

Judges 16: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Judges chapter 16. Judges chapter 16.

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Then Delilah said to Samson, Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound. And he said to her, If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.

So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber, but he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

Then Delilah said to Samson, Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound. And he said to her, If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.

[2 : 16] So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom and the web.

And she said to him, How can you say I love you when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies.

And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. And he told her all his heart, and said to her, A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazarite to God from my mother's womb.

If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man. When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.

Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.

[3 : 28] And she said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. And he awoke from his sleep and said, I will go out as at other times and shake myself free. But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said, Our God has given Samson our enemy into our hand. And when the people saw him, they praised their god.

For they said, Our God has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us. And when their hearts were merry, they said, Call Samson that he may entertain us.

So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.

[4 : 33] Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there. And on the roof there were about three thousand men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, O Lord God, please remember me, and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.

And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines.

Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshterol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

[5 : 30] At the beginning of Judges chapter 16, Samson pursues a harlot. And it's a story similar to the story of Joshua's spies that are sent to the city of Jericho. An Israelite goes into a city and goes to a prostitute.

The men of the city hear about the Israelite in the city and try to capture him. The man escapes, and then there is damage done to the defences of the city. In the story of Jericho, the city walls are brought down, and in the story here, Samson takes the gates of the city.

However, unlike the spies in the story of Joshua, it seems that Samson is not being faithful here.

He's being driven by his lusts once again. And while he takes the gate of the city, no victory is won.

It is a great exploit, but apart from irritating the Philistines, it achieves nothing. After this escapade, Samson goes to the valley of Sorek, where there's a woman that he has fallen in love with.

A woman named Delilah. Delilah's name might remind us of night, Leila, which has been mentioned a number of times in the chapter already. Samson's name associates him with the sun, and this relationship between the sun and the lady of the night is not an auspicious one.

[6 : 42] Indeed, Delilah's whole purpose in this chapter is to lull Samson to sleep, to cause the sun to sink, and finally that Samson's eyes that have been closed in sleep might be plucked out, and Samson be left in complete darkness.

Delilah may be a Philistine, but not necessarily. She does seem to be known to the lords of the Philistines, though. Maybe she's a woman of high status. They each offer her 1,100 pieces of silver to betray Samson.

In the next chapter, Micah takes 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother. This surely is not an accident. At the request of the lords of the Philistines, Delilah seeks to discover what the source of Samson's strength is, and he plays a game with her.

He keeps misleading her, quite likely knowing that she has some design against him, but taking his chance. He is flirting with extreme danger here. And the details of this game are interesting.

They're strange. It should suggest to us that the details are important, that there's some significance in the specifics. The first suggestion is seven fresh bow strings, that if they're tied around him, he will be unable to release himself.

[7 : 51] The second is using new ropes. And then the third, and then the third involves weaving the locks of his hair and fastening it with a pin. What is the significance of all of this, then?

The most compelling explanation I've heard is that these are symbolic ways of representing the encounters that he's had with the Philistines to this point. The first, the seven fresh bow strings, represents his marriage, the seven days of his marriage.

It seemed at that point that the Philistines had the upper hand. At the end of those seven days, they solved the riddle, and Samson had to get them 30 sets of clothes. However, Samson can snap the bow strings, as flax is snapped by the fire.

The second episode, the one with the new ropes, has a more obvious parallel. That's connected with his deliverance over to the Philistines by the men of Judah. In Judges chapter 15, verses 13 to 14, They said to him, No, we will only bind you and give you into their hands.

We will surely not kill you. So they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock. When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.

[9 : 08] This is the exact same attempt to subdue him, as Delilah tries for the second time. The third attempt, the weaving with the web and the pin, connects with the episode at the beginning of this chapter.

The broken gate pulled up with the bar. Samson's hair is woven into the loom, and that verbally plays off Samson being ambushed at the gate. Hair and gate connected, and woven and ambushed

