

RUF Bible Study – Judges  
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Judges 13-14 – Samson 1 – A Savior is Born

*He shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistine.  
Judges 13:5b*

Chris McCandless was only in his early twenties when he wandered into the Alaskan wilderness in the late 1990s. I'm reading a book about him, *Into the Wild*, by Jon Krakauer. You might think he had problems of some kinds. Yes, he had become estranged from his family to some degree (though not severely so), but he cut his ties with them and his former life after he graduated. Apparently he befriended people quickly, for on his trek he gathers an entourage of people pulling for him and encouraging him – which he leaves behind. He worked hard and was willing to do any job set before him – all with a single goal. That goal of getting to Alaska and getting away was what drove him.

It was where he died of starvation.

McCandless pursued the ultimate freedom. It was a new life without any connections. Not attachments. But that freedom cost him his life. He was found four months later by a moose hunter in an abandoned bus.

The life of Samson is an exciting one. It feels like it could easily be adapted to a movie script, and we'd see a young, strapping Arnold Schwarzenegger renew his Conan the Barbarian role for it. Samson's chapters in Judges have sex and violence, intrigue and tragedy. He seldom seems like much a hero. He acts more like a juvenile delinquent. Yet he is God's judge and the deliverer for God's people. Let's see how that can be with three points: Israel Has Lost It, Samson as Judas, and Samson as Jesus.

### ***Israel Has Lost It***

You've lost that lovin' feelin' – oh that lovin' feelin' – you've lost that lovin' feelin' – now it's gone, gone, gone, ohhhhhhhh. That song is cliché by now, but God still sings it to his bride. She's lost it.

We've seen unfaithfulness so often before in Judges, and we see it now again. Israel did what was evil in the sight of God. We remember the connection between infidelity and the key text which we found in the last verse of the whole book, "*In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.*" (21:25) Israel whores after the Baals, the gods of the foreigners. They integrate them into their own lives so they can call coexist together. But that, we have seen, brings slavery to God's people. Slavery brings death.

God's people have been sold into the hands of the Philistines. If you know the Bible, then this word makes your skin crawl. Because you know up ahead the Philistines will factor into the story as Israel's enemy against David (Goliath was a Philistine). Here they come up for the first time, so you should hiss and boo at their name to "get into the skin" of an original reader.

We'll learn more about the Philistines, but first we concentrate on God's people. Where do they cry out for help? In chapter 10 we found it. It was tenuous and fitful, but we found a cry for help and perhaps even for repentance. They threw away their gods to only worship Yahweh. They made a new start. And now here we are again. Enslaved. But no cry this time. They have given up. They have sold out to the culture. "Here then is Israel – in the power of Baal and Philistia; an Israel who not only does not cry out in repentance from sin but also does not even cry out for relief from misery. They have, apparently, grown accustomed to servitude; in fact, in the Samson cycle, they are content with it, are surprised anyone should suggest otherwise."<sup>2</sup>

As we read the story, Samson is free to come and go. He doesn't receive any resistance from the Philistines. There is no threat from one to the other. They are living in peace.

For example, we read through the motions of Samson's marriage, and all appears well until the end. No seems to protest an Israelite marrying a Philistine after Samson's parents' first reaction. We can imagine that marriages like this between Philistines and Israelites were happening all the time. But they were wrong. Not because of racial barriers, but because of religious ones.

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For this series, I used commentaries on Judges from Block, Wilcock, Redeemer Pres, Davis, Cundall/Morris, Jordan, and listened to sermons from Brandon Barrett, Shaynor Newseome, and Pete Hatton. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

<sup>2</sup> Davis 160

The Bible teaches that Christians, God's people, can only marry other Christians (see 2 Cor. 6:12-14). This is because the heart motivation of the Christian's life will forever be in sync with that of the person who you have the most intimate relationship with. If you are a Christian, although you share the bulk of life in common with someone who isn't, you will not be sharing the part of you that you say matters the most. So the ultimate part of you will stay untouched by that other person. If we say these "loves" are gods or idols, then your love of God will be challenged by the loves, idols and gods of the other person. That has a tremendous potential to destroy your first love of God. The Bible teaches Christians must marry Christians. Of any kind, race, popularity, intelligence, etc. But he or she must be a Christian. That is a part of submitting to God and his ways and not following Judges 21:25 and doing whatever seems right in your own eyes.

Throughout this story we see that Israel has been drifting away from God. Now they appear to have stopped fighting altogether. This is the scariest, most dramatic point. If someone will keep fighting, they have a chance to live. But when they give up, you cannot help them any more. "Israel had totally sold out to the values of the Philistine world."<sup>3</sup>

You can hear Israel saying things like, "It's just not worth it.... What's the point?.... We are doing okay anyway without him.... Go ahead without me.... Just let me go....." It's being assimilated into the Philistine culture.

I'm sitting in a hotel in Trujillo, Peru, right now. We're helping build churches, clinics, sidewalks, walls and teach English in an institute. I've been learning how the Incas ruled so far and wide before the conquistadors came. They didn't have sophisticated weapons at all, but they were able to capture tribes. Then they displaced them hundreds of miles away. They'd scatter them about off of their land and then put in some Incas with them. They'd see who flourished and who bucked the system. This policy of isolation dampened uprisings, and most people just wanted to survive so they went with it. Thus, they became assimilated Incas over time.

Friends, is that what is happening to the church? Are we so happy to pursue our freedoms that we forget our first love? Do we cultivate and nourish other gods in our lives, so we eventually cannot see correctly that we have been assimilated? Are we Christians first or Americans first? Are we willing to do whatever wherever God tells us to go and do? "Israel's ultimate rebellion lay in renouncing this conflict, accommodating herself to the ways of the Philistines, recognizing the role of Dagon, and deliberately blurring the distinction between the people of God and the people of the world."<sup>4</sup>

Have our worlds been blurred? I worry when I hear of Christians, preachers and missionary groups who put hard guilt-trip sales pitches on students. We should not go overseas because we feel guilty. We don't need to "be different" in weird ways.

But would you live overseas if God called you? Is that even an option? I don't see and hear as many "radical" calls as should be out there, people giving their lives away. Or here, starting projects and organizations even on a small scale in order to give their lives away. We pledge allegiance to a King and a Kingdom.

What does he want us to do? If we disobey him, he calls it evil like he does in Judges 13:1. There is a standard, and there is a judgment. There is sin. We need to reevaluate. We need to see how our lives are falling short of what God wants, and we need to cry out in repentance for God to show up and work in our lives, committing ourselves to do whatever he says because he loves us and cares for us.

### ***Samson as Judas***

Let's start then looking at Samson's life and how it goes so wrong, yet is so entertaining. The first story we read about Samson himself is something like a Spring Break trip. He goes with some buddies to Timnah and sees "one of the daughters of the Philistines." He comes home on the trip, and you can imagine his mom has been worried. She knows his friends. She knows where he's gone. She knows the Girls Gone Wild crew was done there. But she's proud of her son – he's a Nazirite (more on that in a little bit); he's a good boy.

"Did you have fun?" she asks.

He nods without answer. He appears to look down on her as young, single men sometimes do with their mothers.

"What did you do?"

Still no answer.

"Did you meet anyone?"

Finally, he answers with this statement and request, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now go and get her for me for my wife."

"Umm...." The mother is not happy. The father comes into picture, and together they begin to reason with Samson about how this is a bad idea. They love him, but this isn't according to God's ways for him. You don't marry someone you saw on Spring Break.

Samson answers, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eye." Case closed. Samson wants this woman. He must have her. The parents relent. Maybe they're afraid to confront him.

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<sup>3</sup> Wilcock, 126

<sup>4</sup> Wilcock, 127

They start making trips down to meet her. On one of these trips, apparently away from his parents, Samson rips a lion in half. Yikes. He has an amazing strength when the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon him, like a superpower with superhuman strength. Never did a lion make more of a mistake than jumping out at a man than that day. But Samson didn't tell anyone.

Samson had been raised a Nazirite. This vow, described in Numbers 6, is for a temporary priest in times of distress and war. It might be analogous to fasting to know God's will or to express to him deep concern for a certain time. But this distress and work was shown in a person. It didn't have to be a lifetime vow, but it appears as if it was in Samson. His mother was told to do this with him in chapter 13 verse 7.

A Nazirite was to avoid all alcohol, eat, drink or touch nothing unclean (a specific term for certain designated foods and for dead things) and not to cut his hair. A Nazirite then on was a bridge between life and death. He stood for the people in between good things – hair and wine – and bad things – unclean foods and death. As he walked around, he reminded people of their own commitment to God, so he would have been sort of a walking and talking repentance object.

In some cultures today many pastors (and not all of them Catholic) still wear their collars to identify them as clergy. As they go about their daily lives, they are testimonies that God is amidst his people, living and acting in ways that help claim the city for Christ.

But the signs can switch around and do more harm than good. They can be a sign for death and hypocrisy instead of life and integrity. Samson neglected his sign. He shouldn't have killed the lion, shouldn't have touched its dead body when he scooped out the honey, and he shouldn't have neglected to tell his parents.

We continue reading about this party, which was thrown as a week-long wedding celebration for Samson and his bride elect. The marriage would have been consummated on the last day, after the party was over.

The Philistine woman brought her entourage, and after the wine had flowed (another violation of the Nazirite vow), the riddles get pulled out. Riddles played a part in the Philistine culture, as they were descendants from Egypt. Samson wanted to best them and live, and get their clothes. They weren't playing for poker chips but for fancy suits. Samson doesn't seem to be from a wealthy family, so this wager would have either set him up for awhile or set him back for a good time. He needed to win.

So he riddles them a doozy. Not a fair riddle, because it was really a historical reality put into a riddle. Similar to when Bilbo gets in the riddle contest with Gollum and he resorts to "what is in my pocket." That's not a riddle. But it won him the ring, and he got away, so it worked.

Samson thinks the same thing. He hadn't told his family, so they couldn't be brought in.

But the Philistines have an ally. They start working on the fiancé, threatening her family if she won't tell him. We'll burn down your family's house if you don't get the information. A serious threat scene.

They send her back in as a secret agent, told to use her girl powers for bad. She manipulates Samson to tell her. We give her some credit because she's scared. But she crosses Samson and here shows she cares more about her people than for her husband. Which is, ironically, the quality Samson is supposed to have but doesn't and is why we're in this situation in the first place.

Samson really wants to have sex with her. He has the moment he saw her, and has to wait all through this long wedding week. As he wades through the tears and sees she won't be happy unless he gives in, he tells her the answer to the riddle, hoping that will make everything okay and they'll live happily ever after.

Nope. She told the Philistines. They came back and solved the riddle. Samson gives them another mean-spirited derogatory riddle about plowing his heifer, and then Samson goes out and opens up a can on some men in Ashkelon to get the garments he owes the Philistine men.

When he gets back, his wife has married someone else. His best man.

That was a bad week for Samson.

We observe a few things about Samson. We first see Samson's disobedience. Samson stuck it to his parents. That was a big deal in those days, and is the first place where we wonder if something is really wrong with Samson. That he saw a pretty girl in Timmon is not a problem. That happens. But that he was overcome so much that he had to have her without the consent of his parents is a problem.

Your parents love you. I know there are unloving parents who do unloving things. There are terrible stories out there (stories you should tell to someone if you have them) about abusive, neglective parents, But most of your parents love you. You should listen to them and care about what they say. If not them, or in addition to them, you should add your pastors and your friends. If you are in community, your people can help you when you like someone or fall in love with someone. You should ask their thoughts and get their opinion early on in the process and then commit to listening to them and doing what they say. There is a wisdom of groups, wisdom in authority over your life.

Samson did not display this. He did not honor his father or his mother. You should try to do so – unless your authorities lead you to disobedience. Some parents think this parental authority carries so much weight that they will not let their grown children do things without permission. This is then heavy handed, unbiblical authority. Jesus loved his mother, but he would not let her rule him. He gave her up for a higher cause. He said would even divide us from our families at times when his call and his cause was higher than theirs. So listen to your parents, but do not be enslaved by them.

Samson also shows a great amount of ignorance. At first he thinks he's so smart. He lies to his parents. He commands his parents, bossing them around. He has these riddles, where he uses words to hide things. But he gets used by words, doesn't he? He is shown to be the ignorant one. "There is a profound ignorance on his part. He has no idea of his calling to be judge and savior, nor of the real nature of a Nazirite vow. He cannot see how his relation with his Philistine 'wife' is the complete opposite of the marriage relationship of the first judge Othniel. He is quite unaware that his fraternizing with the Philistines generally, from which the entire story springs, runs counter to everything his predecessors stood for."<sup>5</sup>

Again, I think we should involve our community in what we know. We should ask good questions of each other. We should try our hardest not to hide things, but to bring them out into the open. Tell on ourselves. At least to a few good friends. This helps mitigate against our ignorance, which could come back to haunt us some day. If we start using words to manipulate people and things, we will in the end have it come back to us.

We finally see Samson directed by his sensuality. This will become a theme with Samson, so we won't linger on it here, but we first notice it. He comes back from a trip and says, "I saw a *woman!*" That's great Samson. She isn't a good match for him. She's not a good fit. And she doesn't love him, as proven in the end. First impressions won't carry.

Friends, you don't want to marry someone who is facebook HOTT. Cool and sexy are not lasting qualities. You need to look for someone who can be your friend for life. Marriage is built on friendship and mission. Sex is between two married friends who love each other and commit to each other to work together for God's glory. Being attracted to your best friends is something that happens, but it is not the first thing. Don't be led around by your sensuality, but be praying for and looking for a man or a woman who loves God first (really does, not just says he or she does), and who will be a best friend to you. Involve your community in that decision.

### ***Samson as Jesus***

That is a strange way to put this next point. We know that Samson was not Jesus. In fact, as we look at his story, we will continually see more and more ways where he falls short.

But think again about the book of Judges. It comes right before 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, where we will learn of the great king David and his great son Solomon. In a sense, Judges is an apologetic for these kings. There was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. We need a king!

The first place we see this kingship theme comes from chapter 14:4 "*His father and mother did not know it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.*" Samson's parents didn't understand that all of this was from God. Yahweh was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

This surprises us. God does not want his people to live in harmony with everyone. No, not if that means making peace with the enemy. Israel is to be taking this land for God. Instead she is whoring around, drifting farther and father from God, to where now she doesn't even know how far gone she is.

But God knows. And God is active in this, even in the little thing of one Israelite boy trying to marry one Philistine girl. He is there. And he is provoking. He's acting as an irritant. Getting in there and making sure something small gets noticed so it will escalate and become a real war again, which is what he wants for his people.

Kings go to war. Kings make peace, and they go to war. In this sense, the Great King does not want his people to get assimilated by the culture and chooses to fight against it through the bumbling strong man of Samson. Fair enough. We have to start somewhere. We're glad to know God cares.

We first read of our possible king in the middle of the night, when Israel wasn't even crying out for a savior. In the darkest of the dark, God showed up again

What we read in chapter 13 sounds very similar to something else, doesn't it? If you read it again, where does that sound familiar? An angel of God appears to an obscure, childless woman and tells her a son will be born who will lead and save his people.

In this case it was to a man named Manoah from the tribe of the Danites. He had a wife whose name we don't know. But we do know she was barren. This means they were poor and hopeless. When women couldn't bear children, they were basically useless in the society. She was irrelevant. All her worth was taken away, for bearing children was their very essence for life. So she had no life. We wouldn't be sure why Manoah would have stayed with her. Perhaps he was a kind man. Perhaps he had other wives.

An angel appeared to this nobody woman one day, in the depths of Israel's woe. He told her she was to have a child and to raise him as a Nazirite (to be one herself since from conception the child would need to grow as one) and that "*he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.*" Whoa. That must have been pretty awesome.

The woman told her husband and they go through a few rounds of visions and offerings as they test and confirm that this is true. At one point, understandably, Manoah thinks that because they've seen this angel of the Lord, they will die. But the woman is more rational than her husband – she reasons that God would have already killed her if he had meant to. Sound thinking.

So she had her miracle baby, and she named him Samson. And he grew up away from the public eye.

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<sup>5</sup> Wilcock, 138

That sounds an awful lot like Jesus. God works this way. He works through barren women. He works through marginalized people. He works through people off camera and out of the spotlight. Think of the barren women throughout the Bible. Can you name some of them?

Think of the outcasts – can you name some of them? Can you think of last-placed brothers?

God works with the least. As we try to build power and position, we must be reminded that God comes to the broken and hurting, the poor and the hungry, the meek and the lowly, those out of the inner circle. Do we try to always be in the inner circle? Are we starving for attention or positions or power?

Or are we content to cry out to God in our weakness. He delights in using the foolish. Are you foolish? He delights in the weak. Are you so busy trying to be in control and strong?

God showed up here. He didn't see a judge available so he made one. He raised up a judge from scratch out of unlikely conditions.

But he cares more than that. Samson was not THE savior. He was a savior. God raised up THE Savior from the beginning of time. Ephesians 1 tells us from the Foundations of the world, Christ was raised up just for this purpose. He was announced in obscurity to the ultimate in impossibility, a virgin. He was born and then we didn't hear much from him until his adulthood. But he wasn't ignorant, disobedient or overcome by sensual passions. Instead he lived in wisdom, obedience to the Father's will and loving self-control.

I've been carrying around a copy of February 11, 2008's Sports Illustrated. It's gotten battered and torn, but I've been waiting to tell the story of Paul Assaiante and his Trinity College squash team.

This squash team is amazing. They have not been beaten in 10 years. Not one match. A ten-year winning streak, with national championships coming every year. The team is made up of players from all over the world who come play for Assaiante. That's impressive.

But Assaiante himself is quite a character. He's a nonstop talker and has been divorced twice. His eldest son is a recovering heroin addict who is in prison for armed robbery. He preaches balance, but lives an obsessed life. But he lives lives with his freshmen players, and he teaches them from the mistakes of his life while leading them to greatness on the squash court.

Assaiante is a flawed leader, just like Samson and the rest of our leaders. Even flawed leaders can do great things with those around them for a goal of glory. Chris McCandless is a much sadder tale. He pursued his idol of freedom and detachment from others. This radical selfishness ended up killing him in the frozen tundra of Alaska. Alone. His idol turned on him and devoured him. We see that same picture in Samson, in Israel and in our own lives.

We must repent of our idols, turn to Christ and live a new life. We need a savior who loves and cares for us. We need a king who will defend us from our enemies and shake us when we're too complacent. We need a priest who won't neglect his duties. We need a prophet to call to us so we can hear from God. We need Jesus, who in his nativity story was the perfect Samson, the Greater Than Samson, the one who came to save sinners like you and me.

### ***Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Charles Wesley***

*Come Thou long-expected Jesus Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the saints Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever, Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal Spirit Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit, Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*