

Exegetical Notes – Judges 16:1-22
Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kyllies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

Background: When Joshua died, the conquest of The Promised Land was only partially completed. In large part, Israel had followed the instructions of YHWH regarding the taking of the land and the destruction of the indigenous population who lived there, but Israel had not followed God completely. Large sections of the indigenous population remained and were not under Israeli control.

From the time of the occupation (around 1380 BC) until the beginning of the Monarchs (1050 BC) Israel was a THEOCRACY, a nation whose king was God. Israel was supposed to listen to and follow the word of the Lord, but as we have already seen, Israel was not good at following the instructions of YHWH. Her failure to do so left her in trouble time and again. Partial obedience to the word of the Lord is disobedience to the word of the Lord and always leads to disaster. “Judges provides many examples of the principle that OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW BRINGS PEACE, WHEREAS DISOBEDIENCE MEANS OPPRESSION AND DEATH” (Charles Ryrie). This is the constantly repeated lesson of the Book of Judges. Judges is the story of the time in Israel’s early history when “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6 and 21:25). This always results in chaos and disaster.

In the Book of Judges a recurrent theme emerges: Step one - The people are following the will of YHWH; Step two - The people stop obeying the word of the Lord; Step three - An enemy arises that oppresses the people of God; Step four - The people cry out to God for help; Step five - God answers Israel’s prayer by sending them a deliverer (a judge to lead her, a Messiah); Step six - The people repent and return to the Lord. Then, the process begins again. Judges simply repeats this pattern over and over again. God’s people are “stiff necked and disobedient.” God is forever faithful. If God’s people would follow God’s word, they could save themselves hardship, worry, pain, etc. But they choose to do what seems right in their own eyes.

Judges 16:1-22

Verses 1-3

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.

- Gaza was one of the five major cities of the Philistines. Samson was Israel's leader. The Philistines and the Israelites were enemies. But Samson went there anyway.
- Once in Gaza, Samson saw a prostitute and he decided to "spend the night" with her. This was in violation of the word of God.
- The Philistines learned that Samson was with the prostitute and laid plans to capture him as he left Gaza in the morning. But Samson left her house in the middle of the night instead of at dawn. So, the Philistines, who planned to surprise Samson, were surprised. They were not ready to spring the trap when Samson got to the city gate.
- Samson was exceptionally strong. He pulled the city gates and the frame which held the gates to the walls down, carried them some distance from the city and dropped them there. Thus, he escaped the trap which was laid for him.
- There is no indication in the text that Samson's strength was other than natural. The Holy Spirit did not empower him. He acted out of his own strength.

Verses 4-9

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 bowstrings 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 bowstrings 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 bowstrings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

- Sometime after the episode told above in verses 1-3 (we are not told exactly how much later), Samson fell in love with a woman whose name was Delilah. She lived in the Valley of Sorek and was friendly with the Philistines. She was not a Hebrew.
- The leaders of the Philistines came to her and offered her a reward if she could get Samson to tell her the secret of his strength so that they could capture him. She agreed to help Samson’s enemies capture him.
- Delilah asked Samson the secret of his strength and he told her that if he was tied up with seven fresh bowstrings he would become as weak as an ordinary man. This was clearly a lie. The Philistines brought Delilah seven fresh bowstrings with which she tied him up. She then cried out warning that the Philistines were there to capture him. But the bowstrings did not render Samson powerless. His lie was exposed, and he was not captured by the Philistines.

Verses 10-12

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.

- Delilah confronted Samson with his lie. She told him that he was making a fool of her and not trusting her with the secret of his strength. She asked again to be told his secret.
- Samson told Delilah that if he was tied with new ropes he would be as weak as any other man. So, Delilah got new ropes tied him up with them and cried out that his enemies were upon him. But the new ropes did not hold Samson

Verses 13-14

¹³ Delilah then said to Samson, “All this time 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.

- Again, Delilah confronted Samson with his lie and demanded that he tell her the true secret of his strength. Again, Samson lied to her telling her that if she wove his hair into the fabric on her loom, he would be robbed of his great strength. She did it. Again, she called out to him in warning and again discovered that Samson had lied. He was not rendered powerless.

Verses 15-16

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 sick to death of it.

- After this, Delilah turned up the heat. She accused Samson of not loving her because he would not confide in her. She nagged him to tell her the truth of his strength day after day.

Verses 17-18

¹⁷ So he told her everything. “No razor has ever been used on my head,” he said, “because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother’s womb. 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.

- So, Samson yielded. He confided in Delilah. Given all that happened, trusting Delilah was a mistake.
- Samson’s hair was not the source of his great strength. Shaving his head would be an indication that the Nazirite vow was finished or broken. A

Nazirite did not cut his hair as an indication that he was dedicated to God for a time. He cut his hair to show that his time of service to YHWH was over. By cutting his hair, Samson would be ending his time of service to God. (We know that Samson was dedicated to God's service from birth. We have seen that Samson was not always faithful in following God's word and sometimes did things which were contradictory to word of the Lord. He is not what we would expect a man dedicated to God's service to be. However, he understood that he was dedicated to God's service. Like us, the servants of God shown to us in the Bible are imperfect. The stories in Judges are written to show us God's faithfulness not "perfect men." There is hope in this for us. God works through our imperfection, through our weakness, to accomplish His plans. You do not have to be perfect to be God's servant (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Verses 19-22

¹⁹ After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone 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 grain in the prison. ²² But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

- Delilah then let Samson put his head in her lap, and there he fell asleep. As he slept, she had a servant shave his head. When his head was completely shaven, she called out to him warning him that the Philistines were upon him.
- When Samson awoke, he arrogantly assumed that he would be able to handle them in his own strength. He did not cry out to YHWH for help at anytime in this story. He was operating in his own strength through this entire episode.
- "He did not know that the Lord had left him." Before Jesus, the Holy Spirit acted differently than it does today. Before Jesus, the Holy Spirit visited people at special times but did not "remain" with them all the time. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would "remain with" or "abide with" those who followed Him (see John 14:15-28). In this episode, Samson never operated in the power of the Holy Spirit. He operated out of his own ability

to manipulate and out of his own strength. The Lord left him sometime before his encounter with Delilah, not when his hair was cut. None of this was done in the Lord. Through all of this, Samson was not with the Lord. His fall into the hands of his enemies was the consequence of his acting in contradiction of the word of the Lord.

- Samson was captured by the Philistines. They gouged out his eyes and put him to work grinding grain in a prison. But as he worked in the prison, his hair began to grow. Time passed. Samson had time to think and consider all that had happened. Samson realized that he was dependent upon God and not upon himself (see Judges 16: 28).



(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Samson & Delilah*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship*, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)