

# PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

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“The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. Christ has given the promise: ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.’ If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.” {Great Controversy, p. 598}

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## WEEK 7 - SAMPSON

### I. An Unwise Marriage

1. Sampson’s life had an unfortunate, unhappy ending. What would have given him a nobler and happier destiny?

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2. When Sampson set his heart on marrying the Philistine girl from Timnah, his parents warned him of the danger and besought him to seek a wife among his own people. What was his only answer?

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3. What was critical about this point in Sampson’s life?

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4. In what way did Sampson yield to Satan and what did he fail to do that he should have done?
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5. Why has God so plainly instructed us not to unite with those who do not love and fear Him?
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6. Why should we not rely on even wise counsel from unbelievers? What is the result of familiar association with those who despise God?
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## II. In the Downward Path

1. Why did Sampson venture again among his deadly enemies and go to Gaza? What did the Philistines know about God's law, and what did they determine to do when they saw Sampson breaking it?
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2. Before his hair was cut, what other conditions of the Nazarite vow had Sampson broken?
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3. Sampson's infatuation with Delilah seems incredible. Had he been so foolish from the beginning? What caused him to give away his secret?
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4. Three times Sampson had clear evidence that the Delilah was working with the Philistines. How did she fool him into continuing on with her?

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5. Every day Delilah kept nagging Sampson to tell her his secret until his soul was vexed unto death. Why didn't he just leave her?

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6. Why did God leave Sampson as his hair was cut by the Philistines as he slept—surely there wasn't "magic" in his long hair?

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7. What showed that God had designed that Sampson would accomplish a great work for Israel? What did Sampson do that prevented that?

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8. What was the difference between Sampson and Joseph—why did Sampson fail while Joseph overcame?

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9. What lesson is there in this, for us as young people today?

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**An Unwise Marriage****October 6, 1881**

The divine promise to Manoah was in due time fulfilled in the birth of a son, upon whom the name of Samson was bestowed. By the command of the angel no razor was to come upon the child's head, he being consecrated to God as a Nazarite, from his birth. As the boy grew up, it became evident that he possessed extraordinary physical strength. This was not, however, as Samson and his parents well knew, dependent upon his well-knit sinews, but upon his condition as a Nazarite, of which his unshorn hair was a symbol. {1.1}

Had Samson as faithfully obeyed the divine command as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny. But he became corrupted by association with idolaters. The inheritance of the tribe of Dan, to which Manoah's family belonged, was adjacent to the country of the Philistines. Indeed, the little town of Zorah, which was Samson's early home, was in close proximity to the dwelling-places of this alien race, and in his youth he came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus intimacies sprung up, whose evil influences darkened his whole life. {1.2}

A young woman dwelling in the Philistine town of Timnah so engaged Samson's affections that he determined to make her his wife. In those days marriages were arranged by the parents. Hence Samson requested his father and mother to secure for him this daughter of the Philistines. Manoah and his wife sought to dissuade the young man from his purpose. They warned him of the danger of forming an alliance with idolaters, and besought him to seek a wife among his own people. But arguments and entreaties were alike in vain. His only answer was, "she pleaseth me well." Seeing his determination, the parents decided that the Lord might design thus to accomplish his purposes; hence they yielded to Samson's wishes, and the marriage was consummated. {1.3}

Thus at the time above all others when he should have maintained entire consecration to the will of God, just as he was entering upon the stage of manhood, the period when he must execute his divine mission—at this critical point in his life history, Samson yielded to the tempter, and by an unwise marriage placed himself in alliance with the enemies of God. This important step was not carefully considered. Samson did not ask himself whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his fancy, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who desire only to please themselves. {1.4}

The Lord has in his word plainly instructed his people not to unite themselves with those who have not his love and fear before them. Such companions will seldom be satisfied with the love and respect which are justly theirs. They will constantly seek to gain from the God-fearing wife or husband some favor which shall involve a disregard of the divine requirements. To a godly man, and to the church with which he is connected, a worldly wife or a worldly friend is as a spy in the camp, who will watch every opportunity to betray the servant of Christ, and expose him to the enemy's attacks. {1.5}

Satan is constantly seeking to strengthen his power over the people of God by inducing them to enter into alliance with the hosts of darkness. And to accomplish this he endeavors to arouse unsanctified passions in the heart which is naturally prone to evil. It is not safe for Christians to imitate the example of the ungodly, or to yield to their influence. The wisest counsels of the wicked are not to be relied upon. If accepted, they may bring trouble and sorrow upon the child of God. The Lord would not have his people take ungodly persons into their confidence. The apostle Paul exhorts us "to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." "For what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" {1.6}

At his marriage feast Samson was brought into familiar association with those who despised the God of Israel. Whoever voluntarily enters into such relations will feel it necessary to conform, to some degree, to the habits and customs of his companions. The time thus spent with vain and trifling persons is worse than wasted. Thoughts are entertained, words spoken, that weaken the citadel of the soul. {1.7}

The wife, to obtain whom Samson had transgressed the command of God, proved treacherous to her husband ere the close of the marriage feast, and at last was put to death by the very class whose threats had caused her perfidy. Samson had already given evidence of his prodigious strength, by slaying, single-handed, a young lion, and by killing thirty of the men of Askalon. Now, moved to anger at the barbarous murder of his wife, he attacked the Philistines, "and smote them with great slaughter." Then, wishing a safe retreat from the Philistines, and fearing to trust his own countrymen, he withdrew to a strong rock called Elam, in the tribe of Judah. {1.8}

To this place he was pursued by a large body of Philistines, whose presence excited great alarm among the inhabitants of Judah. When they learned that the sole object of the invasion was to take Samson captive, they basely agreed to deliver him up to his enemies. In so doing they hoped to secure the favor of the Philistines, and thus lighten their own oppression. Accordingly three thousand men of Judah went up to take the mighty warrior. But even at such odds they dared to make the attempt only because they felt assured that he would not harm his own people. Samson consented to be bound and delivered to the Philistines, but first exacted from the men of Judah a promise not to fall upon him themselves, and thus compel him to destroy them. He permitted them to bind with two new ropes, and to take him down to the Philistines. {1.9}

He was led into the camp of his enemies amid demonstrations of great joy. But while their shouts were waking the echoes of the hills, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson. He burst asunder the strong new cords as if they had been flax burned in the fire. Then seizing the first weapon at hand, which though only the jawbone of an ass, was rendered more effective than sword or spear, he smote the Philistines on every side, until they fled in terror, leaving a thousand of their number dead upon the field. {1.10}

Had the Israelites been prepared to unite with Samson, and follow up the victory gained, they might at this time have freed themselves from the power of the Philistines. But they had become weak and discouraged. They had basely neglected the work which God had commanded them to perform with diligence, thoroughness, and valor; not only failing to dispossess the heathen, but uniting with them in their degrading practices, tolerating their cruelty, and, so long as it was not directed against themselves, even countenancing their injustice. When at last the tyrant power was triumphant, Israel submitted to the degradation which they might have escaped, had they only obeyed God. Even when the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, they would frequently desert the one chosen to set things in order, and would unite with their bitterest oppressors. {1.11}

If those who acknowledge God would but obey his voice, how much suffering might be spared them. God's eye is fixed upon every individual, and every one must render an account to him for all they do, and for what they permit themselves to be. Wherever we are, in storehouse and workshop, in all our business, every day in the week, and every hour in the day, his eye scrutinizes all our works, his ear listens to our every word. In the deepest solitude every act and word of our lives has still one witness—the infinite God. When we are true to the high destiny which he has marked out for us, we become co-laborers with him. If our responsibility be fully and heartily accepted and faithfully discharged, it will secure for us the joyful commendation by the Majesty of Heaven, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." {1.12}

Thousands of Israelites witnessed Samson's defeat of the Philistines, yet no voice was raised in triumph, till the hero, elated at this marvelous success, celebrated his own victory. But he praised himself, instead of ascribing the glory to God. No sooner had he ceased than he was reminded of his weakness by a most intense and painful thirst. He had become exhausted by his prodigious labors, and no means of supplying his need was at hand. He began to feel his utter dependence upon God, and to be convinced that he had not triumphed by his own power, but in the strength of the Omnipotent One. {1.13}

He then gave God the praise for his deliverance, and offered an earnest prayer for relief from his present suffering. The Lord hearkened to his petition and opened for him a spring of water. In token of his gratitude Samson called the name of the place En-hakkore, or "the well of him that cried." {1.14}

After this victory the Israelites made Samson judge over them, and he ruled Israel for twenty years. {1.15}

### **In the Downward Path**

**October 13, 1881**

One wrong step prepares the way for another. Samson had transgressed the command of God by taking a wife from the daughters of the Philistines, and ere long he ventured again among that people—now his deadly enemies—in the indulgence of his unlawful passions. Trusting confidently to his great strength, which had inspired the Philistines with such terror, he boldly entered Gaza, one of their largest and most powerful cities, and visited a harlot of that place. {2.1}

The disgraceful fact was soon made known to the inhabitants of the city, who were eager to be avenged upon their dreaded foe. Fearing to attack him, however, they sent for reinforcements, and kept a vigilant watch at the gate of the city, determined by some means to put him to death in the morning. {2.2}

At midnight Samson was aroused. The accusing voice of conscience filled him with remorse, as he remembered that he had broken his vow as a Nazarite. But despite his sin, God's mercy had not forsaken him. His great strength again served to deliver him. Wrenching the city gate from its place, he took it entire, with its posts and bars, and carried it several miles, to the top of a hill on the way to Hebron; the guards meanwhile, being too much surprised and terrified to intercept or pursue him. {2.3}

But even this narrow escape did not serve to stay him in his evil course. The third step downward soon followed the second. He did not again venture into the territory of the Philistines, but sought at home those sensuous pleasures that were luring him on to ruin. "He loved a woman in the vale of Serek." Her name was Delilah, which fitly signifies consuming, or wasting. In the society of this enchantress, the judge of Israel squandered precious hours that should have been sacredly devoted to the welfare of his people. But the blinding passions which make even the strongest weak, had gained control of reason and of conscience. The vale of Serek, a little valley not far from his own birthplace, was celebrated for its vineyards. These also had a temptation for the wavering Nazarite, who had already indulged in the use of wine, thus breaking another tie that bound him to temperance, to purity, and to God. {2.4}

The Philistines were well acquainted with the divine law, and its condemnation of sensual indulgence. They kept a vigilant watch over all the movements of their enemy, and when he degraded himself by this new attachment, and they saw the bewitching power of the enchantress, they determined, through her, to accomplish his ruin. {2.5}

Accordingly, a deputation consisting of one leading man from each of the five Philistine States was sent to the vale of Serek. It was not their purpose to seize him while in possession of his great strength, but to learn if possible some means by which that strength might be taken away. Such marvelous power, far exceeding anything which they had ever known before; that of the famed descendants of Anak, who dwelt among them, could not be compared with it, and the Philistine lords decided that it must be supernatural, the result of some condition that might be changed, or some charm that might be broken. They therefore bribed Delilah to discover the secret of his strength, and reveal it to them, offering her eleven hundred shekels of silver from each of their number, aggregating a sum of more than three thousand dollars. {2.6}

As the betrayer plied Samson with her questions, he deceived her by declaring that the weakness of other men would come upon him if certain processes were tried. When she put the matter to the test, the imposition was discovered. Then she accused him of falsehood, saying, "How canst thou say thou lovest me, when thou hast deceived me and lied to me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth?" {2.7}

Samson's infatuation seems almost incredible. At first he was not so wholly enthralled as to reveal the secret; but he had deliberately walked into the net of the betrayer of souls, and its meshes were drawing closer about him at every step. Three times he had the clearest evidence that the Philistines had leagued with his charmer to destroy him; but when her purpose failed and his strength returned, she had treated the matter as a jest, and he blindly banished all fear of danger. {2.8}

Day by day Delilah pressed and urged him, until "his soul was vexed unto death," yet a subtle power kept him by her side. Her heart was set upon the tempting bribe, and she exerted all her blandishments to secure it. Overcome at last by the bewitching spell which he seemed to have no power to break, Samson made known the secret: "There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my birth. If I be shaven then my strength will go from me, and I will become weak and be like any other man." {2.9}

Eagerly the betrayer listened to his words, fully convinced by his serious and earnest manner that he had told truth; and she determined to profit by it. A messenger was immediately dispatched to the lords of the Philistines, urging them to come once more to her chamber without delay. She next sent for a man who, while the warrior slept with his head upon her knees, shaved off the heavy masses of his hair. Then, as she had done three times before, she called, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!" Suddenly awaking, he thought to exert his strength as before, and destroy them all; but his powerless arms refused to do his bidding, and then he knew that the Lord had departed from him. {2.10}

When he had been shaven, Delilah began to annoy him and cause him pain, thus making a trial of his strength; for the Philistines dared not approach him till fully convinced that his power was gone. Then they seized him, and having put out both his eyes, they took him to Gaza. Here he was bound with strong fetters of brass, and kept in their prison house as a trophy of their victory, and compelled to drudge in hard labor. {2.11}

What a change to him that had been the judge and champion of Israel! — now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him, but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, that moment God departed from him. There was no virtue in the length of his hair, in itself, but it was a token of his loyalty to God, and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of lustful passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited. Had Samson's head been shaven without fault on his part, his strength would have remained. But his course had shown contempt for the favor and authority of God as much as if he had in disdain himself severed his locks from his head. Therefore God left him to endure the results of his own folly. {2.12}

In his sufferings and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson had opportunity for reflection, and he learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before. As his afflictions led him to repentance, his hair began gradu-

ally to grow, indicating the return of his extraordinary powers, but his enemies, regarding him only as a fettered and helpless prisoner, felt no apprehensions. [2.13]

As the Philistines exulted over their great victory, they ascribed the honor to their gods, praising them as superior to the God of Israel. The contest, instead of being between Samson and the Philistines, was now between Jehovah and Dagon, and thus the Lord was moved to assert his almighty power and his supreme authority. A favorable opportunity for this was soon presented. The Philistines held a feast in honor of their God Dagon. A vast company was assembled, and in the height of their sacrilegious festivities, they ordered the captive to be produced, that the people might have a new source of amusement. The multitude greeted his appearance with shouts of triumph, and praised their god who had thus subdued the “destroyer of their country.” Samson had been made the sport of the people before; But now even the rulers of the nation mocked at his misery. [2.14]

The immense building was thronged with the brave and the fair. Even the roof was crowded with thousands of spectators. After a time, as if weary, Samson asked permission to rest against the two central pillars which supported the temple roof. Then he breathed the prayer, “O Lord Jehovah, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” With these words he seized the pillars in his mighty arms, and with the cry, “Let me die with the Philistines,” he bowed himself and the roof fell, destroying at one dread crash, all that vast company. “So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.”

[2.15]

God designed that Samson should accomplish a great work for Israel. Hence the utmost care had been taken at the very outset of life to surround him with the most favorable conditions for physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral purity. Had he not in after years ventured among the ungodly and the licentious, he would not so basely have yielded to temptation. Physically he was the strongest man upon the earth; but in self-control, integrity, and firmness, he was the weakest of men. His passions were not held in subjection to reason and the fear of God. The blandishments of beautiful women often have dangerous temptations to the young. Those who do not make God their strength will be overcome by Satan’s devices. [2.16]

The very men whom God purposes to use as his servants, the dread adversary uses his utmost power to lead astray. Yet the sacred word presents for our encouragement noble examples of men who have in the strength of God resisted the fiercest attacks of the powers of darkness. The youthful Joseph was subjected to a most severe temptation. It came from one in high position, one whose enmity might destroy his worldly prospects. The future of Joseph’s life was determined by the decisions made in that trying hour. He calmly looked up to Heaven, and exclaimed, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” The fires of unholy passion were not permitted to kindle. God’s commands, God’s promise were before Joseph. He felt that the all-seeing eye was upon him, extending

to all his thoughts, penetrating to the secrets of the heart, to the motives underlying every action. {2.17}

Samson in his peril had the same source of strength as had Joseph. He could choose the right or the wrong as he pleased. But instead of taking hold of the strength of God, he permitted the wild passions of his nature to have full sway. The reasoning powers were perverted, the morals corrupted. God had called Samson to a position of great responsibility, honor, and usefulness; but he must first learn to govern by first learning to obey the laws of God. Joseph was a free moral agent. Good and evil were before him. He could choose the path of purity, holiness, and honor, or the path of immorality and degradation. He chose the right way, and God approved. Samson, under similar temptations, which he had brought upon himself, gave loose rein to passion. The path which he entered upon he found to end in shame, disaster, and death. What a contrast to the history of Joseph! {2.18}

The youths of today can bless or blight their future life. God calls young men in the strength and glory of their manhood to do service for him. But many whom God could use refuse to obey. They desire to secure worldly gain and worldly honor. To become a servant of Christ they consider as requiring too great a sacrifice. {2.19}

The history of Samson conveys a lesson for those whose characters are yet unformed, who have not yet entered upon the stage of active life. The youth who enter our schools and colleges will find there every class of mind. If they desire sport and folly, if they seek to shun the good and unite with the evil, they have the opportunity. Sin and righteousness are before them, and they are to choose for themselves. But let them remember that "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." {2.20}

### Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.1 | 2) 1.3 | 3) 1.4 | 4) 1.4 | 5) 1.5 | 6) 1.6, 1.7 |

Section 2: | 1) 2.1, 2.5 | 2) 2.3, 2.4 | 3) 2.8 | 4) 2.8 | 5) 2.9 | 6) 2.12 | 7) 2.16 | 8) 2.18 | 9) 2.19 |

This lesson is from a 13-week (1-quarter) set of Sabbath School lessons for youth and young adults called *Prophets & Judges*, based on a series of articles by Ellen G. White in *The Signs of the Times*, 1881–1882.

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