

# Samson: Delilah and Death

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[ 0 : 00 ] Friends, let's pray. Father, we thank you for the scriptures which point us toward your son. And we thank you that they instruct us in how to live.

And we pray today that you might teach us, that you might be at work in us by your spirit, that we might be driven to faith and obedience. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please sit down. Friends, I do want to assure you, despite this passage today, that there was no intention in having it on Mother's Day.

It's quite a doozy for Mother's Day, really. And I'm really just going to jump straight into it today. So I want you to open your Bibles at Chapter 13 in the Book of Judges.

And I don't have a page number, but if you work your way back from where we were, you'll find that it's not too far away. So Judges Chapter 13. And I do this because I want us to orient ourselves so that we understand Chapter 16 well.

[ 1 : 04 ] So let's just do that. And one way to orient ourselves to Chapter 16 is to remember the context that is set. One way to orient ourselves is to remember Chapter 13, Verse 1.

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord so that the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines 40 years. This is the context for the whole of this story and particularly for Chapter 16. This is the first perspective on the story of Samson that you really need to grasp. Israel continued to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. They did what Israel did and what Israel constantly is doing in the Book of Judges.

And God did what God does. He delivered them into the hands of a foreign aggressor. This has been the cycle we've seen time and time again. The foreign aggressor this time is the Philistines. Now, we've met the Philistines before in the Book of Judges. They are the other for Israel. That is, they are a threat from the unknown. They are technologically advanced as a nation. They're able.

[ 2 : 02 ] They're cunning. They're religiously different. They are the other. And Israelites feared them. They are ruling over Israel in this time. And as we saw last week, Israel seems to have at this point in their history just complied with them.

They've given in to them. They've said, oh, well, you know, that's life. Not Samson. No, Samson takes them on. We see that throughout this story. He has absolutely no fear of Philistines.

And that's perspective number one for this chapter. Philistines, overlords ruling over Israel, and Samson with no fear of them. Now, another way to orient ourselves to chapter 16 is to remember the various women in Samson's life.

Most of them are unnamed. However, they are important. They shape Samson's existence. The first woman is his mother. And I'm glad to say on Mother's Day, she's the best of the three.

Of the three or four that we encounter in his life, I think she's quite a star, in fact. So there's the mother for Mother's Day, as it were. In chapter 13, we are introduced to her.

[ 3 : 06 ] She is a noble woman, as I said, married to a somewhat clueless man and a member of the tribe of Dan. This man has a wife who is barren.

However, the angel of the Lord visits his wife, and he promises that she will have a child. And the child is to be a Nazarite from birth. That means a number of things.

However, the things that are stressed by the angel to this woman is that his head is never to be touched by a razor. And more than that, he will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

There are more things that a Nazarite is famous for, but those are the two stressed by the angel. And we don't know whether Samson himself was ever told of those things.

We know that his mother appears never to have told the husband, and the angel of the Lord doesn't appear to have told the husband either. So maybe the husband doesn't know, and maybe Samson himself doesn't know that he's to be the deliverer of Israel.

[ 4 : 03 ] Anyway, there's woman number one. Woman number two, she comes into focus in chapter 14. And Samson does what is typical of all of Israel. He does what is right in his own eyes.

In this case, what happens is this doing what is right in his own eyes takes the shape of finding a woman who is right in his own eyes. Chapter 14. However, unfortunately, what is right in his eyes may not be right in the Lord's eyes.

She is a Philistine. Even so, our author tells us that this is somehow from the Lord. It is the Lord's means by which the Philistines will be confronted. And so the wedding with this woman goes ahead, and Samson gets into some riddle-making contest and turns it into a wager.

And the Philistines then threaten his wife. She finds out the riddle from Samson, and she tells the Philistines. They tell Samson. Samson gets very angry and kills a bunch of Philistines to fulfill the demands of the wager.

And his wife is given away to another man. But the story doesn't end there. In chapter 15, we saw last week, after some time has passed, Samson goes back to see this wife who was right in his eyes.

[ 5 : 12 ] However, she has been given away to another man. That anger Samson. He burns down the staple crops of the Philistines, thus denuding them of their staple food as well as trade goods.

That understandably angers the Philistines. They go off to the leaders of the tribe of Judah and threaten them. And the leaders of Judah, they offer no resistance. They say, yeah, we'll go and sort out Samson.

And they go searching for Samson. He goes with them and the Philistines. But then he bursts the bonds when he's with them. And he grabs them. Remember last week? The jawbone of a donkey. And wipes out a thousand Philistines with this rather unusual weapon. And then he finds himself thirsting in the wilderness. And he cries out to the Lord. And the Lord causes a spring to appear and Samson is revived.

So the very first perspective on Samson is that he's a man dedicated to God from birth. He's a man whom God has appointed to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. The second perspective is that he's a man shaped by women.

[ 6 : 16 ] His mother and his Philistine wife. And what he does is shaped by them. The third perspective comes from the Lord. And here's where I want you to make sure you have your Bibles open. Because we're going to have a look at something else.

You see, up until this point in the book of Judges. We've heard of the activity of the Spirit of the Lord three times. Let me tell you what they are. In chapter 3 verse 10.

The Spirit of the Lord comes on a judge called Othniel. He becomes Israel's judge. He goes to war against the Ammonites. The Lord gives the Ammonites into his hand. In chapter 4 verse 34.

It happens again. The threat this time is the Midianites, the Amalekites and some others. But the Spirit of the Lord comes on Gideon. He blows a trumpet. Armies amassed behind him.

Israel is saved. That's the second time the Spirit of the Lord is mentioned in the book of Judges.

The third time occurs in Judges 11 verse 29. The enemy is the Ammonites this time.

[ 7 : 10 ] The Spirit of the Lord comes on a judge called Jephthah. He wages war on the Ammonites. He wins, although at the cost of some awful consequences for his daughter. And those are three of the seven occurrences of the Spirit of the Lord in the book of Judges.

Where do you think the remaining four come? They come in the story of Samson. All remaining references to the Spirit of the Lord in the book of Judges involve Samson.

And we've already seen three of them. Here's where you have your Bibles open and follow with me. First reference, chapter 13 verse 25. Flip in your Bibles to 13.25. And you'll see that the Spirit of the Lord begins to stir in Samson.

Now flip down just a few verses to chapter 14 verse 6. And look at what we're told. We're told that the Spirit of the Lord comes powerfully upon him. And he tears a lion apart with his bare hands.

Now keep going. Chapter 14 verse 19. Again we're told that the Spirit of the Lord comes powerfully upon Samson. And he kills 30 Philistines. Keep going.

[ 8 : 18 ] Go to chapter 15 verse 14. And look at what happens this time. The Spirit of this time, the Spirit of the Lord, again comes powerfully upon him. And this time he kills a thousand Philistines.

So first, the Spirit stirs him. Second, the Spirit comes powerfully on him and he kills a lion. Third, the Spirit comes powerfully on him and he kills 30 Philistines.

Fourth, the Spirit of the Lord comes powerfully on him and he kills a thousand Philistines. That is the third perspective on Samson. Later I'll have more to say about this particular perspective. But at the moment I want you to realize this. In terms of the Spirit of God's activity in someone, there is no one to match Samson in the whole of the book of Judges. There is no one else who has such a close association with the Spirit of the Lord as Samson.

It's unusual. It's unexpected. We wonder what is going on here. So there are three perspectives on Samson so far. Now, let's take a quick run through our passage for today.

[ 9 : 29 ] Chapter 16. We pick up the story. Look at the first three verses. We find the third woman in Samson's life. The first had been his mother. The second was his wife.

Now he appears to have given up on that. And now we meet a prostitute. Again, she's an unnamed woman. We're not explicitly told she was Philistine. However, she's in the Philistine city of Gaza. And so we can probably assume she is a Philistine. One can't help wondering whether Samson still has an attraction to Philistine women. Doesn't appear to like the Israelite ones terribly much. However, prostitute might mean a little less complications for him. Less entanglements, less trouble. However, if that's how he's thinking, he's deluded.

But as one commentator notes this. Given Samson's damage so far, safe sex in Philistine territory is out of the question for him.

[ 10 : 29 ] And so in verse 2, that is demonstrated. Have a look at verse 2. Samson clearly has a reputation. He's now a hunted man. And the people of Gaza are told, Samson is here.

And so they surround the place. Perhaps they wait for him to finish his exertions of the night. Perhaps they think that'll slow him down a bit. But Samson does not wait for them. Look at verse 3. He lies there only until the middle of the night.

And then he gets up. And then, I guess, as you do, he takes hold of the doors of the city gates. He bundles them up with its two posts. He lifts them on his shoulders. And he transports them to the top of a hill opposite the Israelite city of Hebron.

What a picture that is. Here is Samson with his key characteristics. Impulsive. Infatuated with women. Not only a man with his strength, but clearly a man with a strong sexual appetite as well. Samson, a hunted and independent man with some weird quirks. Another judge would have just used the gate and its posts as a rallying point for all Israel against the Philistines.

[ 11 : 32 ] Not Samson, no. He's independent, hunted, womanizing man on his own against the world. Well, at least against the Philistines. Oh, by the way, I should show you something.

Look at verse 3 again. Samson is said to take hold of the doors of the city gates. There are very few references where this verb is used in the book of Judges to take hold of something.

But we have two references in this same chapter. There's one here. And flip down to verse 21. The Philistines see Samson.

It's the very same word. Can you see it there? So here he takes hold of the doors of the city gates, the Philistine gates, and later on the Philistines take hold of him.

Anyway, with that, let's move on to the one named woman in Samson's life. We meet her in verses 4 to 22. And let's check her out. Let's find out what we can about her.

[ 12 : 30 ] We're not explicitly told she is Philistine. However, given the interaction she has with the Philistines, we can probably assume that she is. Her name is Delilah. And lots of people have speculated as to what that name might mean.

I suspect it means flirtatious. I suspect that's a reasonable translation of it. Anyway, she appears to be somewhat independent because she has her own house.

Very unusual. And she's not named as being associated with a man. She appears to be an independent woman. She's not defined in relation to any man. And as we shall see, she is persistent, ingenious, and determined.

However, we can only assume that from the incidental items in the story. But let's see what happens. What's critical about her is what the text actually tells us. Verse 4.

Can you see what it says there? It says that she is a woman that Samson loves. That puts her at an advantage that no other woman has had so far in the story. And the Philistines clearly want to take advantage of it.

[ 13 : 35 ] Look at verse 5. The rulers of the Philistines come to her. And they ask her to lure him into showing the secret of his great strength. They also want to know how that great strength can be curtailed so that they can overpower him and capture him.

They offer Delilah very significant incentives. Each of them will give her 1,100 shekels of silver. Now, there are five key cities of the Philistines.

And that means, I think, five key leaders probably. So you multiply 1,100 by 5, you get 5,500 shekels. Let me tell you, that is an extraordinary amount of money. Anyway, the woman clearly agrees.

And that brings us to her machinations. Let's see if we can get the big picture about how she goes about things. Most of you will know the story. Her goal is to find the secret of Samson's strength and how he might be tied up and subdued or confined in some way.

Her method is simply to quiz him. And Samson is quizzed three times. Each time he gives an answer that goes along the lines of this. If anyone does this to me, I'll become weak like any other man.

[14:45] That happens for the first time, verse 6. He speaks of being tied with seven fresh bow strings. Then in verse 11, he speaks of being tied securely with new ropes that have never been used.

But if we've read the earlier chapters, we'll know that that's not going to work. Because if someone's already tried new ropes on him and that didn't work then, it's already been used. Then in verse 13, he suggests braiding his hair into fabric on a loom.

On each occasion, Delilah gives it a try. And on each occasion, she then calls out to him in his sleep. Samson, the Philistines are upon you. And each time, he does not become weak.

He bursts the bonds and Delilah remonstrates with him. On the first two occasions, she merely just says that he's made a fool of her. But on the third occasion, she repeats a note of being made a fool of.

However, she pulls out the big guns. Can you see it there? Verse 15. She says, 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.

[15:58] Then look at verse 16. This apparently is repeated over and over and over again. And let me give you a literal translation of verse 16. Literally, it says, and it came about that she forced him with her words every day and she pressed him until his spirit was short.

Now, the strategy of forcing or harassing Samson has been used before by a woman on Samson. It's the same word that's used back in chapter 14, verse 17, of what his wife did to extract the meaning of the riddle from him.

She forced him until he gave in. And in verse 17, the narrator intervenes and tells us the result. Can you see it there in chapter 16, verse 17? He told her everything.

Now, the narrator's telling us that. And that and this is what the everything was. Samson says, no razor has ever been used on my head because I have been a Nazarite dedicated to God from my mother's womb.

If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me and I'd become as weak as any other man. Actually, in my mind, Samson's words don't contain the whole truth. As we have read up to this point, we know it's not the whole truth, don't we?

[17:07] We have read the story up to this point and know that the source of Samson's strength is the spirit of the Lord. How do we know that? We even know it in this chapter, don't we? Because as soon as the Lord withdraws from him, he becomes weak.

However, the symbol of his being special is his hair. And Samson has given away this secret, just as Israel has given away their special status with God by breaking covenant time and time again in the book of Judges.

Anyway, look at verse 18. Delilah knows she's got what she's after. She knows what the narrator has told us. She knows that he has told her everything.

So she sends word to the Philistines. Come back once more. He's told me everything. And they come and they are clearly convinced because they hand over the silver before they see the evidence.

Now look at verse 19. Samson is shaved. But look at the end of the sentence. Samson had been appointed by God to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Remember that? Now I want to read to you what happens in this verse.

[18:10] This woman has now begun to subdue him. This Philistine woman has now begun to subdue him. This Israelite man. And the word for subdue here means to oppress, to humiliate, to do violence.

It's a word that can be used in the Old Testament for rape. Samson has been overcome. This shrewd woman does not need to test her knowledge. She already knows what she is after, that she has what she's after.

However, she now verifies her knowledge by trying the test again. She calls out, Samson, the Philistines are upon you. Now we already know that Delilah knows. But now we're told that Samson did not know.

He did not know that the Lord had left him. It's not the hair. It's the Lord's absence. Previously, this might have been the point at which the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him.

But no, not here. Instead, we're told that the Lord has left. And the Philistines sees him. They gouge out his eyes. They take him down to Gaza. They bind him in bronze shackles.

[ 19 : 12 ] And they set him grinding grain in prison. And then there's a passing note by the narrator. You see, we never heard, did we, in the story, that Delilah told the Philistines the secret that Samson had told her.

We never heard that she told them that the secret was the hair. And the narrator tells us in verse 22 that the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Now, let's turn to the death of Samson, 23 to 30. As we do, I want you to notice the signs that things are shaping up for God to do something. First, the note of Samson's hair growing.

That's a sign by the narrator, isn't it? Something's going to happen. And then there's a reference to the God of the Philistines being exalted. And you know when that happens that God's about to do something. In verse 22, it said, Our God delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands.

Full of the Philistines, isn't it? We know that this is not true. We know that it's God withdrawing that caused him to be delivered into the hands of the Philistines. Had nothing to do with the Philistines themselves.

[ 20 : 18 ] Then there's the praise of the false God in verse 24. Can you see it there? The Philistines exalt themselves and they praise their God and they say, Our God has delivered our enemy into our hands. The one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain.

Now let me tell you, in the original language, those two utterances of the Philistines consist of 16 words. Eight of the 16 words have the word our attached to them.

Our God, our enemy, our hands, our God, our enemy, our hands, our land, our slain. Now we know the true God and we know that the Philistines are at this point on risky ground.

As the proverb says, pride comes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Anyway, Samson is brought in to entertain them in their high spirits and their praise of their God.

He asks the servant to put him where he can feel the pillars that support the temple. And just as he did in chapter 15, he now turns to God. And just as in chapter 15, he's turning to God, he's not untainted by himself and his own self-interest.

[ 21 : 31 ] Nevertheless, it is a prayer. And God answers. Down comes the temple. And just like Jephthah before him, his greatest moment of dignity and success is achieved at great personal cost.

For he kills more when he died than those he killed in his life. And in verse 31, he's brought home. His brothers and his father's whole family go down to get him and he's buried.

And we're told again that he had led Israel for 20 years. So there's the story. What are we going to do with this? How can we tie it all together? First, I want to return to what I mentioned earlier on.

Do you remember that I told you that there are seven references to the spirit of the Lord in Judges? Do you remember that four of them are in reference to Samson? And three of them emphasize the power of the spirit in Samson.

But did you notice there is no reference to the spirit in chapter 16? No reference. There have been references all the way through so far. None in chapter 16.

[ 22 : 33 ] In fact, the reference to God in chapter 16 is that not of his spirit moving Samson, but of having left Samson. Friends, I cannot be sure. But my guess is that the reason that Samson has gone into the world of the ungodly once too often.

He's been enticed by the women of Philistia once too often. He's played the harlot once too often. And God has punished him.

God has left him. At the very hands of the woman who deceived him. Friends, I think that Samson is something of a parable of Israel and the whole period of the Judges.

I think this has been true all the way through his story. Samson, you see, is like Israel. Like Israel, he is a special child of God. He has been chosen by God, appointed by God.

Like Israel, though, he is immature, rash and opportunistic. Like Israel, he is enticed. And like him, Israel will be overcome as their history progresses.

[ 23 : 40 ] You see, Israel will one day be bound and taken from their own land into a foreigner's land. Israel will too be subdued in a place where the gods of the land will be exalted.

Their king will have his eyes gouged out. And they will find themselves in a place where it will look as though God has left them. In Babylon. So what hope can Israel get from this chapter as they read it?

What hope can they have? Well, here's where I want you to notice the endings to chapter 15 and 16. Do you remember it there? Chapter 15. God is present in chapter 15.

His spirit is still active. In chapter 16, however, God leaves Samson. However, did you notice that there are parallels between the two chapters? In each chapter, there's a concluding note about how long Samson was a judge for.

But more importantly, just before that, in each chapter, what does Samson do? For the only times that we hear of in his life. He prays.

[ 24 : 48 ] In both cases, it's not an ideal prayer. It is not without self-interest. But it is a prayer asking God to be God. It's a prayer asking God for his help.

It's a prayer that God answers for his glory. And it's a prayer that God answers and thereby gives us a glimmer of hope. For it shows where help is found even in the midst of frailty, such as Samson experienced.

Friends, I wonder if you can see the point. The point is Samson is Israel. Israel is Samson. And if Israel reads the story of Samson years later, what can it do?

What help can it find here? It can find help. But I want to press this even more. You see, I think that I could argue from the New Testament that we are sometimes not that far removed from Israel ourselves.

Let me explain. Friends, I think that we have much more in common with our Old Testament brothers and sisters than we care to acknowledge. You see, we have God's great gift of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 25 : 59 ] We weren't just redeemed from Egypt. We were redeemed from sin and the devil. We have an eternal future secured in Jesus Christ.

And yet we too are often fickle like our ancient sisters and brothers, aren't we? You see, we see it in a variety of texts in the New Testament. For example, I just want to speak to you of James chapter 4.

James chapter 4 speaks of us as being people of desire, of covetous, of people who have wrong motives, of wanting to spend our time on our own pleasures.

He talks of Christians being adulterous, of having friendship with the world, which inevitably means enmity with God. And he says that God jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us. And he warns us in our fickleness, our spiritual adultery. And he says it has risks associated with it, attached to it. After all, he says God opposes the proud. And he shows favor to the humble.

[ 27 : 05 ] And James then goes on to warn us and urge us. He says this, submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. And then he tells us to do what Samson does.

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Then he tells us how to follow this through in the way that we live. He says, wash your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve. Mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning. Your joy to gloom. Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up. Friends, please hear what is being said.

It's very important. Many of us are not far removed from Israel and from Samson. We are fickle. We are spiritual adulterers. And it is time that this ceased.

It is time that we return to God and stop playing the harlot with the world and the flesh. That cannot continue without judgment. James is telling us that. And Paul warns us of similar things in 1 Corinthians 6.

[ 28 : 06 ] He tells us that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God. We were once wrongdoers but are not any longer. We were washed. We were sanctified.

We were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God. We must not turn back to that from which we came. And the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews warns of similar things in chapter 9 and chapter 10 of Hebrews.

Then in the book of Revelation, the Lord speaks to a church that has lost its first love and is at risk of having its lampstand removed. Friends, we Christians must be vigilant in our Christian lives. We need to be careful. And friends, if you're being caught out today, then let me remind you of the note of encouragement from the book of Judges in the chapters we have read today.

Both chapter 15 and 16 remind us of our God. He is the God, friends, of all grace. He is the Lord, the Lord, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

[ 29 : 13 ] So turn to him in prayer as Samson did and meet his grace with dependence upon him. But friends, as well as that, meet his grace with obedience.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that in the Lord Jesus, we know you to be the Lord, the Lord, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Forgive us, Father, when we forget this and we treat you with disdain and we act like the Israelites, fickle. Please help us.

Please turn us toward yourself. Help us to call upon you in prayer. Help us to meet your grace with dependence and also to meet it with obedience.

Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.