

Monday, January 23 – Read Judges 13:1-5. For Israel, the cycle of sin, judgment and repentance continues. You can scan the previous chapters in Judges and see it very clearly. Unfortunately, this cycle continues throughout the Old Testament. The Israelites would not turn to God unless they had been stunned by suffering, oppression and death. This suffering was not caused by God, but it resulted from the fact the people ignored God, their Judge and Ruler. What will it take for you to follow God? The warnings in God's word are clear: if we continue to harden our hearts against God, we can expect the same fate as Israel. Samson was to be a Nazirite – a person who took a vow to be set apart for God's service. A Nazirite vow was sometimes temporary, but in Samson's case, it was for life. As a Nazirite, Samson could not cut his hair, touch a dead body, or drink anything containing alcohol. Manoah's wife was told that her son would begin the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines. It wasn't until David's day that the Philistine opposition was completely crushed. Samson's part in subduing the Philistines was just the beginning, but it was important nonetheless. It was the task God had given Samson to do. Be faithful in following God even if you don't see instant results, because you might be beginning an important job that others will finish.

Tuesday, January 24 – Read Judges 13:6-24. Why did the angels keep his name secret? In those days people believed that if they knew someone's name, they knew his character and how to control him. By not giving his name, the angel was not allowing himself to be controlled by Manoah. He was also saying that his name was a mystery beyond understanding and too wonderful to imagine. Manoah asked the angel for an answer that you wouldn't have understood. Sometimes we ask God questions and receive no answer. This may not be because God is saying no. We may have asked for knowledge beyond our ability to understand or accept. Samson's tribe, Dan, continued to wander in their inherited land, which was yet unconquered. Samson must have grown up with his warlike tribe's yearnings for a permanent and settled territory. Thus his visits to the tribal army camp stirred his heart, and God's Spirit began preparing him for his role as judge and leader against the Philistines. Perhaps there are things that stir your heart. These may indicate areas where God wants to use you. God uses a variety of means to develop and prepare us; hereditary traits, environmental influences, and personal experiences. As with Samson, this preparation often begins long before adulthood. Work at being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading the tasks God has prepared for you. Your past may be more useful to you than you imagine.

Wednesday, January 25 – Read Judges 14:1-3. Samson's parents objected to his marrying the Philistine for several reasons: (1) It was against God's law (Exodus 34:15-17; Deuteronomy 7:1-4). A stark example of what happened when the Israelites married pagans can be found in Judges 3:5-7. (2) The Philistines were Israel's greatest enemies. Marriage to a hated Philistine would be a disgrace to Samson's family. But Samson's father gave in to Samson's demand and allowed the marriage, even though he had the right to refuse his son. Sometimes parents make mistakes and sometimes parents must let their children learn from their own mistakes. There is no perfect way to parent in which the end result is your children turn out perfectly. We do our best and let God take care of the rest.

Thursday, January 26 – Read Judges 14:19. Samson impulsively used the special gift God gave him for selfish purposes. Today, God distributes abilities and skills throughout the church (see I Corinthians 12). The apostle Paul states that these gifts are to be used "that the body of Christ may be built up," that is, to build up the church (Ephesians 4:12). To use these abilities for selfish purposes is to rob the church and fellow believers of strength. As you use the gifts God has given you, be sure you are helping others, not just yourself.

Friday, January 27 – Read Judges 16:28-30. It is sad to be remembered for what one might have been. Samson had tremendous potential. Not many people have started life with credentials like his. Samson was to do a great work for God and help deliver Israel from the Philistines and he was given great strength to help accomplish God's plan. Because Samson wasted his strength on practical jokes and getting out of scrapes, and because he eventually gave it all up to satisfy a woman, we tend to see him as failure. Yes, he wasted his life and his gift and he still accomplished the purpose the angel announced. In his final act, Samson began to rescue Israel from the Philistines. Read Hebrews 11:32-35. In the end, Samson recognized his dependence on God. When he died, God turned his failures and defeats into victory. It's never too late to start over. However badly we may have failed in the past, today is not too late for us to put our complete trust in God.