

JOSHUA 16:4-20 | DELILAH'S TRICKERY

Verses 1-9, see Session 9. Verses 10-17, see Session 10

VERSE 18 -

The final presentation by Samson must have been different from his previous attempts to deflect. Now Delilah knows that "he had told her all his heart."

One would expect a woman with any compassion to show some sympathy and perhaps even refrain from sharing the information with the Philistines. However, Delilah shows no signs of love and immediately "called for the lords of the Philistines." They arrived with "money in their hand," which may have been Delilah's primary motivation from the start. It should be noted that Delilah has never been presented as a woman with even a hint of Samson's best interest at heart.

VERSE 19 -

While he was asleep, Delilah brought in the barber. Scissors and razors have been in use for at least 4,000 years, so the necessary tools to cut his hair were readily available. As she cut his hair, she immediately "began to afflict him," and his strength vanished instantly.

VERSE 20 -

The saddest words, perhaps, of the Samson account come when he awakens, having deceived himself. "He wist not that the LORD was departed from him." It seems that God's presence had been upon Samson from the day of his conception, but now was gone. For those of us who know the rest of the story, we rejoice that the presence of the Lord will return.

Note that the archaic but poetic word "wist" is the past tense of "wit." While today, the word "wit" is only used to describe sharp intellectual humor, the word was originally used to refer to knowledge.

As harsh as we may be towards Samson, it is challenging for all of us to accept the realization that "I will go out as at other times before" will not happen, whether it is a loss of spiritual strength, physical strength, or simply a change in circumstances.

JUDGES 16:21-31 | SAMSON'S FINAL FEAT

VERSE 21 -

The punishment seems to be immediate and consists of four parts. Firstly, they blind the individual. Blinding was a common practice in the ancient Near East and surrounding areas. By blinding someone, they would be rendered nearly incapable of participating in combat, escaping captivity, or leading a revolt. It served as a method of ensuring long-term incapacitation without the need for constant surveillance. Later, King Zedekiah, the last king of Israel, would have his eyes gouged out by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:7). Also compare Numbers 16:14 to see the somewhat standard nature of this practice.

Second, they brought him to Gaza. The Delilah incident happened in the valley of Sorek, whose exact location is unknown. Gaza, however, was the most prominent of the five Philistine cities, all today in or around the Gaza strip. Gaza was the capital city of the Philistine coalition. It was in Gaza that Samson previously demonstrated his strength by lifting the city gates (Judges 16:1-3). Now, he is returned there in humiliation.

Third, they "bound him with fetters of brass." If there is significance to brass, we are unaware. Likely this was the strongest and most long-lasting material. Iron fetters would have likely also been available, but would be prone to rust.

Fourth, they made him "grind in the prison house." The work of milling grain was laborious and, depending on the mill, physically taxing. Furthermore, this appears to be a job done by women, thus adding to the humiliation (Ex. 11:5, Mt. 24:41).

VERSE 22 -

Amidst the bleak circumstances of Samson's life—his eyes gouged out, fettered with brass, grinding grain in a Philistine prison—the narrative takes an abrupt tonal shift: "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven." While not making a direct connection with a return to and of the Lord, this verse gives a strong hint to the reader that something good is about to happen!

This subtle anticipation evokes a literary device often used in the Scriptures, wherein a brief statement foreshadows a momentous change. Consider the question posed to Abraham and Sarah, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14), signaling that despite the incredulous nature of a child born to them in old age, the miraculous was about to unfold. Another example comes from the book of Esther when Mordecai reminds the Queen that she may have come into her royal position "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). This single line brims with unspoken promise, subtly alerting the reader to the providential significance of Esther's role in the forthcoming events.

Even in the New Testament, when Stephen recounts Joseph's sufferings in Egypt, he includes a phrase that serves as a glimmer of hope in a grim narrative: "But God was with him" (Acts 7:9). This understated line foreshadows the eventual reversal of Joseph's fortunes, reminding the audience that divine providence often works silently but persistently through adversity.

In a similar fashion, the simple observation about the regrowth of Samson's hair serves as a cryptic yet hopeful sign. It doesn't guarantee an immediate or complete restoration of his former life, but it crackles with the potential for something transformative to occur. Thus, in just a few words, the narrative captures the essence of anticipation, a subdued yet potent undercurrent of hope—hinting that God's story with Samson, and by extension, Israel, is far from over.

Some have referred to this continual yet subtle display of hope in Scripture as the "Scarlet Thread of Redemption." The verse doesn't just serve as foreshadowing within the context of Samson's own story; it also resonates with the broader biblical themes of redemption, restoration, and divine intervention.

VERSE 23 -

The Philistines organized a celebratory event—a sacrifice to their god, Dagon—in honor of capturing Samson. This gives us two indications of the time that elapsed between Samson's capture and the celebration to Dagon. First, it was long enough for his hair to begin growing (v. 22). This is a general statement, but it likely suggests a period ranging from a few weeks to a few months. Second, the event, which required some planning, was intended to commemorate and celebrate the capture. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to place the event more than several months after the capture. Based on these two pieces of circumstantial evidence, I conclude that Samson was imprisoned for a period of 3-4 months before the celebration took place.

Dagon was a god worshipped by the Philistines. The Bible does not provide a detailed description of Dagon's image. However, some sources outside the Bible depict Dagon as a merman, a figure that is half-man and half-fish. It's important to note that this representation might be a later development or a different interpretation of the deity in a specific region. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the term "Dagon" is sometimes used in ancient Near Eastern texts to refer to a type of deity rather than a specific god. This adds complexity to understanding this figure.

In 1 Samuel 5, there is a second disastrous event involving Dagon and Israel. When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, it was taken to Dagon, who twice fell before it in the night, the second time severing his head and hands.

The Philistines rejoiced, saying, "Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand." It is a common tendency for humans to attribute victory to spiritual forces. However, in this instance, the truth is that a substantial bribe, a deceitful woman, and a morally compromised man were the factors that led to Samson's capture by the enemy. Since the Bible reveals man as being given dominion and free will, I do not believe that we must take an "everything is spiritual" approach to life.