



“The Lord Was Departed from Him”

Kevin Presley

Today, we’re going to look at one of the most famous stories in the Old Testament. It’s found in **Judges 16**. There is a very sad verse here that casts a shadow over one of the greatest heroes of the Bible.

Judges 16:17-20 “That he (Samson) told her (Delilah) all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazirite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not (*or knew not*) that the LORD was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.”

This is the story of a great man who fell away from God. It’s a tragic statement in verse 20 when it says, “*he knew not that the Lord was departed from him.*” It’s just as sad when that can be said of a child of God today. Today, we’ll look into the life of Samson and what caused the Lord to depart from him. Could it be that the Lord has departed from some of us today?

Samson is one of the great heroes of the Bible. From birth, he was a *Nazirite*, which refers to *one who was devoted to God in a special way*. One of the most notable marks of a Nazirite was their hair.

I Corinthians 11:14 “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?”

This passage teaches us that it is a shame for a man to have long hair while it is a glory for a woman to have long hair. But God made an exception to that in Old Testament times when a man took the Nazirite vow. In that case, he wasn't allowed to cut his hair. This was part of his dedication to God as a Nazirite. Samson lived his life keeping that vow, and as a result, God endued him with incredible, supernatural strength. His parents were people of faith who devoutly served God, and Samson was also a person of faith, as the writer of Hebrews would later tell us (**Hebrews 11:32-33**).

God raised Samson up to be a judge over Israel for some twenty years and his heroic exploits are recounted one after another in **Judges 14, 15, and 16**. The Bible makes it evident that Samson wanted to do what was right and wanted to be victorious for God. But Samson, the strongest man who ever lived, had a weakness of the flesh, and that led him down a destructive path. It really started when he fell in love with a Philistine woman. God had forbade His people from marrying people of other nations, like the Philistines, but that didn't seem to bother Samson much. His father and mother tried to talk him out of going after the woman from Timnath, but that didn't stop Samson.

Judges 14:3 "Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well."

He wasn't interested in her spiritual qualities; he was enamored with her outward beauty and the desires of his own flesh. That weakness led to his complete downfall. Unfortunately, that has been the case with many a Christian. People who set out to do well but make foolish and unscriptural decisions in their lives end up making shipwreck of their faith. They marry someone who doesn't share their beliefs or spiritual goals. Perhaps they do so with the good intentions of converting them to Christ, but usually it goes the other way. Some choose companions and friends who end up leading them away from the Lord. Others take jobs or choose career paths because of the good salary offered or exciting opportunities that they hold, but it may put them in the awkward position of having to compromise their faith or drawing them away from the church and spiritual things. That one decision sets off a chain of events in their lives that ends in spiritual disaster.

I Peter 2:11 "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;"

That's what happened to this great man of faith, Samson. His physical desires came first, and the decisions that he made determined his destiny. Instead of using his life in a way that pleased God, his life turned out to be a disappointment, and his choices led to his complete downfall.

Isn't it strange that a man who could kill a lion with his bare hands according to the story in **Judges 14**, who could kill a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, could not control his own fleshly desires and made a disaster out of his life? You know, there are many people like that today. They have tremendous intellect, incredible talent, charisma, the ability to make untold amounts of wealth...they have all the tools to have what many would think of as the perfect, successful life. But somehow, they mess it up. There are those who could be such a tremendous force for God. That's the real tragedy. They can't control their lust, their pride, or their temper. They are like Samson: they have an Achilles heel that makes them vulnerable and ultimately leads to their downfall. That's why the Bible gives us warnings like this:

I Corinthians 10:12 “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Matthew 26:41 “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Galatians 6:1,3 “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted...For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”

Samson may have had a lot of strength, but he had a fatal weakness. All his strength could not outweigh that weakness. Did you know that you have a weakness in your life? Not only that, but the devil knows that weakness. I have a weakness in my life, too. In fact, most of us have many weaknesses in our lives, and the devil knows every one of them. He reads you like a book. He knows exactly what tempts you. He knows where your Achilles heel is, and he will very subtly and craftily exploit it. He’s not interested in the things that don’t allure you or tempt you; he knows what gets to you and he will do everything he can to exploit that vulnerability.

Luke 22:31 “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:”

Peter, the very one whom Jesus warned that night would later say--not only by inspiration, but by his own experience in that Jerusalem courtyard--:

I Peter 5:8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

Satan certainly knew where Samson’s weakness was. In his case, like many men, his weakness was beautiful women. It was not only the woman from Timnath; he later became quite smitten with another woman named Delilah, who brought about his final undoing. The Philistines wanted to get even with Samson. He had won all these battles and humiliated them, and they wanted revenge. They persuaded Delilah to beguile him into revealing the secret of his supernatural strength. They gave her money to do it. So, she applied her feminine charms and asked him wherein his great strength was.

Judges 16:6 “And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.”

Samson teased her at first.

Judges 16:11 “And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.”

Well, they bound him up with new ropes and he snapped them off like threads. He whipped the Philistines that she had lying in wait. So, she tried again. You know the story.

Judges 16:13 “And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.”

Again, he easily overcame the men who were lying in wait. But, Delilah didn't give up, and neither will the devil, the world, or the flesh. She continued to urge him to tell her where his strength came from.

Judges 16:16 “And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;”

Just like the devil will do to me and you, if we let him. He finally gave in and told her the truth.

Judges 16:17-20 “That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazirite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he knew not that the LORD was departed from him.”

That's a tragic statement. This mighty man of God was now putty in the devil's hand. The Philistines took him, put out his eyes with a poker, and brought him down to Gaza where they chained him up with fetters of brass and made him do the work of an animal—turning the grinding wheel in the prison house. Now, look at him. Here you have the Arnold Schwarzenegger of ancient Israel: now blind, weak, chained, helpless, and bound by his enemy. You know, that's a stark picture of a Christian who compromises with sin. It's a grim reminder of what happens when a Christian gives in to the flesh. The worst part of it all: *The Lord departed from him.*

The Bible teaches that sin always leads to separation from God. When Adam and Eve sinned in Eden, God drove them out. God would not dwell where sin was, nor would He allow it to dwell in His presence. He doesn't allow it today either.

Isaiah 59:1-2 “Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”

Samson's downward slide finally led him to be separated from his heavenly Father. Could it be that sin has caused the Lord to depart from you or from me and we, like Samson, know it not? I don't know exactly where that line is that we cross that determines that fellowship with God is broken in the life of a Christian. Yes, the scriptures DO teach that God is patient with us as we grow and even struggle to be what He wants us to be, but there comes a time when God departs from the person who sins. First of all, don't believe what many preachers will try to tell you today, that a Christian cannot be lost. The Bible teaches no such thing. That is a false doctrine.

I Corinthians 10:12 “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”
Hebrews 10:26-27 “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins...”

That last verse was written to Hebrew Christians who were tempted to turn back to the sacrifices of Judaism and away from Christianity. They knew and served Christ, but they were tempted to go back because of the opposition and persecution that they were facing. What does the Hebrew writer warn them of, should they turn back?

Hebrews 10:27 “...But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

Samson was a servant of God, who had had tremendous triumphs in fighting for God. God’s people were encouraged by him. But Samson set his heart on evil women, and God finally had enough of his wandering eye and his compromise with the flesh and God departed from him. Many think they have an open pipeline to heaven; that regardless of whatever they choose to do, they can call on God and He will respond to their present distress or whatever needs that they have. But the Bible says otherwise.

John 9:31 “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.”

Proverbs 28:9 “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.”

In other words, if you refuse to listen to God, he’ll refuse to listen to you.

Proverbs 1:24-28 “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:”

You see, we need to learn from Samson.

Luke 4:12 “And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

Don’t try to see how close to sin you can get or how deep into sin you can go without leaving God’s fellowship. In fact, if that’s your attitude toward things that are wrong, questionable, or bad for you spiritually, your fellowship with God is already in jeopardy. Rather, the Bible tells us this:

James 4:7 “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Notice: when Samson lost his fellowship with God—that is, the Lord departed from him—he not only lost his strength, he lost his forgiveness and his righteousness.

I John 1:5-7 “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

You see, as long as I *walk in the light* where God dwells, I am in fellowship with God and the blood of Christ cleanses me of all unrighteousness. But how did Samson turn back to darkness? He gradually allowed his flesh to dominate his spirit. He let the glitter of the world drown out the light of life. When I turn back from light to darkness, when I leave God's fellowship and abandon Christ, I therefore forfeit the cleansing blood of Christ. I no longer have the blood of Christ cleansing me from unrighteousness when I leave the fellowship of God.

It is a false doctrine when people say that you can still be saved and still go to heaven and not be in fellowship with the Father. When you leave one, you leave the other. When God departs from us, we are no longer seen as cleansed and righteous; rather, under His wrath and condemnation.

Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

This verse assures us that as long as we walk in Christ, there is no condemnation. But when we're NOT abiding in Him, we ARE under condemnation. It's as simple as that.

John 15:7 "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

What does it mean to *abide in Christ*? Look further.

John 15:10 "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

You see, if I want to abide in Christ, I have to abide in His word, in His commandments. When I turn a deaf ear and refuse to submit to what the word of God says, I can't have fellowship with God. God won't dwell in a heart or a life like that. Samson had so rebelled against the teaching of God in his life because of his affinity for Philistine women that God had forbade, he compromised his faith to the point that God departed from him. What a terrible feeling it must've been when Samson realized that the Lord had left him. His strength was gone. In his weakened state, the devil and his crowd had their way. His life was now in shambles. He was blind, helpless, and hopeless. That's the picture of many a worldly Christian who has made shipwreck of their faith.

But the story of Samson doesn't end with his defeat, and yours doesn't have to either. Samson evidently repented, and I would imagine that as he ground the wheel in that prison house, he felt about like that foolish prodigal son did, as he stood hot, sweaty, and stinking in that pigpen so long ago.

Judges 16:28 "And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee..."

That wasn't a panicked prayer of *Lord, please get me out of this mess!* It was apparently a prayer of repentance and deep contrition because the Lord heard his prayer. When they put him in prison, his hair began to grow again. He renewed his resolve to be faithful to his vow, and the Bible says that his strength came back, so that in the final scene of his life, he performed his greatest feat of all. The Philistines threw themselves a religious party of sorts. They came together to worship their false god and called for Samson to be brought forth so they could make sport of him.

Judges 16:24-30 “And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.”

There is hope for the wayward child of God. There is hope for the wayward sinner who has never been saved.

Colossians 1:21 “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled,”

God, in His mercy will forgive and restore you. But you have to leave your sin. You must submit to God and resist the devil. God returned to this mighty man, Samson, in his repentance. Maybe you’ve pushed God out of your life. Maybe you’ve let sin dwell in your life and your heart until God could live there no longer. Maybe a long time ago, He departed from you and you knew it not. That doesn’t have to be the end of the story.

If you’ve never obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, being baptized for the remission of your sins (**Acts 2:38**), I hope you’ll do that today. If you’ve left the faith that you once knew, if you’ve left your first love, isn’t it time to come home? Haven’t you lived in sin long enough? God longs to have fellowship with you. He longs to dwell in your heart by faith. He wants to strengthen you, to enable and empower you to live the Christian life, to be a partaker of His divine nature and holiness. He wants to give you the right to be His child and to be the heir to all the riches He has promised to the redeemed. But you have to submit to Him. You have to resist the devil. You have to put to death the desires and the lusts of the flesh and be risen with Christ and set eyes on things that are above. God longs to have that fellowship with you, but that choice is left with you.

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