

SAMSON (2.4.18)

Today we will continue with a look at Samson as one of the “faith” heroes named in Hebrews Chapter 11.

Since last Sunday, while on the internet doing more research for this sermon, I saw where a new movie is hitting the theatres February 16, called “Samson.” That is the first I saw of that and let me assure you this sermon (which I started working on late last year) has nothing to do with the fact that this new movie is coming. I watched that movie’s “trailer” and, as you can imagine, it is quite dramatic and, yes, a bit over the top. But, I’m glad to see the topic of Samson will soon receive attention in this failing nation.

Several weeks back, I had an opportunity to talk with a young, female K-State student who attended this church as part of her “research” for a religion class she was taking at that university. In the course of our discussion, I mentioned Samson. She gave me a blank look. I asked her: “Have you ever heard of Samson?” She hadn’t. After we conclude today, I trust none in this listening audience will suffer from that shortcoming.

With that, we return to the book of Judges, and specifically Chapter 16 therein, taking up where we left off last time:

16 Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

² And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.

³ And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.

⁴ And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

⁵ And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

⁶ And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

⁷ And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

⁸ Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

⁹ Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow [*shorter, less desirable flax fibers*] is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.

¹⁰ And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

¹¹ And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

12 Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.

13 And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

14 And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

15 And she said unto him, 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.

16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

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.

- We are now a couple decades-plus down the road from the earlier events discussed in the preceding chapters 14 and 15. In this chapter's account, Samson travels to Gaza – a major Philistine city – where things went south real quick. It was dangerous for him to travel there, given his history with the Philistines, though he probably traveled under a disguise. It wasn't long before the men of that city (Gazites) discovered Samson's presence (it being unrealistic such a famous person could remain undetected) at which point they immediately began plotting to kill him the next morning. Henry: *Notice was sent to the magistrates of Gaza, perhaps by the treacherous harlot herself, that Samson was in the town. . . . The gates of the city were hereupon shut, guards set, all kept quiet, that Samson might suspect no danger.* They thought they had him.
- But Samson sensed danger and awoke at midnight, perhaps roused by a dream as we see in Job 33:15: **In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed.** Or perhaps by a guilty conscience was he awakened.
- Samson then made his way to the gate of the city and **took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders** (Judges 16:3). This act showed his colossal strength to his enemies: The doors and posts were quite heavy and he carried them for miles, Hebron being about 20 miles from Gaza. Toting the gate away was understood in that part of the world to be a very peculiar insult. And then there's this from Gill: *This was an emblem of Christ's resurrection, of whom Samson was a type, who being encompassed in a sepulchre, and sealed and watched by*

soldiers, broke through the bars of death and the grave, and carried off the doors in triumph; and in a short time ascended to heaven, whereby he declared himself to be the Son of God with power. It was usual for doors and bars of gates to be carried in triumph, and laid up in temples; and the Jews say these doors were not less than sixty cubits, and suppose Samson's shoulders to be as broad. [Note: A Biblical cubit is about 18 inches; obviously, the length of Samson's shoulders was not 18" x 60 cubits as that would be 1080 inches or 90 feet; what Gill is probably saying here is that each shoulder was around 18 inches in width. In any event, it would be fair to say that Samson had "broad shoulders."]

- Delilah was of the valley of Sorek, believed to be close to Samson's home town of Zorah. The money offered to Delilah by the Philistine rulers was, to quote Ellicott, *a most enormous bribe for that age, and especially to such a woman as Delilah*. Sadly, with Delilah – like Judas Iscariot – it was all about the money.

- The lengths to which Delilah went trying to discover the source of Samson's strength, with the trembling Philistines waiting in the wings, is self-explanatory from the text. The first attempt with **seven green withs** (Judges 16:7) -- vines or crude vegetable stalks -- didn't work. Next, the **new ropes** (Judges 16:11) similarly fell short, when he busted them loose **like a thread** (Judges 16:12). Weaving the seven locks ("machele" meaning "curls" or "plaits") of Samson's head of hair likewise failed. As to this third incident, Ellicott writes: *With almost incredible levity and folly, Samson here goes to the very verge of the true secret, and suffers his sacred hair to be woven in a harlot's loom.*

- But Delilah wouldn't give it a rest, to the point that Samson **was vexed unto death** (Judges 16:16). Jamieson-Fausset-Brown says on this: *Though disappointed and mortified, this vile woman resolved to persevere; and conscious how completely he was enslaved by his passion for her, she assailed him with a succession of blandishing arts, till she at length discovered the coveted secret.*

At which point, Samson finally revealed the true secret, that he had never had a haircut, and **if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.** (Judges 16:17). On this, Benson tells us: *Not that his hair was in itself the cause of his strength, but because it was the chief condition of that covenant whereby God was pleased to engage to fit him for and assist him in that great work to which he had called him. But upon his violation of the condition, God justly withdraws his help.* Matthew Henry is merciless in this regard: *The disclosure he at last made of this great secret; and, if the disclosure proved fatal to him, he must thank himself, who had not power to keep his own counsel from one that manifestly sought his ruin. Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, but in Samson's sight is the net spread, and yet he is taken in it. If he had not been blind before the Philistines put out his eyes, he might have seen himself betrayed.*

- Delilah then gave Samson some kind of sleeping potion and while he slept, she called for a man (probably one of the concealed spies mentioned in Judges 16:9) who shaved Samson's head. Straightaway Samson's strength left and the Philistines then put out his eyes, bound him and took him back to Gaza where he was imprisoned. Such is the wretched condition of man when the Lord departs; i.e. no inherent strength to self-save, blind, bound and imprisoned. Why didn't they kill Samson at that point? Most believe these Philistine actors had promised Delilah if she cooperated with them in the capture of Samson, they would not kill him. But his hair **began to grow again** (Judges 16:22) and Matthew Henry best captures the meaning here: *Samson's afflictions were the means of bringing him to deep repentance. By the loss of his bodily sight the eyes of his understanding were opened; and by depriving him of bodily strength, the Lord was pleased to renew his spiritual strength. The Lord permits some few to wander wide and sink deep, yet he recovers them at last, and marking his displeasure at sin in their severe temporal sufferings, preserves them from sinking into the pit of destruction. Hypocrites may abuse these examples, and infidels mock at them, but true*

Christians will thereby be rendered more humble, watchful, and circumspect; more simple in their dependence on the Lord, more fervent in prayer to be kept from falling, and in praise for being preserved; and, if they fall, they will be kept from sinking into despair.

- Now we move on to the final scene of this drama, that being the Philistines' **great sacrifice unto Dagon their god** (Judges 16:23) coupled with their celebration of Samson's downfall. Dagon was the national idol of the Philistines. The Hebrew word *dag* means fish, and this Dagon was likely in the form of part-fish, part-human, with the top part being human and the bottom part being fish, not unlike a mermaid. We learn more of the ultimate outcome of this "god" from 1 Samuel 5:4 - **And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.** This god-idol was so important to the Philistines that the **house of Dagon** (1 Samuel 5:2) was a major part of the Philistine culture, comparable to the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. One might think a people worshiping a fish god is supremely stupid, but it makes about as much sense as making a multi-colored (red, white and blue) piece of cloth a nation's idol.
- As these high and mighty Philistines festively paid homage to Dagon and raised thanks for Samson's fall, they decided to make **sport** of Samson and had him brought into the place and then made the unwise decision of placing **him between the pillars** of that great arena. (Judges 16:25). Josephus says they sent for Samson *that they might insult him over their wine*. They doubtless heaped on him every species of indignity and bitter scoffs. Here we have more similarity to Christ. For example, from Matthew 27:29 we see the Roman soldiers making sport of Jesus: **And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they**

bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And from Matthew 26:67-68 we read of the chief priests and elders doing likewise: **Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him, and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?** In the middle of all this, likely feigning some level of fatigue, weariness and perhaps handicap, Samson convinced his keeper to let him lean on the pillars to the building.

- This was no mean gathering of humans. We are told 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.** (Judges 16:27). This roof was likely flat with a railing constructed around the edge (as was the custom in those days and places), making it virtually impossible for anybody to escape. See Deuteronomy 22:8 in this regard: **When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.** Likely the rulers, office-holders, judges and the like were in the great hall itself, while the common people were on the roof. It was then and there that Samson prayed unto the Lord for a one-time strength to be **avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.** (Judges 16:28). The prayer was answered and Samson pushed aside the two pillars holding up that building with this result: **[T]he 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).
- Troubling questions are presented by this story's conclusion. Was this suicide? Did Samson seek vengeance in his own right? Matthew Henry seems to give us the best take on this: *Nothing fills up the sins of any person or people faster than mocking and misusing the servants of God, even though it is by their own folly that they are brought low. God put it into Samson's heart, as a public person, thus to avenge on them God's quarrel, Israel's, and*

his own. That strength which he had lost by sin, he recovers by prayer. That it was not from passion or personal revenge, but from holy zeal for the glory of God and Israel, appears from God's accepting and answering the prayer. The house was pulled down, not by the natural strength of Samson, but by the almighty power of God. In his case it was right he should avenge the cause of God and Israel. Nor is he to be accused of self-murder. He sought not his own death, but Israel's deliverance, and the destruction of their enemies. Thus Samson died in bonds, and among the Philistines, as an awful rebuke for his sins; but he died repentant.

- A final note of interest from the closing verse (31) that mentions **all the house of his father** involved in burying Samson. The suggestion is that Samson's parents had more children after his supernatural birth, which is usual when God has given extraordinary and unexpected power of procreating a child, such as Abraham (Genesis 25:1-2) and Hannah (1 Samuel 2:21), the latter telling us: **And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters.**

A few thoughts in closing: I found no sermon on Samson -- no serious literature or poetry. There is one poem I ran across: *Samson was a big strong man, a big strong man was he. He killed a lion with his hands, like one would squash a flea. With but a donkey's jawbone he whacked a thousand men, and iced yet even more when foes set fire to kin. He trapped 300 foxes and set their tails ablaze, and though men gouged his eyes out their temple Samson razed.* Not exactly Nobel Prize in Literature or Pulitzer Prize for Poetry material. But let that not deter us. To put a fine point on it: It's all about the faith!

I love you. Amen!