



# Central Peninsula Church

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Mark Mitchell  
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## The Weak Strong Man

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My name is Samson. I can tell by the looks on some on your faces that you know my name, and I'm not surprised. I was the most famous man of my day; everyone knew the name of Samson. My enemies...they spoke my name with fear. I'm not surprised you know my name because in my day I was the strongest man alive; some would say I was the strongest man to ever live. If I was alive today, you would accuse me of being on steroids, but I didn't need anything like that. You see, I had the Spirit of the Living God in me, and he gave me strength like you've never seen. If I competed in your Olympic Games, you would have to create a special category just for me. The only competition I'd have would be to beat my own marks. Some of you think I'm exaggerating. Some of you think, "Well, he might have been something special in his own day, but with the way athletes train today, he would just be an average Joe." If that's what you're thinking, let me tell you a few facts.

### **I. The Strongest Man Alive**

I was a small town boy, born in the town of Zorah, about 14 miles due west of Jerusalem. As a young man I would often walk the four miles to the town of Timnah. There was a girl there I was smitten by. I used to enjoy that walk. I would often be lost in my thoughts as I walked through those hills. One day as I was just outside of Timnah I heard a rustling and before I could even see what it was I heard a deafening roar. It was a lion. Not the kind of lion you're thinking about. Not the caged excuse for a wild animal that sits around all day in one of your zoos waiting to be fed dead meat at 10:00 and 4:00. Not that kind of lion. This was a young lion; one who has learned to live by its wits in the wild; one whose body has been honed by the chase; one with jaws so strong it can snap the bones of a jackal. Before I knew it this blur of gold was upon me. What would you have done? Run for your life? Cry for your mother? Make a mess? I didn't do anything like that. No, in a split second I felt the Spirit of the Lord upon me. As he lunged, I moved slightly to my left and I latched onto one of his hind legs with my right hand, and then the other with my left. As I pulled them apart I could hear the ripping of sinew as the lion was torn in two! When the carcass stopped twitching, I stood in awe of my own strength. I really was the strongest man alive.

Still doubt me?

Have you heard what I did to the Philistines? They had settled along the coast sometime after we came to the Promised Land. We didn't like them much, but they had superior weapons, and so we Jews had grown accustomed to having them around. But I caused a lot of trouble for them. You can imagine that as news of my strength spread they were more and more threatened by me. On one occasion I was forced to hide in the territory of Judah, in the cleft of a large rock. The Philistines came to the men of Judah and said, "We don't want any trouble, we just want Samson." The men of Judah had no heart to fight. They found me and said, "We don't have any choice. There are thousands of them and they have swords and chariots. Let us bind you and hand you over to them." So I agreed. I let them tie me up with new ropes. Not binder twine, mind you. Not that yellow stuff your children jump over on the playground. I'm talking about thick hemp; the kind used at the seaport to make sure the ships stay moored to the dock. The men of Judah bound me and brought me to Lehi and left me at the end of a field facing 15,000 Philistines! They smelled a kill. Fame and fortune would go to the man who held my severed head under his arm. I heard their war cry and felt the ground shake as they ran toward me. But then I felt the rush of God's Spirit upon me. Immediately, I snapped the ropes like they were burned wicks on one of your birthday candles. Some of them stopped when they saw I was free, but many kept coming. They had the finest weapons and I had nothing. I looked around for something to fight with, and I spotted a dead donkey. It hadn't been dead long; its bones would still be heavy and strong. I ripped free his jawbone, and that's all I needed. As they came at me, I began to swing and turn and I felt my weapon cut through flesh and bone. Before long all I could see was their backs as they ran away. I looked around and saw heaps of men, all of whom were killed with the jawbone of an ass. Once again, I stood in awe at what I could do.

Still don't believe me?

Okay, one more story. One day I guess I was just bored. I went out to the beach and snuck into the Philistine city of Gaza for a little fun. My own people could be so boring sometimes. But one thing I can say for the Philistines,

they know how to have a good time. Late in the night I was having my fill. In the middle of the night, I began to head home when I realized that some of their men were hiding at the gate of Gaza to ambush me. This was a city with walls thick enough to ride on with iron chariots. The gates of those cities were considered the pride of the people, made of solid hardwood some six feet thick; mounted on huge posts buried 15 feet into the ground; attached with bronze hinges and reinforced with bronze bars. When they locked those gates on me they thought I was theirs. What would you have done? Try to hide? Pick the lock? That's not my style, not Samson. I wanted them to see what they were dealing with. So I walked right up to those gates. I took hold of those posts with their bronze bars and I began to pull. I pulled them right out of the ground and with the doors I began to walk with that massive gate over my shoulders. I could have just dropped it, but I wanted to show them something they would never forget. I carried it 28 miles to the top of the mountain. And I just left it there. I took the strength of their city and stole it!

## II. The Weak Strong Man

Now do you believe me?

I was the strongest man to ever live. The thing that bothers me is that when people remember me, they don't just remember my strength, they also remember my weakness; they remember my failure. You see, before I was even born, God had a special purpose for me. My parents had been unable to have children at all. But one day the angel of the Lord visited my mother and told her that she would soon give birth to a son, and that son would deliver our people from the hand of the Philistines. That was to be my purpose; my mission in life. But that's not all the Lord told her. He also said, "The one thing you need to remember is that your son is to live as a Nazarite his whole life through." That meant I was to keep three simple rules, which by the way my parents never stopped reminding me of: "Don't forget! You can never cut your hair." Not many fathers have said that to their sons! "You cannot drink wine or anything stronger. Stay away from those Philistine parties! And don't touch that which is unclean; don't touch any carcasses!" To be a Nazarite meant to be separated, dedicated to God. Most Nazarites got to choose to take the vow, and that for a limited amount of time. I got stuck with it until the day of my death. I resented that.

As a young man, on one of my journeys down to Timnah after killing the lion, I ran into its

carcass there on the side of the road. It was a hot day. I was hungry and thirsty, exhausted from my journey. I came upon that carcass and to my surprise I discovered that a swarm of bees had nested right there in the carcass of the lion. It was just dripping with honey! I have to tell you, nothing ever looked quite so good to me. As I reached down to scoop some of that sweet honey I remembered what my mother had said, "Don't touch anything unclean. Don't ever touch a carcass." But I was so hungry. What harm could it do? Why would God put it right there in front of me if he didn't want me to enjoy it? I scooped it out and tasted it and it was so good. As it dripped down my beard I felt myself strengthened. I remember thinking, "I broke my vow, but nothing happened. No lightning struck me. No earthquake swallowed me up. Nothing happened. Maybe my parents were wrong. Maybe it's not that big of a deal."

Then I went on to Timnah, passing through their vineyards. I was to be married there and it was up to me and my parents to throw a party in the town of my bride. There were mostly Philistines there. One thing you need to know about those Philistines; they can sure party! We Jews...we like to have fun, but our parties were nothing like theirs! They were elaborate and raucous affairs. I wanted to make sure that my party was up to snuff. I made sure to have the best breads, meats and cheeses available. And, of course, they knew their wines and strong drink. We provided nothing but the best. Oh, what a party that was. You think your wedding receptions cost a lot; that's nothing compared to this! This went on for days. I saw things at that party that I wouldn't dare to mention in a place like this. And I got caught up in it. There were young men there my age. I was the new guy and I guess I wanted to be one of the guys. I didn't want them to think I was some kind of Holy Joe, so I thought, "What harm could one drink really do?" With less hesitation than the last time I broke my vow, I took that drink. It tasted foul, but, once again, I looked around and nothing happened. I didn't drop dead. I even grew to like the taste. My parents had always warned me about sin. Like it was some kind of poison that would make me drop dead on contact. I could see that it wasn't as big a deal as I had thought. God hadn't left me. He was still there when I needed him, even after I broke my vow.

It wasn't just my vows I resented. It was the whole thing. You see, it wasn't just honey that looked good to me. It wasn't just an unclean carcass I wanted to touch. What can I say. I was a red blooded young man. What do you say about "sowing wild oats." It started with that young woman in Timnah. The first time I saw her, I knew she was the one. I could tell she felt the same way about me. I came home and told my parents that I had met the love of my life in Timnah. You would think they would be happy for me, but all they could say was, "Why couldn't you fall in love with a nice Jewish girl? Samson, you know what our Scriptures say

about that. Don't marry outside our faith. You of all people. You're to be separate; dedicated to God. He has a special purpose for you." But I'd had enough of it: "Don't do this; don't do that." Oh, she was a beauty! I insisted and plans were made; you heard about the wedding party. Too bad that one didn't work out.

But that was the beginning for me. From there on, I indulged my fantasies. And there were plenty of women to make it easy. Remember that little excursion to the beach town of Gaza I told you about? I failed to mention that before I carried off the city gates I was having my fill of a woman; a prostitute. But, you see, that's just the point. I could spend half the night with a woman like that, but the Spirit of God would still give me the strength to make fools of the Philistines. He still answered my prayers. I was beginning to believe that my personal life had nothing to do with my public calling as one God would use to overthrow our enemies. Despite my sin, I was still the strongest man alive. I don't know, maybe that's because there was one vow I would never break. It was the visible sign of my Nazarite vow. It was my hair. Oh, it could be a pain sometimes, but it had never been cut. Somehow I knew that was one line I could never cross.

But then one day I met a woman in the Valley of Sorek. And this was a woman! Thick hair as black as a raven. Olive skin. Eyes so big and dark they made me melt. And she could fill a dress. Her name was Delilah. It means "worshipper," and every man who laid eyes on her worshipped her beauty. It turns out she knew all about me, and she liked what she saw too, and like two magnets we just came together. She wasn't perfect, though. She was a nag. She had this thing about knowing the secret of my strength. And she kept at me. Day after day. Night after night. She made it THE issue in our relationship. "If you love me, you will tell me everything. We need to be open with each other. No secrets.

Finally, I thought I'd have a little fun with it. I came to her home and she started in on me and I told her, "If you just tie me up with seven fresh bowstrings I will be as weak as a child." She was satisfied, and we had a great night. But in the middle of the night she woke me, "Samson, the Philistines are here to capture you!" I snapped those bowstrings like thread and ran my captors off. But she wasn't too happy about that. The next night she said, "We have a problem, Samson, if you cannot be totally open with me." So just to get her off my back I told her I had made a mistake and it wasn't bowstrings but it was rope; fresh rope. That night, the same thing happened. She woke me, "Samson, the Philistines are here to capture you!" I snapped the rope and ran them out. Once again, she wasn't happy. So the next night I thought I would at least tell her part of the truth. I told her it was my hair. But I said,

"If you just weave it on a loom into seven braids, I will be as weak as a lamb." But that night, it happened again. The Philistines came and I ran them off. But this time she was really mad. I knew that if I wanted to be with her, I would need to tell her the truth. I know what you're thinking, "He may be strong, but he sure is stupid." But as I looked into her eyes, I felt sure I could trust her. So I told her. "If my head is shaved, my strength will leave me." That night, as I slept, she brought a man in to shave my head. She then tied me up and called for the Philistines. And then I woke to her screams, "Samson, the Philistines are here to capture you!" I lifted my head, and I tried to pull my hands free...and my strength had departed. When the Philistines realized I was unable to free myself, they rushed upon me. As they dragged me out, I looked back and I saw one of them hand something to Delilah. They were paying her off. She had sold me out! The love of my life! That was the last thing I remember ever seeing, because those Philistines cut out my eyes. For days, they mocked me and the God whose strength had left me. And when they got bored with me they took me to the bowels of a prison, unhitched an ox, and used me instead of it to grind the grain that fed Philistine soldiers.

Days, weeks, I don't know, perhaps even months past. As I walked round and round, my hair grew back. All that I could think was that God had chosen me. God had set me apart for his purpose. I was to deliver my people from the yoke of the Philistines. And now, here I was with a yoke around my own neck. Oh, I had killed a lot of Philistines. I had been Israel's Judge for some 20 years, but I would never accomplish what God intended. Something had been lost, and I could never get it back.

As time went on, the Philistines decided to celebrate. They got all their important people together in the temple of Dagon to celebrate that false god. Again, the wine flowed freely and people began to shout, "Samson! Samson!" Like a freak, the great Samson was to be ushered out by a little boy for a good laugh. They led me into the Temple and the place erupted with laughter and blasphemy against God. I knew that I was the one who had allowed this to happen. I couldn't blame anyone – God or my parents or the women I loved. God's name was being defamed because of me. They led me to the front of the Temple and I asked the boy if I could just lean against something. As he placed my hand upon a pillar, I realized I had one last chance to vindicate my name and the name of God. And I prayed. It was unlike any prayer I ever prayed. "Sovereign Lord, please strengthen me just one more time. Let me die with

them, but pay them back for what they have done to me.” And he did. As he had throughout my life, he answered my prayer. The Spirit of God stirred in me again, and with my left hand I found the second pillar, and began to push. I heard the creaking and groaning of the Temple and the people began to scream and cry out for Dagon, and finally the whole thing came down. I killed more people in my death than I had during my entire lifetime.

They say that when you die your whole life flashes in front of you. It’s true. In my last breath, I thought about my parents, and my vows, and the choices I had made with women. I knew that I would always be remembered as the weakest strong man to have ever lived. God was good enough and gracious enough to use me over and over again, but I didn’t come close to accomplishing his purpose in me. He had given me everything I needed, but I squandered it on sin. I thought I could sin and it wouldn’t affect God’s purpose for my life. I was the strongest man alive. No one could stop me. But I was wrong, and I gave away my ministry for the pleasures of sin. Your ministry, your purpose, your calling, will be different than mine. But I’m here to tell you as one who has learned the hard way, no one can take your ministry away from you. There is no enemy so great that God isn’t able to preserve you and enable you to do what he has called you to do. But I am also here to tell you that you can give your ministry away. You can allow sin to steal it. I learned that nobody sins and gets away with it. You may think you’re getting away with it, but in the end sin will rob you of everything that matters. You have a Savior that you count on every day for forgiveness, but your Savior also warns you, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap.” No one sins and gets away with it. Not me. Not you.

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