundamentally altered the meaning of marriage, embraced the notion that men can become women, and is now promoting the idea that grown men should be welcome to share a bathroom with women and young girls. Not unexpectedly, we’re also seeing movement toward the normalization of polygamy, pedophilia, and incest.

It’s precisely in times like this that we need some historical perspective. Which is why Lutheran pastor Matthew Rueger’s new book, “Sexual Morality in a Christless World,” is a timely godsend. In it, Rueger shows how Christian sexual morality rocked the pagan world of ancient Rome. The notions of self-giving love, sexual chastity, and marital fidelity were foreign, even shocking to the people of that time.

Citing existing scholarship, Rueger details the Roman sexual worldview that prevailed for hundreds of years.

Women and children were viewed as sexual objects; slaves—male and female--could expect to be raped; there was widespread prostitution; and predatory homosexuality was common. Christian sexual morality might have been seen as repressive by the licentious, but it was a gift from God for their victims.

Rueger writes that “Claims in our day of being progressive and moving forward by accepting the ‘new prevailing views on sexuality and same-sex marriage’ are horribly misinformed ... Contemporary views about sexuality are simply a revival of an older and much less loving view of the world.”

But they are also a revival of an older and impoverished view of human beings. Imagine the reaction of a pagan Roman slave girl who learned for the first time that she had value—not monetary value as a piece of goods to be enjoyed or discarded by her owner—but eternal value because she was made in the very image of God.

Or imagine the pang of conscience felt by an unfaithful Roman husband when he learned that God became incarnate, and took on human flesh, and that how he treated his own body and the bodies of others mattered to God. Mattered immensely.

Folks, we can’t look away and ignore this unholy revival of pagan sexuality and its cheapened view of human beings. But we also can’t wring our hands in fear or throw them up in defeat. As Rueger points out, Christ and His Church radically transformed a far more sexually cruel and chaotic world than ours.

Look to those ancient believers who went before us: Rather than succumbing to or accommodating the spirit of the age, new converts in the early Church came to understand, as Rueger writes, that “Christian morality is based on Christ’s all-encompassing purity and self-emptying love... Christians could no longer live as the Greeks or Romans. Their worldview and self-view was distinctly different. They were now one with Christ in heart and soul.”

Now, their distinctiveness, as Rueger writes, “would not spare them from suffering; it would invite suffering.” It’s pretty clear now that the same holds true for us. Will we bend the knee to this revived pagan sexuality, or will we hold out to a needy world the freedom of God’s plan for human sexuality?

“Sexual Morality in a Christless World,” by Matthew Rueger

In ancient Israel the Lord (Yahweh), spoke to the “Chosen People” through His prophets, showing that conditions in Israel of that day are similar to the conditions that have sprung up from sprouts from that may have been considered dead roots in America today.

(11) The Lord said to the Israelites, “When the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, (12) Sidonians,

Amalekites, and Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to Me, did I not deliver you from their power? (13) But you have abandoned Me and worshiped other gods. Therefore, I will not deliver you again. (14) Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them deliver you in the time of your oppression.” (Judges 10:11-14, HCSB)

The rejection of Yahweh in favor of gods of man’s invention in all but unbelievable, and their behavior is gross! How could any nation with Israel’s history possibly entertain such thoughts? How could America have changed so much in the lifetime of many of us who are alive today? I grew up in Mississippi when it was called a “dry state.” No one could sell alcoholic beverages legally. When I moved to Louisiana I would soon discover that the same insurance on my car was twice as much as it was in Mississippi. I also discovered that even church members would laugh at the idea that Mississippi was a dry state: “You can buy liquor anywhere in Mississippi. It is just a matter of knowing where to find it.” Today, in Louisiana you can find huge sections of WalMart, local pharmacies, and super markets that are dedicated to whiskey, wine, and beer. When I was growing up I never saw anyone buy alcohol openly from a liquor store, pharmacy, or super market. Not one time.

I knew people who would buy it in Tennessee or Arkansas and take it back to Mississippi, but when I saw alcohol in any form that was produced in Mississippi there was an awareness among us that they brought it in from another state. And, please don’t try to tell me that people in Mississippi back then made their own whiskey or moon shine. My parents saw to it that we never went around some relatives because they were, or had been bootleggers. My own grandfather served time in Fort Leavenworth, Atlanta, and Fort Worth because he was a member of a family that began bootlegging back during Prohibition. Some never stopped after Prohibition. I learned that two different men on our farm were going into the woods and making home brew. One time, a deputy pulled up in front of our house and blew his horn. My father went outside and he said, “I have one of your hands on the back seat and I am taking him to jail. If you want him out you are going to have to go Tunica and post bail for him.” My father looked into the car and saw old Elgie sitting on the back seat and said to the deputy, “You had better not set it too high because he is not worth very much.”

I never saw him but I was told of an uncle who made liquor in such volumes that he would haul it through towns in north Mississippi and on to other states by having a car load of armed men in front of the truck, armed men in the truck, and armed men in another car behind it. I have a picture of a working whiskey still, complete with a great, great grandfather and two great uncles, along with others who were working at the whiskey still. Someone asked me, “Who made that picture? Wasn’t he in danger of losing his life?” I said, “No, she fed them.” That photographer was a sister to the great uncles. She was also a photographer and I have a picture of her small studio in my den. My son John heads the Juvenile department for a DA’s office and he had a copy of the picture of that still in his office. Those men did not operate on the same scale as the Kennedys or the Bushes, but it was above average.

In the same collection of pictures I mentioned above is a picture of two young boys, who were brothers. One of them, Kermit, grew up to be a deacon and Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church, Water Valley, Mississippi. When I participated in the Junior Memory Work Drill at First Baptist, Columbus, Mississippi, I was surprised to discover that Kermit Cofer was the president of the State Training Union Convention and he was the one in charge of the Bible Drill. In time, he would become the Chief Justice of the Mississippi Supreme Court. He was also an influence in my Mother’s life when she was a teenager.

Today, not only is the selling of alcoholic beverages legal, gambling is a major source of income for a lot of people, it is also the cause of a lot of bankruptcies. Someone commented on those casinos as a source of income for the state. A business man told me that it was like the ones at Tunica and Vicksburg sucked all the money out of the Delta. Add to that the repeal of Blue Laws, and the introduction of drugs to our youth - and adults - and you have a totally different country from the one in which I grew up in the past century.

Now, let us follow the Scripture to see the Lord’s plan to deliver His Chosen People, even though they had chosen to reject him and live like pagans. Next, we will compare America today with ancient Israel. That comparison can be extremely disturbing.

Now, Let Us Look at the Man Called Samson

In Judges, Chapter 13, we read of the birth of Samson, the last Judge (do not confuse that with references to the Angel of the Lord, vs. 3). I agree with those who believe this is a reference to the pre-incarnate Son of God, Jesus

Christ.

1) The Israelites again did what was evil in the Lord's sight, so the Lord handed them over to the Philistines 40 years. (2) There was a certain man from Zorah, from the family of Dan, whose name was Manoah; his wife was barren and had no children.

How many times in those ancient days did the Lord choose a woman who had never been able to conceive and give birth to a child and bless her with a most remarkable son. Consider Sarah and Hannah, for examples.

(3) The Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "It is true that you are barren and have no children, but you will conceive and give birth to a son.

The Lord placed specific restrictions on the soon to be mother, and on her son. We know these restrictions as the Nazirite vow. Samson was to be a Nazirite all his life and his mother was to follow that vow during the time of her pregnancy.

(4) Now please be careful not to drink wine or other alcoholic beverages, or to eat anything unclean; (5) for indeed, you will conceive and give birth to a son. You must never cut his hair, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth, and he will begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines."

Note that the Nazirite vow was binding and a part of it had to do with the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Here, the warning is against drinking wine or some "other alcoholic beverage." For wine drinking in biblical times, see the article (below) by this writer posted on PastorLife.Com (Wine Drinking in New Testament Times).

THE USE OF WINE IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

BY

JOHNNY L. SANDERS, D. Min.

How popular is home wine-making? The question appeared recently in a weekly magazine. The answer was that every month, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms of the U.S. Dept. of the Treasury licenses a new 5,000 heads-of- households. The American Wine Society, a Hobby group, reports (back in 1975) membership as 12,000 with a 30% annual increase.

"Pop" wines, advertised so freely on TV, radio, magazines, and billboards, have contributed to a serious and growing problem among young people. People like to joke about the amount of beer consumed by servicemen but it is no joke to three million American veterans who are now alcoholics.

Alcohol is a major problem, but when one takes a stand against beverage alcohol, some "sleeper" comes up with the same old worn-out protest, "But Jesus drank wine! They drank wine at the Last Supper, didn't they? The answer is, "yes." Wine was used at the Last Supper. But the answer to the implied question (Is not modern drinking the same as that practiced by the Jews at their feasts and social function?) is no. There is a difference.

An article by R. H. Stein, "Wine Drinking in N. T. Times" which appeared in the June 20, 1975 issue of "Christianity Today" (p. 9) is helpful in understanding the difference in wine drinking in N. T. times and modern social drinking. Stein pointed out that in ancient Greece wine was stored in large jugs called AMPHORAE. When used it was first poured into large bowls called KRATERS and mixed with water. From these kraters cups (KYLIX) were filled. It is important to note that before the wine was consumed it was mixed with water. The cups were filled from the kraters and not the amphorae.

The ratio of water to wine mentioned by ancient writers varied from 1 to 20 parts water to 1 part wine. Common ratios mentioned are: 2-1, 3-1, 4-1, 5-2 (the larger number represents the water). "Sometimes the ratio goes down to 1 to 1 (and even lower), but it should be noted that such a mixture is referred to as "strong wine." Drinking wine unmixed, on the other hand, was looked on as a Scythian or barbarian custom" (Stein).

Wine was not only a common beverage in ancient times. It was used for medical purposes as well as a solvent for

medicines. Wine is mentioned often in ancient writings. Plutarch wrote, "We call a mixture "wine" although the larger of the component parts is water." Writers simply called the mixture wine without explaining the ratio. But if straight wine or unmixed wine was intended it was called "strong wine" or strong drink.

It seems reasonable to assume that the practice among the Jews was similar to that mentioned above. In several places in the O. T. a distinction is made between wine and "strong drink." In Lev. 10:8-9 we find the Lord addressing Aaron, "Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting..."

OTHER REFERENCES: (1) Num. 6:3; (2) Deut. 14:14-26; 29:6; (3) Judges 13:4, 7, 14; (4) I Sam. 1:15; (5) Pro. 20:1; 31:4, 6; (6) Isaiah 5:11, 22.

Both the Talmud and the 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia suggests that a mixture of three parts water to one part wine was customary. Therefore, it may be safe to assume that the wine used at the Last Supper was a mixture of 3 parts water to 1 part wine.

Yes, Jesus drank wine. Yes, the apostles drank wine. But no, the modern use of alcoholic beverages does not parallel the use of wine in N. T. times. "To consume the amount of alcohol that is in two martinis by drinking wine containing three parts water to one part wine, one would have to drink over twenty-two glasses" (Stein). There is a striking differences in modern social drinking and the use of wine in those days.

In ancient times safe drinking water was often very difficult to find. Unfermented fruit juice would soon spoil and milk would sour. The only answer to a very acute problem was real, fermented wine. The wine helped purify the water and the water stretched the wine supply. When one took an extended trip the only safe, reliable drink was this mixture of water and wine. It was not only practical, it was essential.

Today safe water, coffee, tea, refrigerated milk and juices and cold soft drinks are available to most people whether at home or on the road. These drinks are not only safer than wine, beer and liquor, they are usually less expensive. Seldom does a family become destitute because of a father's addiction to coffee or tea. The same cannot be said of alcoholic beverages.

Lost men generally associate the drinking of alcoholic beverages with worldliness and sin. Many unsaved people can only be reached by one who lives a separated life. Any Christian who drinks beverage alcohol places his testimony in serious jeopardy and to deliberately jeopardize one's witness is a serious offense against God and the unsaved. Knowing this, the man who drinks is seeking the minimum in service and loyalty, and avoiding the maximum. Those who try to justify their drinking may often be trying to determine just how little they can do for God and still be called a Christian by others. It is easy to tell when someone is rationalizing to try justify compromise.

"If the drinking of unmixed wine or even wine mixed with a ratio of one to one with water was frowned upon in ancient times, certainly the drinking of distilled spirits in which the alcohol content is frequently three to ten times greater would be frowned upon a great deal more" (Stein).

Habakkuk warns in 2:15, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also..." On cigarette packages there is a warning: "The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health." Should there not be an even stronger warning attached to alcoholic beverages?

"At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Read Proverbs 23:29-32.

Article by this writer, posted on www.pastorlife.com (Founder and Editor Dr. J. Mike Minnix)

The Lord's plans for Samson were very specific. He was to be a "Nazirite to God." At least 1100 years later, there be another miracle birth in Israel. His name was John and his mother was Elizabeth. We know him today as John the Baptist, and we know more about him than we do Samson. Whereas Samson violated his Nazarite vows, John the Baptist was completely sold out to the Lord. Whereas Samson may be called the man who might have been, John

the Baptist was the man who was everything he was born to do. Jesus delivered the ultimate praise for His cousin John: no man born of woman was greater than John (the Baptist). When I compare Samson with John the Baptist I call Samson the man who might have been, even though it grieves me to do so. By contrast, Jesus said of John the Baptist that no man born of woman has ever been greater than John.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia carries the following note on Samson's identification as a Nazirite:

Samson is distinctly named a Nazirite in Jdg 13:7 and 16:17, but it has been objected that his case does not conform to the regulations in the Pentateuch. It is said that he must have partaken of wine when he made a feast for his friends, but that does not follow and would not be so understood, say, in a Moslem country today. It is further urged that in connection with his fighting he must have come into contact with many dead men, and that he took honey from the carcass of the lion. To us these objections seem hypercritical. Fighting was specially implied in his vow (Jdg 13:5), and the remains of the lion would be but a dry skeleton and not even so defiling as the ass's jawbone, to which the critics do not object. (ISBE, Bold added by this writer)

The Holman Bible Dictionary notes that:

SAMSON (ssam' ssuhn) Personal name meaning, "Of the sun." Last of the major judges over Israel about 1100 B.C. (Judg. 13:1–16:31). The son of Manoah of the tribe of Dan, Samson was a legendary hero who frequently did battle against the Philistines who, at that time, "had dominion over Israel" (14:4).—Holman Bible Dictionary

Now, let us return to the excited woman could hardly wait to share the good news with her husband. The Scripture (Judges 13:6-7 informs us that:

(6) Then the woman went and told her husband, "A man of God came to me. He looked like the awe-inspiring Angel of God. I didn't ask Him where He came from, and He didn't tell me His name. (7) He said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Therefore, do not drink wine or other alcoholic beverages, and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from birth until the day of his death.' " (Bold added)

Manoah's response is that of most anyone in his situation. He wanted to hear this news himself. The father of John the Baptist was informed of the son his wife Elizabeth would bear. His birth would be miraculous, as was the birth of Isaac, whose mother laughed when she heard the angel of the Lord tell her husband that Sarah, in her old age, would bear a child, and that this child would play a very real role in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. There was major difference, however. The Lord would use Samson to deliver Israel from the hands of an oppressive and evil nation at a particular time in history. John the Baptist would proclaim the coming of the long awaited Messiah who would deliver His people from evil with an eternal covenant. John announced the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Both men were amazing people, but sadly, Samson did not take his Nazirite vow as seriously as did John (the Baptist).

(8) Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, let the man of God you sent come again to us and teach us what we should do for the boy who will be born."

(9) God listened to Manoah, and the Angel of God came again to the woman. She was sitting in the field, and her husband Manoah was not with her. (10) The woman ran quickly to her husband and told him, "The man who came to me today has just come back!"

(11) So Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he asked, "Are You the man who spoke to my wife?" "I am," He said.

(12) Then Manoah asked, "When Your words come true, what will the boy's responsibilities and mission be?"

(13) The Angel of the Lord answered Manoah, "Your wife needs to do everything I told her. (14) She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine or drink wine or other alcoholic beverages. And she must not eat anything unclean. Your wife must do everything I have commanded her." (Judges 13:6-14)

We are told that the Angel of the Lord spoke to a human being. He spoke to Manoah, regarding the message the

Lord wanted Manoah to know about the promised son, and about what his wife would be permitted to eat. One interesting question here again - and there are many - concerns the identity if the Angel of the Lord. Is it possible that those who believe that angels refer to literal angels in the Old Testament, while the Angel of the Lord denotes the pre-incarnate Christ, whose miraculous birth is recorded in Matthew and Luke? Once again, I would mention the fact that one of my seminary professors made a point of denying the existence of Satan in our Intensive in Revelation. Later, that same professor announced to a group of pastors that he wished people would stop referring to the Trinity. He added, "The word doesn't even occur in the Bible." Of course, one might like to ask that professor whether or not he has found words theological seminary, or airport, automobile, submarine, or computer in the Bible.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, one of my favorite Old Testament professors vehemently denied the existence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. That statement raises the question as to whether or not he believed in the existence of the Holy Spirit at all. This writer believes in the existence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, as well as His existence before Creation. Without a doubt, Jesus existed before His birth in Bethlehem. John 1:1 clearly states that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). In John 1:1 we are told that God (the Father) said, (Let there be...), and God (the Son) caused it to happen.

As to the professor who so dramatically declared that "There is no Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, I would remind him of the possibility that when the Spirit is mentioned in Genesis, there is every possibility that this denotes the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1, we read, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters" (Gen 1:2, bold added). One other thing I wonder about when I hear someone deny the presence, or even the existence, of the Holy Spirit: How can one possibly subscribe to the Trinity and then deny His existence when it serves his purpose. While I do not find the Holy Spirit mentioned as such, can we reject His existence at any time if He inspired the writing of the Scripture?

Once again, the Angel of the Lord affirmed what he had told Manoah's wife. She would, indeed give birth to the one whom the Lord would use to free His people Israel from the evil and oppressive control of the Philistines. One point we may want to consider is the identification of the one mentioned here only as "the Angel of the Lord." Many believe that when there is a reference to the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, the reference is to the pre-incarnate Son of God. For anyone who questions the presence and work of the Son of God in the Old Testament, might want to look at John 1:1-2, were Jesus, identified as the "Word" (Logos) is specifically identified as the One who created all things. God said, "Let there be," and Jesus made it happen. He created all things! Sadly, there are those who do not believe in the Trinity, and condemn those who do as ignorant, (as did one of my seminary professor). I served two terms on the Board of Trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources when Dr. Jimmy Draper was President. In one meeting of the Board at Glorieta, NM, Dr. Draper shared his list of BAPTIST ESSENTIALS. Here is his list:

1. Salvation by grace through faith
2. The Lordship of Jesus Christ
3. Sufficiency of Scripture
4. Autonomy of the local church
5. Religious liberty
6. Trinitarian view of God
7. The Great Commission

NOTE: (Bold, above, by Jimmy Draper)

I checked my mail yesterday and found a Christmas card from Jimmy and Carol Ann Draper, a blessing to my wife Rebecca and me at Christmas for some 20 years). Dr. Draper stressed the fact that there are certain Baptist "distinctives" that are identified with Baptists which are not Baptist Essentials. For example, most Baptists believe in the Security of Believers, but some "have a problem with that." When I became pastor of the Forest Baptist Church, Forest, LA, the man who had served as chairman of the search committee asked if I would like to take a ride with him to see his pastures. He was the Elementary Supervisor for the Parish school system. When the subject comes up, I do not hesitate to say that, just as David had a shield in the Lord, Winford Hammett was a shield the Lord provided for me. There were, of course many others, but I think the average pastor will understand what I mean. I preached his funeral message several years back and I doubt that anyone was offended by my claim.

Dr. Draper assured me that while these (and other) Baptist distinctives, they may not be Baptist Essentials, but as such they are important. He also assured me that I have his permission to use his list of Baptist Essentials whenever I choose to do so. He also told LifeWay board members that Dr. Morris Chapman had prepared a very similar list of Baptist Essentials.

The next verses should not be too much of a surprise to the modern Christian, for the simple reason that Manoah had never seen a copy of the Old Testament Scripture, or the New Testament, which would not be given to believers for well over a thousand years. Manoah must have believed that this visitor was someone special, possibly one sent by the Lord Himself.

15) "Please stay here," Manoah told Him, "and we will prepare a young goat for You."

16) The Angel of the Lord said to him, "If I stay, I won't eat your food. But if you want to prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the Lord." For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord.

17) Then Manoah said to Him, "What is Your name, so that we may honor You when Your words come true?"

18) "Why do you ask My name," the Angel of the Lord asked him, "since it is wonderful." (Ex. 13:15-18, Bold added by this writer)

This is very interesting, and we find the name Wonderful associated with the promised Messiah in the book of Isaiah:

He will be named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace
Isaiah 9:6 (HCSB)

In my youth, I heard an outstanding preacher preach on this passage, using the KJV, and he found five points, which the KJV provides: His name is:

1. Wonderful
2. Counselor
3. Mighty God
4. Eternal Father
5. Prince of Peace

My friend back in my youth wanted to preach on those five points to identify the five names as that the star the Lord provided to lead the Wise men from the east to Bethlehem. It has been called The Star of Bethlehem. In the HCSB, we find four "points":

He will be named

(1) Wonderful Counselor, (2) Mighty God,

(3) Eternal Father, (4) Prince of Peace
(Isaiah 9:6, HCSB)

Our Lord is known by various names, and indeed, there are many names by which He is identified. In the Old Testament God is known by three distinct and unquestioned names: He is Elohim, (The god with power to create all things). He is Adonai (Sovereign - He has the right to reign over all He has created). He is Yahweh (the great I AM). We could go on and on looking up the names for God. He identifies Himself as Wonderful (Judges 13:18). The

name of Jesus Christ is not given until we come to the New Testament, but when the Lord gave us His name we must realize that it is the name above every other name. His name really is wonderful.

If you have a copy of the book, *A Name Above Every Name*, written by one of the most amazing preachers of the twentieth century, buy it - if you do not already have it, check the lists of sermons preached the late R. G. Lee and you should find the sermon he named **THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME**. I heard R. G. Lee preach every Sunday for several years. We had our worship service at 9:00 and Sunday School at 10:00. We got home just as R. G. Lee was going to the pulpit most every Sunday. I also heard him preach his famous sermon, *Pay Day Some Day*, in person twice. He preached *Pay Day Some Day* in person over 1200 times. I have never heard another sermon like it.

My very good friend, Dr. Lonnie Wascom, a Director of Missions in south Louisiana, told me that when he was a student at Golden Gate Seminary they learned that R. G. Lee would be preaching *Pay Day Some Day* at some church a few hours away. They rented a bus for the trip and when they arrived they were late and Dr. Lee was well into his sermon. He realized what had happened and stopped and asked the congregation for permission to start over. The people agreed, so my friend was able to hear that sermon from beginning to end. When I was on the Board at LifeWay Dr. Wascom was on the board at the International Mission Board and we often communicated about various denominational issues. We were both involved with the Conservative Resurgence, but his contribution was much greater than mine.

But, for now, let us look back to Judges 13 (I heard R. G. Lee preach the sermon, *A Name Above Every Name* at a State Convention when I was a student at Mississippi College):

19) Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered them on a rock to the Lord, and He did a wonderful thing while Manoah and his wife were watching. (20) When the flame went up from the altar to the sky, the Angel of the Lord went up in its flame. When Manoah and his wife saw [this], they fell face down on the ground. (21) The Angel of the Lord did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the Angel of the Lord.

The realization of the fact that he had received a visit from The Angel of the Lord was almost more than Manoah could comprehend. In 13:23, Manoah is frightened because he has received a visit from the Lord Himself and he must have known how the Lord revealed Himself to Moses at Mt. Sinai. "We're going to die," he said to his wife, "because we have seen God!" (13:22).

23) But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had intended to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering from us, and He would not have shown us all these things or spoken to us now like this."

24) So the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the Lord blessed him. (25) Then the Spirit of the Lord began to direct him in the Camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. (Judges 13:19-25)

As stated earlier, Samson was **THE MAN WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN!** It would be interesting to know what his parents told him about the Lord's plans for his life. There is no doubt that the time would come when there would be contact with the Philistines, just as there would have been an awareness of his Nazirite vows. As soon as Samson reached the age at which his parents embraced, by with the covenant they had made with the Lord, for their son there would be contact with the Philistines (Judges 13:7; 16:17). That time had come.

The Angel of the Lord laid down to Samson's parents the basic aspects of the vow they had received from the Angel of the Lord. Other children, we would assume, had been taught by their parents to honor the Lord, to obey Him, and to be faithful to Yahweh all the days of their lives. We do know that the Lord would bring Samson into contact with the Philistines in time. However, Samson had a way of doing things in a way that he might get what he wanted. He wanted to meet a Philistine woman! He managed to get his way most of the time.

The first thing we see about Samson, as he matured, was his fascination with certain Philistine women. Here is where we may wonder why it was that Samson would go chasing after Philistine women, especially since the Lord had made it clear from the beginning that Samson was the person through whom the Lord had planned to overthrow the Philistines. There can be no doubt that Samson's parents had told him many times how the Lord called him to be

a Nazirite, and as a Nazirite he would be expected to avoid contact with Philistine women.

The Holman Christian Standard Dictionary provides us with a brief description of the demands the Lord places on a Nazirite:

The Nazirite's outward signs—the growth of hair, abstention from wine and other alcoholic products, the avoidance of contact with the dead—are illustrative of devotion to God. Violation of these signs resulted in defilement and the need for purification so the vow could be completed. Numbers 6:1-21 regulated the practice and lined the phenomenon to cultic law and locality. Verses 1-8 show how the Nazirite's period was begun. In case of defilement, a method of purification was given (vv. 9-12). The status was terminated (vv. 13-21) by the burning of shaven hair and the giving of various offerings. Parallels exist between the cultic purity of the high priest and the Nazirite. The lifelong Nazirite in biblical tradition included Samson (Judg. 13), Samuel (1 Sam. 1), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-17). In the New Testament, Paul took the Nazirite vow for a specific period of time (Acts 18:18; 21:22-26). Amos 2:12 shows an ethical concern for protecting the status of the Nazirite. (—Holman Bible Dictionary, bold added by this writer)

We shall see how closely Samson followed the Nazirite Vow as we continue. The only part of the vow Samson seemed to take seriously was that he would not cut his hair. He seemed to compromise on other demands of the vow. However, we are not given enough information here to judge him, - it just seems that way to us.

Now, we shall go a little deeper, and see something of Samson's application of the Nazirite vow as he grew to maturity and dealt with the demands of the vow. We should remind ourselves of the loyalty of John the Baptist to his vow. Samson definitely falls short, but there is a question we must ask here. Did the Lord cancel or suspend the vow in order to use Samson to deliver Israel from the evil and oppressive power of the Philistines? We are not given the answer to that question, but we do see times when he violated the vow. However, if he had not been in violation of the vow by which he lived his life, there must have been some different ways of looking at the vows that got him into such deep trouble. From this point on Samson will be judged by this vow.

Chapter 14 - Samson's Riddle

Before we go any further it would be interesting to see how Samson saw himself as a man called to enter a covenant vow with the Lord. I am a little disturbed at times by a pastor or layperson who continually adds something, authoritatively, to the Word of God. With that in mind, we may want to go beyond the place we often stop to see what has happened to, or with Samson. Has he been deceived, or has he simply given his understanding of the covenant by which he lived, or has he simply looked on experiences with the Philistines in a different light? It would be interesting to know how old he was when he first violated the covenant with the Lord. Here is what we are given:

- (1) Samson went down to Timnah and saw a young Philistine woman there.
- (2) He went back and told his father and his mother: "I have seen a young Philistine woman in Timnah. Now get her for me as a wife."
- (3) But his father and mother said to him, "Can't you find a young woman among your relatives or among any of our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines for a wife?" But Samson told his father, "Get her for me, because I want her."
- (4) Now his father and mother did not know this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time, the Philistines were ruling over Israel." (Bold added, JLS)

This may surprise us! When we read this hurriedly it would be easy to say that Samson was determined to break the Nazirite covenant when it came to this young woman? Unless the Scripture had given us this information - that it was "from the Lord," (bold added by this writer) we may not have been realized that Samson was not simply interested in stroll through the country side with this young lady. He did not simply see a beautiful young woman and returned home and insisted that his parents go the parents of this young Philistine girl to make arrangements for a Saturday afternoon date. He wanted them to arrange with her parents for a wedding for their daughter and Samson. This would have required a lot of courage on the part of Samson's parents, even if Samson had only wanted a Saturday night date with this girl. But, Samson was not interested in a girlfriend, he wanted her for a bride.

This verse tells us that the Lord God wanted to bring about a conflict with this pagan nation that would ignite a war between Israel and their bitter enemy. If Samson had been absolutely faithful, and if the Israelites had been committed to that war, the Philistines might have been no problem when the Lord called Samuel, or when Saul was crowned the first king over Israel. Israel may not have understood what was about to happen, and had Samson and his family sought only to avoid this one sided conflict with their oppressors, His chosen people would have suffered at the hands of their pagan enemy for many decades longer than they did.

The Philistines had controlled the country the Lord had given to His chosen people as a way of creating such friction with the Philistines that would set the stage for a conflict that would continue to grow until a major conflict would incite a riot that would bring about major conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines to a head so that a major conflict would rise that would lead to an even greater conflict between the two nations. When the time came for a major conflict between the two nations Yahweh could this to spawn a full blown war.

(5) Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Suddenly a young lion came roaring at him, (6) the Spirit of the Lord took control of him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. (7) Then he went and spoke to the woman, because Samson wanted her.

We are not told why or how Samson became separated from his parents, and only that he did? They may have had different duties to attend before the wedding.

Samson's parents finally gave in and signed an agreement for the marriage. As we shall see, Samson went down to Timnah on his own and his parents traveled separately. The Scripture tells us that Samson did not travel with his parents, and when Samson saw the young lion the "Spirit of the Lord" took control of Samson and he "tore the lion apart." After that, Samson went on to see the young woman - "because he wanted her." The thing that set up the fight with the lion was simply that "Spirit of the Lord took control of Samson" and he was able to tear the lion apart. This seems to indicate to us that Samson did not have the power to rip a young lion apart with his bare hands, except when the Spirit was upon him. Samson may well have been the strongest man who ever lived on the earth, but when the Spirit of the Lord took control of him there was no doubt that he was the world's strongest human.

There are many questions in the Bible that are not explained to us, and one is found in this passage. In the first place, Samson became separated from his parent. In the second, place, he was encountered by lion - or the lion was encountered by Samson! Whatever the case may have been, Samson was attacked by a lion (not a cub), and the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and he tore the lion apart as he might have torn a young goat apart. Lions are mentioned in Palestine some 135 times and the very name seems to have denoted power.

Daniel was thrown into a lion's den to kill the great prophet. The enemies of the Lord never considered the fact that Daniel would not be killed, but that was the work of the Lord, not Daniel. In this case, Samson was attacked by the lion which was obviously at full maturity, and there was no doubt as to its purpose. He would have killed Samson if the Lord had not given the world's strongest man the power and knowledge to kill the lion. Samson simply took the lion, which was in his prime, and tore it apart - we might say, as a grown man might tear a limb from a puppy. Samson was strong, but when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him he was formidable in strength and courage.

We are not told why Samson did not see the young woman after killing the lion - or if he did see her briefly. While all of our questions might not be answered, the Spirit of the Lord was not asleep nor was He being misled by all the activities.

Those who reject the Trinity in general will no doubt tell us there is no Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, but to those who do believe in the Trinity, this is a strong affirmation. I had to go to a hospital I had visited many times as a pastor, and once when I entered to have a new blood thinner. A new doctor could have seen with but a glance that I was taking one mg of Coumadin, but instead of that he decided to give me one of the new blood thinners, which caused a large ball of dead blood cells in my right calf. Consequently, I had to have immediate surgery on my right calf in order to save my lower right leg and right foot. I spent the month of May, 2015, in the hospital, with a lot of care. One man, a Physical Therapist, who was probably between 35 and 40 years of age, seemed to enjoy talking with me about the Bible and about my situation finally got a response from me. I told him that we believe in the

Trinity- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The young man was committed to the ministry of a large, active church, so he immediately stopped me. He said, "We don't believe that the Holy Ghost is a person. The Holy Ghost is what God gives you so you can speak in tongues!" How sad that a large church would brain-wash its members with such a false doctrine as that. If there was one thing he was not about to accept was a different definition of the Holy Spirit. Even worse, I had a few professors in seminary (very few I might add) who did not believe in the Trinity because they did not believe the Holy Spirit was a real person.

(8) After some time, when he returned to get her, he left [the road] to see the lion's carcass, and there was a swarm of bees with honey in the carcass. (9) He scooped [some honey] into his hands and ate [it] as he went along. When he returned to his father and mother, he gave [some] to them and they ate [it]. But he did not tell them that he had scooped the honey from the lion's carcass.

Sometime later, Samson walked by the lion again and saw that bees had filled its carcass with honey. He carried some of the honey to his parents, but he did not tell them he had gotten the honey from the carcass of the lion.

(10) His father went [to visit] the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, as young men were accustomed to do. (11) When the Philistines saw him, they brought 30 men to accompany him.

(12) "Let me tell you a riddle," Samson said to them. "If you can explain it to me during the seven days of the feast and figure it out, I will give you 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes. (13) But if you can't explain it to me, you must give me 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes."

"Tell us your riddle," they replied. "Let's hear it."

(14) So he said to them: Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet."

After three days, they were unable to explain the riddle. (15) On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Persuade your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death. Did you invite us here to rob us?"

(16) So Samson's wife came to him, weeping, and said, "You hate me and don't love me! You told my people the riddle, but haven't explained it to me."

"Look," he said, "I haven't even explained it to my father or mother, so [why] should I explain it to you?"

(17) She wept the whole seven days of the feast, and at last, on the seventh day, he explained it to her, because she had nagged him so much. Then she explained it to her people. (18) On the seventh day before sunset, the men of the city said to him:

What is sweeter than honey?

What is stronger than a lion?

So he said to them:

If you hadn't plowed with my young cow, you wouldn't know my riddle now!

(19) The Spirit of the Lord took control of him, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed 30 of their men. He stripped them and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. In a rage, Samson returned to his father's house, (20) and his wife was given to one of the men who had accompanied him. (Judges 14:1-20)

The Spirit of the Lord was looking for an opportunity like this, so He took advantage of this opportunity to demonstrate His power against the false gods of the Philistines. Samson, in a rage, went out and killed 30 of their men, and then in a rage, returned to his own home. As an historical note, we are told that the Philistines took the

young woman Samson had wanted to marry and gave her to another person - one who had accompanied Samson.

For centuries, there was a serious conflict between Israel and the five Philistine cities that made up the Philistine Pentapolis. There were five Philistine capitols, each with its own king and royal family. Hundreds of years later, David and others would fighting against the Philistines. The Holman Bible Dictionary offers this not about the city of Ashkelon (one of the five cities which made up the Philistine Pentapolis).

ASHKELON (assh' kih lahn) One of five principal cities of the Philistines (pentapolis), located on the Mediterranean coast on the trade route, Via Maris, and designated for Judah in the conquest. Ashkelon was a Mediterranean coastal city twelve miles north of Gaza and ten miles south of Ashdod. It is the only Philistine city directly on the seacoast. Its history extends into the Neolithic Period. The economic importance came from both its port and its location on the trade route, the Via Maris.—Holman Bible Dictionary

Chapter 15 - Samson's Revenge

(1) Later on, during the wheat harvest, Samson [took] a young goat [as a gift] and visited his wife. "I want to go to my wife in her room," he said. But her father would not let him enter.

(2) "I was sure you hated her," her father said, "so I gave her to one of the men who accompanied you. Isn't her younger sister more beautiful than she is? Why not take her instead?"

(3) Samson said to them, "This time I won't be responsible when I harm the Philistines." (4) So he went out and caught 300 foxes. He took torches, turned the foxes tail-to-tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. (5) Then he ignited the torches and released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up the piles of grain and the standing grain as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

The Philistines and other pagan nations had destroyed crops of the Israelites and taken the grain that had been thrashed and left in piles, or stored in some secure place - secure from the normal places where insects and certain animals would devour it. They knew what damage could be done to another nation by destroying the grain crop, whether still standing or with the grain thrashed out and stored, or simply piled and waiting storage.

(6) Then the Philistines asked, "Who did this?" They were told, "[It was] Samson, the Timnite's son-in-law, because he has taken Samson's wife and given her to another man." So the Philistines went to her and her father and burned [them] to death.

This is the kind of punishment - or retribution - pagan nations of the day might well consider. Their first thought may well have been, who caused this? The young lady's father had given his daughter in marriage to a companion of Samson, assuming that he would not be returning for her. The enemies of Samson did not think like the Israelites. There was no mercy in them. This certainly did not please Samson, as we shall see. They had no doubt asked why Samson had done this and he answered them, but he didn't stop with an answer. He destroyed those Philistines who were there.

(7) Then Samson told them, "Because you did this, I swear that I won't rest until I have taken vengeance on you."

(8) He tore them limb from limb with a great slaughter, and he went down and stayed in the cave at the rock of Etam.

Samson, in the power of the Lord, and in his intense vengeance, "tore them limb from limb." There was a news report recently about some Japanese leader who had chosen to visit Hawaii, some 76 years after their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. He announced before he left Japan to fly to Hawaii, but that he would not apologize for the attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor. The Japanese used every subterfuge in the book to set those American soldiers and others up for destruction. Not only did they attack American ships anchored at Pearl Harbor, they did all the damage they could on this one attack, and they did not spare anyone. But still, they would not apologize!

(9) The Philistines went up, camped in Judah, and raided Lehi. (10) So the men of Judah said, "Why have you attacked us?"

They replied, "We have come to arrest Samson and pay him back for what he did to us."

(11) Then 3,000 men of Judah went to the cave at the rock of Etam, and they asked Samson, "Don't you realize that the Philistines rule over us? What have you done to us?" "I have done to them what they did to me," he answered.

(12) They said to him, "We've come to arrest you and hand you over to the Philistines."

Then Samson told them, "Swear to me that you yourselves won't kill me."

(13) "No," they said, "we won't kill you, but we will tie you up securely and hand you over to them." So they tied him up with two new ropes and led him away from the rock.

Samson's Israelite neighbors formed a force of 3,000 men who went to see Samson to let him know that he had jeopardized the welfare of his own people by what he had done. He submitted to himself to them and they tied him with two new ropes and led him away to turn him over to the Philistines. It is interesting that they used new ropes - interesting that his kinsmen had taken new rope with them to tie Samson. Interesting, but practical. Years ago, when fishermen used their nets they had to check them carefully for breaks - until nylon and other synthetic cord was made available to them. The fiber they used would wear, deteriorate from age, use, and abuse. When I was a small boy I often heard men who liked to fish discuss whether or not they were using the old cords for nets or trot lines, or were they using the newer nylon lines or cords. I was born into the nylon world but many of my older neighbors were not.

When the risen Christ met seven of his disciples at the Sea of Galilee, and they had caught no fish. He told them to cast the net on the other side of the boat. They did and caught an incredible number of fish - and the fishing net was not broken!

(14) When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came to meet him shouting. The Spirit of the Lord took control of him, and the ropes that were on his arms became like burnt flax and his bonds fell off his wrists. (15) He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand, took it, and killed 1,000 men with it. (16) Then Samson said:

"With the jawbone of a donkey

I have piled them in a heap.

With the jawbone of a donkey

I have killed 1,000 men."

This is incredible! He had been tied securely by his own people before being turned over to the Philistines, yet when he was turned over to the Philistines he quickly snapped the cords and, with a fresh jawbone of a donkey, killed 1,000 Men. Remember, these were not 1,000 men in the local nursing home, these were 1,000 of the toughest men in the country. They were a part of mightiest army in that part of the world. They were young, highly trained, and experienced soldiers. Yet, exhausted from thirst, Samson looked to the Lord who supplied him with water.

(17) When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone and named that place Ramath-lehi. (18) He became very thirsty and called out to the Lord: "You have accomplished this great victory through Your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" (19) So God split a hollow place [in the ground] at Lehi, and water came out of it. After Samson drank, his strength returned, and he revived. That is why he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. (20) And he judged Israel 20 years in the days of the Philistines. (Judges 1:1-20, bold added).

There is something very interesting here, and it is also disturbing. Samson had been blessed by the Lord in such a way that he experienced phenomenal victories over an enemy far greater than Israel. When we go back to the Exodus and the time spent at Sinai we see a parallel to this. The Israelites would be miraculously saved by the Lord at one point, and then break out in some kind of pagan worship, like they had known in Egypt. They were a part of a great

victory over the Amalekites on the way to Sinai, and then complain against Moses and Aaron. They would see the hand of Yahweh as He provided food and water in the wilderness, but then while Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments the people would be down below worshipping a golden calf - something that was totally powerless, and as dumb as a rock one may stumble over on a hike through the mountains today.

Back a few years ago, my good friend Randy Knepper and I made an appointment to arrive at Glorieta, New Mexico, a day or two early for a scheduled Board Meeting, so we could explore the mountains. We were there for a LifeWay Christian Resources Board Meeting, and he and I were Board members. So, we decided to arrive a day or so early so we could explore some of the area along the Pecos River (near the town of Pecos). I well remember one year walking out onto some large rocks in the middle of the river so I could make some pictures of the Pecos River. The next time I was there, with Randy, there was too much water in the river for that. Randy and I were there to honor Jesus Christ but I could not imagine confusing those rocks with the Rock of Ages.

Here, in the story about Samson, we find something very interesting, interesting in deed, for when we get to the end of the stories about other judges we are told that a particular judge judged Israel so many years. If we wait to the end of the story about Samson we find no reference to how many years Samson might have judged Israel, had he simply obeyed the Lord.

I remember reading about the death of Samson and not finding how many years, beyond the twenty mentioned here that he had judged Israel. I wondered about a number of things, but one of them was how much time had transpired between his vicious attacks on the Philistine people in the past (when he killed 1000 men with the jaw bone of a farm animal, or when he killed the 30 men for their robes to give to those who had conned the Philistines into betraying him). It just didn't add up there, but when we see how Samson had attacked and defeated the Philistines at that time, and then we are told that he judged Israel 20 years we will see that his judgment of Israel and his judgment against the Philistines was about to come to an end. The following poem, often quoted by the late R. G. Lee should motivate us to keep our eyes on the Cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SINNER (Not the Title)

This is the price I pay,
Just for one riotous day;
Years of regret and grief
And sorrows without relief.

Suffer it I will, my friend.
Suffer it to the end,
Until the grave shall give relief.

Small was the thing I bought,
Small was the thing at best,
Small was the debt, I thought,
But, Oh God! the interest.
By Paul Lawrence Dunbar

I heard Dr. Lee quote those lines many times when I was a young man. I have also seen the reality of the great truth those words carry. I might add here that R. G. Lee was among the most interesting people I have ever known. He was the guest speaker at the Ministerial Banquet for ministerial students at Mississippi College (which, by the way, was the first college in America to grant a degree to a woman). We heard an amazing message from Dr. Lee, and the concluding statements were unforgettable - or they might have been, if one could have taken them literally. He closed with a challenge for us to memorize the entire New Testament. Samson had never done that, nor would anyone there taken him seriously. But, R. G. Lee had done just that!

Samson and Delilah

Chapter 16

Here we come to a very sad time in the life of the Judge Samson. Thankfully, we have read that Samson had judged Israel for 20 years, and even though we are not given all the details, if we believe the rest of the story we should not reject that claim. Think how great it would have been if Samson had avoided the “affair” with Delilah. We might be reading that Samson judged Israel for 40 years. But that was not to be the case.

What does help the modern Bible student to accept the reality of what might have been? This is a moral tragedy comparable to some in the life of David and other Old Testament figures. Bathsheba comes to mind when we compare these two mighty men of God whose moral and spiritual compromises hindered their calling more than we can possibly imagine.

When we compare the compromises made by Samson and David with the moral and spiritual decline in America during the years between World War II and the end of the Twentieth Century we should be able to fathom the depth of sin and its consequences on the people involved, whether those committing the sin or those who are victims of it. May I illustrate? When I was growing up during WW II and during which time when many churches closed their doors because of the lack of a pastor and because of the number of men who were drafted and sent to the battlefield, as well as those who volunteered. Many high school students persuaded their parents to go with them to the draft board to sign for their seventeen year old son to be drafted, or be permitted to volunteer. I still remember listening to my mother read letters from my father when he was in Germany at the end of WW II. I was around 8 years at the time.

We watched the road for any sign of his return. Day after day. Night after night. Where we lived in the Mississippi Delta there were no power lines, no telephones, and a limited number of automobiles. I have never forgotten the day I looked across a field and a pasture and saw a civilian walking down the gravel road, about 200 yards from our house, with a man in uniform. I was sure the man in uniform was my father, and it was. The man in civilian dress was a friend of my father's and when he saw him walking that great distance from the bus stop on Highway 61, between Clarksdale and Tunica. He had already carried that heavy bag ten to twelve miles. When his friend saw him he recognized him, joined him and carried heavy bag for him the two more miles to our home. Things often changed for the better when our service men returned. For one thing, we were no longer sending our men into war against the Germans and the Japanese. For another, there was an end to the extremely hard work which fell upon the wife and children of the soldier before he returned.

We would, for decades, hear about “the greatest generation.” Sadly, that to which people were pointing for truth that it was “the greatest generation” became lost in the reports and studies over the following decades. I remember that after Bro. M. C. Waldrup returned from his tour as a chaplain during the war things really began looking up in our mission church. During the War, the doors were closed in many smaller churches, especially mission churches. There were no services. A few years after the War, in 1952, M. C. Waldrup, our Superintendent of Missions for the Riverside Baptist Association (Tunica, Cohoma, and Quitman Counties), had returned and taken up where he had left off, announced that God was bringing about some major changes. Southern Baptists adopted a goal that the denomination reached and it inspired us to believe we were going to continue to reach those goals. In 1954, the Southern Baptist challenge was, A MILLION MORE IN '54. Believe it or not, we reached that goal - but if we ever added that many in any one year after that I missed it.

Americans in the various branches of military service, and their families were optimistic after reaching such a goal. But we have never reached it again. The question is WHY?! It is only my opinion, but the Greatest Generation was not so great after all! Upon what was our society and culture basing the claims that this was the greatest generation? Well, America had gone through the time when Americans could no longer buy alcoholic beverages, the Prohibition, and then came the Great Depression, when families were turned upside down because there was very little work. My father, and his friends joined the CCC - Conservative Civilian Corp, a new program then President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration gave America. There was very little income, many churches could not afford a pastor's salary.

Why was America set up for the kind of justice that followed the vile, evil attack by a pagan nation at the time? Let us see if there are any parallels between the end of WW II and the end of the century and what happened in Samson's sad times.

(1) Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute and went to bed with her.

This verse provides us with a little information about Samson we have not been given before.

Samson left his home and walked the 40 miles to Gaza, the most distant town (or city) of the Philistines from his home (HCS Study Bible Notes). Another disturbing note is that, unlike the previous conflict with the Philistines, Samson here is not looking for a wife. Instead, "he saw a prostitute and went to bed with her." This is more disturbing for a man appointed by God to be a Nazirite, and the final judge of His people Israel. This not only tells us something about the moral decline with Samson, it parallels the moral decline in America and other countries from the end of World War II and the social, moral, and political decline we see today. Sadly, some of that decline can be seen today in the church - people who profess to be walking with Jesus Christ, but often demonstrate it beyond the doors of the church.

This observation has been made by a man who had spent over 50 years in pastoral ministries. He was a young pastor in the Deep South when he discovered that reverence in a worship service mean nothing to scores of the young people in his church. A large section of the auditorium was filled by teenagers who paid absolutely no attention to the pastor when he was preaching - or any other time. The pastor could find it a challenge even to learn the names of many of those young people. It was hard to distinguish between committed young people and those who just came to our church to be with a lot of other young people. That pastor was told that those same teenagers showed the same kind of disrespect for teachers and administrators at school. Police officers had to be on duty at graduation exercises and other events in order to maintain control - that may seem the order of the day for some schools today, but not at that time.

When the new pastor asked the church to show reverence in the Lord's house many young adults and young people showed only contempt for him. The former pastor was asked to call them down, but he said that he was afraid they would not like him. To expand it beyond church and school, one young person was asked by her mother to talk with the pastor about what she had observed over the past 5 years in her church. What that pastor heard - in that church atmosphere - was especially disturbing to him. The young teenaged girl who was sent by their pastor to talk with him about the subculture into which her older sister had been drawn.

The longer this 16 or 17 year old girl talked the more disturbing the conversation became. Finally, the pastor asked, "Are you talking about your sister or yourself?" Her answer was especially disturbing: "Oh, I am talking about myself. Mamma doesn't know about me." She had helped her mother with her older sister without revealing that she was, or had been, more involved in drugs and immorality than one would have expected to hear.

This young teenaged girl and a friend from school would get permission to spend the night with a friend. They would then pack a bag and head for the apartment where a young adult couple lived. They would then spend the week-end, or most of it, in the apartment of that young married couple. After telling her pastor about the drug party which they were hiding from their parents she provided more information for the pastor. Finally, her modern, up to date stories, led him to ask, "How did you afford those drugs?" She looked at him like he was some kind of nut and said, "I'm a girl, I don't have to have any money!" This young lady told her pastor that a lot of younger girls in the church wanted to talk with her came to her, "but their parents don't want their girls talking to me." She added, "I cannot blame those parents, but I could help them if they would come to me."

This teenaged girls talked comfortably about the young people (in her church) who were spiritual and those who were not. When he asked how she could tell, she said, "Those young people who sit in front of you with their Bible and pay attention to you? They are spiritual. Those who are whispering and passing notes or pictures while you are preaching are not."

Sadly, such behavior had made it on up to the I-20 corridor within twenty years. A pastor was surprised when he overheard a conversation between his son and a teacher from a local Christian school. She seemed to be asking him to speak at her school. He was overheard asking about age groups and about pornography. She answered and He replied, "One eleven year old student from (a nearby school) can get a request for "a picture" and that picture will have covered the kids his or her age almost overnight."

Today, the same kind of activity and interest Samson was involved in are wide spread in America today. I served

two terms on the Board of Trustees for the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home in Monroe, LA, one of the most amazing of the Children's Homes in any Southern Baptist state. We were informed about sex trafficking and other things. The LBCH helps with children dropped off with them, those who need help from areas all over the state, and now with others. Because the LBCH had never accepted one cent of tax money, and because they have saved the state a lot of money, they are welcomed to look at new areas of service.

A lady was talking with my son about some case when he received a phone call. He asked to be excused and stepped off to the side. The woman continued her conversation by talking with my wife and me. She told about the area mother who would take her eight year old daughter and leave her with the man next door. She, according to this lady would drop by once a week and pick up some cash.

Parents today need to watch what their children watch, what they wear, where they go, and with whom they spend their time. This is enough to make us wonder what kind of life the prostitute from Gaza had lived. It was not pleasant in the sight of the Lord - that is for sure!

(2) When the Gazites [heard] that Samson was there, they surrounded the place and waited in ambush for him all that night at the city gate. While they were waiting quietly, they said, "Let us wait until dawn; then we will kill him." (3) But Samson stayed in bed until midnight when he got up, took hold of the doors of the city gate along with the two gateposts, and pulled them out, bar and all. He put them on his shoulders and took them to the top of the mountain overlooking Hebron.

We are not given the weight, considering the weight of a city gate must have been mind-boggling. Not only did Samson take hold of the gate that was designed to stop an enemy from invading the city, he carried the gate some 40 miles before setting it down. There can be little doubt that the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him.

Many people, including church members, today might wonder, "How could he do that? Did he not remember the Ten Commandments?" How could the Lord's Nazirite walk through a pagan land and look up and see a prostitute and then go to bed with her?! Recently, a well-known lady in the television news media interviewed the famous tel-evangelist, Jim Bakker. She pointed out that he was the most popular tel-evangelist in the world when he yielded to temptation. He openly admitted to the sin that brought down his ministry and his home. Two or three times when the interviewer asked about what had happened, he said, "It was all about sex." In other words, he explained that this happened only one time, and lasted only twenty minutes, yet it destroyed his ministry at the time. He was not looking for a new wife or a new home - just sex! He made that statement several times during the interview.

If I may add a point here, when one man "falls" (into adultery) the next pastor (or pastors) will have a price to pay to help the church get back its integrity and reputation. Not long after graduating from seminary the call was extended for me to move to a different area to pastor a local church. I soon learned that this church had experienced some ups and downs in the past. Let us call it "Air Port" church, just to give it a name. I learned that there was another church (different denomination) with the same name had attracted some unfavorable publicity because of the sins of their pastor). I was told that our church had discussed changing the name of the church because some people confused the two churches - especially when something ungodly surfaced.

A lady came to me one Sunday morning and told me that she had gone to her beauty shop the day before and a lady said, "I hear your pastor ran off with a woman." Our member assured her that it was not her pastor who had done that! The discussion about the name came up again and after I moved on to another state, someone contacted me and told me that they had changed the name of the church.

From his birth Samson was to have been a Nazirite, but he did not always act like one. In his younger years he acted more like a spoiled brat than a holy servant of the Lord. Compare Samson's life with that of Samuel's. Samuel was not set aside to be a Nazirite, but he was far more moral than Samson, who had been designated as a Nazirite from his birth.

When a pastor falls it is going to be costly, both for the church and for the pastor who follows the fallen pastor. I moved to a new church one time and looked forward to a great ministry, not because of my preaching or anything else I was doing, but because of the faithfulness of our members. Their records made the case for the optimism, or so I thought! Two pastors had given the church a name for a growing, evangelistic church. The first thing I had to do

was to delete over 100 names from the church member's list. During the most recent pastor's five and one half months he had added every visitor's name to our church role, knowing they were not authentic new members.

Another pastor played the role of one who was committed to his church with such vim, vigor, and vitality that he could draw people to him and to his church, regardless of his life. He even told me how I could have everyone in town talking about Johnny Sanders. Just hang out with hunters or fishermen who stopped by a certain restaurant for breakfast and drink coffee on their way to the lake or woods. Then, I could go down to city hall and hang around and visit with them. Apparently, he had done that for seven years. And believe me, I heard that name often!

The New Bible Commentary on the Bible: Old Testament offers these comments from this point:

“Gaza - modern Ghazzeah, the southernmost of the five principal Philistine cities, about thirty-eight miles southwest of Zorah and three miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. It was a gateway city for the caravan traffic between Egypt and Mesopotamia. It was never captured by the Israelites. Today it gives its name to the “Gaza strip” between modern Israel and Egypt.”

Now, let us return to the Scripture about Samson.

4) Sometime later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley. (5) The Philistine leaders went to her and said, “Persuade him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each of us will then give you 1,100 pieces of silver.”

6) So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me, where does your great strength [come from] ? How could [someone] tie you up and make you helpless?”

7) Samson told her, “If they tie me up with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I will become weak and be like any other man.”

8) The Philistine leaders brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied him up with them.

(9) While the men in ambush were waiting in her room, she called out to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But he snapped the bowstrings as a strand of yarn snaps when it touches fire. [The secret of] his strength remained unknown.

10) Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have mocked me and told me lies! Won't you please tell me how you can be tied up?”

11) He told her, “If they tie me up with new ropes that have never been used, I will become weak and be like any other man.”

(12) Delilah took new ropes, tied him up with them, and shouted, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But while the men in ambush were waiting in her room, he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

13) Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have mocked me all along and told me lies! Tell me how you can be tied up.” He told her, “If you weave the seven braids on my head with the web of a loom—”

14) She fastened the braids with a pin and called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” He awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin, with the loom and the web.

15) “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ ” she told him, “when your heart is not with me? This is the third time you have mocked me and not told me what makes your strength so great!”

16) Because she nagged him day after day and pled with him until she wore him out, (Bold added) (17) he told her the whole truth and said to her, “My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.”

18) When Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth, she sent this message to the Philistine leaders: “Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth.” The Philistine leaders came to her and brought the money with them.

19) Then she let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. In this way, she rendered him helpless, and his strength left him. (20) Then she cried, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" When he awoke from his sleep, he said, "I will escape as I did before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. (Bold added).

This assures us that the mighty strength of Samson was not simply his own natural strength. He may well have been able to bench press more than Paul Anderson. In fact he may well have had more physical strength than any other human being on earth had ever demonstrated. Samson may well have been the most surprised man on earth when he discovered "that the Lord had left him." Now, let us go on from his infidelity and betrayal to the price he paid for his unfaithfulness.

Samson's Defeat and Death

Now, we will see what the ungodly Philistines did once they had captured the mighty Samson, the man who for 20 years had defied their gods, laughed at their military, and slaughtered their best trained troops. What a tragic loss for the man Yahweh had chosen to deliver His Chosen People, Israel, from the long agonizing control of this ruthless enemy, the Philistines. When we learned of the cruelty of the Nazis and Japanese during WW 2, many people wondered how anyone could get that way. The truth is that the Philistines and Assyrians were just as cruel and evil as the Japanese and Germans of the Second World War.

Two questions should be considered here. In the first place, the Lord God of Israel had given them a mighty man, a Nazirite, to deliver them from the Philistines, a pagan nation that had used and abused conquered nations for centuries. The conquest over some weaker nation was vile, evil, and intensely cruel, just as cruel as their godless religion could, and did make it. There were reports of the Assyrians who would "rip up women with child" or throw a child up into the air for another soldier to catch it on his spear. The behavior of those ancient Philistines and more recent Nazis will tell us a lot about how cruel people can be if their god is Satan himself.

In Samson, the Lord had miraculously given Israel one infant, one youth, one young man whom He planned to use to deliver the Children of Israel from the tyranny of one of the most evil and ungodly nations on earth. Their cruelty against those they had conquered might remind those of the Second World War period of just how ruthless Germans of World War II, who launched the most bloody war in history by arresting, torturing, and killing Jews - burning them in giant ovens, or having them dig great ditches and then stand by them so they would fall into the great ditch in which they would bury the people they hated so intensely. The Jews would either fall into those ditches, or fall close enough so that they could use a tractor with a frond-end loader to push the fallen bodies into the great ditch, which became massive graves for the fallen Jews. Even after the godless Nazis realized they were going to lose the war to allied forces, they were still burning them alive, having them shot and buried in those monstrous graves they had forced them to dig for the one purpose of burying the enemy, whom they hated so intensely.

After the Philistines had captured Samson, it was not enough for them to torture the enemy and release him, they were determined to humiliate and destroy the enemy. When I was a student at Mississippi College, our Director of Missions for three counties in North West Mississippi, asked me to become the missions pastor for a small mission in an extremely rural area of Quitman County. There were very few men who would assume any kind of leadership role. The one who still comes to mind after some 55 years in the ministry was Joe Fortner. Joe was an amazing leader in that church. He probably told me more about the cruelty of the Nazi Army toward prisoners during WW 2 than anyone else ever has. From what Joe said, the Germans must have been every bit as cruel as those ancient Philistines. One morning, when the prisoners were getting up for their breakfast, they began looking around for the guards, whose vile, evil watch over the prisoners could become intensely cruel and fatal. However, there was a very shocking difference that morning. There were no guards - anywhere! He prisoners had total access to every part of the prison. There were no Germans, guards or officers anywhere. The prisoners were free to find food, clothing or whatever they needed. The half-starved prisoners were breaking into the food storage buildings, the kitchen, and every other place where food was kept. One American found where chocolate bars were stored and ate so many bars that he died from it. Joe found potatoes and began boiling one at a time in a bucket. Joe would eat one potato and then decide that he could only eat one more - but after each potato was gone he forced himself to eat just one more.

When Joe and his comrades began milling about in the open area where prisoners were forced to gather for speeches or to have some prisoners who were determined to live, gather food, and do various things to make their torture more intense and humiliating. On this morning, Joe told me that as some began gathering together and looking around the prison camp they saw that they were completely surrounded Sherman tanks, lined up, side by side, with all guns focused on the prison. The war was over, but the Germans did not want the prisoners talking too early. The life of a POW (prisoner of war) was so worthless that they did not do anything for the prisoners who about to be released. The Germans simply slipped away during the night. There is no question as to what the fact that the Germans did not want to report the cruelties of the Germans against the Allied soldiers. They did not want to be associated with the cruelties with which they had treated allied troops. So, they simply abandoned the prisoners. That way, they would not have to answer for the cruelty against the prisoners. You can be sure that higher ranked officers made their escape first, and then the prison guards. They were determined to make their escape before Tanks had all escape routes blocked. Godless foes were no more civilized at the end of WW 2, than they were when God empowered the ancient Israelites.

Samson, in spite of all the circumstances, and in spite of his suffering, was still God's chosen man for the hour. And, now, the one man, Samson, who had been blessed with a call to deliver the Chosen People had totally blown his opportunity to deliver them from the satanic power of those who wanted to torture and destroy the Jewish People. Now, we will see the cruelty and hatred of those who wanted to use and abuse God's Chosen People.

21) The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles, and he was forced to grind grain in the prison. (22) But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved.

Samson's period of torture must have been lengthy and cruel. They had blinded him and then hitched him with mules to a giant wheel which was pulled by mules or oxen around and around the great wheel which was used to grind grain. Samson had spent enough time in his blind state for his hair to have grown back out, a fact which the Philistines had apparently not noticed.

23) Now the Philistine leaders gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They rejoiced and said: Our god has handed over our enemy Samson to us.

24) When the people saw him, they praised their god and said: Our god has handed over to us our enemy who destroyed our land and who multiplied our dead.

25) When they were drunk, they said, "Bring Samson here to entertain us." So they brought Samson from prison, and he entertained them. They had him stand between the pillars. (26) Samson said to the young man who was leading him by the hand, "Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them."

The Philistines were still, after some period of time, determine to destroy Samson, or humiliate him that they had obviously failed to notice that his hair had grown out again. The godless Philistines, except for some 3,000 people, were about to learn a lesson they would never live to regret.

(27) The temple was full of men and women; all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and about 3,000 men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain [them]. (28) He called out to the Lord: "Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. Through one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes."

It would be interesting to know how long Samson had suffered before the religious leaders of the Philistines decided to bring him out to mock him before this huge audience. It would be interesting to know how many of these Philistines had seen Samson as he was forced to work with mules in grinding grain. What we will see is the determination of a man who had not always taken his calling very seriously until now.

(29) Samson took hold of the two middle pillars supporting the temple and leaned against them, one on his right hand and the other on his left. (30) Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." He pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And the dead he killed at his death were more than those he

had killed in his life. (Bold added)

31) Then his brothers and his father's family came down, carried him back, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. So he judged Israel 20 years. (Judges 16:1-31, HCSB)

It would be interesting to know how many years Samson might have judged Israel had it not been for his sin - the sin of not using his special blessing from God for the glory of God, rather than putting on a performance in order to make an impression on the enemies of God. Even in sin Samson was, without a doubt, the strongest man who ever lived. There is, however, one point we should not forget. Samson was a Nazirite - a Nazirite who had forgotten his Nazirite vows. It was as though he had simply rejected those vows - which, of course, he had.

It is sad when we read about one of the Old Testament characters who was called by the Lord for some very special task, a person who followed the Lord for a while, and then violated his or her commitment to the Lord. Samson and David are disturbing examples from the Old Testament. How is it then that Samson is remembered for his infidelity and the price he paid for his compromise? What about David, who tried to cover one sin with another? It didn't work out for him! I once heard an evangelist say that David never accomplished anything after his sin with Bathsheba. Well, read Psalm 52 for David's confession and appeal for forgiveness. Then, read Psalm 32 for the joy of the forgiveness of his sin. What do you think?

MODERN DAY BLESSINGS

Men Who Were

I was a young pastor in Bastrop, Louisiana many years ago. I had been called to a church that had gone through some really bad times - before I became the pastor. When I met with the Pastor Search Committee they showed me some amazing things. For one thing, there were those two great new buildings. I loved both of them. The auditorium was 110 feet long - 20 pews deep - with no sound system! We could have a good attendance and have empty pews all over the place. Ours was the youngest of the Baptist churches in town, and three of those churches were a lot older and much larger than ours. The educational building was a 110 foot long building with two stories. I had a study and an office. I found one room up stairs that was filled with folding chairs they had never needed.

We had some outstanding members in that church - but, we also had a lot upon whom we could depend on for absolutely nothing. We had two paper mills that operated on three shifts - which meant that when members were working days we never saw them on Sunday. We had young men who worked shift work at one of the mills - and they were out many Sundays in order to meet their commitment to the National Guard. And then there were the hunting and fishing seasons! I received a lot of calls to go fishing or hunting - I won't go into that.

Those were not really bad things. Sadly, the church had a bad reputation because of some former pastors. I remember meeting local residents who would say, "I hope you are not like one pastor they had!" I wasn't, but I didn't ask which one. One pastor was there five months and he had added around 100 members to our Sunday School enrollment. I spent a lot of time visiting those supposed members, only to have them tell me, "We don't belong to your church, we go to Riverside." They would name various churches in town.

I spent some five years walking the streets and knocking on doors - with no observable results. Then, one day I received a phone call from a man who asked me if I would talk with him and his wife. They were both saved that day, and various members of their family were saved over the next few years. During that year I baptized one person for every 11.6 members - and it was all of the Lord. We had one addition for every 6.8 members. This continued for another year. I invited Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, former president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, to preach a revival for us. He may well have been among the most brilliant people with whom I had ever worked. When I was in seminary he and I spent a lot of time in the gym shooting baskets or playing volleyball.

Dr. Edeleman not only preached for us, but he preached every morning at Cherry Ridge Baptist School. Every spare moment Dr. Eddleman was working on his commentary on Acts. I was working on my first study guide on Acts, so I called him a number of times after the week was over. Dr. Eddleman preached every morning at Cherry Ridge School and that week.

After the Monday morning service, he told me that he had not spoken to children in a long time and asked for suggestions. I suggested that he might quote the Hebrew alphabet for them at the beginning and he did that. The results were amazing. So many children walked the aisle on Tuesday morning that the world spread all over town. The third day the pastor of First Baptist Church and other pastors were there. Dr. Eddleman asked the pastor of First Baptist to come forward and help talk with the children who came forward. At the end of the week 103 children had made professions of faith and 102 were baptized on one church or another. Interestingly, neither our church, nor Cherry Ridge baptized one of those children.

Dr. Eddleman returned to Dallas and then a Sunday or two later, preached at Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas. The church was without a pastor and a member of the Pastor Search Committee asked him to recommend a pastor. He recommended me as a possible pastor for a church that appreciated him very deeply.

It was not too long after that revival in our church that we a Pastor Search Committee in our morning worship service. This was a very impressive group of men - as I recall, all of them worked as Superintendents in one division or another in one of the three giant oil refineries that surrounded the church - several miles away. The church was Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas - in the Golden Triangle between Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange. Nederland was one of three smaller cities within that big triangle. I soon discovered that Dr. Leo Eddleman had recommended me to the church, and I accepted the invitation to preach for them and was called as pastor.

Interestingly, I had grown up around cotton gins and when we moved to Bastrop they had two paper mills that would dwarf those cotton gins. When we moved to the Golden Triangle I discovered that either of those refineries would dwarf a large paper mill. I had gone on a tour of cotton gins and one large paper mill, but my tour of an oil refinery was taken from outside the wire that surrounded the refiner.

When my wife, Rebecca, and I drove to Nederland to preach the "trial sermon" we left her in the hotel and Bob Moore and Thurman Levin drove me around all over the area. I was shocked once during that tour. As we pulled into the parking lot a Hillcrest Baptist Church, Bob Moore told me they had drawn the plan for one of the buildings. My first thought was about a church or two that had been built according to plans drawn up by a member of the church. After a brief tour of the early childhood facility, I felt a lot better. Bob Moore supervised draftsmen for the Texaco Oil Refiner. The building was amazing, and my respect for Bob Moore hit the elevator immediately.

One thing that stood out in my mind was that Vernon Greenville, who was a member the Pastor Search Company who could not join the other members of the committee when they came to hear me and visit with me. About two weeks later we had two visitors in our morning worship service in Bastrop. Mr. And Mrs. Vernon Greenville - "just a Baptist deacon from Texas."

A couple of weeks later the Pastor Search Committee was on their way to hear another preacher when Vernon Greenville asked, "What did you think of Johnny Sanders, whom you heard in Bastrop, LA?" Immediately, Bob Moore asked, "Vernon, did you go by and hear Johnny Sanders preach when you were on your vacation?" He had. While Thurman Levins and Bob Moore were driving me around town Thurman mentioned Vernon Greenville. Bob Moore said, "If the Lord would call Vernon Greenville to the ministry I would vote for him to be my pastor." That gave me something to think about! Did he mean that he would prefer a layman to me as the pastor. The more I knew Vernon Greenville the more I appreciated what Bob had said about him. Vernon was highly respected among church members - as were Bob Moore and Thurman and were both highly respected at the giant Texaco oil refinery where they worked in Port Arthur.

I could mention a number of men and women who really impressed me in that church. One former pastor was the well known evangelist Manley Beasley, whose sister, Henry Mae Blanchard kept his records and managed his schedule of revivals for many years. When my son John was in the LSU Law School, he had a break and joined me in me on a trip to the Nation Wide Bible Conference at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis. We heard Jerry Vines, Adrian Rogers, Stephen Olford, many other speakers. I was amazed when Adrian Rogers announced that Manley Beasley was going to be one of the speakers. He had checked out of a hospital in Dallas to fly to Memphis to preach for us - after he was told that if he checked himself out of that hospital he might not get to return. His response was that if it came down to another few days in the hospital, or an opportunity to preach the Gospel he would be going to preach at Bellevue Baptist Church.

As we were driving home John told me how much he liked the preaching he had heard. He especially liked Jerry

Vines. I assure him that a lot of people there loved Jerry Vines. However, the man who impressed pastors more was probably Stephen Olford. I sat on the same row with Stephen Olford and Spiros Zodiaotes, when they received their PhD and a whole section of us receive the D. Min. Degree. I loved hearing Stephen Olford preach - even when he did make us squirm more than others. I listened to pastors and denominational workers talk about the preachers who meant more to them than the average pastor. My all-time favorite preacher was R.G. Lee, who had been pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis for 33 years. I explained to John that Stephen Olford would walk all over the toes of pastors and we would come under conviction by the Holy Spirit.

I served two terms on the Board of Trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources a number of years ago and I had the opportunity hear some outstanding preachers. One day, a group of men stood in front of the audience, during break time, and discussed the outstanding preachers they had heard. Finally, they agreed Stephen Olford was the one preacher whose preaching touched them more deeply. I met Dr. Olford when we received our degrees from Luther Rice and as I looked into his eyes and listened to him speak I realized that I was looking into the eyes of the most humble man I have ever met - and the strongest!

From the beginning of this study, a few names have stood out among hundreds of pastors I have heard over my life time. In contrast to the many preachers and professors I have heard, I still like to hear and read what other preachers I have written or said. However, today I would like to speak about layman. His name? Bob Moore.

Bob Moore may have been the quietest man on the Pastor Search Committee, and when he was talking he seemed to have been about the most humble and the most frank and honest man to whom I have listened. He had served a few years in the Marine corps and I wondered if that had any impact on his personality.

Bob was from northwest Louisiana, but he had been in south Texas for a number of years, where he headed up the drafting division for Texaco. When me became the head of the drafting department he saw that a lot of the men used off color language and profanity. He said he knew that if he had given the men a stern lecture they would go out of his office and laugh at him. So, what would he have to do? When he was standing there talking with a draftsman and another one came into the office and started telling an off color joke, Bob would not laugh at is joke. In time, various men would walk in, hear the joke and laugh. Bob told me that the men were totally surprised when they would tell an off color joke and he didn't laugh. He would stand there and look the man in the eyes and then turn back to his work. In time, someone would tell a new off color joke and another man would say, "Don't say that in here, Bob is here."

The way Bob handled situations like that was to add a note to his evaluation of the man that he was doing a good job, but he needed to do some work on his communication skills. Texaco would not have worried about off color jokes, but when they learned that one of the men had used less than professional language, they sent that person to see his supervisor immediately.

Then Bob could talk with them about their language - and they had to listen!

Bob Moore told me that he and his wife Paula bought some land about an house north of Nederland, as most long time workers at the refineries did. They breathed enough of the air released by those three refineries while they worked there, so to escape it they moved north of the area if they could find the land.

Bob had bought some land northeast of Nederland, and to try to see if they wanted to live there they decided to buy a mobile home and move up there. Bob and Paula would drive an hour or a little more to work. Bob said, we will never know for sure we want to live there if we don't become a part of the local church. So, they moved their letters to the local church. At the end of the summer they knew their son and daughter wanted to return to their home in Nederland so they could go to school with their friends. When Bob told the pastor what they planned to do, he went to see Bob to try to talk him out of it.

After the pastor offered his arguments Bob assured him they had already decided to move back to Nederland. At that time, the pastor said, "Well, I would like to know what you think of my preaching." That was his biggest mistake! I didn't think I had ever known anyone who was more honest than my father, who might have found some way around being as bold as Bob.

My friend said, "I want you to know that I never would have mentioned this if you hadn't asked, but since you did

ask I feel that I must be as honest in my answer as possible. Frankly, your preaching does not appeal to me. You do a good job for about ten minutes and after that you ramble around trying to come up with something to say.” While Bob was telling me that, I was thinking, “You will never have to worry about my making a mistake like that!”

There is one other thing that seemed to define the integrity of Bob Moore. We had a very large young adult membership and they had their basketball team. The only problem was that they had to play all their games away -at other church gyms. Those young adults began asking the church to build a family life center, which would allow them to add some rooms around the gym. I talked with the deacons and stressed that when a church is packed every Sunday you are never going to grow beyond that point.

This issue came up at a business meeting after I had moved back to Louisiana. Bob Moore tried to explain that they could build a new auditorium and convert the current auditorium into a family life center. They might have increased the height of the roof and made it work. Those young adults wanted nothing other than a gym like they had at one of the largest churches in the entire area of south east Texas.

Some one made the motion to build the new Christian Life Center, and Bob opposed it, stressing the need for more worship space. The young adults would not listen. After the debate they voted and the young adults won out. As soon as the votes were counted, Bob Moore stood and asked to speak. He said, “My church has just voted to build a new Christian Life Center and I want you to know that I am 100% behind it. I also want you to know that I will do everything I can to make it happen. However, a lot of you who are sitting out there do not give enough to pay the light bill, and we are going to need more from you. I will do what I can to help.”

I could go through a lengthy list of things that underscore the mind, character, and integrity of a man called Bob. There are many Christians who could never even dreamed of any comparison to Samson. At times, church members look for a Samson and forget to look for Bob. The Samsons can impress new members with their genius, gifts, and money. The Lord knows what is in each heart and He will judge according to his knowledge.

Oh, there is one more thing I want to tell about Bob Moore. Bob was a Marine and at one time he was stationed on an island and had the privilege of spending a lot of time watching bombers make their practice runs. He said, “You could watch the flyers come in over the field and then climb out of the dive before coming to the woods on the other side. He added, “You could always tell which one was Ted Williams because he flew the lowest and stayed the longest.” When I was a child and a teenager I loved Baseball. I started every game from my freshman year until the end of my senior year in high school. A very good friend from high school, and his wife, came to hear me preach several years ago at Oxford, and a few months ago when I preached the home coming service at Hollywood Baptist Church, Sledge, MS. Ken remembered my warming up for football and he remembered some long drives I hit in baseball. He seems to remember more of the good things and I may remember the mistakes! Ken still remembers that my favorite player in the National League was Stan Musial, and my favorite player in the American League was Ted Williams. Williams hit .408 when he was just breaking in, and then he was drafted and fought through World War II. After WW 2 - and after the Korean War -Ted Williams returned to hit .368 (or, was it .386? - if memory only served).

Sadly, there has only been one Samson and he compromised his covenant with the Lord to the point that he was forced to pay a horrendous price for it. The one good thing that came out of that was that he was given an opportunity to make one final move in the face of the enemy that would make the point that his God was greater than they god. This would be a great opportunity for us to examine our commitment to the Lord. He blessed us with certain gifts and we must choose as to whether we will use those gifts to glorify the Lord or for our own benefit..

Johnny L. Sanders, D. Min.
Southern Baptist Pastor
Sermons, Commentaries and Articles