

# Judges

## Chapter 16

### *Samson and Delilah*

Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her. 2 The Gazites were told, "Samson has come here." And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, "Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him." 3 But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron. 4 After this 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, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." 6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you." 7 Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9 Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known. 10 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound." 11 And he said to her, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 12 So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread. 13 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 14 So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web.<sup>[a]</sup> And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web. 15 And 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 you have not told me where your great strength lies." 16 And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. 17 And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man." 18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. 19 She made him sleep on her knees. And she called 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!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him. 21 And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. 22 But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

**16:1** *Gaza.* An important Philistine seaport on the Mediterranean coast of southwest Palestine. (CSB)

*prostitute*. While Samson certainly possessed physical strength, he lacked moral strength, which ultimately led to his ruin. (CSB)

For all of his physical strength, Samson was not strong enough to control his physical lusts, which would eventually be his downfall. Samson is a type of the whole nation of Israel, which, while capable of great strength through God's grace, continually sinned and fell into spiritual adultery (cf 2:17). (TLSB)

**16:2** *light of morning*. By that time they expected Samson to be exhausted and sleeping soundly. (CSB)

**16:3** *doors of the gate*. The gates had heavy doors, likely clad in metal and fitted with round-bottomed posts set into sockets, allowing the doors to swing open. They would be locked with a bar that went through the whole assembly, including the posts, to prevent them from rotating. (TLSB)

*bar*. Probably made of bronze (1Ki 4:13) or iron (Ps 107:16; Isa 45:2). (CSB)

*in front of Hebron*. That is, in the direction of Hebron, which was 38 miles away in the hill country. Since Hebron was the chief city of Judah, this must be seen as Samson's response to what the men of Judah had done to him (see 15:11–13). (CSB)

Hebron is c 40 mi away, but that the hill is "in front" of the region may mean it was much closer. (Perhaps the hill marked the direction of Hebron.) Samson tore the entire structure out of the wall, carried it up a hill, and set it up so all could see. This prodigious feat of strength with the gates that were supposed to guarantee the city's security made a mockery of the Philistines. (TLSB)

**16:4** *Valley of Sorek*. Near Zorah, Samson's birthplace. (TLSB)

**16:5** *overpower him*. The Philistines were not interested in killing him quickly; they sought revenge by a prolonged period of torture. (CSB)

*eleven hundred shekels*. An extraordinarily generous payment in light of 17:10. (The total amount paid by the five Philistines would have been equivalent to the price of 275 slaves, at the rate offered for Joseph centuries earlier; see Ge 37:28.) Micah stole a similar amount of silver from his mother (17:2). (CSB)

Three years' wages. With five Philistine rulers promising Delilah this sum (cf 3:3), the bribe would support her for 15 years. (TLSB)

*pieces*. Sometimes translated as "shekels." A shekel was about a month's wages, about  $\frac{2}{5}$  oz. (TLSB)

**16:6** Delilah made a brazen request. Samson was convinced of his own invulnerability. As a lover of riddles and games, he toyed with her. (TLSB)

**16:7** *seven fresh bowstrings*. The number seven had special significance to the ancients, symbolizing completeness or fullness. Note that Samson's hair was divided into seven braids (v. 13). (CSB)

Made from animal sinew or gut, these would contract as they dried, causing the binding to tighten. (TLSB)

**16:9** *The Philistines are upon you.* Philistines did not necessarily attack each time. Delilah, in effect, may have been shouting “Gotcha!” to test Samson’s reaction and the effectiveness of each scheme to weaken him. (TLSB)

**16:11** *new ropes.* The Philistines apparently did not know that this method had already been tried and had failed (15:13–14). (CSB)

Event in 15:13–14 may have given Samson this idea (TLSB)

**16:13** Out of disdain, Samson arrogantly played with his Philistine adversaries. (CSB)

*tighten it with the pin.* Probably from a weaver’s shuttle. The details of the account suggest that the loom in question was the vertical type with a crossbeam from which warp threads were suspended. Samson’s long hair was woven into the warp and beaten up into the web with the pin, thus forming a tight fabric. (CSB)

Threads of a weaver’s loom. Stakes of Delilah’s loom were probably driven into the ground. (TLSB)

**16:15–16** Samson was fooled by his passion for Delilah and by his sense of invincibility. (TLSB)

*vexed to death.* Seems that Samson genuinely loved her and continued to seek her love.

**16:17** *Nazirite.* Samson had broken his other Nazirite vows. His uncut hair was the last sign of his commitment. (TLSB)

**16:19–20** *his strength left him ... the LORD had left him.* The source of Samson’s strength was ultimately God himself. (CSB)

**16:19** *on her knees.* Perhaps with his head on her lap. (TLSB)

*shave off.* Typical means for cutting hair, using a straight razor. (TLSB)

*she began to torment him.* Exact nature of torment, whether physical torture or verbal cruelty, is not clear. The theme in Jgs of a woman conquering a warrior appears again (cf 4:9; 9:53). (TLSB)

**16:20** *The Philistines are upon you.* This time, Delilah was telling the truth. (TLSB)

*he did not know.* One of the most tragic statements in the OT. Samson was unaware that he had betrayed his calling. He had permitted a Philistine woman to rob him of the sign of his special consecration to the Lord. The Lord’s champion lay asleep and helpless in the arms of his paramour. (CSB)

*the LORD had left him.* Samson assumed that, as in the other cases, he still would be strong. God had been long-suffering with Samson’s sinful ways, but now, with Samson repudiating his final sign of dedication to God, the Holy Spirit left him. Because his strength came from God and not, as he assumed, from himself, Samson now had nothing but weakness. (TLSB)

**16:21** *gouged out his eyes.* Brutal treatment of prisoners of war to humiliate and incapacitate them was common. (CSB)

*to Gaza.* In shame and weakness, Samson was led to Gaza, the place where he had displayed great strength (vv. 1–3). (CSB)

*ground at the mill.* Means of humiliating prisoners, since grinding was women’s work performed on the ground with a hand mill. (TLSB)

**16:22** Nazirite vows could be renewed. Samson—weak, blind, and defeated—is in a position to repent and turn to God. In Lv 19:27, God forbids trimming hair at the temples and the edge of one’s beard, which were required by Canaanite funeral rituals. Levitical laws entailed shaving off all of one’s hair (Lv 14:8–9). Only the Nazirite vow, which could be temporary, required not cutting one’s hair (Nu 6:5). At the end of the term of the Nazirite vow, the hair would all be cut off and burned as a sacrifice on the altar (Nu 6:18). (TLSB)

**16:1–22** Samson’s weakness for women proves to be his doom when Delilah coaxes from him the secret of his strength. Bereft of all of his powers, Samson is at the mercy of the Philistines. Often, like Samson, it is when we are weak and broken spiritually (or perhaps also physically) that we finally despair of ourselves. In that hour, Christ is the true strong man for us spiritually. Samson carried the gates of a city, but Jesus carried the cross and all our sin. • O Lord, forgive me both for succumbing to temptation and for presuming Your forbearance again and again. Take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Help me to trust not in my own strength but in the strength of Jesus Christ, my Lord, in whose name I pray. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Death of Samson*

**23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.” 24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.” 25 And when their hearts were merry, they said, “Call Samson, that he may entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. 26 And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.” 27 Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. 28 Then Samson called to the LORD and said, “O LORD GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” 29 And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. 30 And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. 31 Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.**

**16:23** *Dagon.* Thought to be a water deity with the body of a fish and the head and hands of a man, more recent scholars think Dagon may have been a corn or vegetation god. (TLSB)

*god.* Hbr is plural, “gods.” (TLSB)

*Our god has given.* It was common to attribute a victory to the national deities. (CSB)

The Philistines interpreted the defeat of Samson as a great victory for their god (or “gods”), thus vaunting Dagon over the true God of the Israelites, who worked through Samson. (TLSB)

**16:25** *entertain.* Connotes laughter and derision. Perhaps Philistines mockingly called him to perform feats of strength, of which he was no longer capable. (TLSB)

**16:26–27** Archaeologists have not yet found such temples in Canaan but have found them in Cyprus, the Aegean culture from which the Philistines came. The structure enclosed a large courtyard, with pillars supporting the roof. (TLSB)

**16:27** *on the roof.* The temple complex probably surrounded an open court and had a flat roof where a large number of people had gathered to get a glimpse of the fallen champion. (CSB)

**16:28–29** Samson called upon God, invoking Him by each of His three revealed names in the OT: Adonai (Lord), Yahweh (LORD), and Elohim (God). Samson repented and turned to the true God. He then asked that God strengthen him one more time so he could be what God had intended him to be, a Nazirite called to deliver Israel. (TLSB)

*remember me.* Cf Lk 23:42, where the thief on the cross has the same request. (TLSB)

**16:30** *Let me die with the Philistines.* Not an act of self-destruction—that happened when he threw his life away with Delilah—but the laying down of his life to destroy the temple of the false god and to deliver God’s people. Chem: “Samson was not a private individual but a judge over the people of God who ... prayed of the Lord, from whom he had his mandate, for the public punishment of the Philistines so that he might be able to avenge himself on the enemy. Just as a ruler in punishing the enemy in a lawful war, when he exposes himself to the danger of death, is not sinning, neither did Samson. Furthermore, Samson was a type of Christ, who in dying must destroy death in keeping with the statement of Hos. 13:14, ‘I will be your death, O death’ ” (*LTh* 2:409). (TLSB)

*bowed.* Samson pushed the wooden pillars from their stone bases. Archaeologists have discovered a Philistine temple with a pair of closely spaced pillar bases. (CSB)

*killed many more.* Samson previously had slain well over 1,000 people (see 15:15; see also 14:19; 15:8). (CSB)

**16:31** *came down and took him.* The freedom of his family to secure his body and give it a burial indicates that the Philistines had no intention of further dishonoring him (contrast Saul’s death, 1Sa 31:9–10). (CSB)

Samson’s family showed courage in retrieving his body from the ruins and giving it an honorable burial in the tomb of his now-deceased father. Because Samson’s mother had been barren, giving birth to him by a miracle, these “brothers” may have been tribal kinsmen. (TLSB)

*Zorah and Eshtaol.* C 1½ mi apart; Zorah was his birthplace. Site would have overlooked the Valley of Sorek, where Delilah lived. (TLSB)

*led Israel ... years.* See note on 12:7. (CSB)

*twenty years.* Round numbers are frequently used in Judge. (CSB)

**16:23–31** As Samson is weak and humiliated, the Philistines ascribe their victory to their god Dagon. In that hour, Samson turns to God in faith. He pushes down the columns that support the roof of the temple, destroying thousands of the enemy. Like Samson, Christ died for His people. But unlike Samson, Christ fulfilled the Law and brought forgiveness and eternal life. • O Father, I, too, am a defeated sinner, spiritually blind and in bondage to the devil according to my sinful flesh. Remember me, Lord. Give me strength to carry out what You have called me to do. May Christ in His sacrifice pull down the works of Satan and deliver me from captivity. In His name I pray. Amen. (TLSB)