

Judges 16:1-31

Samson, Delilah, and Samson's Final Act

In the previous chapter, it says Samson judged Israel 20 years (**Judges 15:20**). Normally the length of someone's life or career in the Old Testament is mentioned last for a character to signify the end of his relevance to the narrative. David Kimchi notes that it is mentioned at the peak of his career; which implies that the rest of the story marks his decline and downfall.

Judges 16:1 - "Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her."

The prostitute is not named. Delilah is the only woman in Samson's story who is named.

Judges 16:2-3 - "And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him. And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron."

Because Samson sinned with this prostitute in Gaza, Gaza became the site of his captivity and punishment, in **verse 21** - "they brought him down to Gaza."

Samson's strength is again displayed. But there is also another surprise - how could Samson have known about the plot? And, instead of killing the Philistines hiding at the gates of the city as we expect, he carries off the city gates themselves.

Samson's Clamoring Hair

Whenever the Spirit came upon Samson, according to the rabbis, the hairs of his head arose and clashed against one another so that they could be heard "from Zoreah to Eshtaol." (Leviticus Rabbah 8:2)

This is an interesting commentary on why Nazarites kept their hair uncut. Hair is used as a metaphor for our sins in scripture:

- **Psalms 40:11-12** - "Do not thou, O Lord, withhold thy mercy from me, let thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness ever preserve me! For evils have encompassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, till I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me."

By allowing their hair to grow, those under a Nazarite vow are displaying a symbol of their sin. Normally this would be a symbol of humility and repentance. Those who are under a Nazarite vow for a limited time cut off their hair at the end of the vow and present it in the Temple on the same fire as the peace offering.

The general rule is found in **Leviticus 19:27 and 21:5** - "They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh."

It was the custom of some heathen nations to cut and trim their beards and hair into particular shapes in honor of some pagan god. The Egyptians, for example, had their hair cut short and in a certain way, so that what remained appeared in the form of a circle surrounding the head (the halo was derived from this). In another instance, a round spot would be shaved off. Both of these forms are indications of worship of the sun god.

It was considered a disgrace for an adult man not to have a beard (**2 Samuel 10:4-5**).

But, apparently, cutting or trimming hair was normally allowed for Jewish men. The High Priest, in fact, was forbidden to let his hair "grow wild" - "he shall not leave his hair unshorn" (**Leviticus 21:10**).

Samson's hair was braided in seven locks, indicating a perfect and complete representation of sins.

Because Samson was indifferent to his vow, and his sins and even his loyalty to his people, perhaps the hairs of his head were loudly trying to get his attention.

Recall that the Nazarite's unshorn hair was considered his "crown." With different vowel points, "*Nazir*" becomes "*Nezer*," which means "crown." Humility was the crown, and it led to the eating of the peace offering when the Nazarite vow was completed.

See our previous notes on the Nazarite Vow

https://www.communityoncolumbia.org/pdf/Readings_Notes/Numbers6_Notes.pdf

Delilah

Judges 16:4 - "And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah."

The rabbis explain that Delilah's home town of Sorek indicates the futility of this relationship, like an ilan serak, a tree that does not bear fruit (Num. Rabbah 9:24).

Her name was also emblematic for the rabbis. *Delilah* = "She dwindles." She diminished (*dildelah*) Samson in different ways.

By falling in love with Delilah, Samson lost his strength, his independence as a man and what was left of his spiritual fortitude. It was not the shearing of his locks that caused the Lord to leave him, some rabbis explained, but his forging a bond with this foreign woman.

An argument can be made that Samson was not a life-long Nazarite, not only because Delilah cut off his hair, but because of his wine drinking and generally ignoring the vow itself. But his mother had said “for the boy is to be a Nazirite to God from the womb,” as the angel told her, but then she added, on her own, “to the day of his death” (Numbers Rabbah 10:5; cf. vv. 5 and 7 in Judges 13).

But Samson tells Delilah, “for I have been a Nazirite to God since I was in my mother’s womb” (**Judges 16:17**), indicating he somehow still retained an inkling of his calling, even then.

Perhaps this is because "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (**Romans 11:29**) i.e. they are "irrevocable."

Samson loved Delilah, but the love wasn't reciprocated.

Delilah exhibits traits of Jael, Esther and Judith, but used in the opposite way - to try to derail God's plans instead of implementing them.

Her three unsuccessful attempts to find out Samson's secret of strength can be compared to an inverted "three rebukes" to someone who want to become a Jew, demonstrated by Naomi in the book of Ruth. Again, everything in the Samson story is upside down.

In Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus writes that Delilah gave wine to Samson in order to then bind him: ‘and while Samson was drunken [she] bound him with the shoots as firmly as possible’ (Ant. V. 310). This is similar to Judith and Holophernes and with Esther and Haman at the feast of wine. It also punctuates Samson's fall by breaking another of his Nazarite restrictions.

The rabbis say Delilah harassed Samson not only verbally but also physically, during intercourse with him. The Rabbis learn this from the wording “she pressed him” (Judges 16:16); and they find an allusion to this in Jacob’s blessing to the tribe of Dan (Samson’s tribe) in Genesis. 49:17: “a viper by the path [*orah*].” From an example like **Proverbs 4:14** - "Enter not into the path (*orah*) of the wicked," they infer this as Samson following after a wicked woman. **Proverbs 2:19** - "None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths (*orah*) of life." Because of the “*orah* of women,” the actions of a sly woman, he revealed his secret to her.

We are told only that Delilah ‘lulled him to sleep on her knees’ (Septuagint: ‘between her knees’) in **Judges 16:19**. The rabbis, however, exposed the eroticism behind the verse in their midrash on ‘and she pressed him’ (v. 16): ‘What does "and she pressed him" mean? R. Isaac of the school of R. Ammi said: At the time of consummation, she detached herself from him’ (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 9b).

Many of the phrases in Samson's story show up in the Song of Solomon. (Compare **Judges 14:5–9 and Song 5:1**; **Judges 15:5–6 and Song 2:15**; **Judges 16:13–14 and Song 7:6**.)

Why would Samson eventually tell Delilah the secret - the real way he would lose his strength? She had betrayed him three times before.

It is a vivid example of how temptation can wear you down, if you continually allow yourself to be exposed to it. First he gave up the answer to the riddle in **Judges 14** after his wife wept and lay sore upon him for seven days. Now, Samson lost not only his ability to resist, but even his own concern for self-preservation. Everything went out the window under the "pressing" and importunity of Delilah.

This is what we would call today a "first-world problem." He is in terrible straits because the woman he loves is nagging him constantly. Compared with Job, Samson's troubles shouldn't even show up on the radar. It's all in his head.

Samson is the last of the judges, and he is also the worst.

The story emphasizes that we don't know what we think we know.

Throughout the story, the verb *nāḡad* is repeated. It means two things - "to tell" and "to solve." (It is also used when Joseph "solves" or interprets the meaning of dreams (Genesis 41:24).)

In these chapters of Judges, the teller discloses a secret, and the one told "discovers" it.

The text does not expose its own solution. All the riddles are subliminally explaining that we can't trust the surface, we must inquire behind the appearances, in the same way Manoah asks the Angel his name, and exposes a deeper level of understanding - the Angel is Messiah, "Wonderful."

Cracking the code - Samson is Israel. He neglects his Nazarite vow in the same way Israel neglects her covenant with Yahweh.

Samson here represents the stubbornness and stupidity of Israel during the time of the Judges. And of course we can see ourselves in him, too.

Judges 16:28 - "And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."

In his last act, Samson finally appeals to God, although he still speaks in terms of personal vengeance. Nevertheless, he appears as a type of Christ.

Judges 16:30 - "And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

His stance is the inverse of Christ on the cross - he stands between two pillars rather than being impaled upon one, similar to Moses lifting his hands between Joshua and Hur at the battle with the Amalekites.

But his self-sacrifice destroys Israel's enemies, and points to Christ's sacrifice :

- **1 Corinthians 15:55-57** - "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

About three thousand Philistines were killed (**Judges 16:27**). This as balanced out at the day of Pentecost, when about three thousand were saved.

- **Acts 2:41** - "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."