

The Final Chapter Judges 16

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This final chapter of Samson's life is not the best as he fell into an enemy's trap that cost him his sight and led to the loss of his life.

Even so, his story serves as a warning as well as an inspiration to us. For one thing, we're warned that anybody can fall into sin.

Judges 16:1-3, "One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. The people of Gaza were told, "Samson is here!" So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, "At dawn we'll kill him." But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron."

In these first three verses of Judges 16, the writer tells a rather unpleasant story that took place sometime after the battle of Lehi in chapter 15.

Why he decided to return to the land of the Philistines is one of the Bible's unsolved mysteries. Even more of a mystery is why Samson decided to find, and sleep with a Philistine harlot.

A Nazarite was supposed to live a holy life, separated to God, but spending a night with a prostitute was about as unholy as one could get. Stranger still, why did Samson go to Gaza.

Maybe he thought he'd be safe if could get as far away from Gath as humanly possible. But one is never safe, when living in violation of God's Word and will.

Regardless, word got around that Samson was in Gaza, so a number of people thought this was their opportunity to get rid of him once and for all.

Their strategy was to surround him and kill him in the morning, but, for some reason, Samson woke up at midnight and left, but not empty handed.

When he left, he took the city gates and the two posts from which they hung and carried them to a hill between Gaza and Hebron.

I can imagine that the people of Gaza must have been dismayed in the morning when they didn't find Samson nor the city's gates!

After this, Samson made the last, and worst, journey of his life. The story begins in verse 4.

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Judges 16:4-5, "Sometime later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

When Samson left Gaza, he headed toward Hebron. Its unknown where he went, but as time passed, he returned to the Valley of Sorek, not too far from Timanh and Gath, his homeland.

We're not told how he met Delilah or why she was attracted to him just that he was in love again.

Now, the Bible doesn't say, but it is inferred that they were living together. There's no record that they were ever married.

Even though he loved her, it's clear she didn't love him because whatever affection Delilah had for Samson vanished when the "*rulers of the Philistines*" approached her, offering money if she would hand him over to them.

These "*rulers of the Philistines*" may have been as many as five; one for each of the five major Philistine cities: Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, Ekron, and Ashkelon. These lords were not only wicked, they were wealthy.

They wanted Delilah to get Samson to reveal the source of his strength so they could basically torture him. Each one of them pledged 1100 pieces of silver to Delilah if she would deliver Samson, and his secret.

Her first attempt to get Samson to disclose his secret was rather blatant. As she comes right out and demands, "*Tell me the secret of your great strength.*" That should've raised an alarm or something.

He was old enough to know better, and surely, he remembered what his wife had done to him, but he played along.

He said, "*if you bind me with seven fresh bowstrings,*" most likely green branches freshly removed from a tree, I'll be as weak as anybody else.

And guess what? The "*rulers of the Philistines*" gave her seven undried green "*bowstrings*" to bind Samson.

And to Delilah's surprise, and also those who were in hiding, when she gave the alarm Samson broke those "*bowstrings*" like they were nothing.

But that didn't stop Delilah and her associates from trying again.

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Judges 16:10, "*Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied."*

Delilah tried to shame him into revealing his secret and again asked how he could be bound.

Judges 16:11, *“If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I’ll become as weak as any other man.”*

Samson, tied as directed, broke them like they were nothing but thread when the alarm was sounded.

Then in verses 13-14, he told Delilah that if she wove his hair into whatever she was weaving, he would be as weak as any other person.

Yet, when she sounded the alarm, Samson woke up and took the pin, beam, web, and everything else connected to it and walked away.

Again, she complained to Samson, *“How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me?”* These words were Samson’s death warrant.

Judges 16:17, *“No razor has ever been used on my head,” he said, “because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother’s womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.”*

Realizing that Samson finally told her the truth, Delilah gets word to the Philistines. And sure enough, they came with the money.

Judges 16:18, *“When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, “Come back once more; he has told me everything.” So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands.”*

Delilah probably used something to make him sleep so she could have someone shave off his hair. Now, he really was as weak as any other man.

Remember, his strength wasn't in his hair; nor was his strength anything he seemed to possess naturally. His strength came from his obedience to God, but now he reaps the results of his disobedience.

So, when Delilah shouted, "*Samson, the Philistines are upon you!*" Not only was his strength gone, but he didn't know that the LORD had departed from him, too.

Captured and helpless, the Philistines put out his eyes, bound him in fetters of bronze, took him back to Gaza, and made him grind grain in a prison.

Yet, regardless of his predicament, Samson was still a chosen vessel to and for the LORD and his time in prison apparently made him realize how much he had failed.

He didn't know when his last days on earth would be, but he knew that not being right with God was no way to live and God was not finished with him.

Judges 16:22, "*But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.*"

The length of time between his head being shaved, the re-growth of his hair, and the events of the final day of his life in the verses to follow, is not known.

The Philistines were in no hurry to end Samson's misery. They were content to keep him bound, blind, and grinding grain in a Gaza prison house.

But that changed when the Philistines decided to celebrate a national religious holiday!

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The five rulers of the Philistines decided to make a special sacrifice to their national god, Dagon, an idol, made by human hands, which was credited with giving Samson into their hands.

Judges 16:23-24, “Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, “Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands. When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, “Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain.”

At least they got part of it right: Samson had indeed destroyed part of their country, i.e. the grain harvest, vineyards, and olives groves around Timnah and slain many of the Philistines.

He killed 30 in Ashkelon to honor his wager at the wedding feast, then an unspecified number whom he “*smote hip and thigh,*” and 1000 more at Lehi when he used a donkey’s jawbone as a weapon.

An estimated 1100 or so may not seem like much but considering one man, alone, did this, no wonder they sang Dagon’s praises when Samson was finally captured and rendered unfit for combat!

Judges 16:25, “While they were in high spirits, they shouted, “Bring out Samson to entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars...”

As they led Samson, blinded and fettered to the temple, the Philistines began praising Dagon for all he had done! He was at their mercy, and they were going to enjoy this day of rejoicing.

One wonders what thoughts Samson may have had during this time. But notice the one mistake the Philistines allowed to happen. They set him between the main pillars that kept the temple in place.

Something else to notice is that there was at least one decent Philistine among the others, *“the servant who held his hand.”*

Judges 16:26, *“Samson said to the servant who held his hand, “Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them.”*

Whoever this servant was, we can give him credit for showing some compassion towards an enemy.

The servant didn't have any idea what Samson was going to do. Maybe he thought Samson was tired after all the “sport” he had been through and just wanted to get some rest.

So, with Samson between the two main pillars of the temple, the stage was set for his final deed.

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Judges 16:27-28, *“Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.”*

The size or dimensions of this temple are unknown. But it was filled to capacity since the overflow crowd had climbed on top of the temple, 3000 in all.

Even though Samson couldn't see, he could hear, and most of all, he could pray. And pray he did.

Look at his prayer in verse 28: *“Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.”*

God answered that prayer, not to avenge Samson's eyes, but to vindicate His Name. It was because the Philistines worshipped Dagon that the LORD judged them by the hand of Samson.

What happened next was not a demonstration of Samson's strength but victory by the Living God in a contest against Dagon, the god of the Philistines.

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Conclusion

Now we see the final act after Samson's prayer. Remember, he's standing by the two main pillars that supported the whole temple.

Judges 16:29-30, "Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived."

Samson had found the one weakness in the temple, and the last thing Samson did on this earth was to push on those pillars with all his might.

When the temple collapsed, it killed more Philistines than all his other encounters.

But let Samson's life be a warning. Either your life will honor God and glorify His Name, or you will assuredly spend your strength in futile pursuits destined to fail.

As an epilogue, we see that Samson may have died with the Philistines, but his body wasn't buried with them.

Judges 16:31, *“Then his brothers and his father’s whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.”*

This is the only mention of Samson’s extended family. The term “brothers/brethren” may just be close kin but we have no record of their names or how they related to Samson.

Samson’s life illustrates that we can never overestimate the grace and mercy of God. Samson remembered the graciousness of God and knew God could use whatever time he had left, and he was right.

Today, we must avoid Samson’s mistakes but learn from his example. Never forget that God is a God of mercy and grace. So, let his life serve as a warning against self-interest.

Jesus spoke to this very issue when He warned in Matthew 10:38-39, *“Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

Samson, endowed with extraordinary divine gifts, wasted his life. Blessed beyond all imagination, his divine calling and blessing were ignored as he squandered his life and indulged his sensualities.

Spiritual apathy led to rebellion; likewise, spiritual apathy will ultimately lead any Christian into rebellion. When self-interest becomes the motivational factor in one’s life, ruin and devastation lie in store.

Samson is proof that God can, and does, use imperfect people. Remember what God said of Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon in the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah 45:4, *“For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.”*