

Exegetical Notes – Judges 16:23-31
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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 16:23-31

Verses 23-25a

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.

- For some time, Samson was the captive of the Philistines (long enough for his hair to begin to grow back - see Judges 16:22). During this time he renewed his vow to God. (He did not cut his hair. This was the sign of his vow to God.)
- The rulers of the Philistines held a celebration to offer sacrifices to their God, Dagon, for delivering Samson into their hands. At that celebration, the people sang praises to Dagon, and Samson was brought from his prison cell to entertain them (perhaps with feats that showed his great strength.)

Verses 25b-27

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.

- Samson was standing before the two major pillars which supported the temple of Dagon. The Temple was crowded and on the roof were 3,000 additional spectators.

Verses 28-30

²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, 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

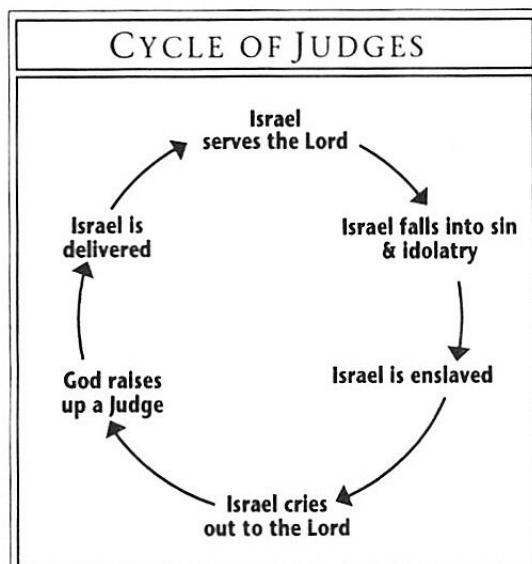
Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

- Samson prayed asking God to strengthen him just once more so that he might get revenge on the Philistines for gouging out his eyes. He asked God for strength but for the wrong reason. He was still seeking personal revenge upon the Philistines for what they did to him.
- There is no mention in the text of extraordinary power coming upon Samson from the Holy Spirit. However, it is unlikely that he would have been strong enough to move the pillars by his own strength. Still, his motive was wrong. It would be reasonable to assume that the Lord answered his prayer even though his motives were wrong because Samson's request was in line with God's plan for the Philistines and Israel.
- The temple of Dagon fell, and all of the Philistines gathered there to worship him that day were killed. This was not to avenge Samson's eyes but to bring glory to YHWH.

Verse 31

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.

- Samson was buried in the family plot. He had led Israel as judge for twenty years.



(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Samson's End*. 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.)