

## Judges Chapters 15-16- John Karmelich

1. At my Sunday school class at church this week, the teacher threw out a line that made me realize, "That's the perfect title for this lesson about Samson". It is, "God is a God of many, but not infinite chances". What I mean is God gives us one opportunity after another to be a witness for Him, but there is some unknown limit to those opportunities! We may have a gift to lead, organize, teach children, work with seniors, write, preach or teach, but if we don't use those gifts for His glory, we may hit a "wall" one day where He takes away that gift if we refuse to use it to glorify Him. If we're to glorify God with our lives, then He expects us to use our gifts to do it!
  - a) But John, I thought God's gifts to us are irrevocable? They are if we use them. If we waste them, why do we have them? I'm not talking about Christians who say take a semester off from say volunteering to teach a children's class at Sunday school. I'm talking about never doing what God calls us to do in the first place. How do we know what God's called us to do? Easy. What is it you can't stand not doing? If we tell God we'll surrender our will to His, I promise God can't resist a prayer of surrender. He makes it obvious to us over time what is His will for us. The bible is a guide for our lives as to how to live. Over and above that we're free to do whatever we want. The key is to use the gifts God's given us to make a difference for Him. That's the great failure of Samson here despite the gifts he's given. I get the impression he cared about pleasing God at the end of his life, but before that, I see Samson's life as mostly using God's gifts for his own desires as we'll read in the text.
  - b) What about non-Christians who have a great gift say to play music as an example? Do we see God taking away those gifts? Of course not. The issue is what matters for eternity. It's our witness for Him. For people who don't care about pleasing God, this life is all the joy they'll ever get. I can't explain why one person has a gift for "this" and others do not. All I know is God gave me certain gifts and expects me to use them for His glory. I see many people who have great gifts that use them for His glory and it gives me joy to see them as they glorify God with their lives. That's why we have those gifts in the first place. What'll matter for all of eternity? What we do to make a difference for Him? That's what we have to keep in mind when we think about the issue of "What do I enjoy, what can I do and the most important, how can I make a difference for God that will bless Him and me forever?"
2. With that lofty introduction out of my system, it's time to talk about Samson. We get the final two chapters of his story in this lesson. As we read this, keep in mind that twice in the text it says he judged Israel twenty years. Yet Chapter 16 ends with his death. My simple point is don't read all four chapters and think this occurred over a one week period of time. From the time Samson was first on the public scene until the time of his death at the end of Chapter 16, we get a twenty-year time period. Samson never sat in a chair and ruled. He never went from town to town being some of leader over Israel. He "judged" simply by the fact that God used the things Samson did in his life to "bring down" the Philistines, a group that was ruling over Israel at that time. God's intent wasn't to completely wipe the Philistines out, but just to "bring them down a few notches". God still had use for them roughly a hundred years in the future as King David of Israel had dealings with them both good and bad. God's intent during the time of Samson was simply to end the rule of Philistine dominance over Israel and God used Samson for that role.
3. The great mistake Samson made is he used the gift God gave him for his own personal benefit. It eventually cost him his life. I'm convinced Samson did surrender his will to God right before the time he died, but in a sense, Samson's life "was a waste" because he was given a great gift by God, and mostly used for his own personal vengeance as opposed to leading Israel to defeat an enemy that was ruining their lives at this moment in history.
  - a) The reason we should care about this has nothing to do with learning history. It has to do with realizing the danger of wasting the gifts God has given us. Even if we've used them for many years, the issue is the failure to be living as He desires we live.

- b) As most of you know, I'm obsessed with the issue of "now what". I write these lessons for people who already believe Jesus is God. My great question is "now what". God desires a life of obedience to Him. What He desires is we use the gifts He's given us to make some sort of difference for Him. Our rewards in heaven are not based on how many people we save. It's based on us using our lives to make a difference for Him. It may be as simple as raising Godly children. It may be involved in some project at a church or a ministry that's helping people. The big question of life is not "are we saved?" To me, the big question is what are we doing with it? Samson wasted his gifts and that's why I titled the lesson what I did. OK, enough guilt for one introduction. Let me summarize these two chapters before I start my verse-by-verse commentary.
4. Chapter 15 opens in a sense with the continuation of the story from the last part of Chapter 14.
- a) Chapter 14 told the story of Samson hosting his wedding party with a Philistine. God is working behind the scenes of that wedding, as He wanted to use Samson's gift of strength to lead a revolt against a foreign nation living in Israel at that time called the Philistines.
  - b) The Philistines was a group that migrated either from Phoenicia (an area that was part of what is today Lebanon) or from Greece. They settled in what we refer to as the "Gaza Strip" today. They had five main cities and one "Lord" over each city.
  - c) Samson's parents protested him marrying a Philistine woman as it violated the idea of one of God's laws (Deuteronomy 7:3), but his parents went along with Samson's plan anyway. At that wedding, Samson lost a bet and killed 30 Philistines to pay off that bet.
  - d) As we enter Chapter 15, Samson figured "Ok, so much for that, time to come back and go settle down with my new wife". When Samson returned to her town, it was discovered that her father gave her away to another man. Her father thought that Samson hated her for making him lose the bet and her father gave her to someone else to marry.
  - e) Out of vengeance for that act, Samson caught 300 small animals and used them to burn the Philistines food supply. It's an example of how God used the gifts He gave to Samson, while he only wanted to use his gifts for the sake of his own vengeance. In effect, it's an example of Samson wasting his gifts, as he never used his "God given" great strength to help Israel overthrow the Philistines. God used this story to show how He gave Samson that gift, but we also see how the gift was wasted as it was only used for him to gain vengeance, not lead his people to victory!
  - f) Anyway, when the Philistines found out what Samson did, they not only killed his wife to be and her father, they threatened Israelites unless they turned Samson over to them! The short version is a large group of Israelites turned Samson over to them. He then used the incredible power God gave him to overcome the Philistines. It's a famous story of Samson killing 1,000 Philistines with a jawbone of a donkey.
  - g) After than Chapter 15 finishes with a strange story of God providing Samson water as he was dying of thirst after all that killing. Then Chapter 16 opens with a story of him having an affair with a prostitute. The Philistines found out where he was and once again it was an opportunity for Samson to show off the gift God gave him. He escaped and carried the gates of the city on his shoulders for a long distance. It was a way of telling the Philistines "Don't mess with me, you can't win".
  - h) Then we get into the famous story of Samson and Delilah. Many movies and songs were made based on this story. This woman was also a prostitute. She pretended to love him as she was offered a large sum of money by the Philistines to find the secret of his power. It's a strange story of her begging Samson over and over again to tell him his secret. We read that three times he lied to her and she kept at it. Finally he said that if you cut my hair, I'll be as weak as any other man. Delilah somehow knew this was the truth and she gave him a haircut while he was sleeping. That leads back to my lesson title, "God is a God of many, but not infinite chances". It wasn't the hair to me, as much as the fact that Samson was not interested in being a witness for God, but only for his own self-preservation!

- i) For the few of you who don't know this story, after the haircut, the Philistines defeated as well as took Samson prisoner. Instead of killing him, they blinded him and made him into a slave and an exhibition to stare at. At a religious celebration with 3,000 Philistines, we read of Samson praying to God for the first time in this book. He asks God to give him great strength one more time as Samson commits suicide while killing all of the people at that gathering, himself included.
  - j) That's the end of Samson's story. It ends with the reminder that since God gives us gifts to glorify Him, He has every right to take them away if we fail to use them to glorify Him. If we are willing to be used by Him, those gifts are not revocable! As Samson surrendered to God at the end of his life, Samson got his gift back so he could use it for God's glory. Does this mean God condones suicide? Of course not. This is a story of wasted opportunity to be a witness for Him. It's for us to remind ourselves that there's a price to be paid if we do waste the gifts God gives us. That's why Samson's story is in the bible.
  - k) Now that you know the basics about Samson, it's time for the details, let's begin.
5. Chapter 15, Verse 1: Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife. He said, "I'm going to my wife's room." But her father would not let him go in.
- a) In the last part of Chapter 14, Samson traveled roughly 20 miles away to kill 30 men and bring their clothes back to the wedding feast to pay off a bet he lost. Samson wanted to travel a little distance (about 20 miles) so the locals at the wedding wouldn't discover what happened for a while. It turned out to be a "waste of time". When Samson returned to the hometown of his bride to be, apparently the wedding feast was over. The father of the bride thought Samson left in a "puff of smoke" for losing the bet. The father of the bride took matters in his own hand, and he "ended the wedding feast" by giving his daughter in marriage to one of the Philistines who was at the wedding feast. Bottom line is after all that, Samson never got to marry the girl he wanted to marry. Let me explain:
  - b) By the time Samson got back to the seven-day wedding feast, it was over. The guests were gone so Samson couldn't pay the bet. He also brought "a meal" (a young goat) to his bride as a way of saying, "OK, the bet's done, time for us to be a married couple!" Then her dad said as Samson got there, "Too late buddy, she's now someone else's wife".
  - c) OK John, sad story, why should I care? What we're watching is sad story after sad story of Samson "wasting his opportunities" to lead the Israelites. Yes he killed 30 of them, but we don't read of Samson leading any Israelites in victory over them. In fact, coming later in this chapter, the only time we see Israelites organize is to turn Samson over to their enemy to have him killed. My point is, simple as we read these stories in this chapter, think about what Samson "could have done" versus did do, to use his gifts to make a big difference for God as opposed to just getting his personal vengeance. With that in mind, let's read how Samson escalates the violence out of his own hatred, as opposed to leading his people!
6. Verse 2: "I was so sure you thoroughly hated her," he said, "that I gave her to your friend. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead."
- a) Meanwhile Samson's "potential father in law" tries to calm the situation by saying, you'd be better off marrying my other daughter who's better looking than the one you wanted to marry in the first place! The sad part of this story is the Samson's original bride as well as her father are about to get killed by the Philistines due to Samson's desire for vengeance!
  - b) Anyway, Samson is ticked off because he didn't get what he wanted:
7. Verse 3: Samson said to them, "This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them."<sup>4</sup> So he went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to every pair of tails,<sup>5</sup> lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves.
- a) Let's start by saying Samson didn't take the "younger sister offer". Instead he's thinking of how he could harm the Philistines all by himself!

- b) The commentators I read all made the comment about the fact the same Hebrew word for "foxes" is also the same word for "jackals". The reason is, that foxes are loners. Jackals run in packs and it'd be easier for Samson to catch jackals for this task. Personally, I just focus on the fact that "God is God" and whatever He wanted Samson to use, God arranged it so Samson could use those animals for this part of the story.
  - c) The point is Samson wanted to use these animals to do damage to the Philistines. He tied them in pairs so they'd run wildly in all directions. He then tied a lit torch to each pair of tails so the animals would burn wherever they'd run. The site of fire and the fact they're tied together made the animals run all over the place. The point is this "trick" worked. It got Samson to burn the food supply of the Philistines in that area. Don't take this lightly. It meant the Philistines had either to starve or get food from the Israelites for the next year as not to starve. Back in Verse 1, the text said it was the "time of the wheat harvest". This is the early summer. The point is the crops were tall at this time and easier to burn.
    - i) Notice that the wheat crops were not the limit of the damage. Samson also let the foxes (or jackals) go among the fig trees and the vineyards.
  - d) This leads to the question: Was this God's will? Remember the Philistines were ruling in Israel and "dominating" the Israelites. I'm positive God wanted to use Samson to judge in the sense of overthrowing that burden. This book never has Samson leading Israelites in a revolt against them. Samson was interested in personal vengeance and I'd bet vengeance is his only motivation here! Samson was ticked off over losing his bride, and God used it as a motivation tool. In summary it's "more bad than good" and Samson is mostly a book of wasted opportunity, as we're reading here.
  - e) As most of us know, "violence only leads to more violence" as we'll read in the next set of verses coming up:
8. Verse 6: When the Philistines asked, "Who did this?" they were told, "Samson, the Timnite's son-in-law, because his wife was given to his friend." So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. <sup>7</sup> Samson said to them, "Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you." <sup>8</sup> He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.
- a) Samson's act of burning crops ended up causing the burning to death of Samson's "ex-wife" as well as her father. It's interesting to consider back in Chapter 14 she "nagged" Samson to reveal his riddle so she won't be burned alive, and she ended up being burned alive after all of that! I won't argue it was fair. As I like to state, if there is no next life, this one is very unfair! All I do know is God judges people fairly and our job is to glorify God with whatever time length we get to have in this world!
  - b) When Samson found out his "ex" was burned to death, Samson wanted to escalate this to another level! Apparently God gave Samson great strength once again here so that he did kill many more Philistines here at this point. Samson then ran for his life and went to live in a cave in that area.
  - c) This leads back to the question, was all this God's will? On one hand a big bunch of those who were oppressing the Israelites were killed. Samson is single handed escalating a war with them. In a sense he was judging Israel. The last verse of this chapter and the last one of the next chapter both state that Samson judged Israel 20 years. So in that sense, God is using Samson to judge the Philistines. I'm also sure this wasn't God's desire for Samson as a leader. He never lead the Israelites to battle. Samson was just "one ticked off guy". God used that anger to stop the oppression of the Philistines. In summary, this is a "mixed bag" as far as Samson's historical record of being used by God.
  - d) Before we get back to the story, how does any of this apply to us? Part of the answer is we may have a God given gift, and God may use it in ways we think is just for our own gain, but God is guiding it for His glory. The better way to use our gifts is to ask God how is it that we can use our gifts for His glory, and go by His guidance, versus our own desires!

9. Verse 9: The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi. <sup>10</sup> The men of Judah asked, "Why have you come to fight us?" "We have come to take Samson prisoner," they answered, "to do to him as he did to us."
- Meanwhile, the violence leads to more violence. The Philistines were ticked off not only for the lost food, but also that Samson killed some of them out of vengeance. Therefore, it is logical that the Philistines wanted to end this threat to their lifestyle once and for all!
  - We read here that the Philistines camped out in the territory belonging to one of the Israel tribes, "Judah" (the one that Jesus came from). The Israelites sent messengers to them as to ask, "What's the deal? Why are you on the war path here?"
  - The Philistines response in effect was "Just give us Samson. We know he's here and we're going to kill him. If you don't cooperate and turn him over, you'll die too!"
10. Verse 11: Then three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Don't you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?" He answered, "I merely did to them what they did to me."
- It's interesting that the only time we read in Samson's story of the Israelites organizing an army was to turn Samson over to the authorities. Notice people living in Judah knew the spot where Samson was hiding. Just because we're one of "God's" and living among other people who should be one of God's doesn't mean we're "safe with them".
  - Notice how the Israelites simply accepted the fact the Philistines ruled over them. They're ruling because they had better metal technology and dominated the Israelites because of it and despite the fact it was well known that Samson was the judge of that land. My point's that sometimes we get so comfortable with the status quo, we don't even realize how God wants to work in our lives for the better. That's what we have here.
  - Now notice the dialogue between the Israelites and Samson. The Israelites ask, "What is it you've done to us?" They're effectively asking, "Why are the Philistines so ticked off at us and how do we stop that?" Samson's response in effect was "I just got revenge for what it is they did to me". In other words, it doesn't involve you Israelites, even though it should! Samson should have led the Israelites to overthrow the Philistines, as God doesn't want a foreign group to be ruling over His people. God wants us to eliminate any hindrance that would prevent us from having Him rule over our lives! The point is if there is a sin we do have to deal with or a potential sin that can block our relationship with God, it needs to be dealt with for that reason alone. Meanwhile, back to Samson!
11. Verse 12: They said to him, "We've come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines." Samson said, "Swear to me that you won't kill me yourselves."
- Anyway the Israelites wanted to keep the status quo. Therefore, they decided to tie him up to hand him over to the Philistines.
  - By the way, I don't picture Samson as a big muscle man. I think he was ordinary in how he looked. When God wanted to give Samson great strength, he just got it. I bring it up here, as we don't read of Samson attacking the Israelites who bound him up!
12. Verse 13: "Agreed," they answered. "We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock. <sup>14</sup> As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. <sup>15</sup> Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.
- Here we have another famous story where Samson killed 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey. Samson only got to do this because he used the strength God gave him to break free from how he was bound. I admit I'm fascinated how this event got remembered in a hundred year time span between the event and when it was written. What I suspect is it's such a memorial event, it was past down from generation to generation how God did use Samson to defeat Israel's enemies of the moment.

- b) A few more technical notes here. The reason the text mentions a fresh jawbone is if it's old and brittle it can't be used as a weapon. I also suspect Samson told people what it was like for the ropes to come off his hands, so that fact got recorded for all time as well.
  - c) Again, notice what didn't happen: The Israelites didn't fight the Philistines even after this great victory. It's like the Israelites thought, "If God wants to use Samson for the purpose of wiping out the Philistines, we'll just watch him and stay on the sideline!"
  - d) I also admit, I'm fascinated by how Samson killed a thousand. Remember no guns existed in that day. To attack someone was hand-to-hand combat! Therefore, people had to come up to him and attack him straight on. I'm also thinking if I'm Philistine #814 in that crowd and I see all my comrades lose, why keep attacking? It shows how God is working behind the scenes of every aspect of this miraculous event.
  - e) OK, why isn't God killing the "Philistines" in my life? In effect He is. When we turn from sin, the bible promises a way of escape from what entraps us to sin. (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13). Remember God's goal, to draw us closer to Him. Grand scale miracles are rarely needed. What is needed is our desire to draw close to Him and He will help make that possible!
  - f) Final question: How do we know Samson didn't exaggerate how the Spirit of God gave him the strength to do this, as stated in Verse 14? See the next verse:
13. Verse 16: Then Samson said, "With a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men."
- a) This is poetry in the original Hebrew. That poem got remembered until when this book was organized. (As I said in my first lesson on Judges, Jewish tradition is that it was put together by Samuel, who lived about a hundred years after Samson.)
  - b) Let me ask a different question: Why is the bible full of poetry? Stop and consider all the songs you can sing off the top of your head? For some reason we remember poetry better than we do speeches. Most likely this was sung for a long time. It is proof that God's still working during the time of the Judges and still trying to guide the Israelites close to Him!
  - c) Anyway, Samson's excited God gave him a great victory, and expresses his gratitude for that victory. He knew it wasn't his own strength that did it, but God's. That's why I think Samson wasn't a big muscle man. I think God's Spirit just works through Him.
14. Verse 17: When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi.
- a) The translation of "Ramath Lehi" is essentially "Jawbone Heights". I sort of picture a major housing project built there with that name. However long that title lasted, the point is he wanted people to remember how God worked through him there. I don't think he did it to brag, but just to remember that God is still working in our world. As a Christian I have no problem with bragging about how God works in our life, especially when we're weak. (See 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:9.)
15. Verse 18: Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"<sup>19</sup> Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi.
- a) A question to ponder is how and when did Samson's strength go downhill? Did it stop on a dime? Did Samson figure there's no one left to kill and I can feel my power leaving? It's one of those things we'll never know. All we do know is Samson was now exhausted after all that killing. He was dying of thirst and the place where it took place is called "Lehi" in Israel at that time. The point is God made a water spring come up there to satisfy his need for water. If you've ever been to Israel, it is hot much of the time there. I can see Samson thinking, "God gave me this great military victory and I composed a poem based on it, so am I going to die of thirst now? If nothing else, it shows that God cares about more than our salvation, He cares about our lives as well.

- b) So why isn't God preserving everyone dying of cancer as an obvious example? He is well aware of how long each of us will live. The point is God isn't through with Samson yet. It is a simple example that God is working in our lives until He's done with us, not us.
    - i) Back to the question, why doesn't God rescue, for example all those suffering from cancer? I've heard of a few miracles where it miraculously disappeared. In most of the cases God allows the suffering often so that the victim can be a Godly witness in spite of all the suffering they're going through. Remember that the suffering we feel in this lifetime is nothing in comparison to eternity. The purpose of this life is to glorify God based on however long we get to live. Christian rewards will come in the next life. With that theological point made, back to the text.
16. Verse 20: Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.
- a) This is the final verse of both this chapter and the next one. The point isn't that Samson is a great leader. It's that God used him to oppress the Philistines at that time. That's all for better or worse.
  - b) OK then, time for Samson and Delilah at least after the first few verses of Chapter 16!
17. Chapter 16, Verse 1: One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. <sup>2</sup> The people of Gaza were told, "Samson is here!" So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, "At dawn we'll kill him."
- a) However, before we get to Delilah, we read of Samson having sex with a prostitute. The Hebrew language had two different words for prostitute. One kind in a temple for one of the foreign gods. The other is the "street kind". This girl was the latter. The classic joke of Samson was that he was a "He-man" who had a weakness for the "she-woman". This was a sin, pure and simple as God only desires sex within the confines of marriage. This isn't a specific "Nazirite" violation, but let's be honest, he wasn't a good witness for God at this moment in his life.
  - b) Gaza was in Philistine territory. Think "Gaza Strip". There were five main cities that this group lived and Gaza was one of the five. Anyway, the Philistines were still pretty ticked off at Samson, and let's be honest, they had good reason too, as he was the main reason of the Philistines not dominating even more over the Israelites. It also shows that Samson is not afraid to flaunt his sin by taking this woman in one of the main Philistine city! That's a truism about sin, it causes us to do things we normally wouldn't consider doing.
  - c) Anyway, word got around town that Samson was there. The townsmen thought, let him be worn out by this girl and then when he's weak we'll attack him at dawn! The mistake they made is assuming that Samson's strength was his own, but not God's power!
  - d) OK then, time for another miracle!
18. Verse 3: But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.
- a) I don't know how heavy the doors were and it's debated how far the walk was to the city of Hebron, but to put it simply, this was beyond the ability of a human ability to do. This is another way of God performing a miracle in Samson's life.
  - b) Here's the important question: Obviously, Samson went where he shouldn't have been. A city of the Philistines. He did something he shouldn't have done, had sex with a prostitute who most likely was a Philistine herself. So if Samson wasn't doing God's will at this time why did God "bless" Samson with the miracle of carrying those very heavy city doors a great distance? Why did God reward Samson's bad behavior?
  - c) The answer comes back to my lesson title, "God is a God of many but not infinite chances" in life. God allowed this not because of Samson's sin, but because God still wanted to use Samson as his "judge" to show who He is in comparison to the false god of the Philistines!
  - d) With that said, it's finally Delilah time!

19. Verse 4: Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. <sup>5</sup> The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."
- As I said in my introduction, religious Jewish people were only supposed to marry Jewish girls. Given the fact we read in the last lesson of Samson having a Nazarite vow all his life, he's been separated for God's use and should not have been with Philistine women!
  - Anyway, Samson had the "hots" for Delilah. As we can tell from this text, she only cared about the money and was willing to use Samson to get the money.
  - A couple of background things to consider. By this point in time, Samson was truly a pain in the side of the Philistines. They refused to believe that the Israelite God is the true God. The Philistines figured he must have some secret and hopefully Delilah can find out what it is.
  - Time for a little arithmetic: Joshua 13:3 tells us there were main five cities under the rule of the Philistines. I say this because I suspect when Verse 5 says that each of the Lords will give Delilah 1,100 shekels of silver. A rough estimate is a shekel was 17 grams of silver. I did the math and 1 gram is worth \$0.52. Multiplied by 17 times 1,100 times 5 equals a sum of about \$50,000. In Chapter 17 we learn a year's salary was 10 shekel's of silver, so we can learn that silver went further in that culture. So why such an odd amount as opposed to 1,000 shekels? What is suspected is that she was offered 5,500 shekels, which comes out 1,100 per prince (the leader of each of the five cities).
  - Whatever the amount, the bribe enticed Delilah. She was more interested in getting all that money than she was in Samson. Maybe she heard how Samson's wife died and that's an underlying motivation to cooperate with her city's leaders. Either way the plot is on.
20. Verse 6: So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued." <sup>7</sup> Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh things that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man."
- This is the first of three times that Samson will lie to Delilah. So why lie? Maybe Samson knew there was a plot to get him. After all he was with a Philistine women in that area. It had to have crossed his mind. Maybe it was just to toy with her. In case you care, a thong is not underwear here. It's "animal inwards" used to make rope. So Samson makes up this story that fresh (not dried) thongs (again animal guts) will make him weak.
  - Bottom line, it didn't work as well read in the next two verses:
21. Verse 8: Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh things that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. <sup>9</sup> With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the thongs as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.
- Samson's weakness was beautiful women. I suspect he slept with her and while he slept, she tied him up based on how he said he can be defeated. She then yelled, the Philistine army is coming, and he broke the "thongs" like it was nothing. I wonder if God gave him special strength to do this or was it natural. My personal feeling is God's behind each of these little "false information" miracles as if to subtly remind Samson, "Hey buddy, yes I am watching you, so be careful!"
  - With that said, it's time for Samson to lie the second time:
22. Verse 10: Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied." <sup>11</sup> He said, "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man."<sup>12</sup> So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.
- On false attempt #2, I suspect Samson slept with her again and in the middle of the night, Delilah tied him with new ropes.



- b) It makes you wonder if Samson was half awake, knowing what she was going to do. After all, Samson knew it was "fake news", to use a popular expression! Just liked in Round 1, she yelled out "Philistines" and God made it possible for Samson to snap off the ropes like it was nothing.
  - c) Before I move on to "lie to Delilah #3", let's pause for the "why we should care speech". It's a case where God may give us a special gift to do something, but if we waste that gift or if we use it for our glory, sooner or later God will "pull the plug" as we'll see coming up. My point is God gives each of us gifts. The greatest use of those gifts is to find a way to glorify God with them. Yes a lot of nonbelievers use their gifts only to get rich or famous, but it's not "them" God is interested in, as much as He is those He's called to make a difference for Him in the world. My simple point is the danger of wasting the gifts God's given us, as to not use them for His glory. So if I haven't how do I start? Pray your way through it. Ask people what you're good at! Ponder how you can do what you enjoy with your gift(s) so you can make a difference for Him. Trial and error is usually part of it too!
    - i) OK, enough of that, back to Samson and Delilah.
23. Verse 13: Delilah then said to Samson, "Until now, you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied." He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric <sup>14</sup> and tightened it with the pin. Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.
- a) I can just picture Delilah begging, pleading and crying. Most men can't stand it when their women act like that and often give in just to get them to stop. To quote one of my favorite movie lines, "Men are the heads of the family, but women are like the necks and can work the head the way they want it to". From the movie, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding. (Realize my quote is a paraphrase.). The point is Delilah was doing her best to manipulate him!
  - b) I'm guessing Samson's getting tired of this game, but he doesn't want to mess with the gift God gave him. After all, he's pushed his luck so far, with eating honey out of a lion, with sleeping with Philistines, being in vineyards and part of drinking parties. However, I am sure she was getting on his nerves with the constant asking. This time he gets "close" with a sermon about tying up his hair a certain way.
  - c) Once again, they slept together and once again while he slept, Delilah worked on Samson based on what he told her. Samson must have been a sound sleeper or else she wore him out to a point where he just wanted to sleep. Anyway, she weaved his hair and cried out once again that the Philistine army was upon him. Obviously Samson knew this was not going to work, which is why he slept soundly.
  - d) Time for the plot to thicken:
24. Verse 15: Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." <sup>16</sup> With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.
- a) I have to admit, I pondered, why didn't Samson just leave her. Obviously he was nagging him to death on this issue. Like most men, "when the sex is good" the motivation to leave is not there, despite the nagging! I'd bet she was probably a good cook and she took good care of him as well. Whatever the reason, Samson was dealing with the "status quo" now, and refused to either spill the beans or walk out on her!
  - b) There is an old joke that when a woman says to her man, "We have to talk", that means he has to listen! Often a man is thinking, "What she going on and on about? I must listen in order to get what I want out of her". Notice she stated Samson told her that he loved her! She's saying, "If that's true, why won't you tell me the truth? Why is it that you don't trust me?" That's not in the text, but in essence, that's what the argument was about!
  - c) Anyway, it worked. Samson couldn't take it anymore and he didn't want to leave!

25. Verse 17: So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."
- a) In a sense, this is the first we read of Samson actually being a witness for God here. He is explaining his history with his parents and how God separated him to be a Nazirite. That means he had to explain to her what a Nazirite is and what that means. He also explained that one of the rules of being a Nazirite was never to get a haircut!
  - b) Personally, I don't think the haircut is the only way one becomes a Nazirite. I'd argue God is far more interested in how we act than how we dress or keep our hair. What He desires is for us to use our lives as a witness for Him. Not drinking alcohol or not cutting his hair are simply outward signs for what He desires, a relationship with Him. I don't see to get a haircut was the loss of his power as much as the "last straw" God could take as he failed to be a witness for Him. Samson thought that cutting his hair would end God's gift in his life. In a sense it became a "self-fulfilling" prophecy!
  - c) The other mistake Samson made was his trust in her. After all, she lied to him three times, so you'd think after all that, he'd hold off telling her the truth. The problem is when we're starting down the road of sin, it makes us do stupid things. Her endless nagging over this issue got Samson to blurt it out, even though he believed that would be the end of his gift if she cut his hair!
  - d) In the meantime, Delilah realized what he said was true. Deep down, she still cared about the money more than him (and probably even feared for her own life), if she failed to state to the city leaders what was his secret. Anyway, that news got her to talk to those leaders!
26. Verse 18: When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. <sup>19</sup> Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.
- a) Remember that the first three times Delilah said the "Philistines are upon you", she made it up and they weren't really attacking. It's as if she knew he was lying or at least did not trust what he said. This time, she knew he was telling the truth and arranged a meeting with the five "kings". There had to be a time gap here, at the least for those leaders to get to her. Notice the kings brought the money. They were anxious to end the Samson threat to their people as well!
  - b) Then Delilah did what she did best, she "wore Samson out". I'm guessing with a big meal and a night of sex so he was sound asleep once again on her lap. Then she had a man do the haircut. Maybe she was afraid that if she moved, it might wake him. Anyway, that is when the "deed was done". At that point Samson's strength was gone.
    - i) Again, stop and consider my lesson title, "God is a God of many, but not infinite chances". Samson violated rule after rule of his Nazirite vow and in that sense the limit was reached. God helped Samson fulfill his own prophecy!
  - c) That leads to the question, when does God reach his limit with us? There's no way for us to know. I just know it's something I never want to push. It's my desire to be used for His glory. Am I perfect? Hardly. Do I mess up? All the time. I just want God to be glorified by my life, so I keep on writing these lessons as best I can tell, that's what He called me to do. To waste that gift is to waste my life as well and waste away my chance to glorify Him with my life. Yes, that's a guilt filled concept, but I want each of us to realize the danger of wasting the gifts God has given us. It is a reason the story of Samson is given to us in the bible. OK enough guilt, time to get back to the story.
27. Verse 20: Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.
- a) Here is the sad reality of what happens when we turn from God with our lives.

- b) I wonder if Samson thought, "Hey, I ate honey from a dead lion's mouth, and I've still got his gift of strength. I slept with prostitutes and still have his gift. I drank wine or was at a party where people got drunk and I still have the gift. God used me even after I did all of those things, so why should I fear a haircut?" Don't know if that crossed his mind, but we do read here that God said in effect, "No more excuses Samson, there is a limit to what I'm willing to tolerate and you just crossed that limit".
  - c) This time there really were Philistine soldiers there to seize Samson. He tried set himself free from his captors, but realized God's power had left him. Now comes the sad part of what happens to us when we refuse to use the gifts God gave us to glorify Him!
28. Verse 21: Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison.<sup>22</sup> But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.
- a) The Philistines figured, "Why should we just kill him, when we can use him to embarrass him as well as his people"? Therefore, they took out his eyes, bound him in chains, and he was used to "grind" like an ox. Let me explain that: In order to separate the good part of wheat from the useless part, it has to be grounded up. Usually oxen are used that way. A way of punishment was to make Samson do the grinding.
  - b) Then we get a strange comment in Verse 22. His hair began to grow again. I'd think after all that, Samson would get daily haircuts. However the Philistines figured Samson is over as far as being a threat, so they didn't bother cutting his hair again.
  - c) It's also a subtle message that as long as we're living, God's never willing to give up on us. It's a reminder that if we're willing to turn back to God, we may not get back what we lost but we can still be used by God if we're willing to make that commitment.
  - d) Before I move on, let me ask the question: Most of us know people who've had to suffer in some horrid way through no fault of their own. Where is their miracle? Why do they have to suffer as they never "violated God's rules with a haircut"? The answer is I can't explain all the horrid things that happen in life. I just know that the purpose of living, no matter the length of time is to glorify God. Sometimes He's glorified through our suffering as the book of Job emphasizes. This life is not fair and all of us realize that. All we can do is the best we can with the situation in front of us. I can't explain why one person gets a special miracle and others do not. I just work to glorify God in my life and do the best I can.
  - e) Meanwhile, time to get back to Samson as his story isn't over yet!
29. Verse 23: 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."<sup>24</sup> 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."
- a) Verses 23-24 are Philistine "victory time". They wanted to honor their false god "Dagon" because they had victory over Samson. Verse 24 was a poem that got recorded for us to read in the bible.
  - b) A few quick words about Dagon. He was a "fish" God and related to the entities that are worshipped by the other nations of that area including the Assyrians. The idea is we will be blessed financially in life by honoring this god. The idea of fish had to do with getting wealth and food via the sea. Anyway, this was their brief moment of triumph. God can't let to let this stand especially in Israel as God needed to show not only the Philistines but the Israelites as well as to who is really God. Therefore, we have the ending to Samson's story with one final defeat of the Philistines. Let's read on:
30. Verse 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.
- a) Here are the Philistines wanting to "rub it in Samson's face" of how he lost. We're reading of a big festival to honor their god and now they want to make Samson the entertainment. You can just sense God wanting to work in this event!

31. Verse 25 (cont.): When they stood him among the pillars,<sup>26</sup> 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."<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes."<sup>29</sup> 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,<sup>30</sup> 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.
- a) The first thing I want you to notice is Samson prayed in Verse 28. It's the first time in the story of Samson that we read of him praying to God. It is Samson's desire for God to use him one more time. Notice that despite all of Samson's failures, God can't resist a prayer of surrender to Him. Ever want a prayer to be answered by God? Truly surrender your will to His! Tell Him that whatever He decides about your life, you'll accept. That gives us a peace we can't have by trying harder and harder!
  - b) What Samson asked for in a sense was to commit suicide? Does God condone that? No it is considered a sin, because it is murder of one's self. God granted this request because it was for God's glory that more Philistines would die in this one event than would be killed during the rest of Samson's life. If there is no next life, this is very unfair to everyone there at this event. This is another example of God's in charge of our lives and if he says it's our time, who are we to argue.
  - c) The final miracle of the book was Samson was placed between two pillars that supported this temple. The Philistines were all on the roof of the temple. The inside of the temple is a place of worship. The roof was probably a large flat area. The text says there were 3,000 people up there, so it was a large temple with a big roof. I don't know if Samson was also on the roof or down below one level. I suspect he was on the main level. Anyway God is giving Samson great strength one more time, so that he could use it to kill everyone there as well as himself. Remember that Samson asked for this and God granted it so that He's showing the Philistines as well as everyone else in the region that "God is God" and we've got to deal with it and live accordingly.
  - d) So how do we know this is true as written? Notice the last line we have in this story:
32. Verse 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.
- a) In his death, we read of his family coming to get his body and bury him the family tomb. It is here as an epilogue to teach us that the Israelites were aware of what happened to the man who God wanted to lead Israel at this time. Samson did judge Israel 20 years but in a way that was more of a waste than could have been.
33. OK, I've beaten the point to death about how God desires we use our lives to glorify Him. What I want you to grasp out of the Samson story, isn't so much the details of his success and failures as much as it is the fact that God wants to use each of us for His glory. We may not have the gift of great physical strength, but I'm positive He gives each of us gifts that He wants us to use to make a difference for Him. That's the underlying lesson of Samson. With that said, time for us to close in prayer.
34. Heavenly Father, Help us to realize that not only have You separated us from the world, but You have separated us for a purpose, which is to glorify You with our lives. Give us the wisdom to know exactly what You desire of us. Help us to completely surrender our will to Yours. Make it obvious to us what is Your desire for our lives right now. Guide us so we can use the time You have given us for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.