**1st June 2014**

**Judges 16**

Those of you who are old enough will remember the great Cecil B De Mille Hollywood epic, Samson and Delilah, that was released in 1949 starring Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr*.*  [*Variety*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variety_%28magazine%29) Magazine described the film as a "lusty action story with a heavy coating of torrid-zone romance."[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson_and_Delilah_%281949_film%29#cite_note-Variety_review-4) The magazine also appreciated the film's cast by writing, "[Victor Mature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Mature) fits neatly into the role of the handsome but dumb hulk of muscle that both the [Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible) and [DeMille](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecil_B._DeMille) make of the [Samson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson) character. [Hedy Lamarr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedy_Lamarr) never has been more eye-filling and makes of [Delilah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delilah) a convincing minx.[[1]](#endnote-1)

As we consider our final character from the book of Judges are you ready for a ‘lusty action story with a heavy coating of torrid-zone romance’.

Let’s start the story of Samson this dumb hulk of muscle.

Back in chapter 13 the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.”

It’s interesting that this is the one place in the Book of Judges where we do not read about the people crying out to God to deliver them from their oppression. The game plan of the Philistines was simple. They conquered their enemies by assimilating them through intermarriage and watched with glee as the religion of God’s people began to disappear as it blended into the culture around them.

Does this sound familiar? The church is always in danger of losing its impact because there is no difference between us and the surrounding society.

People say ‘what is the difference between those who go to church and those who don’t?’ Why bother to be a Christian. Why not join another club – the running club, the women’s institute?’ It’s a Big question we need to keep asking ourselves.

The Israelites were in danger of losing their religion. Not through persecution – but through seduction. Being seduced by those around them to give up on their beliefs and join the crowd.

So God gives them Samson.
He had everything going for him. He had the looks, the muscles and the Spirit of God was on him (verse 25 that “the Spirit of the Lord began to move him…”) – but he would waste it all. Compared to other Biblical heroes, he had more than anyone else. And yet, he let it all slip away.

We can all have so much faith and potential to do good and make a difference - but there is always the danger that we can let it slip away.

The next chapter (14) shows up Samson’s flaws that will be repeated again and again in his life.

He is a young stag who does some stupid things. There is always a bit of leniency with the young to make mistakes – in the hope that they will learn from them. Samson doesn’t.

In chapter 14 he goes in search of a wife and it all goes wrong.[[2]](#endnote-2)

1**. He goes looking in The Wrong Place**. He goes to Timnah which was in *Philistine territory*. He’s in the wrong place with the wrong crowd. Sometimes in life you may get caught up in stuff and you wonder – how did I get here? You have the option – get out of the situation or be sucked in by the situation. Sadly Samson got sucked in.

2. **He goes looking For The Wrong Thing for the wrong reason**. Notice the rest of verse 1: “Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman.” When he returned home, he told his parents in verse 2, “I have seen a Philistine woman.”

It’s every parent’s nightmare – your boy flirting with the ‘wrong sort of girl’ – your daughter bringing home some dubious looking boy. Do you say anything? The danger is that if you do say something your son or daughter reacts and becomes even more determined to prove you wrong.

This is what happens with Samson. After his parents try to warn him about marrying the wrong sort of woman, Samson boldly declares, “Go get her for me. She’s the right one for me.” That phrase in verse 3 literally reads, “She is right in my eyes.”

The Bible is telling us something crucial about Samson. He is a man motivated purely by physical appearance. He saw this young woman, she looked good, and now he wants her for his wife. Samson was looking in the wrong place for the wrong thing for the wrong reason.

3**. He Rejects good advice.** The downward spiral continues but now takes a threatening turn. So far, Samson has made some mistakes but they are not fatal. That is about to change. By blowing off his parents, Samson is also rejecting what God said in Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7 about not marrying someone from the surrounding pagan nations. The reason is clear—if you marry an unbeliever, he (or she) could turn you away from God.

When I did training with Relate many years ago our trainer talked about marital fit – what brings people together and keeps people together. She frankly said that finding a partner who didn’t share the same values, background, beliefs as yourself will always be a challenge. It’s not impossible – there are plenty of good examples around – but there will be strains in those relationships - which will have to be negotiated. What you hope is that there are enough strong ties elsewhere to hold you together once the froth of first love romance and sex has evaporated.

You can see the logic. The trouble is romance in our contemporary society is all about the feelings and the heart, and not about the logic and the head. Hollywood movies have the polite clean cut girl meeting the rough street wise guy and somehow they fall head over heels in love and get together – but that’s where the film usually ends. They don’t usually have a follow up movie to look at what happens next.

What happens next in this story is that on the eve of his wedding Samson, having killed a lion, sets the groomsmen a riddle. They get his bride to trick the answer out of him. Samson loses the bet and gets angry and ditches his bride at the altar.

This sounds like something you’d see on the Jerry Springer show!
My brother gets married on Friday – I do hope nothing like this happens…

Chapter 15 has Samson getting angry again over a girl and burning the philistine’s crops. The start of chapter 16 has him visiting some prostitutes. Then we come to Delilah.

My, my, my, Delilah!!!!! Tom Jones put it to music:

I saw the light on the night that I passed by her window
I saw the flickering shadows of love on her blind
She was my woman
As she deceived me I watched and went out of my mind
My, my, my, Delilah
Why, why, why, Delilah
I could see that girl was no good for me
But I was lost like a slave that no man could free

Samson hasn’t learnt from previous mistakes and the result is disaster.

1. **He got involved with another bad relationship**. In verse 4 we read that Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah: another Philistine women.

2. **He toyed with temptation**. The Philistine rulers, who know all about Samson’s fatal flaws, come up with a plan. They offer Delilah the equivalent of a million pounds if she is able to “lure him into showing the secret of his strength.” Delilah’s name means “weakness” or “brought low.” She sure brought Samson down. She was the first woman that Samson gave his heart to and he was like putty in her hands. The combination of characters is lethal. Samson’s fatal attraction was based on sex. Delilah’s motivation was for money. The Philistines were after power. This combination of money, sex, and power has brought many good people to their destruction.

Delilah agrees to trick him into revealing the secret to his strength. Samson toys with her three times, but each time he gets closer to telling her the truth. First he told her that if they bound him with fresh bowstrings he would be helpless. Then he said that if he were tied up with new ropes he would become weak. Finally he said that if the seven locks of his hair were woven into a web he would be helpless. Samson is feeling so self-confident and so cocky. He thinks he’s invincible. Now he’s letting her touch his hair. She doesn’t know the secret yet, but he is letting her get closer and closer and closer. He’s toying with temptation.

3. **He reveals his secret in order to save face**. Finally she said to him in verse 15, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me?’” After playing the “If you really loved me, you’d tell me” card, verse 16 tells us that she resorted to a war of words: “With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.”

Samson then told her everything. Samson, you fool. The rulers of the Philistines come with the money in their hands, and she puts him to sleep on her lap. He doesn’t have a clue what is about to happen.

**4. He didn’t realize what he had done until it was too late**. As soon as he’s sound asleep, she calls a man to hack off his hair. Verse 19 says it plainly: “His strength left him.” The last phrase of verse 20 is one of the saddest statements in the whole Old Testament: “But he did not know that the Lord had left him.”

He didn’t realize what had happened.

Too many Christians drift away from God through stupidity and folly, and they don’t realize what they’ve done until they’ve done it. They don’t appreciate what they had until it’s gone. Sin will always take you further than you want to go.

What happens next is ugly. The Philistines have been waiting for 20 years to get their revenge. Look at verse 21: “Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison.”

Let me say this strongly. If we don’t recognize and deal with our fatal flaws, we’ll end up just like Samson ­ blinding, binding, and grinding. Blinding will take place as we lose our moral compass and vision. Binding will result as we lose our freedom and liberty. And we’ll spend the rest of our lives grinding out a purposeless existence.

So how do you void the road to ruin and head down the road to recovery?

1. **Acknowledge your fatal flaws**. What’s your spiritual soft spot? What area of your life has the most potential to ruin you? Is it lust? Coveting? Revenge? An unforgiving spirit? Anger? Lying? Money, sex, power – what’s your flaw? Psalm 38:18: “I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.” Know yourself – self -awareness is always the key to maturity and spiritual growth.

**2. Avoid temptation**. Don’t put yourself in situations where you know you’re vulnerable. If you have a problem with drinking, don’t go to bars. If you have a wandering eye, don’t flirt. Be careful on the internet. Be aware when money is controlling you and take measures to wrest control back. One of the best antidotes to being money obsessed is to give money away. You break its power over you when you do that.
**4. Ask for help**. First of all, ask for God’s assistance. Samson did this in Judges 16:28 when he prayed and said, “O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” God honoured this request by using Samson to wipe out the Philistines temple in his death.

Prayer is powerful. In my bible reading notes (IBRA)[[3]](#endnote-3) this week Paul Nicholson writes about asking God to help you discern your motives. (see: <http://shop.christianeducation.org.uk/freshfromtheword/> for half year discounts on Bible reading notes) He said Ignatius of Loyola, a 16th century Basque nobleman who founded the religious order he belongs to practiced a form of prayer he called the discernment of spirits. This involves carefully reviewing with God’s help, the various influences underlying your actions. Did you critics colleagues in a genuine effort to help them improve, or because you were jealous of their successes? Did you go out of your way to help someone prompted by real charity or were you just hoping to be noticed? This kind of discernment recognises that we can be influenced by good and bad motives and we can grow in Christian discipleship be being more aware of these influences. Ultimately the good comes from God’s Spirit, the bad from everything in the world, the flesh and the devil, that opposes God.

Second, ask for the help of others. Sadly, when you look at Samson’s life, everything he did, he did by himself. He never mustered the troops. He never partnered with a buddy. Don’t make the same mistake. Find a trusted friend be part of a community that can hold you accountable.
It’s absolutely imperative that we stay connected with God and with others. Left to ourselves, it’s just a short walk to becoming a Samson. Cultivate your relationship with Christ and commit yourself to do whatever it takes to grow. That’s why it’s important to belong to a church. Together we can encourage each other on the journey of faith. And stop us sliding into defeat like Samson.

Let me ask you a question, “How far can a person go before God will not deal with him any more?” What if you get drunk? Is that too far? What if you steal money? Is that too far? What if you kill somebody? Is that too far? What if you cheat? What if you commit adultery? Is that too far? What if you have an abortion? Is that too far? How far can you go before God will say, “That’s it. I’m done with you.”

Corrie Ten Boom, after surviving Nazi prison camps, has been asked how she could keep on going when thing were so tough. I love her answer: “There is no pit so deep that the love of God is not deeper still.” No matter how far you run away from God, you can never go so far that God can’t find you.

I’m sure during the drudgery of grinding Samson realized what he had done. At the last he calls on God’s help and God gives him strength for one last push.

May God help us to resist the Delilah in life, sop our eyes from being gouged out, our lives bound in misery and our lives grinding along in useless living. As we rely on the power of his Spirit may we find the strength to follow in the way of Christ.

1. Wikipedia [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This sermon is based on Brian Bill’s sermon: Samson’s Fatal flaws: <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/samson-dealing-with-fatal-flaws-brian-bill-sermon-on-sin-exposed-56515.asp> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Paul Nicholson IBRA Fresh from the Word 2014 - [↑](#endnote-ref-3)