

PERVERTING GOD'S GIFTS

"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 that the Lord was departed from him." Judges 16:20.

Samson, the thirteenth judge of the Israelites, was a man of remarkable physical strength and alarming weaknesses of character. He is remembered by his selfish indulgences rather than his worthy exploits.

I. The Foretelling of Samson's Birth.

In the village of Zorah, which was nestled among the scenic hills of northern Judah, lived Manoah and his wife. They had never known the joys and responsibilities of parenthood. Advancing in years, they were grievously disappointed and truly heart-broken over being deprived of an heir.

God sent a messenger to the wife of Manoah to promise her a son. Through this messenger God announced His purpose in giving the boy, namely, "The child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Filled with inexpressible joy at the thought of becoming the parents of a son, they resolved to do their best to help the boy to achieve God's purpose in his life.

God's messenger told Manoah's wife what to do during the prenatal period. He commanded her to refrain from drinking any wine or strong drink or from eating anything which would impair the physical well-being of the child. What a pity that so many mothers today injure their children before they are born! With unquestioning faith Manoah's wife obeyed the command of God, and her correct living was causally related to the splendid physique and magnificent strength of her son.

When the boy was born, he was named Samson, which means "sunshine," and truly he was the sunhsine of that home. God gave this boy a good body, a good mind, and the proper religious training. From his infancy he was dedicated to the Lord under the Nazarite vows, which caused him to refrain from partaking of anything that came from the vine, from indulging in the pleasures of the world, and from going near the dead. Samson was fortunate in being reared in the knowledge that God had given him life and was expecting great things from him. In attempting to compress his childhood and youth into one sentence, the historian wrote: "And the child grew and the Lord blessed him." What a priceless inheritance!

II. The Feats of Samson.

God selected Samson and endowed him with superhuman strength in order that he might "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." God never calls a person for a task without also equipping him. There were a number of remarkable feats of strength in the career of Samson. One was the seizing of the young lion by the jaws, wrenching them apart as one would tear a piece of cloth, and leaving the carcass by the roadside. Another was that of breaking the cords with which he was bound. So great was his prowess that on still another occasion he seized a moist jawbone of a very recently deceased ass "and slew a thousand men therewith."

It pleased God to grant Samson this unequalled strength so long as he was obedient to Him. In various ways Samson commands our admiration.

III. The Fall of Samson.

There is only one way to fall. Sin marks that way. No man ever committed a sin and escaped a fall. Samson sinned when he made his own pleasure, instead of the will of God, the rule of his life.

Samson went to Timnath, saw a Philistine girl, fell in love with her at first sight, and decided to marry her. His parents counseled him against doing so. They advised and pleaded with him to marry one of his own people, but Samson displayed his demanding nature by saying: "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well." Disregarding God's purpose for his life, Samson made pleasure the chief thing in his life. Finally, his compromising parents, against their own better judgment, accompanied him in the way of clear disobedience to the expressed will of God. As we might expect, the result was a sad one, she later deserted him for one who professed to be his friend. Samson then went to another Philistine town, Gaza, and there found an harlot, who also betrayed him. But still Samson did not learn his lesson. Again, he fell in love with a Philistine woman, Delilah, and she caused his downfall. As a Nazarite he had no business in the company of such a person as she.

Her people promised her eleven hundred pieces of silver if she would discover for them the secret of Samson's strength. Even so, the world is always seeking the secret of the strength of God's children in order that it may weaken it and dishonor the Giver of it. Three times Delilah sought to get Samson to tell her the secret of his strength, and each time he drugged his conscience and told her a falsehood. With tenacity and persistence and the feminine argument "you don't love me any more or you would tell me," Delilah made a supreme attempt to accomplish her purpose. As a result of her blandishments, Samson told her that if his locks were shorn his strength would be gone. His long hair was only the symbol of his Nazarite vow to God. He lost his strength when he broke his vow.

IV. The Folly of Sin.

Without any delay Delilah called in one of the Philistines. She caused Samson to sleep upon her knees. In obedience to her command, this man shaved off the seven locks of Samson's hair, whereupon his strength left him.

1. Sin cost Samson his strength.

When the temptress greeted him with the familiar cry: "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," the hero arose with his old-time courage, but found that his strength was gone. God will not give us power if we refuse to use it for Him. The father loved the prodigal son while he was in the far country, but he could not bless him there. Our Father woos us when we are in the far country, but He feeds us at His own table. Sin cuts us off from His help and strength. It robs us of His power.

2. Sin cost Samson his vision.

His enemies took him and put out his eyes. When he broke with God, he broke with the light. When he went into sin, he went into darkness. It is ever so. Sin means moral blindness.

3. Sin cost Samson his freedom.

It bound him with fetters of brass. It set him to working as a slave. That was not what Samson expected. He thought when he left Israel and set out for Gaza that he was going to find a larger life and a fuller freedom. That is the promise which sin has made to its votaries all through the centuries. But it is a promise that has never been kept. Sin never means freedom or liberty. It always means slavery. The very moment you step aside from the pathway of righteousness, you begin to dress your soul in chains. Samson went into the ways of wrongdoing to find a larger liberty and a larger life, but he did not find either. He only found fetters and a prison house and a slave's task. It is ever so.

Satan delights to bring down the giant. He has a terrible blinding and binding power. Truly Samson is one of the most pathetic figures in the Word of God. His biography portrays the tragedy of a life which was auspicious in beginning, rich in possibilities, and wondrous in God-given strength, but profligate in the use of God's gifts. Samson illustrated the fact that God will not continue to give His power to those who refuse to use it for Him. Samson's wasted life is a warning to all of the folly of sin, and of the tragedy of perverting or misusing God's gifts.