

JUDGES 13-16

SAMSON

THE WALKING CONTRADICTION

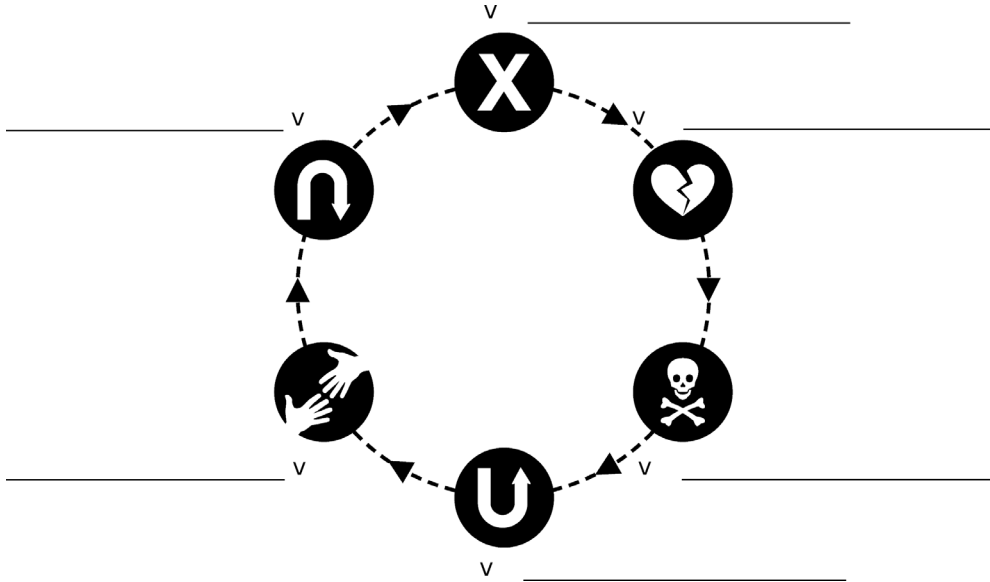
In 2017 McCrindle Research asked Australians what turned them off Christianity. Nearly half those asked said their biggest turn off is Christian hypocrisy. Saying one thing with their lips, but living completely contrary. And it's no surprise is it? In light of the royal commission, church abuse, and a long history of church leaders being caught up in things they'd happily condemn on a Sunday, but engage in during the week. Christians have a real problem with hypocrisy.

As we meet the next Judge of Israel, Samson, we meet a man full of contradictions. And yet God will work through even the worst hypocrisy and evil to bring about his good...

SAMSON

Read Judges 13:1-25.

1. Fill out as much of the following familiar cycle from this chapter as you can ...



2. What's missing in this cycle compared to previous cycles? Is this significant?

3. What's going to be special about Samson? What vow is he to make? (**See 'Nazirite' sidebar**)

Read Judges 14:1-9 & 15:1-20

4. Does it look like Samson is living as one who is especially dedicated to the LORD? List the things he does that go against his Nazirite vow...

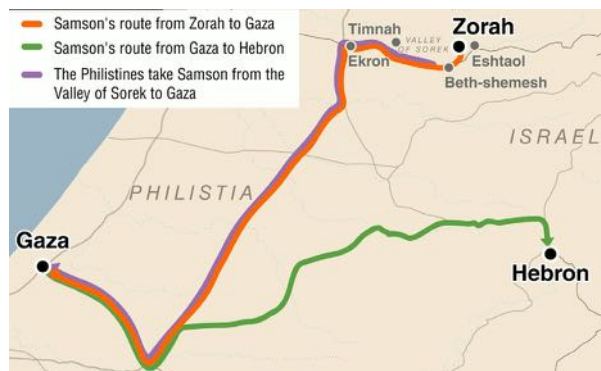
NAZARITE

A Nazirite is described in Numbers 6 as an Israelite who made a special vow of dedication to God - their lives were intended to be a living reflection of God's holiness and goodness to the rest of Israel, a lot like the whole nation of Israel was meant to be for the rest of the world. During the time of their dedication, a Nazirite was to abstain from alcohol, touching dead bodies and cutting their hair, all as a sign of their special dedication to God. Samson had the particularly unusual calling of being a Nazirite not just for a particular period of time but for life.

Samson is an enigma. As a Nazirite, he's a complete failure. Both in his relationships with Philistine women and in his contact with corpses he fundamentally breaks his vows, and mirrors Israel, a nation meant to be dedicated to God but instead lusting after other gods and stained with violence and vengeance. However, in all his imperfection, Samson is still God's chosen saviour upon whom the Spirit stirs to fulfil his promise "...he shall take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines" (13:5).

5. How would you describe Samson's Spirit enabled activity (14:6, 19; 15:14)? How do you reconcile this with Samson's motivation in each of these incidences (14:19; 15:7-8, 11)?

6. In the past, Judges have led God's people into victory. But now Samson fights alone. In 15:9-13, Judah goes a step further. What do their actions say about their current allegiance?



Read Judges 16:1-31

Once again, Samson is weakened by a Philistine woman, actually from almost the exact same place (see map). He sells the secret of his strength for love. Apparently this is more important to him than obedience to God. So Samson suffers at the hand of the Philistines.

7. Samson's relationship with Delilah is so foolish it's funny. If Samson represents Israel, what do you think this story was saying to Israelites attracted to non-Israelite gods and culture?

8. How do the Philistines interpret their capture of Samson? (v23-24). What's ironic about this? (see verses 20 and 22)

After he's captured, tortured and humiliated, Samson finally cries out to God (v28). And God answers his prayer. Yet again, we see God work through weak and broken people. This is no great military victory... No, it's a messy victory, achieved in the death of God's chosen servant, who's weak and humiliated and returns home in a body bag. But God works a surprising salvation, choosing to act even when his people's hearts are far from him.

LIVING GOD'S STORY

What happens to Samson is really a lot like what happens to Israel as a nation. Though things start out so promising, the nation of Israel disobeys God by assimilating with the people who should be their enemies. Their hearts desire what the world can offer, instead of what God has already blessed them with. What follows is destruction at the very hands of the people they've allied with.

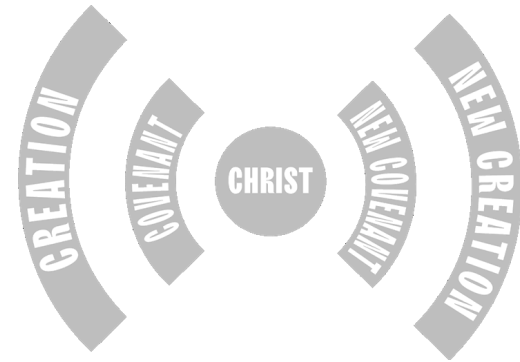
Later, God would again send a Saviour who would "rescue Israel from the hands of their enemies" (Luke 2:74). He'd also be handed over to foreign enemies by the very Israelites he was trying to save. But, unlike Samson, this Saviour would be whole-heartedly dedicated to God. And through his death, Jesus would bring salvation not only to the nation of Israel, but to all nations (Gal. 2:13). In Christ, God chooses to work through the evil of his own Covenant people to bring about a surprising salvation (Acts 2:23-24, 36).

It's remarkable that through episodes 2 & 3 God works salvation through Israel's sin. But we need to remember that sin has sin been dealt with at the cross. As those who are now living in episode 4, God works salvation for others through the church's transformation from sin. As God's people, the church is called to be different - to reflect the goodness of God and so draw others to God also.

9. In what ways are we as followers of Jesus in danger of assimilating with the culture around us? Or to put it a different way - how different does your life look compared to your neighbours? (i.e. passions/desires/investments/achievements etc.)

10. **Read 1 Peter 2:11-12; 4:1-6.** What motivations does Jesus provide for transformation instead of cultural assimilation? Does this motivate you?

Spend some time asking God for insight, wisdom, and strength to identify those things in the world that tug at your heart and are in danger of drawing you away from God. Pray that you would instead display the goodness of God to the world.



1 PETER 2 & 4

²¹Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.¹² Live such good lives among the nations that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us...

⁴¹Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.² As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what nations choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.⁴ They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was preached...