

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, May 16, 2010 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**Earthquakes: Living on the Fault Line – Numbers 32:23b**

**Introduction:** Beginning with the 7.0 magnitude quake on Jan. 12 which killed an estimated 222,000 people in Haiti, to the 8.8 magnitude quake on Feb. 27 which caused damage to over 200,000 homes and killed 507 people in Chile, earthquakes, and the devastation they cause, have been major news stories in recent months. In fact, according to the U.S. Geological Survey website, there have been a total of 115 earthquakes, large and small recorded around the world since May 1. So earthquakes are more common than we think.

Earthquakes don't just happen though. They are caused by things beyond our sight - shifting plates of earth underneath the surface. The edges of these plates are called faults. As pressure builds along a fault line, the plates move and shift and scrape against each another causing long lines of subterranean disturbances that result in tremors, cracks, and eruptions on the ground above. And the end result is some degree of devastation, depending on the magnitude of the earthquake and its location.

Now I'm not here to teach you a science lesson, but the reason I bring up the point is to draw a parallel between physical earthquakes and moral earthquakes. Moral earthquakes, in many ways, are even more devastating than physical earthquakes. And similarly, moral earthquakes don't just happen.

I could mention a number of names of people who have experienced moral earthquakes in their lives and you would probably know who I am talking about and what their moral catastrophe was all about. But with many of these people, you'd look at them and say, "*How could this have happened to them? They seemed to have it all together. They were doing so much good. What caused this to happen?*"

Just as with physical earthquakes, the causes of moral earthquakes lie beneath the surface. Over time, a fault line has developed, and the normal pressures of life have built up to the point that there is eventually going to be an eruption and when it happens, the secret cracks of character flaws in a person's life will be exposed. And the results can be devastating.

This morning, I want you to know that this is not a message you just listen to and then file it away, never to remember it again. This is one of those you need to let sink in. This is one you need to take with you and meditate on the rest of your life and think about every day.

This morning, I want us to take a look at a man who suffered a moral earthquake. Samson's story is found in Judges 13-16. He was a man who seemed to have it all going for him. He was young, strong, good-looking, and was a natural leader. He came from a good family who raised him right and afforded him every opportunity for a successful life. Yet, in the end, his life was ruined by a moral earthquake.

But it didn't just happen. We tend to think that Delilah was the cause of his downfall, but Samson didn't suddenly find himself caught in the trap of a beautiful and seductive woman who brought him down. Samson's downfall began many years before he ever met Delilah. His moral earthquake was a result of years of living on a fault line. Underneath the surface, secret and seemingly insignificant faults had begun to develop and run their course through the character of his life, cracking and fracturing his character here and there until one day, his life crumbled in shame. Delilah just happened to be there at the end.

As we look at Samson's story, I want us to ask ourselves, "*Am I living on a fault line? Are there things in my life that are slowly but surely undermining the foundation of my character? Am I setting myself up for a moral earthquake?*"

You may think that what you're doing now is no big deal and no one is being hurt. That sinful habit, that lowering of standards, that compromising attitude – you may think that these things are nothing to worry about – and that you can stop them at any time. But the reality is that living on these fault lines is like sitting on a time bomb. At some point, it's all going to blow up, and your dirty little secrets are going to be exposed by a devastating moral earthquake. The bottom line is: moral earthquakes are always preceded by secret faults. Now before we get into the story of Samson, I want us to see is that:

**1. A Moral Earthquake is Always Predictable**

Modern science has advanced in recent years to the point where now, earthquakes and other natural disasters such as hurricanes and tsunamis are more predictable. Seismologists still can't predict exact times or

specific locations of earthquakes, but they can identify general times and areas in which they are likely to occur. Meteorologists can more accurately measure the strength and direction of a hurricane and predict more precisely when and where they will hit land. These disasters are becoming less and less of a total surprise.

The same is true with moral earthquakes. If you're living on a fault line of secret sins, and low standards, you may not be able to precisely say when your downfall will happen, but you can be sure it will happen. **Numbers 32:23 (NIV)** says, "...you may be sure that your sin will find you out." The Apostle Paul puts it another way in **Galatians 6:7-8 (NIV)**. He says, "*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*"

Let me ask you...what will happen if you try to defy the law of gravity and jump out of an airplane without a parachute? What will happen if try to defy the law of combustion and stick your hand in a fire? I'll tell you what will happen...you'll discover that you can't defy God's physical laws and get by with it.

Well, the same is true for God's moral laws and standards. Abide by them, and you'll reap the benefit of an abundant and eternal life. But break them and they will ultimately break you!

You see, when we violate God's standards, He cannot let it slide. We will not get away with it in the end. Having sex outside of the bonds of a covenant marriage is a violation of God's standard and design for sex. One cannot violate it, and not get burned! You can't be greedy and selfish and think that you're going to be satisfied - you'll still want more and more! You can't remain angry or bitter at someone and it not eat you up on the inside! Ultimately, you'll suffer the consequences of breaking God's spiritual laws. They are not toys to play around with, because when you continue to break them, the consequences will come and the disaster they cause is all too predictable.

Secondly, I want us to see that:

## **2. A Moral Earthquake is a Potential in Everyone's Life**

Samson's story began so well. Judges 13:1-5 tells us that his birth was an answer to prayer. You see, in those days, the people of Israel had fallen into a cyclical pattern of righteousness and rebellion. When they rebelled, they'd fall into the hands of their enemies. Then they'd cry out to the Lord in repentance, and God would deliver them by raising up a judge to deliver them. The judge would lead them to live right for awhile and then they'd fall right back into sin and rebellion.

Samson came along during a time of rebellion. At his birth, the people of Israel were under the harsh rule of the Philistines. Samson's parents were godly people who had prayed for a son even though his mother was barren. God answered their prayer and came to Samson's mother in the form of an angel to tell her that she would have a special baby who would deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines. The angel also gave her specific instructions on raising this child as a Nazirite, or a child who would be set apart to God from birth.

So, Samson was a special gift from God not only to his parents, but to the entire nation. He had a special calling. He was taught the ways of God, and was groomed for success. Not only that, he was strong, clever and could charm your socks off.

Yet, in spite of all the advantages Samson had growing up in a godly home and having everything going for him, he ended up trying to pick up the pieces of broken dreams and a shattered life because he chose to live on a fault line that ultimately led to a moral earthquake.

Samson's story reminds us that being raised in a godly home is no guarantee of actually living a godly life. Everyone, in spite of their upbringing, and in spite of their outward appearance, still has within them, the capacity and the potential to suffer a moral collapse. Ultimately, everyone chooses their own path.

Now, even though it's no guarantee that your children will turn out right, wise parents will deliberately and with great determination, choose to bring their children up "*in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" (**Eph. 6:4 NIV**). At the very least, you're laying down a solid and godly foundation for them to build upon. But the building is up to them.

The truth is, there is not a person on God's green earth who is immune from a moral earthquake. We all have the potential to either walk the walk or stumble and fall. We have the potential to soar like eagles or crash and burn like a pilotless plane. So don't think for a moment that you have it all together and are spiritually invincible. **Galatians 6:3 (NIV)** says, "*If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*"

Samson eventually suffered the devastation of a moral earthquake in spite of being born as someone who was set apart for the work of God. He fell even though he was raised in a godly home and took a Nazirite vow of holiness and righteousness. How did he go from one who was recognized and lauded as a man of commitment and purpose to a man who was forced to endure humiliation and disgrace at the hands of the very ones he was raised to defeat? The answer lies in the third thing we need to understand about moral earthquakes:

### **3. A Moral Earthquake is the Result of a Progressive Series of Bad Choices**

Over the years, since the development of the American West, California has been the one state more and more people have migrated to and settled in, than any other western state. People choose to live there because of the weather, the lifestyle, the close proximity to the beaches and mountains, and a host of other reasons. “*Californee,*” as the TV show song says, “*is the place you want to be!*”

However, California is also one of the most dangerous places to live. The main reason is because the most famous and most volatile fault line in America is the San Andreas Fault which is located in California. Still in spite of three major earthquakes and many thousands of minor quakes and aftershocks in the past 100 or so years, people still choose to flock to California in droves.

Many make their choice to live or stay there because they say that they just accept the risk. But I wonder if they really know what they are saying. Sure, they’re willing to accept a risk of surviving a smaller quake because they’ve already survived them. But are they really willing to accept the risk of “*the big one*” - the one everyone is predicting WILL happen? I don’t think so, because they really don’t understand “*the big one!*” They just don’t get it!

Samson didn’t get what he was doing either. He ended up living on a shaky, unsteady, and crumbling fault line because of a series of bad choices he made earlier in life. Even though he knew better, Samson chose to take his standing with God for granted and trivialize his Nazirite vows. For example, in **Judges 14:1-2 (NIV)** tells us that “*Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, “I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.”* On the surface, that seems like a rather harmless and innocent action. After all, here was a young man who saw a pretty girl. His heart went pitter-patter. He was bitten by the love bug, and she was all he could think about.

But underneath the surface, a crack was starting to develop in his character. You see, Samson was in a place where he shouldn’t have been and he knew it. He was in Timnah – a Philistine city. He was going against his parent’s wishes. His parents asked him, “*Isn’t there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?*” (**Judges 14:3 NIV**). They were concerned because their son was in enemy territory and among godless people seeking a wife. But Samson chose to ignore his parent’s advice and warning. He was going to have his way no matter what. He told his daddy, “*Get her for me, for she pleases me well.*” In other words, “*You just don’t understand me dad. You don’t care about my feelings Mom. I want this girl, and it doesn’t matter what you say, I know what I’m doing and I’m going to have her.!*”

But look at vs. 5. It gets worse! “*Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him.*” (**Judges 14:5 (NIV)**).

Did you see where he went? He went to the vineyards of Timnah. What is significant about that? Well, if you read in **Numbers 6:2-8**, you will see the commitments of the Nazirite Vow. And the very first one is: “*he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.*” (**Numbers 6:3-4 NIV**).

He was not to even go anywhere near a vineyard or touch a grape or raisin. Yet there he was walking through a vineyard looking for his girl. Apparently, he thought she was worth it.

I heard about a guy once who really fell for a new girl who had moved to his high school. They spent every moment they could together that entire week between classes and on their lunch break. When Friday came, he wrote her a note and stuck it in her backpack as she was getting ready to get on the bus. That afternoon, when the girl got home, she found the note. It said, “*Baby, This has been the best week of my life. You’ve captured my heart, and you’re the only one for me. I can’t think of anything or anyone but you. You’re the girl of my dreams. I’d climb the highest mountain, swim the deepest river, and cut my way through the thickest jungle just to be with you. I can’t wait to see you again. I’ll see you tomorrow, if it doesn’t rain.*”

Well, Samson wasn't like that. He wanted this girl so bad, he was willing to violate his Nazirite vow, ignore his commitment and literally throw away his future just to have her.

Young people, you may not think it's a big deal when you don't do what your parents say, or when you don't keep a commitment you've made to God. But the fact is, when you say no to God or disobey your parents, you're letting a little fault start to develop beneath you. And saying no to God gets easier the next time. One act of disobedience leads to another. One sin leads to another, and pretty soon, you're sliding down a slippery slope and headed for a moral earthquake.

Not only that, look at the complications that started to develop for Samson. The latter part of vs. 5 says, "*suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him.*" **Judges 14:5 (NIV).**

When you decide to step out of God's will, don't be surprised when unexpected problems and hardships and difficulties start coming your way. In fact, think about all the attacks and problems you've had to face this year. Now, how many of those could have been avoided if you had just obeyed God or obeyed your parents? How many lies have you had to tell? How many lies have you had to tell just to cover up the previous ones?

Samson's disobedience in being where he shouldn't have been, doing what he shouldn't have been doing with someone he shouldn't have even been with very nearly cost him his life.

Now, if you read on in vs. 6-7, you see that Samson was able to kill that lion with his bare hands. But notice, it says that he didn't do it in his own power. It was "*the Spirit of the Lord*" who came upon him giving him protection and strength. But even though he got through that problem, look at what he did next. He didn't tell his parents (6b), and he still went on his way to find his girl. You see, one thing leads to another. He's still walking down that downward path isn't he?

But that's not all. Look at the next verse. "*Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along...*" **Judges 14:8-9 (NIV).** Samson went back to the vineyard (a violation of his Nazirite vow), found the carcass of the lion he killed and scooped out some honey from the carcass.

Again, let's go back to the Nazirite vows in Numbers 6: Look at verse 6: "*Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go near a dead body.*" Oops! I did it again! Samson broke yet another commitment. Do you see the pattern here? Do you see how Samson's life choices were leading him down the wrong road? Do you see how he was undermining that strong foundation that had been laid?

The choices Samson made were more than just a temporary lapse of judgment or a one-time mistake. One bad choice and one broken promise led to another. One lie became two, and two became four and four became eight, and before he knew it, his life had become a series of bad decisions that left him with some deep cracks in his character. So by the time Samson met Delilah some 20 years later, and she cut his hair off (which by the way was another violation of the Nazirite vow), he was literally living on a major fault line and didn't even know it. He was totally unaware of "*the big one*" that was about to bring him down. But remember...earthquakes don't just happen. They are always preceded by secret faults.

**Conclusion:** Ultimately, everyone chooses his or her own path in life. As the old saying goes, if you make your own bed, then you have to lie in it. And even though we may be taught better, if we choose to go our own way and live in rebellion toward God and His ways, we are choosing to live on a fault line of our own making, and we're headed for a moral earthquake.

But the good news is that it can be avoided. How? You can avoid a moral earthquake by surrendering your life to Christ. Don't just make a commitment! Completely surrender your will – your way – your life to Him. That's your daily choice.