

Judges

Lesson 30

(c) A Philistine Woman in the Valley of Sorek (16:4-31)

(i) Samson's Love (16:4)

Alas, we come to the story of a Philistine woman in the valley of Sorek, Samson's love. In Chapter 16, verse 4, we read, "*After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.*" (16:4)

Our writer tells us that sometime after Samson had killed one thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone down near Etam and Lehi, Samson made it back up to the Timnah area and the valley of Sorek where he fell in love with another Philistine woman, Delilah. Samson is right back where he found himself in a traumatic situation with his first wife. Samson is right back in a relationship that breaks the law of the LORD for marital relationships for Israelite men. We do not know why in the world that Samson loved Philistine women instead of those women of his tribe or nation, but he did.

Samson's new love was named *Delilah*. The background of the name *Delilah* is interesting. It means *delicate, petite, languishing, amorous*. The Hebrew comes from an old Semitic root that means to "hand down, to languish." Looking at those words, we must wonder how they all fit together in the word picture of Delilah's name. Here is the clue. Delilah was delicate, small, petite, which means she was languishing in size. Languishing means to lack something. Delilah lacked the physical size of other women. She was tiny. But her name also tells us that she was *amorous*. The word means she was loving and sexually attractive to Samson. Was that her Philistine name? We do not know. It was more than likely a Hebrew name given by the Israelites to this woman for this story.

(ii) Samson's Strength (16:5-24)

(a) The Eleven Hundred Pieces of Silver (16:5)

Being attached to Samson, Delilah was surely a target of the Philistine leaders who wanted Samson dead. They wanted to know the source of Samson's strength. And so, they offered her eleven hundred pieces of silver to draw the knowledge of the source of Samson's strength out of him. Verse 5. "*The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, 'Entice him, and see where his great strength lies and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.'*" (16:5)

We have to wonder if Samson was married to Delilah. The Scripture had never given us the answer to that question. Be that as it may, she was in a close, intimate relationship with Samson, yet, the Philistines felt comfortable enough with Delilah that they thought they could bribe her to be unfaithful to Samson. One day, long in the future of this story, the LORD will say, "*the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil,*" and it is. There are very few people in this world who cannot be bought with money. I cannot. Money does not tempt me. I have been offered great sums of money in what I call "*confidential hush money contracts,*" and I have never agreed to sign one. I have made others extremely mad at me because I could not be paid off to keep their sinful, evil deeds secret. Of course, the result is always the same. Because I would not accept such evil deals, those people crafted all sorts of fabricated lies and half-truths to cover up their sin. The only reason for a confidentiality agreement, which is a hush-money contract, is to cover up known evil and sin on their part. For those of us with integrity, we will not be a part of it. But it is true about money. It is always used to tempt people to do wrong. Such was the case in this passage with Delilah.

Let us talk about the "*eleven hundred pieces of silver.*" Each piece was a silver shekel. Each weighed about 224 grains which translates into .512 ounces, just a little over a half an ounce per coin. With

eleven hundred coins being offered to Delilah, it was equal to 563.2 ounces or thirty-five pounds of silver. A talent of silver in the Bible weighed about seventy-five pounds. That means that Delilah was offered about half of a talent of silver to betray Samson. But wait. We must not stop there. Remember the verse says, *“The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said ... Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.”* We do not know how many lords were in her presence. However, each lord was going to give Delilah half a talent to betray Samson. If there were two lords, she would get a full talent. If there were four lords, she would get two talents.

The talent was the largest and heaviest denomination of money in the Bible. We cannot determine the value of a half talent of silver because we do not have any information to compare the value to. We could convert the talent into the denarius mentioned in the Bible, but that coin was not invented until 211 BC in the Roman Empire. We are a thousand years before the invention of the denarii, so its value cannot be used. Because all values are relative, due to inflation through the years and centuries, all we can do is convert to the value of a half talent of silver in today's economy and compare it to our lifestyle, which is far better than that in the days of Samson. Today, in 2021, the values of 563.2 ounces of silver would be worth \$13,195.00. Very few people make that amount of money in a month. The average yearly wages of a family with one working spouse is about \$42,000. That means that the half talent of silver would equal about four months' wages. I can hardly believe that anyone made a half talent of silver in four months in Samson's day. Be that as it may, Delilah was going to be given half a talent of silver from each lord, not just one. She would be a wealthy woman. As we know, it was a temptation she could not dismiss. Later in this book we are going to learn that a Levite man will be offered a job with a salary of ten shekels per year. Comparing that to the offer of eleven hundred shekels from just one lord, Delilah was going to be paid one-hundred and ten-years' salary to betray Samson.

(b) The Fresh Cords (16:6-9)

Delilah accepted the bribe and begged for the source that will conquer his strength. The answer was fresh cords. Verse 6. *“So Delilah said to Samson, ‘Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you.’”*⁷ *Samson said to her, ‘If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any other man.’”*⁸ *Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.*⁹ *Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.”* (16:6-9)

Samson had not been honest with Delilah. He surely thought it was a game of some sort. We do not know if Samson ever knew that the men were lying in wait in the other room.

(c) The New Ropes (16:10-12)

It surely did not happen on the same night, but Delilah did not give up. She asked again. The answer was new ropes. Verse 10. *“Then Delilah said to Samson, ‘Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound.’”*¹¹ *He said to her, ‘If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any other man.’”*¹² *So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.”* (16:10-12)

Once again, Samson had played along with Delilah. The new ropes did not hold him. We still do not know if Samson knew that the men were lying in wait in the other room.

(d) The Woven Locks (16:13-14)

For the third time, Delilah begged Samson for the truth. The answer was the seven woven locks. Verse 13. *“Then Delilah said to Samson, ‘Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound.’ And he said to her, ‘If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web [and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man.’”*¹⁴ *So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove*

~~them into the web~~]. And she fastened it with the pin and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.” (16:13-14)

You will notice that I struck a line through the last part of verse 13 and the first part of verse 14. You will see that the marked-through lines begin with a bracket and end with a bracket. In the New American Standard Version, the committee marked this passage this way to let us know that this information is not found in the oldest and most reliable copies of the Hebrew manuscript discovered to date. Such issues are rare in the Old Testament. The Byzantine manuscripts that were originally used to translate the Old Testament into other languages included these marked-out passages. However, the Alexandrian manuscripts, much older than the Byzantine manuscripts, do not contain this struck passage. We will ignore the marked-through sections for that reason.

Samson’s hair woven in the web did not hold him down. This time, the men were not waiting in the other room, at least not according to the writer’s story.

(e) The Nazirite Secret (16:15-18a)

Finally, Delilah will use the “love” word to obtain the secret. Samson told her about the Nazirite secret. Verse 15. *“Then she said to him, ‘How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is.’”*¹⁶ *It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death.*¹⁷ *So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, “A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man.”*^{18a} *When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart.”* (16:15-18a)

Thus, we learn that Delilah begged him for many days for the answer. For some reason, Delilah believed Samson this time and was willing to risk exposing Samson to someone who could cut his hair. She told the Philistines to come one more time.

(f) The Cut Hair (16:18b-19a)

In secret, Samson’s hair was cut. Verse 18b. *“Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands.*^{19a} *She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair.”* (16:18b-19a)

This time, the lords brought their money to pay her off. They also brought a barber of some sort who was able to quietly shave Samson’s seven locks as his head lay in Delilah’s lap.

(g) The Wakeup Call (16:19b – 20)

As with the three times before, once his hair was cut, Delilah taunted Samson. Verse 19b. *“Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him.”*²⁰ *She said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.”* (16:19b – 20)

We must wonder why Samson would say, *“I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.”* What would he be shaking himself free from? He was not bound with cords or ropes. His hair was not woven into a web. The answer we do not know. But what we do know is that time and time again, Samson had shaken off the attempts of the Philistines. He thought he could do it again.

We must also understand that Samson’s strength was not in his hair; it was in the LORD who was near to him. Samson did not lose his strength because his hair was gone; Samson lost his strength because he broke a major requirement and sign of the Nazirite vow that the LORD had put him under from his conception. When the visible sign departed, the LORD departed.

(h) The Prison Chains (16:21-22)

Weak, we come to the prison chains that the Philistines put on Samson along with physical mutilation. Verse 21. *“Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to*

*Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.*²² *However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.*” (16:21-22)

Samson was not imprisoned in the valley of Sorek, near Timnah, near his wealthy wife. She was surely his wife in the LORD’s eyes because they had been intimate. The Philistine lords took him to Gaza, about twenty miles away, and imprisoned him there. They blinded him. They put him on a grinding wheel like a beast of burden. All the while, he was bound in bronze chains. The one fatal mistake the Philistines made, and they should have known better, was, they did not keep his hair shaved. Think about how fast hair grows. Of course, it greatly depends on the amount of protein in a person’s diet. For the average person in today’s world, hair grows about six inches in a year. It was probably close to that in the time of Samson. Now we can ask some questions. Did they shave Samson bald? Probably not. If the razor had touched Samson’s head while he was asleep, he would have been awakened. If the razor cut off the full length of Samson’s seven locks, almost to the head, that had never been cut, it would take many years to grow that back. But if the barber just cut off about six inches of each lock, his hair could have returned in about a year. We do not know how long he was in prison, but it was long enough for his hair to grow back to a length that pleased the LORD.

(i) The Philistine Party (16:23-24)

It just so happened that when Samson’s hair had regrown, it was time for a Philistine party. Verse 23. *“Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands.”*²⁴ *When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us.”* (16:23-24)

As in all ancient worship, the people were required to make specific offerings to their false gods at specific times of the year. In the passage, it was time *“for a great sacrifice to Dagon.”* The Philistines worshiped primarily two gods, Dagon (the fish god) and Beelzebub (the lord of the flies and the name of Satan). Here the worship is to Dagon. This god was worshipped in Gaza and Ashdod (1 Samuel 5:2-7). The first part of Dagon, Dag, means *fish* in Hebrew. Dagon was his Hebrew name. The statue of Dagon had hands, breast, and a head of a man, and the rest of the body was a fish. Hence, the hands of Dagon are mentioned in 1 Samuel 5:4, but not his feet. He was the emblem of fertility and productiveness for the sea-going people. You can find the image of this god on ancient Philistine and Phoenician coins in museums. You can also see it on Assyrian gems in the British Museum.

At the great sacrifice to Dagon, the Philistines took it upon themselves to thank Dagon for the capture of Samson. They knew he had killed many Philistines.

(iii) Samson’s Death (16:25-31)

(a) Samson’s Last Day (16:25 – 27)

We come now to Samson’s death. At the great sacrifice to Dagon, the people decided to bring Samson out for amusement. The Philistines were amused at the sight of blind Samson. It was Samson’s last day, but it was also a disastrous decision on the part of the Philistines. Verse 25. *“It so happened when they were in high spirits that they said, “Call for Samson, that he may amuse us.” So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.*²⁶ *Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.”*²⁷ *Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them.”* (16:25 – 27)

Can you imagine the sight of the mighty blind Samson being led by a boy? That alone was enough to amuse the Philistines without any feats of strength. We do not know if Samson did anything to amuse the Philistines except be led by a little boy.

But Samson must have known the design of the huge house. Any house that could hold three thousand men and women on the roof had to be huge. In the construction of that day, and after that for many centuries, rooftop plazas were supported by rows and columns of pillars below. More than likely, the three thousand people were on the raised level in the Dagon temple area where they could look down on the courtyard as was the later design of King Solomon's Palace. Once Samson could feel the columns, he could find his way to the main two key columns that held the whole complex together.



Replica of King Solomon's Palace
with a courtyard

(b) Samson's Last Request (16:28 – 30)

Once Samson found his place with his hands on the right two columns, he could make his last request. Verse 28. *"Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. ³⁰ And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life."* (16:28 – 30)