



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2017-18 Leader Commentary

Unit 3: Dare to Be Different
Session 1: Born to Be Holy (see pp. 142-145)

The Question: Why should I be concerned about living holy?

The Point: Failure to live holy has consequences.

Background Passage: Judges 13–16

Focal Passage: Judges 13:1,4-5; 14:1-3; 16:19,22,28

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, “Why should I be concerned about living holy?” and drive home this one truth: Failure to live holy has consequences.

Focus on These Points

God Has Set an Expectation of How We Should Live
(Judg. 13:1,4-5)

When it was time for God’s people to enter the land of their inheritance (Canaan), they were to destroy completely the pagans who lived there. God had commanded the Israelites not to intermarry or make treaties with them. The pagans’ altars and corresponding paraphernalia used in their idol worship were to be destroyed, too (see Deut. 7:1-6, 20:16-18). The Israelites disobeyed. Before long the pagans turned the Israelites away from God and led them into idol worship. As the Israelites continued in this pattern of sin, God would hand them over to their enemies. In turn, God’s people cried out to Him for relief from their oppressors. He responded by providing them deliverers called “judges.”

As Judges 13 begins we find Israel doing evil in the LORD’s sight once again (v. 1). This time God handed them over to their chief enemy, the Philistines for forty years—their longest oppression yet. Although we have no record of Israel crying out to God for relief, He still prepared a deliverer for them—Samson.

Samson’s birth announcement is reminiscent of John the Baptist’s (see Luke 1:5-25) and Samuel’s (see 1 Sam. 1:1-20)—men whose mothers were also barren. Samson was gifted and favored; God supplied him with everything he needed to succeed. He had pious parents unlike some judges. (Gideon’s father, for example, even built an altar to Baal (6:25)!) Empowered by God’s Spirit, Samson was exceptionally strong (14:6). God also answered his prayers favorably (15:18-19). Prior to his birth, God called him to be a deliverer for Israel. Plus, he had a special birth announcement—something that couldn’t be said of any prior judge. Previous judges had never been bound to a Nazirite vow, either.

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Personal Desires Often Conflict with God's Expectation (Judg. 14:1-3)

Christians are expected to be unique, different. Many times, though, believers don't live their lives in such a way that their devotion to God is obvious. Samson didn't either. Samson traveled to Timnah, a land occupied by Israel's chief enemy, the Philistines. Timnah was only six miles away from Samson's hometown. Still, because Samson was born to deliver God's people from their oppressor, he had no reason to enter the Philistine territory unless he had a battle plan in mind and Israelite troops as travel buddies. However, neither Israel nor Samson seemed concerned about defeating the enemy. While in Timnah, Samson spotted a woman and simply had to have her as his bride. His parents made futile attempts to dissuade him (v. 3a). They reminded him that the Timnite woman's people were "uncircumcised Philistines" (v. 3a). (In the Old Testament, circumcision was an outward indication of one's devotion to the one true God. In keeping with the example set by Abraham, Old Testament Israelites continued to practice the religious ritual (Gen. 17:10-11).

Regarding marriage, Samson thought he knew best. He disrespected his parents, his nation, and his God.

Living Short of God's Expectation Zaps Our Spiritual Strength (Judg. 16:19)

We shouldn't corrupt our witness. We must consider whether our actions encourage others to sin, or whether they draw others nearer to God. Scripture elaborates by warning believers not to become stumbling blocks to others (1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 14:13). Our love for God should help us refrain from any behaviors that don't honor Him. However, Samson's love for God was not evident in his lifestyle. Before he could even marry the Timnite, he had already broken two-thirds of his Nazirite vow (i.e., touching a dead carcass and drinking alcohol). And he continued to defile himself. Sometime after the Philistines murdered Samson's wife (15:6), he slept with a prostitute (16:1), fell in love with Delilah—another Philistine woman (16:4), and came in contact with more dead animals' body parts (15:15).

Delilah took a large bribe from the Philistine leaders to find out how Samson could be rendered helpless (16:5). After nagging by Delilah, Samson yielded, explaining the connection between his long hair and his Nazirite vow. Delilah had his seven braids shaved and most likely included his beard, too. Samson's supernatural strength was gone. With all three elements of his vow now violated, the Lord left him (16:20).

God Can Renew and Restore (Judg. 16:22,28)

When the Spirit left Samson, he lost the true Source of his strength. God had been providing Samson's strength all along; his hair was merely a visible sign of his vows. Samson's hair grew back. His vows were being restored.

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The Philistines had imprisoned Samson, gouged out his eyes, and forced him to grind grain (16:21)—a job that often required the strength of an ox to push the large grinding stone. Humiliated in his plight, Samson called out to God just as he did in Judges 15:18. He asked for strength, and his prayer was answered even though he showed no signs of repentance for his sinful behavior. He clearly stated that he was seeking vengeance for his eyes. Samson also requested to die with the Philistines as he pushed down the temple's support beams. God answered that request, too. In the end Samson obviously turned to God in faith, and God responded (see Heb. 11:32-34).