



## Samson, Delilah and the Philistines Judges 15-16

### Introduction

Samson was born and lived most of his life in the town of Zorah, which was situated on a hillside overlooking the valley of Sorek. This valley is a direct route between the Israelite hill country near Jerusalem and the Philistine plain. If one approaches Jerusalem today, from the west, it is still through the valley of Sorek. This area was dominated by the Philistines. Where had they come from?

"Apparently the Philistines had been driven out of Crete and Asia Minor by invaders from the north, perhaps the Greeks themselves, and before settling in Canaan they had attacked Egypt. However, they were repulsed by Ramses III in a decisive naval battle and were compelled to turn their attention to the coastal areas of southwestern Palestine" (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible, E.M. Blaiklock, editor).

The Philistines held a huge advantage over their enemies due to their monopoly on iron. Beside having iron agricultural implements, their armies were equipped with a variety of iron weapons and heavy horse-drawn chariots. With their "iron-power" they dominated and oppressed the Israelites. This is the environment into which Samson, the Nazirite, had been born.

His life is a study in strengths and weaknesses, man's will and God's will, and flesh and Spirit. Let us learn all we can, for more is written about Samson than about any of the other judges. Also, he is the last judge recorded in the book of Judges. We see the downward path of the nation infiltrated by paganism and harassed by the enemies they had not defeated.

### Outline of Judges 15-16

- I. Samson's Marital Problems and the Philistines – Judges 15:1-9
- II. Samson's Arrest by His People – Judges 15:10-13
- III. Samson's Astounding Victory Over the Philistines – Judges 15:14-19
- IV. Samson's End - Judges 16:1-31

### I. Samson's Marital Problems and the Philistines – Judges 15:1-9

- A. Samson's Attempt at Reconciliation - Judges 15:1-2

It seems that *after a while* Samson had the desire to make amends with his wife. At the time of wheat harvest,

he decided to visit her, taking a young goat as a token of reconciliation. However, her father met him at the door and barred him from seeing her. His excuse was, *I really thought you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead.*

### B. Samson's Retaliation - Judges 15:3-8

Samson's response, *This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them*, is self justifying with the hint that he may have overreacted the first time. However, he was still bent upon revenge.

#### 1. Foxfire - 15:3-5

We find an interesting mixture here of personal revenge working together with God's plan (Judges 14:4). For it was God's plan to remove the Philistine threat from His people, Israel. Samson's action, however, was motivated by his desire to retaliate for a wrong done to him personally. This is far different from the revenge David would seek against the Philistines years later, not as his personal enemies but as the enemies of God.

Samson's lively imagination and immature bent toward mischief led him to catch 300 foxes, tie torches between the tails of each pair, and set them afire. Then he let the foxes go into the Philistines' standing grain, vineyards, and olive groves. The fire was probably audible and visible for quite a distance.

#### 2. Fighting fire with fire - 15:6

The Philistines asked, *Who has done this?* When they were told that Samson had done it because his wife had been given away, they burned both Samson's wife and her father to death!

#### 3. Samson's continued revenge - 15:7-8

Rather than leaving the Philistines to settle the matter among themselves, Samson saw further cause for revenge. He attacked the Philistines *hip and thigh*, "a saying which was proverbial for a ruthless slaughter" (The MacArthur Study Bible). Then he went down to live in a cleft rock.

### C. Philistine Reaction – Judges 15:9

The Philistines, who did not regard the contest finished nor the score even, encamped in Judah and prepared to attack at Lehi. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Old Testament History) writes, "Only the Philistines posed a continuing

challenge to Israelite sovereignty. As late as the time of Saul, we read of Philistine garrisons at Bethel (1 Samuel 10:3-5). The exploits of Samson were of a personal nature. He led no armies and performed his deeds of valor without help. His foes, the Philistines, occupied the coastal plain from Gaza northward toward Mount Carmel. They kept strong garrison posts, and by their monopoly of iron prevented the Israelites from making weapons (1 Samuel 13:19)".

## II. Samson's Arrest by His People – Judges 15:10-13

### A. Judah's Compromise - Judges 15:10-11

*Why have you come up against us?* the people of Judah asked, puzzled at the sudden array of Philistine might. *To arrest Samson,* was the reply. So three thousand Judeans went after Samson. *Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us?* they asked him. *What is this you have done to us?* They blamed Samson for the crisis rather than the Philistines who were camped on their border. Samson replied that he had only given them what they deserved.

### B. Judah's Cowardice - Judges 15:12-13

When the Judeans said that they would arrest him to deliver Samson to the enemy, his concern was that he not fight Israelites. *Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves,* he said. He did not want to have to defend himself and cause the deaths of fellow Israelites.

The Judeans did not resist the Philistines' demand, but rather cowardly agreed to turn over one of their own to the enemy. The three thousand would have been more heroic to have said, "If you want him come and get him, but we will not turn him over to you." How often we refuse the high road of honor and take the low road of expediency!

They bound Samson with new ropes which were not stretched or frayed and brought him out of hiding to give him to the Philistines.

## III. Samson's Astounding Victory Over the Philistines – Judges 15:14-19

### A. Supernatural Strength - Judges 15:14-19

When Samson came to Lehi, the Philistines approached him with shouting. What happened to him next should happen to all of us at the sight of the enemy. *The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.* He flexed his muscles and broke the bonds. If we would flex more spiritual muscle in prayer and bold action, we might likewise be freed of some of our restraints.

### 1. For a creative solution

Rather than bemoaning the enemy's apparent advantage, Samson looked around for fighting means and saw decaying animal bodies. (Lehi means "jawbone" and may have been a place for discarding dead animals.) Undismayed, he picked up a jawbone of an ass and fought off his attackers until there were none left. He killed one thousand men single handedly, armed by the Spirit of God.

### 2. For Adequate Praise

Samson's poetry arose from a triumphant but grateful heart. As he surveyed the battle scene, he realized what a tremendous thing had happened. Samson was a poet as we have seen before (Judges 14:14,18). As a poet, he memorialized the place of supernatural victory with an epitaph and a name. His poem is part of scripture, and he renamed the place Ramath-Lehi, the hill of jawbones, or literally Jawbone Height. Quite a mound had resulted from the one jawbone he had found and used. Samson had added the jawbones of the enemy.

### 3. For needed refreshment

Thirsty, Samson cried to God, giving thanks for the victory. *You have given this great deliverance by the hand of your servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?* Samson believed, trusted, and relied on God. However, even this relationship seemed subject to his own needs.

Is your relationship with God a sometimes thing, or a steady, close, consistent daily walk of obedience?

God mercifully and miraculously gave him water, so he named the place "Spring of the Caller." Do you keep track of God's blessings and answered prayers? Do you note them in your Bible or keep a diary? If not, today is a good time to start.

### 4. For occupation

The victory brought peace enough for Samson to exercise his judgeship. Samson judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines. See Judges 13:1 and 16:31.

### B. Survey of Six Spectacular Uses of Samson's Strength

The first part of Samson's life contained six acts of special strength against the Philistines which increased in intensity and impact:

#### 1. The slaying of the lion on the way to Timnath;

2. The slaughter of the thirty Philistines in order to pay for the garments of his wedding wager;
3. Catching three hundred foxes and using them to burn the fields of the Philistines;
4. The slaughter of the Philistines for their burning of his wife and family;
5. Bursting of the cords with which he was bound by his countrymen;
6. The slaughter of a thousand with the jawbone of a donkey.

2. The games people play - 16:6-14

Three times Delilah tried to pry from him the secret of his supernatural strength. Three times he avoided revealing it while playing a game with her and the Philistines. When Delilah asked him where his great strength lay and what would successfully hold him, he told her seven fresh, damp bowstrings would make him weak. She bound him with seven fresh bowstrings which the Philistines gave her and they waited in the next room. Samson broke loose easily.

#### IV. Samson's End - Judges 16:1-31

##### A. His Unconquered Sin - Judges 16:1-3

1. A pagan harlot - 16:1

After 20 years of judging Israel, Samson *went to Gaza, saw a harlot, and went in to her*. This little verse records three big mistakes.

First, he went to Gaza, which was enemy territory. Samson seems to have been fatally attracted to the enemy. Gaza was occupied by the Philistines who did not acknowledge the true God nor accept His standards. Samson had no business looking for anything there.

Second, he went in to a harlot in direct defiance of God's law. God meant for sexual intimacy to take place within marriage. By going in to a harlot he committed fornication which is sexual activity apart from the marriage relationship.

Third, God had commanded that marriage was to take place within the community of God. The harlot was a pagan and Samson should not have invited a close relationship with her.

2. The enemy's opportunity - 16:2-3

The men of Gaza surrounded the house at night and waited for morning to kill Samson. But Samson waited until midnight. Then he carried the city gates, bars, and posts on his shoulders and set them on a hilltop which faced Hebron, a city forty miles away. The astonished Gazites let the matter drop.

##### B. His Unwise Love - 16:4-20

1. Delilah - 16:4-5

Next Samson loved a local lady named Delilah. We do not know whether she was a Philistine or an Israelite, nor whether he married her or not. We do know that she was more influenced by the great amount of money offered her by the Philistine leaders than by her interest in Samson.

The same thing happened when she bound him with new ropes and cried, *The Philistines are upon you*. He escaped. Then he varied his answer to her by saying that if she wove his seven locks into the web of a loom, he would be weak. Then he fell asleep. Again Delilah did her part to betray him. When the Philistines attacked, he awoke, stirred, and pulled apart the loom.

3. The secret revealed - 16:18-20

Delilah accused Samson of mocking her and not loving her. She pestered him daily with her words and tears and pressed him so that *his soul was vexed to death* (16:16). He foolishly told her of his lifelong Nazirite vow and that his hair had never been cut. Samson thought if his hair were cut he would be weak. Actually his strength was not in his hair but in the will of God for his life. His uncut hair was the only vestige of his vow that was left. Delilah, sensing the truth in his answer, called the Philistines, who paid her off, and cut the sleeping Samson's hair.

The Scripture says, *She began to torment him, and his strength left him* (16:19). This time when she cried, *the Philistines are upon you, Samson*, he found that he was helpless, for the Lord had departed from him. God was through playing games with Samson. It was time for his accountability.

##### C. Samson's Capture - 16:21-25

1. Samson's degradation - 16:21

Captured at last, Samson bore the full brunt of his folly. God allowed him to suffer the disillusionment of Delilah's callousness; the shame and dishonor of capture by the Philistines; the ignominy, brutality and torture of blindness when they put out his eyes, and the humiliating shame and exposure of grinding at the mill, a job usually done by women.

2. Samson's hope - 16:22

The hair of Samson's head began to grow again. God had left him for the moment but not forever. God was with his servant, using extreme measures to seek his

obedience. What an illustration of the will of man and the sovereignty of God we see in blind Samson grinding at the mill with his hair slowly growing.

### 3. Samson's humiliation – 16:23-25

The mocking of the enemy is a bitter experience and even more so if it is deserved, as in Samson's case. Satan mocks believers when they are in God's will and when they are out of it. Jesus endured the undeserved mocking of the enemy (Luke 23:35-37). As a Christian, do you ever feel mocked and ridiculed? Recognize the enemy in it and take Christ's comfort, knowing that He understands.

The Philistines gathered the elite together to celebrate their pagan god Dagon and rejoice over the defeat of Samson. The people praised Dagon. At the peak of their celebration, when they were feeling merry from wine, they called for Samson to perform. They put him between two supporting pillars where he could be seen by those inside the hall and those on the roof, a prime vantage point. Three thousand are mentioned as being present.

### D. Samson's Heroic Final Act – Judge 16:26-31

Samson spoke to the boy leading him, *Let me feel the pillars which support the temple so that I can lean on them.* Then he prayed, *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.* He felt the pillars, leaned against them, believing God would answer his prayer, and prayed again. *Let me die with the Philistines.* He pushed with all his might and God answered his prayers. The temple collapsed killing more Philistines in his death than he had killed in his lifetime.

Samson's family took his body and buried it near his home, in the tomb of his father Manoah. It is repeated that he had judged Israel twenty years. Samson is included in God's Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11.

Samson had a powerful life but it was not a holy life. It is sobering to learn that a person can exhibit the power of God even when not living a disciplined life of obedience to God. At the judgment seat of Christ, the works of believers will be subjected to fire and at that time it will be made clear what sort of works they were (1 Corinthians 3:11-13).

## E. Samson's Strength and Weakness

### 1. Samson's strategy

Samson's strategy was to have no strategy, but to be victim to the whims of his feelings. He had been chosen by God to be a Nazirite, before his conception. He had been chosen to accomplish a specific task and given a life of meaning, purpose, and significance. However, he chose not to enter into that purpose with commitment until his dying day. He is the most tragic of all the judges. Unlike the other judges who led armies and battled for the Lord, Samson worked alone. He reacted to the situation at hand, driven only by his own desires.

### 2. Samson's weakness

Though blessed with great God-given strength, Samson gave in to great weakness of the flesh. He was attracted to foreign women and he did not learn the lesson that they were forbidden and destructive to him. His permissive parents may have contributed to his weakness by not teaching and guiding him. It seems they even tolerated and assisted his wrong behavior (Judges 14:5).

We are advised, *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul* (1 Peter 2:11). Controlling some of our basic impulses is a battle we all fight. It is also a measure of our maturity. Samson flunked this test.

### Application

In what ways are you like Samson? Does your life demonstrate gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-23) or weaknesses of the flesh? What is your vision for God's purpose for your life? How will you surrender your life to that purpose?