

# The End of Samson

## Judges 16

We have come to the final chapter of Samson's narrative. There are three major stories of Samson's adult life. One begins with his saying to his father, "I've seen a woman in Timnah. Get her for me, she looks good to me." Samson's physical desire for this Timnite woman led to the long story (in chapters 14 and 15) of his marriage, the wager and its aftermath ending with a thousand Philistine killed by Samson with a donkey's jawbone. The second story is this short paragraph here about his traveling to Gaza to see a prostitute. The third and most famous story, which we'll consider this morning as well, is the "fatal attraction" story of Samson and Delilah. Each story is introduced with Samson's sexual desire as his motivation to act.

As we have seen, Samson was not a perfect deliverer. Samson was a compromiser. He is often a reflection of the compromise of the whole nation of Israel at this time in their history. But I have to be careful in how I judge Samson because the New Testament book of Hebrews lists him as one of the faithful of whom the world was not worthy. Samson has displayed faith in some things. At least he knew the Lord was God and he prayed to Him. At least he knew that Philistines were the enemy and they should not be ruling over God's people. At least he increasingly knew his strength came from the Lord.

### 1. Samson and the Harlot at Gaza (16:1-3)

As chapter 16 opens the author doesn't try to cover up Samson's scandalous behavior.

**1 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.**

**2 When the Gazites were told, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him."**

**3 And Samson lay low till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.**

Didn't Samson feel any sense of shame in seeing a prostitute and fraternizing with the enemy? We see Samson sowing seeds in Gaza which germinate with his destruction with Delilah. Sin has consequences.

Samson became enslaved by his cravings. He strangled a lion but couldn't strangle his lust. He burst ropes but was bound by his appetite. He burned the enemy's crops yet was enflamed with desire for their women. He was strong, but not really in control. The champion was captivated by the enemy and conquered by himself!

This ought to remind us that the proclivity to sin never dies of old age, that our weaknesses never go away; they are always there. We can always overcome them in the power of the Spirit of God, but they never leave us. We are always weak in the area of these old sins. As someone has said, "Old flesh never dies; it just smells that way."

The town knows Samson is there; he wasn't trying to keep a low profile. The Philistines try to trap Samson by securing the city gates; he is locked in, so they think. But Samson lifts the gates with his enormous might and carries them to Hebron, 40 miles away! It's estimated that these gates may have weighed over a thousand pounds. In Bible times the gates of cities were considered the symbol of their strength. By removing the city

gate Samson caused Gaza great humiliation. Let's remember that Samson's story is no fable, no "tall tale". We may wonder how Samson performed his amazing feats; he was in a class by himself. There are no limits with God's power.

## **2. Samson and Delilah (16:4-17)**

The danger here shows that there will be greater danger.

After the Gaza debacle, Samson was on the Philistine's "Most Wanted" list! Something had to be done about him, but the Philistines were too afraid to take action. They had to learn the source of Samson's strength. They find a willing accomplice in Delilah. Delilah becomes their "secret agent". Her name has become synonymous with seduction, and she's often blamed for Samson's fall, yet she was merely doing her job as a loyal Philistine informant. She turned on the charm, and Samson was very vulnerable.

**4 Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.**

**5 And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."**

**6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you."**

**7 And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man."**

**8 So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them.**

Delilah, her name in Hebrew means "weak," and how interesting that Samson, the strong one, could be totally dominated by Delilah, the weak one. Again, it is not the strength of the flesh which overwhelms us; it is our unwillingness to lay hold of the strength of Jesus Christ.

Delilah pleads with Samson to reveal the secret of his strength. What's wrong here? It should've been obvious that God was the Source of Samson's strength! But the superstitious Philistines figured Samson was using some kind of magic, some conjuring. His lifestyle did not lead them to consider that he was a religious man. We may think of religion as private and personal, but nowhere in Scripture does it say that. There should be some evidence, some observable indication that we're following God. When we choose to serve God, we're not enrolled in the "Secret Service"! The Philistines understandably figured that God wasn't part of Samson's life. They ponder: How did he get so strong?

Samson thinks Delilah is toying with him, and he playfully goes along, misleading her as though this was a big joke of some sort.

**9 Now men were lying in wait, staying with her in the room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.**

**10 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with."**

**11 So he said to her, "If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man."**

**12 Therefore Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And men were lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread.**

It's interesting that he suggests being tied with new ropes would weaken him; that had already been tried (ch 15), and apparently the Philistines had forgotten.

Samson was infatuated with Delilah and wasn't thinking straight. A Bible teacher notes: "Rather than break his relationship with Delilah, he allowed it to break him" (Herbert Wolf). This time Samson plays even closer to the fire and gets even closer to the truth,

**13 Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom"--**

**14 So she wove it tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom.**

Delilah is not about to give up, so with nagging words that remind us of Samson's bride back in chapter 13 she presses him,

**15 Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength lies."**

**16 And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death,**

**17 that he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."**

Delilah sobs and questions his love, and so he tells her of his vow. Samson can't resist Delilah's allure and persuasion so he gives that which was sacred to a pagan enemy.

Samson was a Nazirite. He knew that he was called from the day of his birth to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines; he knew that his strength came from God, that his whole life was to be a walking demonstration of truth; he knew that his hair was a sign of weakness but that out of weakness would come strength; he knew that not to drink wine was to show that he could derive joy from the Spirit instead of wine; he knew that not to go near a dead body was to show that he would never have to depend upon dead flesh for life.

His parents had warned him about the Philistine women, and God bailed him out. He set out on a road of personal vengeance and his own people captured him, but God bailed him out. He went into a harlot and almost was captured again, but God bailed him out. He went to Delilah and he had three chances to get out, but finally God did not bail him out. It's like God was saying to Samson, "Is that what you really want? Then you can have it." That's the judgment of God. Sometimes we get involved in sin and because there is no thunder and lightning, we think we have gotten away with something. God may bail us out for a period and then he doesn't bail us out any more. He lets us have it.

Samson's hair by itself didn't make him strong, but it was the most observable sign of his vow, which set him apart as a Nazarite. By cutting his hair he severs his tie to God. Samson had grown insensitive, bound by his appetite, blinded by his desires. This time would be different,

### **3. Samson Is Conquered (16:18-21)**

**18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand.**

**19 Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.**

**20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.**

**21 Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison.**

It was not magic in his hair that ultimately departed from him. The problem was not that his hair was gone. In verse 19 it says his strength left him. But it is verse 20 that tells us why: It was the Lord God himself that had departed from him. The source of his favor and his strength had always been God. That's what Samson never understood. Do you see how sad that is? The presence of God in his life had just been removed, and he didn't know it.

You make a grave error when you attribute anything good in your life to anyone but God. The Lord had departed from him and what happens to Samson physically now is also a picture of what has happened spiritually.

And that is what happens to us when sin conquers us. God will give us up to the passions of our own life, if we insist on it. This picture of Samson grinding away at the mill is such a vivid illustration of what happens in the inner man. There is a blinding--a loss of a sense of moral perspective and vision. There is a binding--a loss of our freedom and liberty and mobility in the Spirit. And there is a grinding--a sense of futility and boredom and purposelessness about life, of just going around and around and around inside.

The Philistines gloatingly capture Samson, cruelly gouge out his eyes, and throw him into a dark cell. They put him to work grinding corn, menial and degrading labor, work only slaves would perform. Samson burned their grain, and here we find him grinding the enemy's grain. It sometimes takes a great fall to get our attention. When Charles Colson went to prison over Watergate, he found faith in Christ and became a great leader in the church. It's been suggested that Samson's prison became a place of repentance.

### **4. Samson's Greatest Victory (16:22-31)**

Verse 22 hints that this is not the "end of the story" in a verse charged with anticipation:

**22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.**

Verse 22 gives us a glimmer of hope. His hair began to grow again. Perhaps his faith grew as well. We have said that the hair was not the source, but it was the sign of his consecration which was his strength.

The Philistines hold a huge celebration at the Temple of Dagon, their god of grain, and decide to use the occasion to revel over captured Samson, who has become a symbol of Israel's shameful defeat, a trophy of their conquest. The five lords of the Philistines, along with over 3,000 men and women are present. The one person the Philistines feared the most, the man that well-armed soldiers dared not confront, is now led into the pagan temple by a servant boy. He is brought to the temple to "amuse" his captors.

**23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!"**

**24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, The destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead."**

**25 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars.**

**26 Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them."**

**27 Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there--about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed.**

As they blaspheme the God of Israel, Samson prays:

**28 Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!"**

**29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left.**

**30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.**

**31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.**

Samson prays to God, and is granted one final burst of strength. He asks for vindication and death. He would rather sacrifice his life and die with the Philistines than be bound by them.

The drunken laughter turns to screams as Samson brings the house down! Many are killed instantly; others are trampled to death by the panicked mob. Among the dead is the powerless idol Dagon. The occasion was to mock Israel's God along with His

champion, but God is vindicated. When things couldn't have seemed bleaker, God turned the tables. The Philistines are so fearful of Samson that they quietly turn his corpse over to his family for burial, rather than defile it. They've had enough.

Why did Israel need to hear this story? In Samson Israel was to see herself. Having received grace and blessing from the Lord and yet compromising over and over again with the gods of the peoples around them. Israel is a people who do not know that her blessings come from the Lord. And they do not know that the Lord could depart from them just as He departed from Samson.

It is a message that we need to hear as well. Beware of compromise and playing loose with the world. Jesus warns His churches in Revelation 2 and 3 of the danger of compromise. To one church He says,

**Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent. (Rev 2:4-5).**

To another church He writes,

**Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. (Rev. 2:16).**

And again,

**Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. (Rev. 3:2).**

And finally in word that sound like He could have spoken them to Samson, Jesus says to His church,

**I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-- I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. (Rev 3:15-20).**

Maybe you are surprised and offended at God's choice of Samson. But maybe you need to look inside and be just as surprised at God's choice of you. The good news is that God returned to Samson and won a great victory over the enemy through him.

Samson's story serves as a warning to us, but it also serves to give us hope. This is the heart of the Gospel message, a promise of grace, reconciliation and restoration.

Samson was born to begin to deliver Israel. Jesus was born to finish it. Like Samson, Jesus dies alone. As in Samson, through Jesus, God saves through one man. In Judges, "God had shown that He could deliver Israel with an army of willing volunteers; He had also shown that He could save with as few as three hundred...But when the Spirit of God came upon Samson, the Lord showed that He had no need for even three hundred. He could deliver by one." (E.Clowney, The Unfolding Mystery, p.137)

Samson dies with the Philistines; Jesus between two thieves. Samson's greatest victory comes when he is at his weakest, when it is last expected - eyes gouged out, prisoner, strength gone, ridiculed, surrounded. Jesus' greatest victory came when He was betrayed, beaten, mocked, and nailed to a cross.

Samson triumphs over his enemies through his death -- so does Jesus. Better: His death brings life.

Samson is crushed by the temple because of his iniquities, Jesus is crushed by God for our iniquities.

Samson calls out to God to remember him and God answers to show that He is with him again. Jesus calls out and is forsaken, so that we might, like the thief on the cross next to Jesus, be remembered and accepted into His kingdom.

So where are you this morning? Where are you with the Lord? Maybe you need to do what Samson did and say, "Lord, remember me."

And whatever you are and whatever you've been doing and wherever you've been living and hiding and sleeping, God says it doesn't matter. He will receive you back because it does not depend on what you have done, but what Jesus has done for you. Won't you come to Jesus today?