

THE FALL OF SAMSON

By Micky Emmerson

Within the pages of Judges chapter 16 we get a glimpse into the tribulations and fall of Samson, the final judge. We have a man within the book of Judges that was foretold by an angel of the Lord, anointed as a Nazarite to sacrifice himself to the Lord and given the gift of glorious strength that he might use as a means to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines and lead God's people down a straight and narrow path as a judge. What has taken place has been a life of debauchery, womanizing, alcoholism, and handling things that the Lord deems to be unclean. He was given great strength by the Lord, yet he never seems to use it to glorify the Lord, rather to mock the Philistines and be a showoff. The word of the Lord has this to say concerning gifts [Num 18:29](#) "Out of all your gifts you shall offer every heave offering of Jehovah, of all its fat, the holy part of it out of it". What we have been blessed with, the healthy part should be used to show gratitude to the Lord. He was meant to cast out the Philistines, yet as soon as he was old enough to be a man he ran to them and spent more time in their presence than he did in the presence of God's chosen people. At least that is what we see on the surface. Within the pages of the Bible there is so much going on behind the scenes that we don't see. Conversations and situations that we do not see on the surface can be taking place that we know nothing about. What kind of conversation was Pilate and his wife having while Jesus was being sent to King Herod? What did Barnabas and John Mark do and talk about after the split with Paul? What were the other apostles doing while Paul, Peter and John were writing the New Testament? Productivity and God-glorifying activities can be going on that we do not see on the surface. With that being said, we do not know what was going on with Samson behind the scenes that may have been glorifying God and judging His people. What we have is what the prophet Samuel, upon inspiration from God, saw necessary to relay to us.

At the tail end of the chapter 15, we are told that Samson judged Israel for 20 years. This is where I struggle with my synopsis. With the previous judges, the time of judgement tends to come at the end, yet with Samson we are told the length of his judgement in the middle of his biography. So, after the slaying of the Philistines in Lehi did he judge Israel for 20 years and then fall apart once he met Delilah, or had he judged Israel for 20 years up to that point? I cannot say for certain; I have done some research and read commentaries, but nothing seems to give a sure fire answer. What we do know is that within chapter 16, Samson makes his way to Gaza, a 25-mile strip of land with Egypt to the south and Israel to the north and east. He has made his way into the hotbed of Philistine activity for one reason or another. Has he come to judge the Jews who live there? Has he come to merely taunt the Philistines? It does not say, however it does say that as soon as he arrived he took up a bed with a harlot, not actions becoming of a judge. While in bed he is surrounded by the men of Gaza yet escapes by ripping the city walls off of the hinges, carrying up a hill and intimidating them with his strength.

This must have been his cue to leave because beginning with verse four we see our hero at the Valley of Sorek (red grapes), at the border of Dan where he meets his Achilles, the love of his life, Delilah. We are not told why he was there, if there was a mission of judgement for the people of Dan or if he was merely playing the vagabond and this is where he laid his head. We do know that he was of the tribe of Dan so this may have been a community with friendly faces unlike the 3,000 countrymen that betrayed him in Lehi of Judah. If we read on in chapter 18 or later on in 1Kings however, we find that the Danites had abandoned God and the territory had become a mecca for idolatry. However, what we do know for certain is that he was in love with this woman who would be used as a trojan horse by the Philistines and would lead to his demise. The enticing young lady is approached by the lords of the Philistines to determine the root of Samson's strength so that they may exploit it. There are a total of five lords as mentioned from Judges 3 as well as Joshua 13:3 I do believe, hailing from the southwestern Levant communities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath the city=states of the time. Each of the lords are so desperate for the head of Samson that they each offer Delilah 1,100 shekels of silver. To give you an idea of the type of money she is looking at, we are told later on in Judges 17:10 that 10 shekels of silver are the equivalent of a year's wages. This means that each lord offered this young lady 110 years' worth of wages in exchange for Samson, 5,500 years' worth of wages. To put this into modern terms, the average individual income in the United States today is approximately \$37,000. If you were to multiply 37,000 by 5,500 you would come to a total of \$203,500,000 in current U.S. currency. So, we have a young lady who has most likely grown up and lived in poverty, spends her days scraping by and quite possibly has no bright future in her midst. In exchange for 5,500 years' worth of wages she simply has to relinquish the root of his strength so that the lords may bind him and afflict him. In the Hebrew the word for afflict is below, to wear out. As far as young Delilah is concerned the lords will do nothing more than bind him and wear him out in order to teach him a lesson. What would you do?

There is no way that this young lady can pass up this kind of pay day and so she begins to woo him in exchange for the secret of his strength. Verses 6-14 are slightly comical in the right context. Three times Delilah asks Samson the secret of his strength and three times he lies to her. All three times men were lying in wait in order to seize him to which he destroyed them all three times because he had lied to her each time about the secret of his strength. If my wife were to ask me an incredibly compromising question that resulted in people bursting through the door in order to apprehend me, not once or twice but three times I would take a hint and hit the road. That is just downright sketchy. Samson must have held a special kind of passion for Delilah because he stuck around and eventually gave her the secret to his strength. He told her all that was in his heart and informed her that he was a Nazarite to God and that a razor had never touched his head. At this point she knew that he was sincere and so she informed the lords who put the money in her hands. At this time she likely got him drunk so that he passed out on her knees affording a gentleman the opportunity to shave the seven

locks of hair from his head. Unbeknownst to him the Lord had departed from him and so when the perpetrators came in to seize him he was easily bound.

Truth be told, his strength did not lie in his hair or in his body but in the Lord, but we will save that for a bit later. I can only imagine the horror that Delilah felt as the situation begins to unfold, and he is not merely bound or worn out, but his eyes are gouged out so that he cannot see (maybe that was God's way of removing his lust of the flesh). Samson was immediately bound in bronze chains and made to be a grinder in prison. This once he-man had been reduced to the equivalent of ox labor not to mention a spectacle for mockery, taunts and abuse. How the Philistines must have loved the sight of this man who for years made a spectacle of them, now reduced to a life of humility. A life of grinding grain may have been punishment for the burning of their grain fields back in 15:5, or simply irony.

Within the final hours of Samson's life, he is brought into the temple of Dagon, the vegetation god who had three temples; one in Gaza, one in Ashdod, and one in Beth-Shean. Several thousand people had gathered for a celebration that was in need of entertainment. We are told that they requested Samson when they were in "high spirits" to entertain them, something that may have been a regular occurrence or this may have been a first. Again, we see a once man's man reduced to dancing and acting the fool for the sake of entertainment for the pagan Philistines. During a pause in his activities of amusement Samson asks a young man where the pillars are that he may rest at which time he places his left hand on one and his right hand on the other. Then comes his prayer to the Lord that he may be strengthened one last time to avenge himself for the sake of his eyes and that he may die with the Philistines. He gives a great push and the pillars that hold the temple up collapse, causing the temple to collapse, killing all inside, including Samson. His family came, collected his body and buried him in the tomb with his father. Thus were the days of Samson.

As I mentioned earlier, Samson is known for his great strength due to his long hair but his hair was not the source of his strength, his faith in the Lord was. While it is easy to point out the shortcomings of Samson, he is listed amongst the champions of faith in Hebrews 11:32. It is also easy to come down on Delilah but for the modern day equivalent of \$200 million just to make a sport of her boyfriend, it is possible that she expected to receive the money, ask for his forgiveness and the two of them live happily ever after. There are so many what-if's pertaining to the lives of Samson and Delilah. What we know for certain is that his life is applicable to ours. How often do we mingle with sin as Samson did with the Philistines? How often do we put our faith in our mental or physical prowess rather than in the Lord? We were created in God's image and given the gift of the Holy Spirit that we may not hold onto physical, finite things. We are called to give ourselves as a complete living and holy sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) and that includes our spiritual gifts which were granted by God. Dating back to the sin offering of Leviticus 8, we can deduct that the ceremonial and meaningful aspects were different. Upon sacrifice, the entire portion is to be given up but to the Lord the death of the sacrifice was somewhat incidental. His true concern is with the willingness to make the sacrifice, not the

sacrifice itself. What could we possibly offer to the Lord that He cannot have for Himself? His concern is with our willingness to be mindful of and generous with what we have been granted. As I said before, there is much going on behind the scenes that we will never be privy to and I am confident that at the end of the day God looked favorably upon Samson regardless of what we were allowed to know about his life. May we take this opportunity to be cognizant of what we have been given and do our absolute best not to take it for granted. All glory be to God.