

Judges

Chapter 16

Samson and Delilah

One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. ² 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." ³ 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. ⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. ⁵ 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." ⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued." ⁷ Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh thongs that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man." ⁸ Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh thongs that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. ⁹ With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the thongs as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered. 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." ¹¹ He said, "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man." ¹² So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads. ¹³ Delilah then said to Samson, "Until now, you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied." He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric ¹⁴ and tightened it with the pin. Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric. ¹⁵ Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." ¹⁶ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. ¹⁷ So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man." 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. ¹⁹ Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. ²⁰ Then she called, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” He awoke from his sleep and thought, “I’ll go out as before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him. ²¹ Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison. ²² But the hair on 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 *dawn.* 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)

faces 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 *rulers of the Philistines.* See note on 3:3. (CSB)

subdue 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 (see note there). (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)

1,100 pieces of silver. 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 thongs.* 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 (see 1Sa 11:2; 2Ki 25:7; see also note on Jdg 1:6). *to Gaza.* In shame and weakness, Samson was led to Gaza, the place where he had displayed great strength (vv. 1–3). (CSB)

set him to grinding. See note on 9:53. (CSB)

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 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.” ²⁴ 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.” 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, 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.” ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” ²⁹ 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, ³⁰ 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. 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.

16:23 *Dagon*. See note on 10:6. (CSB)

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 delivered. 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).

pushed. 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 *went down to get 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 Judges (see Introduction: Background). (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)