

Week Three - *Did I Hear That Right?*

Judges 16

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Today we're going to look at the story of Samson, a man whose life God began speaking into even before he was born. Read Judges 13:2-14.

2. What did the angel of the Lord say Manoah and his wife's son should be? (v. 4-5)

3. Read Numbers 6:2-21. Summarize a short list of the requirements for a Nazirite vow.

4. In Numbers, we see a Nazirite vow was usually taken by a man or a woman for a short period of time. How long was Manoah's son's vow to last? (v. 7)

5. It is interesting to note that only two other people are listed in the Bible as having taken Nazirite vows from birth: Samuel and John the Baptist. Both accomplished amazing things for God. Read on in Judges 13:15-25. How do you think hearing this news directly from an angel of the Lord would have impacted the seriousness with which Samson's parents heeded God's direction?

6. Describe how you feel such clear and specific directions would have impacted you.

7. After making an entrance into the world like this, including an incredible vow, one would hope Samson would listen carefully to God. But we'll soon see that was not always the case, just as it is for us. Close your FIFTEEN today by thanking God for having a purpose for all of us, in spite of our imperfections.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. We now catch up to Samson when he is a grown man, supposedly carrying out the purpose God has given him to help rescue his people from the Philistines. Now read Judges 14:1-7.
 - a. Whom did Samson want to marry? (v. 2)

 - b. What was his criterion in selecting a wife? (v. 3)

 - c. How was this strange choice used by God? (v. 4)

9. Samson is not off to a great start. He's supposed to be rescuing his people from the Philistines, not fraternizing with them. Continue reading Judges 14:8-9.
 - a. How did Samson kill the lion?

 - b. Where did Samson find the honey he ate?

10. Samson ate honey (made from pollen) found inside a dead animal lying next to a vineyard. The vow is pretty clear, nothing from the grapevine, not even seeds, no unclean food, and no dead bodies. Samson did not follow the rules of his vow. The Bible does not give insight into Samson's motives; do you think he purposely ignored his vow? Could there be other reasons that he did not follow the rules?
11. Verse 4 hints that God was even going to use Samson's bad choices for his purposes. Sometimes we spend a lot of time beating ourselves up for our mistakes. How does it feel to know God can even use your weaknesses for good?
12. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Give thanks to God that he is able to take those times we do not listen to him correctly and turn them into opportunities.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

13. Samson continued to struggle with following God's commands. Read Judges 16:1-3. What was nearly Samson's demise?
14. Samson's carnal desires almost cost him his life, but his heart would be his undoing. Continue reading Judges 16:4-21.
 - a. How did Samson feel about Delilah? (v. 4)
 - b. What did she try to get him to tell her? (v. 6)
 - c. What was she promised in return for the information? (v. 5)
 - d. What did she do to wear him down? (v. 15-16)
 - e. What was his reaction? (v. 17)
15. Delilah did not know his weaknesses, but she knew what his weak spot was: her! She used what was important to him to get what was important to her. Samson gave his heart away to someone he shouldn't. But far more tragic, Samson loved Delilah more than he loved God. By the time Samson finally broke the last part of his Nazirite vow, he had greatly forsaken his relationship with God. Read Matthew 12:30-31; what is the only unforgivable sin? Why is it unforgivable?
16. Does knowing that God will forgive you when you try and fail to follow him perfectly make you more or less courageous to try to hear him speak to you? Explain your answer.
17. At the end of today we see that Samson tragically lost his strength, his eyesight, and the ability to be used by God...or did he? Thankfully God is a God of second chances! Tomorrow we'll read what God still has in store for this not-so-perfect hero. End your FIFTEEN today by asking God to give you the courage to try to hear him, even though you know that you won't be able to do so perfectly.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

18. Read Judges 16:23-31. What was Samson's final act?

- a. What was the ceremony honoring? (v.23-24) Why is this significant?
- b. Whom did Samson call upon once more? (v. 28)
- c. How many died in his final act? (v. 30)
- d. How many years did Samson judge Israel? (v. 31)

19. Even though Samson was weak and repeatedly failed God, God still used him to help accomplish his mission of destroying the Philistines. Although Samson made a complete mess of things, he was still willing to lay down his life for the cause God had given him. What better place to display God's might than in the middle of a ceremony dedicated to one of the Philistines' false gods! Samson called out to God in faith, God honored Samson's request to be used by Him one final time, and in so doing, Samson avenged what he had lost. What flaws or past sins keep you from calling on God?

20. Why is it so easy to allow your sins to keep you from calling on God?

21. Are there other flaws you use to "excuse" yourself from God's work?

22. What do you think God would like you to do instead of making excuses or avoiding him?

23. End your FIFTEEN in prayer, turning over your weaknesses and your very life to God. Reach out to him in faith, knowing that he wants to talk with you more than anything else and that he can use you to accomplish great things.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day FIVE

24. For many of us, the moments we long to hear from God most are the moments we need direction or help with a weighty decision. What do you typically do when you want to hear from God?

25. Does the fear of not hearing God correctly make you hesitant in seeking his counsel? Why or why not?

26. The story of Samson helps us to see that God can use us for his purposes even when we fail. Read Joel 2:18-27. What does God promise he will do? (See v. 25-26.)

27. What is God's promise to his people in verse 27?

28. How does that promise make you feel?

29. Take a few moments and think about the times you have not trusted in his promises enough to seek his counsel. Then close your FIFTEEN in a time of confession. Ask God to help you to be emboldened by his promises in order to seek first God's wisdom for your life.

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