

Day 254 - MONDAY: September 11th

Judges 16

Judges 16:1-31 NKJV

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. 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 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. Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 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." So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you." 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. 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. 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 with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, that he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." 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. 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. Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!" When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, The destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead." So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them."

Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "God had been seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines (Judges 14:4). In itself, that is an interesting turn of phrase, for it implies that God works out His plans within the willing activities of men. God could have directly caused a thing to come to pass, but the Scripture says he *sought* an occasion. God often works in human events in this manner, interweaving His plans with those of men, bringing His will to pass by using the circumstances and individuals at hand. Thus, God works within the flow of history to accomplish certain ends without violating man's free will and often without producing an obvious trail of "miraculous" happenings. This does not, of course, mean that there is *no* evidence of miracles in history. The incredible strength of Samson alone would have been clearly miraculous to the people of his day—he carried massive city gates uphill for 40 miles! (Judges 16:3)

The free will God allowed the Philistines is extended to all men—even those God specially uses. To break the Philistine tyranny over Israel,

God would use a man, Samson, who had remarkable strengths coupled with regrettable weaknesses. God would accomplish His purpose and Samson would be the tool, whether he acted according to his better attributes or allowed his weaknesses to triumph. Regrettably, Samson would allow his weaknesses to get the better of him.

Contrary to scriptural principles, Samson had married a Philistine woman who was eventually given to another man. He could have chosen any Israelite woman, but Samson allowed his impulsive desire rather than his faith-guided intellect to control his behavior. He was lustful and arrogant. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, and so Samson descended even further into sin because he was unwilling to control his desire and submit to God—he went in to a Philistine harlot. Samson was now fully set to follow his lust, and this God would use to finally free Israel.

When Samson fell for another Philistine woman, Delilah, the Philistine lords persuaded her to discover the secret of his strength. After several failed attempts to capture him—attempts that Samson *knew* involved Delilah—he was finally captured. It is remarkable that in spite of knowing what Delilah was up to, Samson actually told her the truth. Maybe he did not really believe the truth himself, which might be hinted at in verse 20. Perhaps he had grown a bit cocky as to the source of his strength. If so, that was about to end. Overpowered and blinded by the Philistines, he was afterward forced to grind wheat. Some commentators suggest that he ground wheat as the women did, using a grinding stone and plate. Others suggest that he was harnessed to a grinding stone as a beast of burden, although this was apparently not typical until centuries later. In either case, the point was the same: to humiliate Israel's strongman.

When Samson was brought before the Philistine lords in their temple of Dagon some time later, his call to God was sincere. However, his stated

motive—revenge for the blindness inflicted upon him (Judges 16:28)—was surely not the only motivation he had for seeking God. There is evidence to support Samson's repentance in that the New Testament lists him as a hero of faith who, out of weakness, was made strong (Hebrews 11:32-34). Indeed, is it not directly stated that he, along with the others mentioned, died assured of the promises of God's Kingdom and will be "made perfect" with Christians of this age? (compare verses 39-40) Moreover, Judges 16:22 is quite telling in relating what happened during Samson's servitude. It states, "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven." Just what significance does this have? After all, we know that Samson's hair was not "magical." It was *God* who gave him his miraculous strength—the hair simply representing the Nazirite vow of consecration to God, which, in Samson's case, was supposed to be lifelong. Perhaps verse 22, then, is telling us that while blind and humiliated in servitude to pagans, Samson finally "saw the light" and reconsecrated himself to God. Viewed this way, the final scene in his life is but the culmination of that rededication. This final scene is well known—Samson brings down the temple by toppling two pillars, which killed him and all the Philistine lords within. Until recently critics had thought this unlikely, a dramatic myth. How could a whole temple be destroyed by toppling two huge stone pillars? Just this past decade, however, a Philistine temple was fully excavated, revealing that the structure of the temple rested entirely upon two central pillars barely six feet apart. Given the weight distribution on those pillars, it would have been entirely possible for the biblical story to have ended precisely as recorded.

Why is not more made of Samson's repentance if it happened at this time? Because that is not the point of the narrative. The entire book of Judges concerns God's repeated deliverance of His people, regardless of the inclinations of those to whom He gave the task. *The Nelson*

Study Bible notes: "Samson's life is ultimately a story about God's faithfulness in spite of human weakness. God's hand can be seen throughout the story—in Samson's empowerment by God's Spirit and in God's professed desire to subdue the Philistines (Judges 14:4). It also can be seen in this last contest between the true God and the Philistine god Dagon. When the Philistines captured Samson, they attributed this to their god and celebrated his victory (Judges 16:23, 24). We know, however, that it was God who had allowed it (v. 20), and that it was God who gained the ultimate triumph against Dagon and the Philistine rulers (vv. 27, 30)" (note on Judges 16:23-31)." [END]

Verse 7 – Regarding the meaning of “bowstrings” (NKJV), Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “That is, any kind of pliant, tough wood, twisted in the form of a cord or rope.”

Verse 21 – Many commentaries bring out that they may have blinded him so that if his strength returned, he would be limited in his ability to hurt them. It may have been also to show their dominance over their once strong enemy and to warn others of the punishment of fighting against them. As I thought about this, I also thought it was interesting that Samson never learned to rule over his lust for the flesh. Now it’s impossible for him to gaze upon a woman’s beauty and lust.

Verse 23 – Dagon means “a fish”. He was their “fish god”. Dagon seems to be their chief deity and they had a temple to him at Ashdod (one of the five principalities of the Philistines).

Verse 25 – The NKJV says they called for Samson that “he may perform for us”. This Hebrew word means “to laugh”. The people wanted to mock him and laugh at him. John Gill’s commentary states: “he was the object of their sport and scorn, and he bore it patiently, their cruel

mockings, buffetings, and spittings; in which he was a type of Christ. It was a diversion to them to see him in his rattling chains, groping, and blundering along from post to pillar, one perhaps giving him a box of the ear, or a slap of the face, another plucking him by his nose or beard, and another spitting in his face, and others taunting at him, and reproaching him:" [END]

Verse 27 – Their five lords were there from their five principalities (the lords of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron)