

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #22

Judges 16:1-31

The life of Samson was anything but dull. He is the most colorful judge in the entire book of Judges. On the one hand he is a fearless warrior for God. Yet on the other hand he is a flesh-controlled womanizer dominated by lusts.

So far we have seen him tear a lion apart with his bare hands (Judges 14:6). We have seen him scoop bees and honey out of a lion's carcass (14:8-9). We have seen him kill thirty Philistines to get their clothes so he could pay off a bet (14:19). We saw him leave his wife in a fit of anger (14:19-20). We saw him catch 300 foxes, tie their tails together and burn down Philistine grain fields, vineyards and orchards (15:3-5). We have seen him break through ropes that were tied around him (15:14). We saw him kill 1000 men with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15).

Whatever you think about Samson never forget this point; he did have a heart that loved God, that would stand up for God, and that would fight for God to his death. Samson was weak when it came to women, but he is a champion warrior when it came to fighting for God.

The story we come to tonight in Judges is one of the most famous stories in the entire Bible. It is a story of a broken man who gave into his flesh passions one too many times. At times he looks pathetic, but when the story ends, he is a champion who ends up a faith hero in Hebrews 11. I am convinced that the story of Samson proves this thesis:

GOD SOVEREIGNLY USES HIS OWN DISOBEDIENT PEOPLE WHO ARE IN MISERABLE CIRCUMSTANCES BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN SINFUL CHOICES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS SOVEREIGN WILL WHEN THEY CRY OUT TO HIM FOR HELP.

Back in the book of Genesis there is the story of Joseph who was sold by his brothers as a slave to the Egyptians. The reason the brothers did it was evil; they were jealous and wanted to get rid of Joseph. Years later, when Joseph faced his brothers he said this, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Their evil, sinful choice God used to accomplish His will.

Now in this chapter, Samson has an encounter with two women. Neither encounter is based on a prayerful decision to obey God's Word nor do God's will.

SINFUL ENCOUNTER #1 – Samson spends an immoral night with a prostitute. **16:1-3**

We don't know exactly when this episode occurred, but we must assume that it was in the later part of the twenty-year reign of Samson because when this chapter is over, Samson will be dead.

Now these verses are obviously critical to the Samson story or else God would never have put them in His Word. These three verses become a prelude to the next encounter that will lead to his death.

Verse 1 opens with the fact that Samson went to Gaza. The name Gaza means “strong place.” Gaza was one of the five major Philistine cities. It was located about forty-five miles from Samson’s home of Zorah. We are not exactly sure why he went to Gaza. It is doubtful he would have walked some forty-five miles just to visit a prostitute because there were many who lived a lot closer to his home. It is possible that he had gone to the “strong place” of the Philistines to do the work of God.

He was well known by the Philistines and he was hated by the Philistines, and obviously he is not afraid or threatened by the Philistines. He is in Gaza, right out in the open. Of course the Philistines were afraid of him, because they knew exactly what he had done to them single-handedly. There was no one man who was about to fight Samson when he had taken on 1000 of the best trained Philistine soldiers, and piled up their bodies like a stack of wood.

We must assume he initially went to Gaza to do a work for God. While Samson was in Gaza he saw a prostitute. Now the O.T. Law is clearly against prostitution (Lev. 19:29; Deut. 22:21). Samson is a high-strung type of man and he was not the kind of man who denied himself anything. He couldn’t seem to say no to lustful temptation. He should have been looking for a nice Israeli girl, but instead he is in Gaza looking at a prostitute. He is obviously not interested in doing God’s will in this matter; in fact, as Gary Inrig said, at this point in his life he “was totally out of fellowship with God” (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 244). So he decided to give in to his lusts and spend the night with a prostitute.

Now according to **verse 2**, when word spread that Samson was spending the night with this woman, the Philistines quietly surrounded the place for the purpose of ambushing and killing Samson. They were prepared to wait all night until morning.

But according to **verse 3**, at midnight Samson decided to leave the city. The text does not say why he decided to leave. **We must assume God stirred him to leave at this time.** At night the entrance gates to Gaza were shut. The gates were massive. They were studded with nails and they were covered with metal to make them fireproof. They were on two posts driven deep into the ground with iron bars, and they were locked so that there was no way anyone could get in or out during the night. Apparently the gates were so secure that they didn’t even post a guard; or if there were a guard, he felt so secure that he didn’t see the need to closely monitor the gates.

Samson was empowered by God to pull the posts that held the gates right out of the ground, put the two gates on his shoulders, and walk out of the city and straight up a mountain near Hebron. Now there is some discussion as to how far he carried these gates. But by virtue of the fact that Hebron is mentioned we must assume he carried them to the top of the mountain opposite Hebron. What that means is he carried these gates a distance of 38-40 miles up a mountain. This is an amazing demonstration of strength from God.

Think about this; Samson has just been involved in committing an immoral, sexual sin with a prostitute and God, in His amazing grace and sovereignty, was still looking out for Samson. God was still using him. If Samson would have learned from this not to give in to immoral flesh urges, his life could have ended in an entirely different way. But he did not learn the lesson.

Perhaps you have done something immoral in your life either years ago or recently. Maybe you were involved with a prostitute or maybe you have been on an immoral web sight or watched an immoral movie or been to some immoral place. You need to know a couple of things. God can and will still use you in a great way if you walk away now. However, if you don't face it and deal with it your life will spiral downward, and the end will not be happy. Frankly, there is nothing more pathetic than Christian sex scandal. God does not want His people messing around with immoral things. Flee them and run from them.

SINFUL ENCOUNTER #2 – Samson spends immoral time with Delilah. **16:4-27**

There was another Philistine woman who caught Samson's eye and her name was Delilah. This is one of the famous stories in scriptural history which has even fascinated the world. There are at least six facts we know about Delilah:

- (Fact #1)** - We know her name - Delilah, which is not a normal Philistine name. **16:4**
- (Fact #2)** - We know where she lived - the valley of Sorek, which is probably not that far from Timnah, which was the location of his first wife. This is critical because she is very much aware of the story of Samson's first wife. **16:4**
- (Fact #3)** - We know she was sexually attractive to Samson. **16:4** In fact, **this is the only woman in Samson's life of which it is said that he loved her.** So he had a very strong emotional attachment to a woman who would turn out to be a traitor.
- (Fact #4)** - We know she was immoral. This relationship was not based on meetings in church, but on meetings in the bedroom. Probably she was a prostitute.
- (Fact #5)** - We know she loved money. **16:5** This is the kind of woman who would sell you out for the right amount of money.
- (Fact #6)** - We know she was not loyal to Samson. **16:19** She will cost him his life.

These are certainly not the qualities of a woman who will be a real asset to you or your life. But Samson's moral compass was so skewed that this was the kind of woman to whom he was drawn.

According to **verse 5**, each leader of the five Philistine cities offered Delilah 1100 pieces of silver, which is a total of 5500 pieces of silver if she could find out the source of Samson's strength. The dollar value has been calculated in a variety of ways. According to Lawson Younger, 5500 shekels amounted to 550 times the average annual wage. To put this in some perspective, if an annual wage was \$30,000, this is equivalent to 16 ½ million dollars (*Judges*, p. 316). I am not exactly sure what the amount is, but they are offering Delilah a lot of money. She was being offered a huge sum of money 1000 years before Jesus Christ was born if she could figure out the source of Samson's strength.

Now what this tells us is that there was nothing about the look of Samson that gave the secret to his strength away. If he would have stood nine plus feet high like Goliath, or had bulging muscles, they could have seen where his strength was derived. But apparently when they looked at Samson they realized he was getting his strength from some place other than his physical ability.

I read this week of a Marine sergeant, David Douglas, who just set a bench press world record at Camp Pendleton by bench pressing 738.5 pounds. He is a 6 foot, 272 pound man and he has been given the nickname “The Beast.” When you look at this guy, he looks strong. His arms bulge. Apparently Samson didn’t look like that at all.

The world cannot ever figure out where average believers get their strength. The first time I ever saw Dr. Haddon Robinson speak, he didn’t look like anything spectacular until he opened his mouth, and you knew he had the power of God.

I believe TCBC baffles the world. If we were a mega-church of thousands, then the world would say they get their strength from their numbers. But here we are a church of 400-500 people and we are known literally all over the world. The strength comes from the Lord, from prayer and the commitment to the Word of God, and the world can’t see it.

In **verses 6-27**, Delilah tries to entice Samson to tell her where his strength comes from:

Enticement #1 - Delilah tries to trap Samson for money by using seven fresh cords. **16:6-9**

According to **verse 6**, she doesn’t try to hide anything. She asks Samson where he got his strength and how could anyone bind him so that they could afflict him?

Now you would think that Samson would say that is an odd thing for her to ask. This would be like a woman coming to your house and asking you for the combination to your safe. You would think you would find that a little suspicious. But when it came to women Samson didn’t use a lot of brains. So he decided to play along with Delilah and said in **verse 7** if they bind him with seven fresh cords or bow strings that have not been dried, he would become weak like any other man. **No gift of God is ever given so one can use it to play games with the world.**

So according to **verses 8-9**, Delilah had the men get her the cords and probably while he was sleeping she tied him up and said “the Philistines are upon you Samson,” and he snapped those cords like when a string is burned by the fire.

Enticement #2 - Delilah tries to trap Samson for money using seven new ropes. **6:10-12**

Delilah did the same thing again and Samson told her that if they bind him with new fresh ropes he will be as weak as any other man. Again she yelled the Philistines are upon you and Samson snapped the ropes like thread.

Enticement #3 - Delilah tries to trap Samson for money by weaving seven locks of hair.
6:13-14

Now the weaving of the hair was probably the idea of attaching it to the weavers beam.

Notice there is something odd about the number seven in all of this. It is the biblical number of completion. So by using seven, he is saying that his complete and total strength comes from cords, ropes and hair. Samson is getting dangerously close to the truth because he is letting them get near his hair.

Enticement #4 - Delilah does trap Samson for the money by having his hair cut. **6:15-21**

This time Delilah went to work on emotionally wearing him down. It is possible that she knew the story of how his wife wore him down in Timnah on the riddle matter. Day after day she kept on him. How can you say you love me when you deceive me like this? **Verse 16** says he was “annoyed to death.” One very obvious question is if Samson is so annoyed, why doesn’t he just get up and leave Delilah? Why not just walk away and stop the annoyance? The answer is that he was getting some pleasure out of the sin. Sin will give pleasure for a while. But in the end sin will ruin you.

Finally, in **verse 17**, he broke down and told her his strength was in his uncut hair because of his Nazirite vow that had been made to God. He told her about a vow to God and this time Delilah sensed he was telling her the truth. He didn’t bring up the subject of God in this immoral relationship until this moment. When you are in immorality you do not typically want to talk about God, study the Bible or sing hymns. But now he brings up the subject of God.

According to **verse 18**, Delilah contacted the Philistines and they brought her the money. Samson went to sleep in her lap and she called in a man who was hiding to cut off his hair and his strength was gone. Don’t miss this point. **Delilah did not cut Samson’s hair as almost every person who tells the story says; his head was in her lap and someone else cut the hair.**

According to **verse 20**, she again yelled “the Philistines are upon you Samson” and Samson did not know the Lord had left him. He had been abandoned by God. The thing that led to this was immoral sex. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said “Many a man has been lost in Delilah’s barbershop, in the lap of a vile, vicious vixen” (*Judges* 16:1-31, p. 6).

Sexual immorality is not a temptation you want to get near because it will trap and destroy you. Over and over again God warns to “flee sexual immorality” (I Cor. 6:18).

Dr. Johnson told a story of a young man who was active in ministry who married a great Christian girl and was involved in a very solid local church. As years went by, he fell into immoral relationships and drunkenness. He went through a divorce. Dr. Johnson said the last time anyone saw the guy he was walking on the streets of Dallas as a bum with a harlot on his arm (*Ibid.*, p. 6). That is what immorality will do. It will ruin you.

If you are in some immoral situation you need to flee it right now. Turn to the Lord and confess it and get out of it before it destroys you. Walk away before it brings you to ruin.

Just like **verse 20** says, Samson did not know the Lord had left him. Now God does not ever entirely leave His people, but He will stop blessing them and using them. This is how insensitive Samson had become to God. He didn’t know when God was present and when He wasn’t. There are many churches right now that do not know the same thing. They do not know the Lord has left them. He isn’t there anymore. There is no power in His Word. There is no conviction of the Holy Spirit. There are no people getting saved. There is no growth in the people of God because the Lord has left the church. The candlestick has been removed and the people don’t even know it.

According to **verse 21**, the Philistines grabbed Samson and gouged out his eyes. They bound him in chains and they made him a grinder in prison. This one-time powerful man of God was now in prison doing women's work; grinding up grain.

SOVEREIGN DELIVERENCE #3 – Samson is avenged by God. **16:22-31**

As pathetic as Samson looks, God was still sovereign in his life. According to **verse 22**, his hair began to grow back again. Don't overlook the grace that is seen in this verse. God was there ready to restore Samson, ready to use him one final time. You would have thought the Philistines would have assigned a barber to Samson, but they figured he was completely neutered. But God was not through using Samson. He was going to restore him and use him one more time.

The five leaders of the five Philistine cities got together to worship their false deity "Dagon" and to praise him for giving them their enemy Samson (**v. 23-24**). They were in a good mood and they all said, let's bring Samson out so we may laugh at him. They wanted to demean him and degrade him. They had a boy bring him out and stand him between two pillars (**v. 25-26**). Samson asked the boy to help him put his hands on the pillars. The temple/house was full of Philistine men and women and there were 3000 more on the roof (**v. 27**). Now Samson could not see how many were there, but he could hear and probably he was told all five cities are represented. The temple was crowded with Philistines. It was a big party; New Orleans Mardi Gras.

Now Samson had been to Gaza before so he somewhat knew how the temple was constructed. He would have seen the pillars.

Dagon's temple has never been discovered in Gaza, but excavations elsewhere in the Middle East have turned up similar temples. One was supported by two pillars that were slightly less than 3 meters apart set on round stone bases. An average arm span of two arms is approximately 60 inches, so pillars that are 36 inches apart would easily be within Samson's reach.

As they were all laughing at Samson, Samson called out to the LORD (**v. 28**). He asked God to remember him and strengthen him one more time. He prayed about his own suicide and God would answer the prayer.

Actually, there are at least three different types of suicide:

- 1) Selfish, self centered suicide because someone is absorbed with themselves and their own problems; they don't care about anyone else so they kill themselves.
- 2) Heroic suicide in which someone willingly lays down his life for the benefit of another.
- 3) Kamikaze suicide in which someone lays down his own life in order to destroy others.

Samson's suicide fits in category 3. This will be a kamikaze suicide.

It is so ironic that the Philistines brought out Samson to entertain them, and to coin an entertainment metaphor, he is about to bring down the house. He grabbed the pillars and bent and the house collapsed and he killed more people at this one setting than in his entire life (**v. 29-30**). According to **verse 31**, Samson's family came and got his body and took him home and buried him.

PARTING THOUGHTS CONCERNING SAMSON AND US:

- 1) You may have been terribly immoral in past years even as a believer. Flee it and God will greatly use you. By God's grace, the hair can grow again and the strength can return. God can salvage your life, but you must call out to Him and turn away from the sin.
- 2) You need to stay clear of people and places that can pull you away from God.

Here we are tonight 3000 years later and there is a good chance we have some Samson's sitting right in this sanctuary. There are probably some in this audience tonight who have great potential to do some great things for God. But spiritual decay has begun to set in because you have been running with the wrong people. Do not throw away your potential; you stay committed to understanding and obeying God's Word.

- 3) You need to stay close to God, for those who draw near to God will see God draw near to them. We need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

Jesus Christ warns His Church in Revelation 3:11 that he is coming quickly, and we need to see to it that no one can rob us of our crown. The biggest threat to robbing us of our crowns is ourself.

- 4) As bizarre as Samson was, he does end up a faith hero in Hebrews 11:32. As bizarre as some of his actions were in life, deep in his heart he loved God.
- 5) Samson's loss of strength and sight did not occur until many failures had occurred. Had he turned from his flesh failures at any point, he could have kept his strength and sight and his life would not have ended in suicide, but in spiritual success.
- 6) Even at your lowest points of life there is always hope of God's forgiveness and usefulness.