

Samson and the Christian (Part Five)

Judges 16: Delilah and Downfall

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As we read the story of Samson, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that he is a judge in Israel. In fact, a couple of commentators say that in the structure of the book of Judges—the way that it is laid out, the way that it works out in its twenty-one chapters—that Samson is, in the author's mind, the archetypal judge. Not only is he about the last judge of the period, basically—Samuel is a judge—but everything leads up to Samson being the judge that was formed because of the way that everybody was. He represented Israel as Israel was at that time. Samson personifies the saying, "Every man did what was right in his own eyes"; he was a perfect example of it. "As was Samson, so was Israel." He represented his country of his time.

We can also suggest, and maybe this is what the author of the book was trying to tell us, that the life of Samson, in a way, parallels God's dealings with Israel over all their years. Samson's life was somewhat like Ezekiel 16, where God said that He had chosen Israel when he found her all messy and bloody. He cleaned her up and gave her many things, and she turned out to mature beautifully. Then she turned around and forsook Him.

Samson is similar to that. God called him from his mother's womb and gave him a great number of advantages, but how did Samson treat God? How did Samson treat his status as a Nazirite?

You can see how Samson's life reflects Israel's very spotty record of faithfulness to the covenant. Samson had his own covenant with God, and we saw how little he kept to it. He would touch dead things. We can see he was in proximity to the fruit of the vine, but that did not seem to stop him. He did one of his greatest works clutching the jawbone of the fresh carcass of an ass. Even when he did something praiseworthy, it was tainted by something that was not praiseworthy.

As we closed last time in Judges 15: 20, it said that he judged Israel 20 years. It is very clear that the author of Judges considers him to be a judge; that he fulfilled the office of a judge for 20 years. This is repeated in chapter 16, verse 31—that he judged Israel 20 years.

We are told in the repetition that, yes, he was a judge of Israel; but when we look at the life of Samson in these four chapters, we do not see anything that suggests any kind of governmental or military leadership. We do not even see any tribal leadership. He did not gather the Danites about him and march off to battle. We have said that there were perhaps people who helped him, especially when gathering the jackals to burn the fields, but it does not seem that he ever organized a military force. It does not seem that he tried to form any kind of government. There is no indication that he even did any kind of judging in the normal sense of judging, such as what happens in our society when the judge renders sentences or judgments on certain things. There is none of this in here.

We see that throughout these four chapters, Samson acts alone—and when he does act, he acts

mostly out of revenge for wrongs that are done to him or offenses done to him by the Philistines, or the things that he does are reactions to the consequences of his own pride, stupidity, or naiveté. Yet the author of Judges calls him a judge.

This begs the question, "What did it mean at that time to be a judge in Israel?" As the very basic foundation of all of this, we have to understand that an Israelite judge was not in any way a petty king or governor. That is not what is meant by the word *judge*. The positions of king or governor suggest a great deal more inherent authority and privilege than what an Israelite judge had.

A king, as Samuel tells us in I Samuel 8, has the ability to levy taxes; to conscript men into an army; to hire them as laborers in his fields, orchards, and homes. A king is an autonomous ruler. His word is law. A governor at that time had similar powers, except that his authority came from the king himself. A judge did not.

There are two main jobs or responsibilities that fall under the title of judge, and not every judge fulfilled both of them. The first is that the judge was a war leader who could call upon his own tribe and maybe nearby tribes to go and oppose the enemy. We know that Gideon and Jephthah did this, and a couple of others did this. Deborah and Barak did this. They were able to raise an army from their part of Israel and then go off to war against Jabin or this group or that.

The second part of being a judge is as a guarantor of justice—what we today might call a one-man final court of appeals or one-man supreme court. He was the one recognized as the one with final authority to judge and decide certain matters.

Both of these responsibilities grew out of the fact that it was recognized by the people that God had called this person and was working through him or her. That was the foundation of everything. His ability to call out the guard—to go off to war—stems from the fact that it was known, because of certain acts that he had done, that God was with him. That the people would come to him for a final judgment on a matter that proved too hard for the elders of their locality was the fact that God had shown Himself working in this person. Thus, his decisions, then, were considered to have a stamp of approval from God, who was really the King.

When God started working with a person, the people saw that God's stamp of approval was on this person and voluntarily allowed him to lead them. He was their judge, appointed by God.

The position of Judge was modeled after the work of Moses and, perhaps more, the work of Joshua. Most Israelites felt, I am sure, that there could not be another Moses. We know what the Jews think of Moses today; Moses was next to God, as it were. I do not know if you could quite call it idolatry, but they considered Moses to be right there at the top. Moses himself said that there would only be the Prophet that would be like him; God said that through him in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. It says that the Prophet, the one for whom everyone was waiting, would be like Moses.

The office of judge, then, was modeled on Moses' successor, Joshua, the first leader within the land of Israel. One thing about Moses and his work was that he was known as the lawgiver; and, of course, being the lawgiver, he had the authority to enforce the laws and to do what he did. However, Joshua was not a lawgiver. Joshua had to take the laws that were already given

to him through Moses and enforce them or do whatever it was that he was going to do with them, and the judges, then, modeled themselves after what Joshua did. Notice in Joshua, after it has become clear that God had chosen Joshua to follow Moses, the people's response to Joshua's first command about crossing over Jordan, "This is what you should do, and this is how you will do it." They answered,

Joshua 1:16 So they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go."

"Okay. We will let you lead us. We will do what you say, and we will go where you tell us to go."

Joshua 1:17 "Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses."

This is interesting. It is strangely translated here in the New King James Version; it is probably very similar in the old King James Version. The sense of it is, "As long as the Lord be with you." Let me read this again:

Joshua 1:17-18 "Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so will we heed you, [as long as] the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. [As long as you are] strong and of good courage."

This is the same manner of construction and attitude. It is not that they are telling him, "God be with you, and be strong and of good courage." No, rather, they are setting conditions for him. "We will follow you so long as God is with you; we will follow you so long as you are strong and courageous."

What they are saying is, "You will lead us at our consent." What a typical Israelite attitude! This is the attitude that goes through the whole book of judges. Obviously, Joshua was worthy of their respect. He was worthy of being a leader, and that was clear. However, you will notice that when judges appeared in the period of the judges, the people followed the judge—but if a successor came on the scene, whether son or somebody else who tried to jump into that position, the people just left him. They went and did their own thing. They did not follow that "new" judge whether, he was good or bad. They followed only as long as the judge was clearly being led by God and as long as he was strong. If he showed any kind of weakness, the people were gone.

That is the way that it turned out by the time of Samson. He was doing great things; he was strong, was he not? That was his one feature. God was with him; God was actually his strength—but he was not really following God.

By the time you get to the period at the end of the judges, the more spiritual aspects of their leadership had fallen by the wayside, and all they wanted was a strong man. What do we get

to? By the time we get to I Samuel 8, the people asked for a king in order to go to battle—go to war—and be like the other nations. They wanted a strong figurehead. Thus, we see that the period of the judges, from the time of Moses and his death and the crossing of the Jordan river, through the time of Samson and Samuel is a period of spiritual decline and physical decline, as well, because they came into the land with a high hand; but by the time that you get to Samuel and the crowning of Saul, they are pretty weak—both militarily and spiritually. Samson is the apogee of the judges, in a way. He was the bottom of the barrel, in a sense.

Do you know that statue of Nebuchadnezzar's in the book of Daniel that started out with gold, then silver, then bronze, and then iron, and finally it was mixed with miry clay? In a similar way, we get that same sort of feeling throughout the book of Judges—that their quality at the beginning disintegrated or weakened as it went. The metal might have gotten stronger as in Daniel: silver is stronger than gold; bronze is stronger than silver; iron is stronger than bronze. The strength was there, but the quality had diminished considerably.

Spiritually, from the time of Joshua until the time of Samson, you can see their fall downhill. Gideon was more spiritual than Jephthah; Jephthah seemed more spiritual than Samson—but there is a steady progression of base, sinful carnality. It is interesting to look at it from that point of view.

Most of the judges came to prominence through some sort of military prowess or military leadership in which Israel's enemy was opposed. Perhaps a good example of this would be someone like Othniel.

Judges 3:7-11 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs. Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years. When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

It became clear that God had chosen Othniel to be the judge very soon after the death of Joshua. He did something militarily: He kicked out the Mesopotamians, and then the people followed him for forty years. He probably did a bit of judging during the forty years in a judicial sense, too. Once it was clear that God was with the judge, the Israelites would submit to him in other areas outside of the military. He did much as Jethro had told Moses to do in Exodus 18, where he said, "Let all these other elders judge as captains of tens, fifties, hundreds, and so on; and if there is something too hard for them to judge, then it will eventually get to you." It appears that is how Othniel acted. In this way, he was much like Moses was. Moses did that sort

of a job for forty years.

Other judges tended to go at it from the other angle. If we were to look at Deborah in chapter 4, we would see that it says,

Judges 4:4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

She was a judicial judge and prophetess first. Then, she got Barak off his duff and went off to fight the Canaanites under Sisera and Jabin, the ones at Hazor. We see that it could go either way: either the person was first a judge and then went to war, or went to war and then was recognized as a judge.

What about Samson? Did Samson go to war? Yes, but he went all by himself. He did come at it from the war angle. Samson's slaughter of the Philistines at Lehi was likely witnessed by thousands of the men of Judah. If it took place down in the valley, some of the Danites might have been watching, too. He was their guy, and here he was going to be arrested and given over to the Philistines. We are told in chapter 15 that there were 3000 men of Judah who came to hand him over, but I am sure that there were a contingent of Danites there, too, to watch the goings on. We know that as he is lead out to be given over to the Philistines, he breaks his bonds, grabs the jawbone of the donkey, and just goes to it. As we saw, he made them right red, as the saying went. He put them in heaps and heaps. At the end of this, he had killed about a thousand men, and he was essentially was unscathed.

They saw him, if there actually were people watching him do this, looking over the cliff saying, "Wow!" Then he stops, throws the jawbone away, and kneels down to pray to God—and what happens? God opens up a spring at Samson's call, and he drinks. If this happened in sight of several thousand Israelites—men of Judah—it was obvious who the judge was. God acted when Samson asked Him to do so. God had miraculously saved him from the onslaught of thousands of Philistines. Who was the judge? It was pretty clear. Thus, we have them recognizing him as a judge over them twenty years.

It is probably Dan, and perhaps Judah, who recognized him as judge. There is no indication in the text here that any other tribe had any involvement with Samson. We might suppose that other nearby tribes did, like Simeon, who were close by, perhaps some of Benjamin and Ephraim, since there were some portions of their allotment close by. However, we do not hear about that; we do not know that. All we know about are Judah and Dan. He was probably a local judge.

Here we are at the end of chapter 15, and we need to start chapter 16 now.

Judges 15:20 And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

It declares that 20-year span here, and then it goes into chapter 16. It seems to suggest that most of those 20 years of his judgeship passed before the events of chapter 16. The suggestion

in the way that it is structured here is that chapters 14 and 15 happened in about one year, from the time that he got married to the girl at Timnah until the time that he defeated the Philistines at Lehi. The period of his 20-year judgeship is pretty much passed over, and then chapter 16 picks up the story again. It is very interesting. There is probably a good reason why, and I hope to get to that at the end of the sermon. But it is mentioned here, and again at the end of chapter 16.

We finally come to the climactic conclusion of the Samson story, which has a very bittersweet ending. Unfortunately, it is the story of a man who repeats many of the same mistakes that he made as a youth. It reveals, then, that he never overcame his sins and weaknesses. If he did, it was at the very end. It is probably true that he did overcome them at the very end.

He never really lived up to his potential. He had so much, too, that had been given to him: Consecrated from birth, he was told what it was he would do by the prophecy. He was strengthened by God whenever necessary. God responded to his prayer and gave him water to drink. He had all this going for him—all this potential—and he did not do anything with it. He never really used it properly. What was he doing during those twenty years? Why did he never think to raise an army? We know that there were three thousand men of Judah upon whom he could have called. Upon how many Danites could he have called? Could he have called to Benjamin, Simeon, and/or Ephraim for an army to wipe out the Philistines?

He did not. Evidently, he just sat there and enjoyed the fruits of his labors. The impression that you get is that he just did nothing. God had to take the most drastic of measures to humble him and force him to recognize that he was dependent upon God, that these things did not happen because of him.

Judges 16:1-3 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her [oh boy!]. 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." And Samson lay low [only] 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.

What a guy! There is no way of knowing exactly when this episode at Gaza took place. As I said, the way that it is placed here between Judges 15:20 and the story of Delilah, indicates that it seems to have taken place immediately prior to Delilah. In a way, it appears that this prompted his meeting Delilah. I will get to that in a moment.

It is also probably placed here to show that, over the twenty years of his judgeship, his strength remained. It was not that God took it away from him because his job was done. Samson could call upon that strength anytime he needed it. Twenty years have passed, and here he was still as strong as he was in his youth, maybe even stronger. God was still with him, despite what was doing.

What it shows us here is the way that the Philistines treated him during these twenty years. As long as Samson was alive, all he had to do was breathe, and the Philistines left the Israelites alone. If he wanted to go to Gaza, they might try to get him, but it was as futile as it ever had been. It was just proving to them that they were nothing. Samson, despite being roughly my age (I am forty years old), was still in his prime. He was still their biggest worry, their biggest enemy. Since there was no way that they were going to repeat what happened at Lehi, basically what they decided to do was wait him out. Evidently, even though they chafed at it, they figured that it was probably safer for them to just wait until he died.

However, then he happened to come into Gaza one day, looking for a girl. Even though they hoped to catch him or kill him while his guard was down, Samson was still in control of matters. Whenever he could, he would make a laughing stock of the Philistines, just as he did here. We see also that, over the twenty years, Samson's weakness remained: he liked those Philistines ladies, for some reason.

It is curious that he went as far as Gaza. If you look at one of the maps in the back of your Bible, you will notice that Gaza is about thirty miles southwest of Zorah or Eshtaol, where he lived. Why did he go thirty miles away? That was an entire day's walk for a very fit man. Thirty miles is a long way to go in a day on foot. Why did he go that far? What was he doing there? Did he come incognito? Did he come in disguised? We do not know. Did he have to go so far just to hide his dalliances from his own people? I do not know. I am trying to figure out why he would go so far away.

Why did he need to go thirty miles away? Was he doing it just to thumb his nose in the faces of the Philistines? "I can go as far as I want, even to your farthest city, and nobody can touch me!" I do not know. If it is true that he went there to hide his dalliances, it shows a measure of guilt. He knew he was doing wrong. It is just something to throw out there. Why did he go so far away?

I want you to note that a few sermons ago, when we started chapter 14, I said that one of the major themes of the story of Samson was, "Samson went down, and saw..." Well, what do you know? As we start chapter 16, here is that same theme again: "And Samson went to Gaza and saw..."

Here was the lust of the eyes at work again in Samson. He would follow whatever his eyes thought would be fun, pleasurable, and enjoyable. What the author is showing us here is that this theme pops up again near the end, and it is going to get him in trouble in a worse way. That is why I say that this little vignette here in Gaza is the prologue to the entire story of Delilah. It is this idea of the lust of the eyes, his looking, his living by sight and not by faith that is going to get him in trouble—and this time, it is going to be fatal.

Someone snitched on Samson. Maybe somebody recognized him. Who knows? Maybe somebody at the "meat market" at the inn recognized him. Maybe it was the harlot herself. "Go tell the garrison that Samson is here. We can get him. He will be here all night."

They put together a plan to surround the house of ill repute and hide men around the house and down at the city gate so that whenever he went walking by, they could spring on him and

capture him or kill him. Everyone took their places but, evidently, nobody figured, and maybe it never entered their minds, that Samson would try to leave during the night. Perhaps they thought that his lust would keep him there until the sun came up the next morning. Apparently, the Philistines decided they could rest. They were at least sleepy, because by midnight Samson was able to walk right through the city—it does not say here that he was slinking out—but that he just walked right up to the gate and left with it.

Where were the men? It does not say at all that he killed any of them or that there was even a fight. Either they all went to sleep, or they had all been ordered to get some rest because they would need all their strength in the morning just to subdue Samson. I do not know. However, there was no one there to hinder him. Somebody dropped the ball.

At that time, city gates were closed and locked at dark, and they were not usually opened until sunrise. Those who needed to get out, if there were a real need, would be let out by a guard at a small door or postern gate, which is basically a side door or back door. It is usually smaller than the city gate, and it was guarded, as well.

It is interesting that Samson decided not to try the postern gate, where he would probably just need to kill one man and then leave. What did Samson do? He decided to go out the main gate of the city—and he decided not just to go out the main gate but to take it with him!

Let us think about this: Gaza was a major city. Who knows how many people were living there at that time, but I did find out that at this time period, near the beginning of the Iron Age, that the city gates of this time and of a city of this size were anywhere from about two meters to four meters wide—about six to twelve feet wide. This was the whole area of the passage into the city, and usually there were two gates.

Let us assume that this was a ten-foot gate. That means that each gate was five feet wide. Each gate was probably at least six inches thick because it had to be—this was the main gate into or out of the city. It also means that, because it was the main gate of the city, it was probably either faced with or bound with iron or brass. Not only do we have six-inch square timbers—or maybe eight-inch timbers—bound with iron or faced with some metal, you have the hinges and the two posts at least as thick as the gate and maybe more—they probably were thicker; let us say eight or ten inches thick—and they were in the ground several feet, as well as secured to the wall on either side. Then you have across the two doors the bar that was who-knows-how-many inches thick, which was probably held up by some iron fixtures to hold it in place.

How much do you think this could have weighed? You have two gates six inches or more thick. You have the bar and two posts on either side that were even bigger. Then you have all the metal. Remember, they built these gates to withstand a battering ram during a time of war and siege. Remember, also, that those posts were planted in the ground several feet—and the narrator just says that he pulled them up, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. You get the feeling that he hardly even strained himself doing this! It was as if he pulled them up like weeds in a garden, and off he went with them. It is written in such a ho-hum fashion. "Samson left—took the gates with him. He carried them off."

There is more to add to this. Let us say that these gates were about one thousand pounds with

that much hardwood and metal, and he decided to take them up towards Hebron. Go back to your maps. Do you know where Hebron is? Do you know how far away Hebron was? Taking them to the hill that faces Hebron, which might be about five miles from Hebron, means that he went thirty-five miles with a one-thousand pound gate and all its attachments on his back uphill three thousand feet in elevation from Gaza, on sand the whole way.

Gaza is on the coastal plain. It was sandy soil, and the way that he had to go up was through the bottoms along the waddies. What are those bottoms where the trails were? Sand! This is like carrying a thousand-pound backpack on an uphill beach for thirty-five miles—and the narrator just says, "He pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. It was a wonderful thing, but there have been so many wonderful things that this was just only another one. Ho-hum."

There is also the idea that he did not take it thirty-five miles, but rather that he just went to the nearest, highest hill that was in the general direction of Hebron. Very well, I will give them that. Do you know how far that is? Nine miles.

Would that make it any less significant what he did? The impression that you get is—which cannot be confirmed—that he trotted it up to that hill, planted it in the top of the hill, and when the sun came up six hours later, the people of Gaza said, "That is my gate! How did that get up there?"

You see, there is also another idea here: Not only was Samson strong, he was fast. He just lifted it up, carried it uphill, planted it there—and there it was reflecting the morning's sunrise. He was up there mocking the people of Gaza, "Ha, ha, ha, ha! Look at those guys down there! I fooled them, did I not?" It was the same kind of attitude he had with the jackals. "Would this not be great fun? Let's tie some flaming torches between their tails and see what fun proceeds!"

It seems to be the way that Samson's mind worked. He was always trying to poke fun at the enemy. Such an interesting man! To me, this has to be the most amazing thing that he ever did.

Judges 16:4 Afterward [it seems to be immediately afterward] it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Going back to Gaza was out, at this point. They would not let him in there even if he had to slaughter the whole city to do it, because they were so humiliated that there was no way that he was going to show his face in Gaza any time soon. Therefore, being a man of great passions and appetites, he started looking around nearby; and he found a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Delilah was probably a Philistine woman, but the Bible does not say. Since Samson liked Philistine women, she probably was; it fits his *modus operandi*. He did not seem to care for Israelite women, for some reason; he liked the enemy's women. I guess that it made it more exciting to do so. I do not know. He was constantly flirting with danger, literally.

What does the name *Delilah* mean? This is interesting, because God names people what they are. No one knows for certain, but the best guess is that the root word in Hebrew, *dll*

(remember, there were no vowels in Hebrew at this time), means "to lay low," not as in "to hide," but as in "to bring a person down to size." When you lay them low, you kill them or, at least, weaken them. This fits the story exactly.

Here is Samson, the strongest man that there ever was, who could fight off a thousand Philistines with one hand tied behind his back and dancing a jig; and then there is the woman named "to lay low." She did it, too.

Another interesting possibility is that her name might refer to the hanging threads of a warp on a loom. This also fits the story. This is one of Samson's answers to Delilah. Perhaps, seeing her name, he chose to use that in an answer to her to throw her off the scent. It did not work.

The most intriguing meaning is that *dll* suggests is "flirtatious" or "devotee." If it is anything like *devotee*, what this tells us, then, is that she is not your ordinary woman. She probably had been or was a temple prostitute and, therefore, had a very high status in the Philistine society. She was one who had done the gods' bidding. She would be like a priestess or something.

We know for sure that she was apparently of a high enough status that when the Philistine lords came to ask her to do this, they asked her and bargained with her. They did not command her to do anything. They had respect for her enough to make a deal with her rather than an outright command to her.

Judges 16:5 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."

Now, these lords of the Philistines were the five tyrants of the five city-states of that federation known as a pentapolis. They were the five lords of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath, the five major cities. When they acted together, as in this case, or when they went to war as a nation, they had equal powers. Not only were they the kings of their particular city or district, but also when they as a nation did something together, they acted as something akin to a triumvirate. They acted as a five-man counsel to rule the nation.

They thought that Samson's strength lay in some sort of magic spell, charm, or amulet that he wore or possessed. Because they believed this, they looked for some form of counter-spell, -charm, or —amulet. This is what they wanted Delilah to find out. They were thinking in terms of magic and sorcery and that sort of thing; they had no concept of a Nazarite vow and the power of God and the Holy Spirit.

They were looking for some form of counter-magic with which to break it. Usually in mythology, if someone is given a great gift of magic, there is always a counter-magic to take that gift away somehow and nullify it. Essentially, the lords of the Philistines were looking for a counter-spell. They wanted Delilah to weasel the secret from him.

It is very interesting in verse 5, when they asked her, "...that we may overpower him...", that the word *overpower* in the King James Version is the word *prevail*. This word's root is also *dll*. "We want you to 'Delilah' him, to lay him low." It is interesting that this comes up again. They

ask Delilah to lay him low.

The Philistine lords here were willing to empty their treasuries to get Samson. They promised Delilah 1100 shekels of silver from each of them, 5500 shekels of silver in total. This seems like a great deal of silver, but what was it really worth at that time? It has been estimated that the average laborer at that time had an annual income of about ten shekels of silver—a year! They were offering her 550 times a typical laborer's income for Samson's head on a platter.

To look at it another way, suppose that the average American salary is \$30,000 a year (just for the sake of round numbers). Take this 550 times more, and you get \$16.5 million dollars just for Samson's head. Not only did they deal with her, they were willing to pay her a huge amount for this. This shows you just how much they wanted Samson out of their hair (pardon the pun).

Judges 16:6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you."

"Tell me how I may torture you." She is such a straightforward woman.

Judges 16:7-12 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." So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them. 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. Then Delilah said to Samson, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with." 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." 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.

Two for Samson, none for her. These two are very similar: They both have to do with restraints; they both have to do typical attempts to bind something. First were fresh bowstrings, which would have been some sort of gut or tendon from an animal that was used for this sort of thing. The other was new ropes, some sort of hemp or other natural fiber, which was new and never used before and, therefore, at its very strongest.

They should have known that he was toying with them, because he had already been bound with ropes and he had broken them like nothing. Why they even tried to do any of these things, I do not know. Maybe with seven fresh bowstrings, they thought, "Aha! That mystical number seven! We have never tried that before. Here, go ahead and use these," and it did not work.

In any case, Samson's attitude is playful. He is just toying and playing with them, going along

with the game. I do not know just how seriously he is taking this at all. At least in these first two, he seems to have no indication whatsoever what she is up to. It seems like a game to him. Maybe he thought it was some sort of sexual thing. I do not know. It could have been; people do strange things.

The most important part of this section, though, is Samson's reply in both cases, when he says, "I shall become weak and be like any other man." This was very true. Not that what he told them to do would accomplish this, but if they finally did find out what it really was that would take his strength away, he would be weak and like any other man. This is a very revealing statement.

The word *weak* comes from a Hebrew root that means "profane." In a way, Samson was not only saying that he would become weak in strength but also just as carnal and weak-minded as any other man on earth. There would be nothing there that would distinguish him from a typical carnal man. The secret of his strength had to do with this consecration; and if she found the secret to his consecration, he would become a normal, carnal man.

Samson is hinting to her that his strength lies in his status as a Nazarite. His secret is that he is sanctified, set apart by God. His strength comes from the fact that God had made him different. Take away that difference, and he becomes just another weak, carnal man.

Do you remember what Jesus said to the apostle Paul when he asked to be healed of his "thorn in the flesh?" Christ said, "My strength is in your weakness." (That is in II Corinthians 12:9, if you want to go look at it.)

Judges 16:13 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"—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.

This translation makes it sound as if he just woke up and shook his head and everything just sort of came out. What it really means is that the loom was secured in the ground, and just by lifting his head, he pulled it right out of the floor and ruined it! This is another astonishing feat of strength that he did—with his hair!

It seems here is that there is a bit of detail missing after verse 13, but basically the same general remarks are supposed to be added in from the context of the previous two episodes: "I shall become weak and be like any other man." She did all of this, had the men waiting there for him to become weak, and declared that the Philistines were upon him. He just got up and did the strongman act again. We are not missing anything. Perhaps all we are missing is that she put him to sleep somehow, took those seven locks of his hair, wove them into the warp of the cloth, and made it part of what she had been working on there. Of course, this did not work either. He was probably laughing again, "Look at your loom! Tee hee!"

Judges 16:15-16 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." And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily [over and over again] with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death...

She must have been the all-time worst nagging woman that has ever lived. It had come to the point where he was willing to slit his own throat. That is what it says, "He was vexed to death." It was to the point of death. His frustration was getting the best of him.

This phrase, though, is a foreshadowing of the things to come. She bugged him to death. Really! It was her bugging and nagging and badgering that really drove him to commit suicide, in a sense. That is the way that things worked out; her vexing of him directly caused his death. He gave in as he had before because he was vexed to death,

Judges 16:17-20 ...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 mothers womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." 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. 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. 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.

This became a very sad, sad situation. He gave in; he could not deny a persistent woman for long. He told her everything, spilled out his heart to her, and did it most sincerely. Then she knew, as his words tumbled out, that she had him this time. This was the real secret. She was so sure that she told the Philistine lords to come themselves and to bring their money. "We have got him. The trap will be sprung tonight."

Notice how he tells her. He does say that he has been a Nazarite to God from his mother's womb. He tells the whole straight story, but there is a clue in here about his approach to it, in that he says, "If I am shaven, then *my* strength will leave me." It is that little possessive pronoun, "*my* strength." It was not the "strength that I have because God has given it to me," but it was his strength.

You can understand how that can happen. After twenty years of calling upon it at any time, he could begin to feel that it was natural to him, even though he intellectually knew that it came because of his Nazarite vow. Yet he had become complacent about this. It was his. It was almost an inherent thing to him, not that it was a gift from God. It was what God had given him

in order for him to do works for God. Samson had begun to see it as his own to do with as he wanted to do. It was his strength. He treated it as if there were nothing unusual about it, when it was a great, spiritual, godly gift. He had cheapened it.

I mentioned Ezekiel 16 before. Remember also that I mentioned that he is typical of Israel's approach to their covenant with God. Look at what it says. God had done all this with Israel:

Ezekiel 16:15 "But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it."

This is similar to what Samson was doing, was it not? His was physical fornication, of course, but it fits the type.

Ezekiel 16:16-19 "You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you—you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was," says the Lord GOD.

He had taken something that was a godly, spiritual gift and profaned it, just as Israel did.

It is interesting that once she had the secret and had his head shaved, she began to torment him immediately. She began to torture and afflict him. This shows her true heart: She never loved him. She probably never loved him even before the Philistines made their offer to her. She was out as much for his capture and death as any other Philistine. Once she had him in hand and he was helpless, she put all her spite into it.

Perhaps the most tragic part in this whole account is the comment right at the end of verse 20, "But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him." He was so cut off from God. Even before this, God had still given him his strength. However, he had drifted so far from God that when God finally left him, he was not even aware of it. He did not feel a thing and did not know a thing.

He had already reached the point where he was this close to the world; and as soon as God left, his own prophecy and words were fulfilled: He had become profane and just like any other man. God was gone. There was nothing to set Samson apart anymore.

He was utterly alone and defenseless. A woman whom he treated with such disdain through all these things was able to afflict him, and she had no reason to fear. He was as weak as a kitten. God was not there to be called upon. He was gone. The emotion that comes through this is very similar to what Jesus Christ said as He was hanging there dying, "My God, My God! Why have

you forsaken Me?"

He was gone.

Judges 16:21-22 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. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

They had every reason to treat him cruelly. Thousands of their men had died. He had made a mockery of them for twenty years. It is a bit of a wonder that they did not just kill him right there, but they did not.

They decided to humiliate them and serve up their revenge as coldly as they could. First, they gouged out his eyes. I am sure that they did this as a precaution. Without his eyes, he could not see anything, could not organize anything, could not do anything. He was pretty much done for at that point, as they looked at it.

They bound him in their strongest fetters made of bronze, and then they put him work doing the most menial job they could find, which was to grind grain. It was not like the movie where he went around like an animal, turning a grindstone upon another. It was not that. That was a terrible anachronism; that sort of thing was not invented for another thousand years or so. It was the Romans who invented something like that. They used animals most of the time, rather than men.

For Samson, it was probably a small hand mill, like a mortar and pestle, both made from stone. He had to grind the grain with what strength he had left. This is the sort of job that the lowest slave would do. If there was no slave, it was considered women's work. It was all very humiliating to him.

It is pretty much the height of irony that they put out his eyes. What did the narrator say was the theme of not only his life but of this particular episode? "He saw." This was the problem. He just followed what his eyesight led him to do; he was guided by the lust of his eyes (I John 2:16). Putting out his eyes was the perfect punishment. They could have done that and just let him go, and it would have been punishment enough.

As we will see when we go into the rest of the chapter next time, he asked to be avenged for his two eyes. He just loved looking at those beautiful women, and it just burned him that the Philistines took out his eyes so that he could never enjoy that again. Is it not ironic that perhaps the last thing that he saw was the leering face of a beautiful, deceptive woman?

Delilah! "Why, why, why, Delilah?"

Perhaps this is what Jesus was thinking when he gave, during the Sermon on the Mount, His admonition against adultery.

Matthew 5:27-29 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at

a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

In a sense, at this point, that is where Samson was headed. He was headed for the Lake of Fire.

There is hope, though. The hair of his head began to grow again. There is a ray of hope that shines through. As he works in humiliation, Samson's hair begins to grow.

Numbers 6:8-12 All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD. And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and the priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned in regard to the corpse; and he shall sanctify his head that same day. He shall consecrate to the LORD the days of his separation, and bring a male lamb in its first year as a trespass offering; but the former days shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

It said that if the Nazarite is defiled, he must shave his head and start all over again. All the former time of his service was considered lost. He had to begin again as if nothing had happened before. Even though what happened in the life of Samson up to this point while in service to the Philistines did not quite fulfill the ritual of Numbers 6, Samson was to have a new but short-lived life as a judge who would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

Think about that, and have a great Sabbath.

RTR/rwu/klg