

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JUDG. 16:21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Samson's Final Victory

Lesson Text: Judges 16:21-31

Related Scriptures: Judges 16:1-20; I Samuel 5:1-5;
Daniel 5:1-4, 23-30; Psalm 74:18-23

TIME: 1049 B.C.

PLACE: Gaza

GOLDEN TEXT— “And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life” (Judges 16:30).

Lesson Exposition

SAMSON'S CAPTURE AND HUMILIATION—Judg. 16:21-22

Samson had fallen in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. Since the Philistine lords were aware of this, they approached Delilah and urged her to discover the secret of Samson's great strength, offering her money to do so. Three times Delilah tried to worm Samson's secret out of him, and three times he gave her false information. Finally, Delilah said to Samson, “How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth” (Judg. 16:15). At this, Samson gave in and told her that because he was a Nazarite, his hair was a symbol of that vow and was the secret of his superhuman strength (vs. 17). So, while he was asleep, a man shaved his head, rendering him unable to ward off his Philistine attackers. Not only was his hair

gone, but also “the Lord was departed from him” (vs. 20).

Blinded by sin (Judg. 16:21). Once captured, the very first thing the Philistines did was “put out [Samson's] eyes.” The Hebrew word rendered “put out” means to gouge out. This cruel and heartless act rendered Samson helpless. Loss of other senses might be serious, but to be left sightless meant that any possibility of escape was virtually impossible for him. Samson was taken to Gaza, one of the chief Philistine cities. He was fettered with bronze shackles, even though his strength had left him. Obviously, the Philistines were taking no chances with their prisoner. Once an Israelite hero, Samson was reduced to the level of a slave or beast, grinding grain.

Gradual regrowth (Judg. 16:22). In the meantime, Samson's hair began to grow during his time of incarceration. While we may get the idea that all of these events transpired rather quickly, Samson may

have been in the prison house for a number of months. The regrowth of his hair pictures God's grace returning to Samson, even though his strength was not yet restored.

SAMSON'S DEFEAT AND SHAME— Judg. 16:23-27

The Philistines congregate (Judg. 16:23). As is usually the case, when there is a national victory there is also a national celebration. The "lords of the Philistines" would have included their leaders, military and otherwise, along with their wives. For twenty years Samson had vexed them; now he was finally subdued. A victory celebration was in order, or so they thought. It was typical in antiquity for a nation that was victorious over an enemy to see this as a victory for their god. To celebrate, the Philistines planned to offer "a great sacrifice" to their god Dagon. "It was tragic that a servant of the Lord, raised in a godly home, was now the humiliated slave of the enemy. But even worse, the Philistines gave glory to their god Dagon for helping them capture their great enemy. Instead of bringing glory to the God of Israel, Samson gave the enemy opportunity to honor their false gods" (*Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, Cook*). Dagon was portrayed as a fish. Some surmise that this reflects the fact that the Philistines were originally from certain Mediterranean islands, where fishing was the main industry. It has been discovered, however, that Dagon was worshipped as a god of grain. Now living in Canaan, the Philistines may have adjusted their understanding of their false god as it related to their present needs.

Samson's burning of the Philistines' grain (Judg. 15:4-5) could even have been a means of showing the superiority of the God of Israel over Dagon.

The people celebrate (Judg. 16:24-25).

The people who had gathered for the great victory celebration took this as an opportunity to both mock Samson and praise their god. While it appeared to them that Dagon had brought them a great victory, this had occurred only because the Lord permitted it. Typical of pagan religious celebrations, the Philistines' hearts soon became "merry" (Judg. 16:25), likely a reference to their excessive consumption of strong drink (cf. Prov. 20:1; Rom. 13:13; Eph. 5:18). At this point, a suggestion was made that Samson be brought out to entertain them. Two different Hebrew words are translated "sport" in Judges 16:25, but neither reveal exactly how Samson performed before them.

A plan conceived (Judg. 16:26-27).

Samson requested that the boy who was leading him around take him to the supporting pillars of the building. He told the lad he wanted to "lean upon them." After all, he was tired because of the entertainment he had just provided for the Philistine lords and ladies. This building, undoubtedly a temple, was obviously very large, capable of holding thousands of people. Most of them were actually on the roof where they could view Samson in the courtyard below as he entertained them. From what is known of Philistine temples, they were long with two main pillars supporting the roof. As far as that goes, most buildings of any size have critical points that can cause

the entire structure to fall if they are compromised.

SAMSON'S SUPPLICATION AND VICTORY—Judg. 16:28-31

A prayer offered (Judg. 16:28). As stated before, Samson's hair had begun to grow again (vs. 22). This symbol of his Nazarite vow was connected with his great physical strength. This, however, should not be looked upon as something magical. "His power was not in his hair but in what his hair symbolized—his dedication to God. If Samson renewed that dedication, God might restore his power" (Wiersbe). What is clear, though, is that Samson made supplication to God. Like the dying thief who asked to be remembered (Luke 23:42), Samson cried out, "Remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God" (Judg. 16:28). It may be that Samson had been seeking the Lord since being blinded by the Philistines. While his physical blindness was not a desirable condition, his spiritual blindness was far more serious. As with the rest of his life, Samson's petition seems to be somewhat self-centered. To be sure, the Philistines had abused and mocked him, but he seemed to be more concerned about vengeance against the Philistines than about God receiving glory through these events. Of course, we do not have all the backstory, so we would call his extended family or distant relatives. The point of the writer is that in death Samson was honored and revered and given a proper burial, something that was cherished among ancient peoples. Samson's body was taken back to the family burial plot near his birthplace, where he was laid to rest.

cannot fully judge the motives of Samson's request. The fact that he is mentioned among the great heroes of faith, however, tells us that he trusted the Lord and was used mightily by Him (Heb. 11:32).

Strength returned (Judg. 16:29-30). Having found his way to the main pillars of the Philistine temple, Samson placed one hand on each of the opposite pillars. Knowing that the dislodging of these pillars would be catastrophic, Samson uttered his final words: "Let me die with the Philistines." In answer to his prayer for strength, God enabled Samson to push the supporting pillars from their bases and literally bring down the house. Since there were three thousand people on the roof (Judg. 16:27), we might conclude that the total number killed was considerably larger. The narrator summarized this by saying, "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (vs. 30).

Final rest (Judg. 16:31). From the account of his birth (chap. 13), Samson would seem to have been an only child. Accordingly, "brethren" (16:31) might simply mean relatives, although we cannot rule out the possibility of natural brothers born after him. Likewise, "all the house of his father" might indicate what man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). —John Alva Owston

QUESTIONS

1. How did the actions of Delilah lead to Samson's capture?
2. What did the Philistines do to control Samson?
3. What was the name of the Philistine god? What do we know about this deity?
4. What did the people request concerning Samson?
5. How many people were on the temple roof watching Samson?
6. Where did Samson ask the lad to take him? Why?
7. What was the substance of Samson's prayer? Do you think this was an acceptable prayer?
8. What connection did Samson's hair have with his strength?
9. What did the writer of Judges conclude about Samson's final act?
10. What do we know about Samson's burial? —John Alva Owston.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. There are often outward consequences to sin, even when God forgives you (Judg. 16:21).
2. God shows us grace, even though we do not deserve it (vs. 22).
3. The ungodly often interpret the setbacks of God's people as proof that God does not exist or does not care for His people (vss. 23-24).
4. The unrighteous believe that the Lord is powerless, not to be taken seriously (vs. 25).

5. It is better to suffer in righteousness than to perish in unrighteousness (vss. 26-28).
6. Though we make mistakes, God is always ready to turn them around for His purposes (vss. 29-31). —Wardell Miller.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How can relationships with unbelievers hinder a believer's walk with God (Judg. 16:21)?
2. How should you respond to someone who asks you to compromise your obedience to God's Word (cf. Acts 4:18-20)?
3. When might believers be tempted to be unfaithful to the Lord and not obey His Word?
4. How can a believer receive forgiveness for disobedience and still be used by God (Judg. 16:28)?
5. How important is it for churches to be hospitals for the spiritually wounded?
6. Why should believers show love and compassion to unbelievers? —Wardell Miller.

Golden Text Illuminated

“And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life” (Judges 16:30).

The life of Samson is a cautionary tale, to be sure. Although in popular culture he has been portrayed from time to time as a kind of superhero, Christians seeking to gain wisdom and practical application from his story in the Scriptures must take his shortcomings of character very seriously.

Our golden text for this week is taken from the climax of Samson’s rule as a judge over Israel. The Philistines had taken him captive, blinded him, and made him a slave; worse yet, they treated him like a mere beast and forced him to push a grinding millstone around in circles day after day. All this happened because he took the Lord’s favor toward him for granted.

For all the heroic victories Samson had gained over the Philistines, his greatest conquest was still ahead of him when he was plunged into the lowliest state of his life. We can scarcely imagine the depths of Samson’s despair during his initial subjugation. Nevertheless, at some point

he eventually began to dare to hope that God still had a plan for his life.

If Samson, going through the suffering and humiliation that he suffered, could return to hope in the Lord, then anyone can.