

16 Now Samson went to ^aGaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. ² When the Gazites *were told*, "Samson has come here!" they ^bsurrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him." ³ And Samson lay *low* till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

⁴ Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name *was* Delilah. ⁵ And the ^clords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, ^d"Entice him, and find out where his great strength *lies*, and by what *means* we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver."

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength *lies*, and with what you may be bound to afflict you."

⁷ And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

⁸ So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them. ⁹ Now *men were* lying in wait, staying with her in the room. And she said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with."

¹¹ So he said to her, "If they bind me securely with ^enew ropes ^fthat have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

¹² Therefore Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" And *men were* lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread.

¹³ Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with."

And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom"—

¹⁴ So she wove *it* tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom.

¹⁵ Then she said to him, ^g"How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart *is* not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength *lies*." ¹⁶ And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, *so* that his soul was ²vexed to death, ¹⁷ that he ⁹told her all his heart, and said to her, ^h"No razor has ever come upon my head, for I *have been* a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand. ¹⁹ ⁱThen she lulled him to

sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then ³she began to torment him, and his strength left him. ²⁰ And she said, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the LORD *had* departed from him.

²¹ Then the Philistines took him and ⁴put out his *eyes*, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison. ²² However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

Samson Syndrome - On Purpose (Judges 16:1-31, NKJV)

There are four women mentioned in the life of Samson. Three of the four are nameless. His mother is the first of the nameless in the story. She is, in a very literal way, called upon by God to help make the man (Jeremiah 1:5; Isaiah 49:1); in the matrix of her womb God fashions a judge for the special task of bringing deliverance to His people (Judges 13:5; 15:18). It was his mother, no doubt, that conveyed to him the special instructions given her by the Angel of the LORD (Judges 13:5, 7). Of great import was the part about no razor coming upon his head. I believe that it is to her that we should attribute Samson's understanding of where his great strength lay. (My view is also based on the fact that the Angel of the Lord repeatedly appears to her... not her husband.) His mother's words are quoted when he told his secret to the fourth woman of his story (Judges 16:17).

"...he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I *have been* a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man." (Judges 16:17, NKJV)

Why are three of the four women in Samson's story kept nameless? Their purpose does not require their names and the use of a name, when the author does provide one, serves to move the reader from concept to a final concrete example of what ails Samson. They are featured as foils; the second and third woman are the means by which the author reveals Samson's tragic character flaws. Through his interactions with them we become witness to the worst symptom of Samson Syndrome: *unbelievable blindness*.

The name of his wife is not necessary for what the writer would show the reader. Where she is involved the main points are these:

1. She is not a woman of God (Judges 14:3).
2. She pledges allegiance to her people and not her husband (Judges 14:16-17).
3. She uses his feelings for her to gain information that will be used against him.

The name of the harlot is also not important. Without her name the writer is still able to convey these key facts:

1. She is not a woman of God.
2. She pledges allegiance to her countrymen and not her Hebrew customer.
3. She uses his compromise against him. (Who was it that told the Gazites that Samson was in their midst (Judges 16:2)? I submit that it was the harlot. Between the betrayals of his wife and Delilah this would be a consistent thread in the life of the judge.)

Having shown the reader Samson's tendency toward compromise and vulnerability through unsanctioned relations (Deuteronomy 7:3-4), the author is finally ready to reveal the judge's end. It is not surprising that it is at the hands of a woman. By this time in the story we have been prepared for this. Now, having shown us where his great weakness lies, the woman that will destroy him is given a name - *Delilah*.

The attributes and subversive activities of the prior women (wife and harlot) are shown to be both proleptic and prophetic. With both his wife and the harlot the judge is unmade. By relentless repetition the reader is made to see that Samson cannot see. "Behold his blindness," says the writer. "No matter how many times it happens he cannot see it coming." As we look upon him in the tragic violence of losing his eyes we have this lesson: *his loss of eyesight was due to his lack of insight*.

The relationship with Delilah is given more space in the narrative than any other relationship that Samson has had. All the previous material was leading up to this. It was leading up to the calamitous loss that would follow him loving a woman who does not love God. It was leading up to the sad end of a powerful man being in a relationship where the woman is never committed to him. It was leading up to the part where his mistress uses his feeling to pry information out of his heart (Judges 16:16). Through the constant pestering that we saw first in his wife Samson is made to give up his great secret (Judges 14:16-17). But couldn't he see that every time he revealed something to her that she tried it? Did he not notice that she tested each supposed truth to see if he could really be rendered as weak as any other man?

Questions for Community Discussion

1. Are you in relationships that compromise your ability to see clearly?
2. When you evaluate your close relations do they contribute to doing God's will or

get in the way?

Samson, c'mon man, if she has checked each of your lies to see if you can be brought down... didn't you see that if you told her the truth that you were going to get a haircut? You had to see this coming. Right?

No! He didn't. The scales of sin have so covered his eyes that he is spiritually blind (Acts 9:18). Samson is blind to the pattern in his life seen first with his wife and then the prostitute. He is blind to the problem of loving a woman that does not love God - his wife (Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:3-4). Blind to the problem of being led by his lust - his prostitute. Blind to the plan playing out before him through Delilah - his mistress. It is painful to watch him played. But through his folly we can be made wiser.

¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV)

When a man is suffering with Samson Syndrome he is fundamentally incapable of seeing that his sin is killing him. In his own eyes he is too clever to get caught, too favored to fail, and too emotionally compromised to see that his lover is leading him to his end (Proverbs 7:26). He did not see it coming and neither will you. If you are in romantic and/or sexual relations outside of God's will your vision is being lost and with each decision to disobey God you are becoming blind.

What can we do if we find ourselves in this situation?

1. Be Accountable - Samson was always alone and refused to receive counsel. The decision to be unaccountable was unmaking him and is unmaking you. Confess your sin and become unconditionally accountable to a few godly men. Confess all of it; half-done confessions and inconsistent meetings with your accountability circle are signs that you are not really accountable. It is an indicator that you are more concerned with avoiding consequences of crimes against God than grieving His Spirit.
2. Be Broken - This means dispensing with the idea that you are indispensable, invincible, and inscrutable. Seeing yourself as desperately needing God's grace is the opposite of what Samson Syndrome is telling you (Psalm 34:18). Beyond confession there must be contrition and a real willingness to be led by the Lord. Getting mad when people correct or criticize you? This is a sign that you are not broken. You claim a dignity that does not belong to you. Don't just accept

- criticism - ask for it. Or, as Alex Mandes once told me, lean into it.
3. Be in Christ - Finding your significance in romantic relations is not going to work. You were made for Him not for her. Trying to fill your cup with that type of love will leave you empty and thirsty. Ultimately you must find meaning and happiness in Christ first. When you can be satisfied *in* Him you can at last be satisfied *with* her. And before she can be yours... she must be his. Do not make the mistake of loving a woman who does not love God. The results are tragic.

On Another Level (Judges 16:1-3, NKJV)

¹ Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. ² When the Gazites were told, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him." ³ And Samson lay *low* till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

Samson is no longer getting into marriages with Philistine women. But he has not learned his lesson. In fact, things are worse. Now, the judge of Israel is picking up harlots. Why did he do that? It was for the same reason that he married the Timnite; he saw her and desired her (Judges 16:1).

Samson is a long way from home in multiple ways. First, Gaza is roughly 30 miles from his home in Zorah. He is as far in Philistine territory as you can get without getting wet. Second, he is living a debauched lifestyle. Fraternalization and the development of family relationships with Philistines has given way to illicit sex with a Philistine harlot. The author wants us to also see how forward Samson has become. He is not just in the territory of the enemy he has the audacity to sleep with their women and then declare his superior martial might by taking the doors of the city.

On this point we do well to stop and think on These last two verses. Otherwise the import and impact of what the writer is saying will be lost. Regarding the situation, character and capabilities of the judge, and outcome, the following four things should be noticed. First, the adversaries were lying **all night in wait at the gate of the city** (Judges 16:2). Second, Samson goes to the place where they were waiting, **took hold of the doors of the gate of the city, pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulder** (Judges 16:3). Most commentaries find it perplexing that he is not caught. But I think that is the writer's point. D. I. Block does a

great job of pointing out the difficulties in explaining a quiet escape:

These elaborate gate houses were often two or three stories high with guard rooms flanking the tunnel-like opening. If the defensive gates of Gaza were like those of other cities of the time, to get to the gate of the city Samson would have had to get past four or six groups of guards stationed in the guard rooms. Did the men posted here assume Samson would stay with the prostitute all night, or did they simply doze off? Surely Samson would have created considerable noise unlocking the gate, lifting the doors, and pulling the hinge posts out of their sockets. Is one to assume that Yahweh put the night sentries into a sleep so deep they did not wake up even from this racket?

¹ Block, D. I. (1999). *Judges, Ruth* (Vol. 6, p. 450). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Most commentaries assume he was trying to make a quiet escape. However, the writer is describing a man that has become acquainted with excess and brazen enough to travel deep into enemy territory for a night of pleasure. Third, he carries the doors, likely in excess of 800 lbs each, from sea level to an elevation of 2,500 feet 37 miles away. Quietly? It is not likely that the operation was done in stealth. But it was done quickly. Let that sink in. Forth, he did it without the benefit of daylight - it was midnight. It has been 20 years since the incident at Lehi. In that time the judge, now a man in his mid 40s, has not lost a step. In fact, based on this passage, he is significantly more capable than he was as a younger man. Remember that after his last show of strength he was depleted and near death (Judges 15:18). There is no record of our judge being winded or weary. The passage is silent on his physical state when he arrived at **the top of the hill that faces Hebron** (Judges 16:3) - *37 miles away*. But if you read to the end you cannot help but wonder if his abilities have increased with the lengthening of his hair. Just sayin'.

Questions for Community Discussion

1. Do you think that Samson's morality has increased, decreased, or remained the same?
2. Has your life trajectory changed for better or worse? Are you on a trajectory that leads to more holiness and more helpfulness to the people of God?

The Defeated Minister of Deliverance (Judges 16:23-24; Jeremiah 10:14; Isaiah 42:17; Romans 1:22-23; 1 Corinthians 1:20)

²³ Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our

enemy!" ²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, The destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead."

From the perspective of the Philistines the proof of Dagon's superiority to other deities is obvious and practical. As the Philistines see it, concerning the question of who is a greater god, the case is closed: the champion of Yahweh has been humiliated and **delivered into their hands**? In their view **Dagon** is to be credited with blinding, binding, and breaking **Samson** their enemy (Judges 16:23). They are **gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice**, because their suffering has ended; **their god** has put a halt to the activities of an Israelite that was hitting them where it hurt.

Samson has earned the title **destroyer of the land**; the long-haired Hebrew had burned Philistine grain, olives groves, and vineyards (Judges 15:5). And that is not all. Samson had also earned the moniker **one who multiplied the dead** because he had single-handedly killed a thousand Philistine men using only the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:14-17). In him the talk of the Torah became a modest mention of how the hand of God could use a single man to put enemies to flight (Leviticus 26:8).

When the people saw Dagon (16:24), they praised their god. You should read this and imagine that Dagon has been brought into view. The carved image has been carted onto some type of stage and the place erupts in a roar of worship for the false God. It may have been a chanting of the false god's name or a song. The reason for their breaking forth into praise is given:

for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, the destroyer of our land, and the one who multiplied our dead." (Judges 16:24, NKJV)

All of this rejoicing because of the blinding and binding of one man. Why? One man, used by the Spirit of God, was all that it took to bring Israel some real relief and **begin** (note the **begin** of Judges 13:5) breaking the hand of oppression. It was a deliverance ministry that the people of God were too dull to discern, too hard-hearted to have, and too acclimated to affliction to accept. Even though Samson was overpowering the oppressors his brethren were bothered and ready to betray him:

...three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What *is* this you have done to us?" ... (Judges 15:11, NKJV)

Can you hear their acceptance of forced servitude? Can you hear their surrender to subjugation. In the minds of the men of Judah the fight is over and the Philistines are in

control. This hairy man is messing up the status quo. They were as blind as their judge. They have eyes but could not see it happening (Isaiah 6:9; Jeremiah 5:21; Matthew 13:14). See what? *a deliverance ministry*. Nobody steps up to help Samson. Nobody steps in to encourage him in his calling to bring deliverance (Judges 13:5). Instead they cry out, "Stop it, Samson!" The irony is that, although Israel did not get it, their enemies did.

To be sure, Samson as a deliverance minister was seriously hindered by his sensual appetites. And he hardly willing to rally his brethren to work against their yoke of oppression. But he was not more deplorable than any other man. He was like every other man in an unwillingness to be solemnly dedicated to God's will - to a deliverance ministry. For Samson the heavenly mission of making freedom available to the men and women of Israel was not as important his manly mission to be sexually satisfied. Just as bad as his failure to focus on delivering God's people is the people's don't-give-a-flip attitude about getting help. Unlike previous cycles into disobedience and chastening, the people had not cried out for help. They didn't want it. And now Israel's deliverer is in a dungeon and a false god is being credited with defeating him. It looks bleak. But the grace of God is greater than our fallenness and His deliverance ministry is. Not. Done.

I Was Blind But Now I See (Judges 16:25-27)

²⁵ So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. ²⁶ Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them." ²⁷ Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed.

The scene is a party. And what secular party does not include copious amounts of alcohol. The phrase "when their hearts were merry" is used to indicate that the people have become intoxicated (Judges 9:27; Ruth 3:3, 7; Luke 12:19; 15:29, 32); it is in that light that we are to see their summons for Samson. Drunkenness has made the people less wary than usual. With their inhibitions suppressed they are not thinking things through and not likely to notice that the man-made-strong-by-hair has hair again (Judges 16:22). Their mistake of not noticing his mullet is made worse, for them, by his strategic positioning - **between the pillars** (Judges 16:25). Between the large supports for Dagon's temple the judge of Israel is made to perform.

Samson never let on to his plan. In fact he played along in order that at last he might play his persecutors. Instead of asking to lean against just any pillars, Samson specifically requested **the pillars which support the temple**. The lad was likely not inebriated. However, lacking adult insight into the mindset of captors, he missed the red flags:

Red Flag 1: Bad Hair Day - An enemy whose super strength was found to be in his hair was shaved and then his eyes were put out. He should be bald but he has hair again.
Red Flag 2: Prisoner Positioned According to His Petition - The enemy is asking to be positioned so that he has access to the one place that can bring this whole building down on the people mocking him. Nobody has a problem with giving the prisoner what he wants.

The author takes a moment to help the reader understand the import of what has been said: **the temple was full of men and women**. Most importantly, in the crowd of sauced revelers were the people who had paid handsomely for Samson's betrayal and by extension his blindness - **the lords of the Philistines** (Judges 16:5). Besides the people in the temple there were three thousand men and women on the roof enjoying the spectacle of a humiliated Hebrew enemy.

Despite his blindness Samson has gained perspective. "I was blind but now I see," says Samson. What do you see, Samson? You lack eyesight. "But now I have insight." His eyes are gouged out but his heart has unprecedented clarity. He sees a singular and costly opportunity to be used by God for deliverance ministry.

Questions for Community Discussion

1. Why might God have been disappointed or upset with his judge Judges 16:23-24; 2 Samuel 12:14)
2. Do you see in this passage any indicator that God is actually orchestrating events?
3. When things are at their worst Samson sees an opportunity. Are you inclined to look for ways to serve God when things are bleak?

The Weak Made Strong (Judges 16:28-30; Hebrews 11:34)

28 Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. 30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.

Many are the commentaries that draw attention to the number of times that Samson says **I** in his prayer. None overlook the opportunity to draw attention to his apparently selfish reasons - **vengeance... for my two eyes** (Judges 16:28). Finally, and almost invariably, Bible scholars regard Samson's request to die with the Philistines with derision (Judges 16:30). I do not share

the perspective of erudition. Maybe that means you should stop reading now and stay with popular perspectives put forward by the learned.

Well, you kept reading. So, having been warned, let us look at these verses through the lens of the context and in the light of other Scriptures. That is, let us peer at this passage with interpretation help that comes from surrounding material and other biblical writings that mention Samson and this incident.

To impugn Samson's prayers because of his repeated use of the personal pronoun **I** seems to miss the fact that it is a special affront to raise a hand against the Lord's messenger or the Lord's anointed (1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 19:21) - even when that person had behaved dishonorably. King David killed a man for as much (2 Samuel 1:14, 16). When David, an anointed king, writes during his flight from his own son he is profuse in his use of the words **me** and **I** (Psalm 3:1-4). There are other psalms where the psalmist asks for retribution and mentions rejoicing in vengeance (Psalm 13; 18:37-50; 58:10). But is Samson anointed? The works he had done were by the Spirit (Judges 13:25; 14:5-6; 14:19; 15:14). But you will say that the Lord had departed from him (Judges 16:20). The Lord would also depart from Israel's first king, Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). However, once anointed that king was still regarded as anointed (2 Samuel 1:14, 16).

In his humiliation Samson has had time to think. The calling on his life and his callous casting away of the needs of his people are fresh on his heart. His newfound identification with Yahweh meant that the mockery aimed at him was also against the Lord, that the praising of Dagon was his fault, and that the gouging of his eyes was seen as a defeat of the greater God. Did he want vengeance for his lost eyesight. Certainly. Just be careful not to see Samson as lacking faith and an awareness of his mission. Why? Because the writer of Hebrews helps us to see that it was by faith that the weak became strong (Hebrews 11:32, 34). A man lacking commitment to the cause found the strength to (1) make the ultimate sacrifice and (2) be superhuman one more time. But for a better reason - a great work of deliverance. Some say that Samson's prayer was bad and suicidal. Hardly! It was finally a crying out from complete commitment, a wayward man's willingness to wage war and fight the good fight, and a determination to die doing what he was born to begin - deliverance ministry.

"Don't let me die of natural causes. O God, don't let me die apart from what you fashioned me to do. Let me die as your agent of angst against your enemies and the enemies of your people. Oh God, let me die *on purpose*."

Conclusion (Judges 16:31)

31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

Israel's judge is dead. And in the end he killed so many of the enemy that there is no one left to protest the claiming of his broken body; the five lords of the Philistines are among the dead. And so his family is able to **come down and take him**. They bury him in a place that has not been mentioned since Judges 13:2 - the beginning of the story. In this bookend of words the author indicates closure on the story of Samson. Between these markers there has been a strong message about Israel's last great judge.

- There was a great calling on his life to liberate his people from oppression. God equipped him to carry out the mission with supernatural gifts from the Spirit.
- Early on it is clear that his calling is undermined by his continuous compromises in the company he keeps.
- Finally the strong man is made weak by his decision to love a woman who does not love God.
- God graciously grants Samson strength so that he can use the last of his life for what he was born to do.

There is a great calling on your life and God has equipped you to carry out that calling in the power of the Holy Spirit. Your calling is undermined or else helped by the company you keep. And your strength may be greatly reduced by the consequences of folly. However, the grace of God is greater than our sin. If you will turn your eyes upon Jesus you can find grace to help in your hour of need. In the power of His Spirit you can go back to doing what you were born again to do.

Questions for Community Discussion

1. What would it look like to become more accountable?
2. Do you know what calling is on your life and what abilities you have been given?
3. How could your gifts be used to bring help to those who are oppressed and in need of deliverance?

