

Prior to the rule of kings in Israel, judges were raised up to deliver Israel from the troubles they got themselves into because of their sin. A tragic cycle kept occurring in Israel during the four centuries which followed the death of Joshua; the era known as the time of the judges in Israel's history. Israel would sin; then God, in judgment, would cause them to come under the oppression of another nation or nations. Under the pain of oppression, Israel would then cry out to God for help; and He would send them a deliverer. But after being delivered, they would eventually retrogress to their evil ways and then again experience the judgment of God through an oppressing nation or nations.¹

Butler, J. G. (1992). *Samson: the weak strong man* (Vol. Number Six, p. 9). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

¹ And the people of Israel **again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD**, so the **LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines** for **forty years**.

A. The Character of the Retrogression

- 1. It was Iniquitous**
 - "did what was evil"
 - God declares that it was sinful
- 2. It was Idolatrous**
 - Whenever Israel departed from God during the period of the Judges they always went into idolatry, especially Baalism
 - Judges 2:11, 3:7, 8:33, 10:6, 10:10
- 3. It was Inexcusable**
 - The book of Judges records six times that Israel "did evil."
 - Judges 2:11, 3:7, **3:12, 4:1, 10:6, 13:1**
 - Four times the text includes the word "again"

B. The Cognizance of the Retrogression

- "in the sight of the Lord"
- God saw their evil conduct.
 - All of our sin is committed in plain view of God!
 - **Jeremiah 16:17 (ESV)**
For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes.
 - **Numbers 32:23 (ESV)**
But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.
 - **Psalms 139:2 (ESV)**
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

C. The Chastisement for the Retrogression

- 1. Instrument**
 - "gave them into the hand of the Philistines"
 - Not prominent in Scripture until the story of Samson.
 - They are mentioned:
 - *Abraham - Gen 20; 21:22-34
 - *Isaac - Gen 26:6-33
 - *Ex 13:17, 23:31
 - *Jos 13:2, 3
 - *Jud 3:3, 31; 10:6, 7, 11
 - The Philistine nation comprised a very small segment of Canaan, much smaller than Israel. How were they able to oppress Israel?
 - *Israel was weakened by sin!
- 2. Duration**
 - "forty years"
 - twice as long as the longest oppression of the past
 - The previous longest occurred during the time of Barak and Deborah. King Jabin and the Canaanites were the oppressors for 20 years (Judges 4:3)

Introduction to Samson / John Butler

Samson was physically the strongest man who ever lived. Yet, he was also a very weak man, and his weakness overcame his strength. His weakness, like Solomon's, was his sensual craving for unholy women. He pursued them with abandon until God abandoned him because of these unholy pursuits. His great strength had given him tremendous potential for doing a great work in delivering Israel; but because of his moral weakness, he realized very little of his potential.

Samson is the last judge written of in the book of Judges. We learn more details of Samson's life from the Scriptures than we do of any of the other judges, but mostly what we learn is a tragic tale of failure, unlike the stories of great success which characterized most of his predecessors. C. F. Keil says, "The life and acts of Samson ... are described ... with an elaborate fullness which seems quite out of proportion to the help and deliverance which he brought to his people."

After studying the life of Samson, one is as surprised that Samson appears in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews as a man of faith as one is surprised that Lot appears in the second chapter of First Peter as a man of righteousness. But, as we will see in our study, there were several incidents when Samson, in spite of his wayward ways, did indeed demonstrate significant faith in Almighty God—significant especially because of the apostate time in which he lived. However, Samson did not live a consistent life of faith. He only demonstrated faith on several occasions. Had he lived a consistent life of faith, he would have been the greatest judge in the book of Judges and would have brought about a tremendous deliverance for Israel.

Our day needs to study the life of Samson more. His failures are being repeated with surprising frequency in Christendom with the result being a great diminishing of a true Christian testimony. Therefore, we need more than ever the warning lessons from the life of this strong but weak judge of Israel.¹

A. The Character of the Retrogression

Baalism

Baal was usually represented by a stone pillar and was a god of fertility, usually worshipped in the groves. At various times Baal-worship included fornication (Jeremiah 7:9), self-mutilation (1 Kings 18:28), and human sacrifice (Jeremiah 19:5).

Judges 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.

¹ Butler, J. G. (1992). [Samson: the weak strong man](#) (Vol. Number Six, p. 7). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

Judges 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Judges 8:33 (ESV)

³³ As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god.

Judges 10:6 (ESV)

⁶ The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him.

Judges 10:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, “We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals.”

Did Evil

Judges 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.

Judges 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Judges 3:12 (ESV)

¹² And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Judges 4:1 (ESV)

¹ And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died.

Judges 10:6 (ESV)

⁶ The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him.

Judges 13:1 (ESV)

¹ And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

B. The Cognizance of the Retrogression

Jeremiah 16:17 (ESV)

For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes.

Numbers 32:23 (ESV)

But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.

Psalms 139:2 (ESV)

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

C. The Chastisement for the Retrogression

The Philistine nation comprised a very small segment of Canaan. Their land was but a small strip located in the southwestern corner of Palestine with the Mediterranean Sea as their western border, Israel as their northern (Joppa) and eastern border, and the desert just south of Gaza as their southern border. They were so small a nation that they had only five cities of any significance (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath). But when Samson came on the scene, the Philistine nation had become great in power; so much so, that they held Israel under check. This power continued on into the time of David. Under his leadership, the Philistine strength was greatly diminished. From then on, Philistia is seldom mentioned in Scripture; for it was no longer a nation of any strength or significance.²

One time during King Saul's day, Philistia so controlled and dominated Israel, that Israel was not permitted by the Philistines to have a blacksmith in their land (1 Samuel 13:19, 20).³

Genesis 20 (ESV)

¹ From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. ² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people?" ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you

² Butler, J. G. (1992). [Samson: the weak strong man](#) (Vol. Number Six, pp. 14–15). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

³ Butler, J. G. (1992). [Samson: the weak strong man](#) (Vol. Number Six, p. 15). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

touch her. ⁷ Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

⁸ So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." ¹⁰ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" ¹¹ Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' ¹² Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. ¹³ And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother." ' ' "

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵ And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." ¹⁶ To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated." ¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. ¹⁸ For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Genesis 21:22–34 (ESV)

²² At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. ²³ Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned." ²⁴ And Abraham said, "I will swear."

²⁵ When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, ²⁶ Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today." ²⁷ So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. ²⁸ Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. ²⁹ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?" ³⁰ He said, "These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well." ³¹ Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. ³² So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. ³⁴ And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

Genesis 26:6–33 (ESV)

⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he feared to say, “My wife,” thinking, “lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,” because she was attractive in appearance. ⁸ When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. ⁹ So Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, ‘She is my sister’?” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought, ‘Lest I die because of her.’” ¹⁰ Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” ¹¹ So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

¹² And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.”

¹⁷ So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. ¹⁸ And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. ¹⁹ But when Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, ²⁰ the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying, “The water is ours.” So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah. ²² And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, “For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

²³ From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴ And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.” ²⁵ So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

²⁶ When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, ²⁷ Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” ²⁸ They said, “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.” ³⁰ So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹ In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. ³² That same day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, “We have found water.” ³³ He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

Exodus 13:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.”

Exodus 23:31 (ESV)

³¹ And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

Joshua 13:2 (ESV)

² This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of the Geshurites

Joshua 13:3 (ESV)

³ (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is counted as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim,

Judges 3:3 (ESV)

³ These are the nations: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.

Judges 3:31 (ESV)

³¹ After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel.

Judges 10:6 (ESV)

⁶ The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him.

Judges 10:7 (ESV)

⁷ So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites,

Judges 10:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And the LORD said to the people of Israel, “Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines?”