

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

Verses 21-23 - see session 11

VERSE 24 -

The Philistines gathered for a grand worship and celebration event, praising their god for delivering their enemy into their hands. They referred to Samson as "the destroyer of our country," recognizing his immense physical and likely moral impact as a judge of Israel for 20 years. This testimony demonstrates God's mighty hand of strength on Samson, using him to rescue His people from their enemies. However, the situation has now changed. While the Philistines revel before their god, the Israelites undoubtedly took notice and felt fear. What does their future hold? Has their God abandoned them? Is Dagon a force to be reckoned with? Should the monotheistic Israelites reconsider their position and incorporate Dagon into their worship practices?

As we read this account in the 21st century, thousands of years after the time of Samson, we know that the "god" Dagon was not a true God. However, we must also acknowledge that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not protect His people from the consequences of Samson's foolish decisions, despite using Samson to protect them. God's choice not to intervene in Samson's failure aligns with a broader Scriptural theme where human choices are respected, even if they lead to unfavorable outcomes.

In Judges 14:4, it is stated that the Lord "sought an occasion against the Philistines." Could it be that God would find such an occasion even in Samson's sinful choices? While God is not the author of sin, He can still accomplish His will even in the presence of sinful activity.

VERSE 25 -

The celebration led to the suggestion that Samson be called in to "make us sport." The phrase has an undertone of humiliation in the specific context of Judges 16:25, where in a broader sense it can be found simply to mean "entertain us." Samson, once a mighty warrior, is reduced to an object of ridicule and amusement for the Philistines.

Such practice is rarely done in modern Western society, but appears more common in ancient Near East and even more recent Greco-Roman societies. We recall that Jesus Himself was dressed in a purple robe and had a crown of thorns placed on His head and was mocked as the "King of the Jews" before His crucifixion.

It is noted in this verse that "they set him between the pillars." Such pillars were a significant architectural feature of temples and other monumental buildings in the ancient Near East, including the lands of the Philistines. In the context of ancient Near Eastern temples, pillars often had both structural and symbolic roles. Structurally, they supported the roof or other elements of the building. Symbolically, they could represent divine attributes, cosmic principles, or the heavens and the earth.

The Bible itself attests to the importance of pillars in religious architecture. For instance, Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem had two notable pillars, Jachin and Boaz, which stood at the entrance of the temple (1 Kings 7:21). These were highly ornate and served both functional and symbolic purposes.

In Judges 16, the description seems to assume some level of familiarity with the temple layout, which would include pillars as a key architectural feature. The fact that Samson is set "between the pillars" hints at his placement in a structurally significant location—a focal point for what unfolds next. When Samson pulls down the pillars, it leads to the collapse of the building, underscoring their structural importance.

Archaeological findings also support the significance of pillars in ancient temples. Temples dating to the time and geography relevant to the Samson narrative have been discovered with pillars or column bases, confirming that such architectural features were common. In Philistine temples specifically, some archaeological evidence suggests a layout that included central pillars supporting the structure, which aligns with the narrative in Judges 16.

VERSE 26 -

Samson requested very specific pillars on which the house stood, doing so subtly to avoid arousing suspicion in the boy leading him. This leads us to question the intentions of this "lad." Was he impressed by Samson and wanted to assist him? Or was he simply naive? Perhaps God orchestrated events so that this boy became his leader. We will never know the answers in this lifetime, but we are captivated by the hidden story within the story. We will be satisfied with the joy of speculation until we know *the rest of the story*.

The Hebrew word for "lad" or "young man" that appears in Judges 16:26 is "na'ar" (נַעַר). This term is somewhat flexible in its application and can refer to a male ranging from childhood to young adulthood. In various contexts, "na'ar" can denote a servant (as in the case of Joseph being sold into slavery in Genesis 37), a young warrior (such as David when he faces Goliath in 1 Samuel 17), or simply a young male. The usage of the term does not provide an explicit age range, and its meaning often relies on the context within the narrative.

Even in his imprisonment, we witness Samson as a leader, devising plans, no matter how small, that held the potential to aid his people and restore his reputation.

VERSE 27 -

We are told that "about three thousand men and women" were "upon the roof" of the building, and from this vantage point, they were able to see Samson. The architecture of the structure is unknown, but it must have been a massive building with a flat roof or balcony type structure. We typically assume this was a temple, but the text does not actually state this as the case. Ancient architecture was known for its advancements, so such a building is out of the question.

The scene itself must have been spectacular. One can imagine that there was music, dancing, coordination of the crowd in synchronized performances and liturgies, and more. In the midst of this scene, Samson experiences his most humiliating moment as he is paraded blind and helpless before his enemies.

VERSE 28 -

Samson "**called unto the LORD.**" We do not know if his calling was silent or verbal. However, there are two reasons to assume that it was verbal. First, the Hebrew verb קרא [qara], used 736 times in the Hebrew Bible, does not appear to ever indicate a silent call. In contrast, 1 Samuel 1:13 uses a different verb, דָּבַר [daḅar], to describe Hannah's silent prayer, stating that "only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." Second, the fact that we have a record of his words implies that someone who witnessed it heard his words. However, we must also acknowledge that God could have given divine instruction to the writer of Judges.

Samson asks the Lord to "**remember,**" and to give him strength "**only this once.**" This seems to indicate that he understands he will die in the unfolding events. Twice in his plea he uses the Hebrew particle נָ [na], translated as "**I pray thee.**" The emphatic particle is somewhat equivalent to the word "please" in English. It adds a sense of urgency, earnestness, and even a beggar's plea to Samson's request. He's not merely asking God to remember him; he's imploring God to do so. The word elevates the emotional and spiritual weight of the moment, intensifying Samson's plea as he faces a critical juncture in his life and the lives of his people.

There is something subtle that is missed in our English translations. The text literally says "that I may take one revenge for the two of my eyes." It can be understood (and even translated as "take revenge for one of my two eyes"). The rabbinical interpretation takes a more literal translation, that Samson is reserving revenge for the other eye. By the later rabbinical period of Judaism, the balance between **OLAM HAZEH**, meaning "this world," and **OLAM HABA**, meaning "the world to come," is an important consideration in Jewish thought. The principle brings medieval commentator Rashi to say, "And the reward for the second eye reserve for me for the world to come, but here pay me the reward for one of them."

In the end, it would be difficult to definitively say what Samson meant. However, we can say with certainty that the wording allows, and perhaps even requires, that we give more contemplation to his request than may first be seen.