

Judges 16: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 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 : 1 6] 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 : 2 8] 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 connected.

He plucked up the doorposts, and he plucked out the pin. So in these three episodes, Samson is representing the previous attempts of the Philistines to subdue and overcome him.

This final attempt, however, is a bit more concerning, because it involves his hair. Delilah is getting closer to the truth. Finally, like the woman at Timnah extracted from him the meaning of the riddle, Delilah extracts from Samson the secret that was first revealed to Samson's mother in chapter 13.

And once again, she gets him to fall asleep. And now she gets someone to shave his head. And the result is that he loses his strength. Delilah is in many respects like jail.

[10 : 14] The word for tent peg, and the word for the pin that's used for the weaving, they're the same. She does much the same thing. She defeats a man by putting him off his guard. She sends the man to sleep.

Judges chapter 5, verses 24 to 27. Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Of tent-dwelling women most blessed. He asked for water, and she gave him milk.

She brought him curds in a noble's bowl. She sent her hand to the tent peg, and her right hand to the workman's mallet. She struck Sisera. She crushed his head. She shattered and pierced his temple.

Between her feet he sank. He fell, he lay still. Between her feet he sank. He fell. Where he sank, there he fell, dead. The Philistines then capture him, and his eyes are removed.

Samson is like Israel. He defeats the lion in the vineyard, yet he falls for the bees in its carcass. He calls out to the Lord and receives water from the rock.

[11:13] He overcomes the walls or the gates of the prostitute city. But as he seeks after prostitutes and unfaithful women, just as Israel sought after false gods, he ends up grinding grain for his enemies, and being made a mockery in a false god's temple.

In the distress of exile, however, his hair begins to grow again, and he calls out to the Lord to remember him. Blind Samson is directed to the pillars that are holding up the temple, and in his final act, with a great feat of strength, he brings it down.

The upper and the lower levels of the temple collapse, with all the Philistines in it. Three thousand men. Perhaps there is some connection between the three thousand mentioned here and the three thousand men of Judah mentioned in the preceding chapter.

If there is, I'm not sure what it is, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were something to discover. Samson wins this great victory in his death, but his story is ultimately a tragic one, a story of failure.

Chronologically speaking, it is also probably the last story in the book of Judges. The stories that follow are all flashbacks, stories that give some greater indication of where it all went wrong for Israel.

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