

## Judges 16A

- In our previous study of Samson, we watched him betrayed by his Jewish brothers and turned over to Israel's enemies, the Philistines
  - The Jews were upset because their oppressors were upset
    - And the Philistines were upset because Samson had killed many Philistines in retaliation for their murder of his wife
    - This was a cycle of revenge and violence
    - And it culminated in all-out-warfare with the Philistines
  - This is what the Lord intended, since he raised up Samson in the first place to free Israel from their oppressor
    - But as we've studied already, Samson wasn't very focused on this mission
    - He got caught up in marrying the Philistines instead of opposing them
    - But through a series of circumstances, the Lord has brought Samson to this point
    - Since Samson wouldn't go to the fight, the Lord brought the fight to him
- And then we have Samson's unique gifts
  - He's anointed by the Spirit to possess unique strength
    - So that he can defeat entire armies by his own hand
    - Last time we read in chapter 15 that Samson used his strength to thwart the Jews' plan to hand him over to the Philistines
    - He broke his bonds and single-handedly defeat the entire army by his own arm using just the jawbone of an ass
- So as we return to the end of chapter 15, we've now seen Samson defeat the Philistine army twice by himself
  - This detail in itself says a lot about the deterioration of the Jewish culture during the time of Judges

- Think back for a moment to the prior judges we've studied
- At first, judges led armies in defeat of God's enemies
- As time has gone by, it's become increasingly difficult for these judges to find the will among the people to enter battle
  - Debrah had to go before Barak
  - Gideon had to be convinced to go himself
  - And Jephthah had to work to recruit his army from among the tribes while other Jews attacked him
- And now we see a judge literally fighting by himself
  - It would seem the Lord knew this would be the situation Samson would face in his time as judge
  - Which explains Samson unique powers
  - The Lord knew Samson would be acting alone in his battles
  - Worse than that, He knew Samson's Jewish brothers would oppose him in the fight
- But now Samson is acting as God expected, pushing the Philistines back to the coast and freeing the Jewish people
  - Perhaps Samson is on the right path now
    - Maybe he'll move ahead in obedience
    - Bringing with him the rest of his brothers
  - Before we can see that answer, we need to return to the scene at the end of chapter 15
    - Because as the battle finishes, there is an interesting moment

**Judg. 15:18** Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the Lord and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"

**Judg. 15:19** But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

**Judg. 15:20** So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

- Following the battle, Samson is understandably thirsty
  - Samson was betrayed by His brothers yet won the battle for them by himself against a determined enemy
    - In the process he became weak and so thirsty that he contemplates the possibility of death
    - So he appeals to the Lord asking for relief and deliverance from the enemies of Israel
  - In response, the Lord split a hollow place creating a fountain of running (or as the Jew would say, living) water
    - That spring revived Samson's strength and brought back his strength
    - He named the spring En-hakkore, which can be translated "the voice of the one calling"
- In all these details, we find a picture in Samson's life of Jesus' death on the cross
  - Jesus was betrayed by His brothers to hang on a cross
    - When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He was winning a victory against the enemy by His own hand
    - No one worked with Jesus in winning this victory, for it was a salvation that only Jesus could accomplish
    - As Isaiah writes concerning the Messiah's victory over the enemy

**[Is. 63:5](#)** "I looked, and there was no one to help,  
 And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold;  
 So My own arm brought salvation to Me,  
 And My wrath upheld Me.

- Secondly, as Jesus hung on the cross, He was in desperate thirst, which the Gospels document

**[John 19:28](#)** After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty."

- Jesus' thirst on the cross came after all the work of redemption had been accomplished

- Just as Samson's thirst came after he had won his battle with the Philistines
- And Samson's mention of death in connection to his thirst is answered by a spring of flowing or living water
  - Just as the Father turned the death of Christ into a spring of living water
  - And like the name Samson gave his spring, the well of living water coming forth from the Spirit is one calling the world to follow the Lord
  - As Jesus described Himself in John 4

[John 4:13](#) Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;

[John 4:14](#) but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

- So Samson has defeated the Philistines and overcome the efforts of his brothers to betray him
  - And with this victory, Samson is able to establish himself as a man to rule Israel
    - Samuel gives us this in a single footnote to the story

[Judg. 15:20](#) So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

- From this point Samson judged Israel twenty years
- In fact, Samuel is referring to Samson's final twenty years of ruling
  - He has been installed as judge for some time
  - But the Lord has been waiting for Samson to fulfill his calling
  - Only now does Samuel indicate that Samson has arrived in his proper place
- Secondly, notice that his ruling coincides with the days of the Philistines
  - Remember, Samson was supposed to remove Israel's enemy

- Just as past judges had pushed out the oppressors and restored peace to the land, so was Samson supposed to do
- But in this continual weakening of the Jewish society, even a mighty man like Samson can't complete his mission
- He will spend his entire life fighting Philistines
- The next moment Samuel records in the story of Samson begins chapter 16

**Judg. 16:1 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.**

- We witnessed steps of faith and obedience from Samson at the end of chapter 15, but unfortunately his untamed, impulsive nature remains
  - Sometime during the twenty years, Samson decides to visit a prostitute
  - He goes into Gaza, an area in the heart of the Philistine territory
  - Historically, his sunny area of the Mediterranean has long been a favorite vacation spot for Jews
  - So perhaps Samson didn't go there expressly to find a harlot
  - But what happens in Gaza, stays in Gaza...
- Samson's plan is a bad idea, and for more reasons than the obvious
  - He's traveling deep into the heart of the enemy's territory
  - He's been at war with them for years, so surely he's a wanted man
  - And yet here he is taking an unnecessary chance
  - In a sense, he's testing God's patience and willingness to protect His anointed
- Furthermore, frolicking with the Philistines on their beaches is not part of the plan of destroying these people
  - It's a similar compromise to marrying a Philistine
  - What part of "destroy the Philistines" didn't Samson understand?
- Lastly, Samson is clearly weak in his flesh when it comes to women

- He lusted after the Philistine woman earlier
- Now he's willing to cavort with a Philistine prostitute
- Ironically, the man has the strength of a thousand warriors, but he can't defeat his own sinful desires
- Every one of us can identify with Samson to one degree or another when it comes to fighting our flesh and losing
  - But having said that, we don't always have to lose that battle
    - While we'll never be free of the struggle as long as we're in this body
    - Nevertheless, we don't have to throw our hands up and concede to defeat
    - We can take steps to stack the odds in our favor
    - We can pray, we can fill our hearts with the counsel of God's word, we can seek godly encouragement and accountability
  - But most of all, we can set healthy boundaries and limits knowing our weaknesses
    - Samson knows he has an eye for the ladies
    - So he had no business walking into the heart of the enemy's territory
    - He was daring his flesh to trip him up
    - And our flesh is always ready to take up that challenge
  - Consider what it means for you to walk onto the enemy's territory like Samson did
    - Where are those strongholds in your life, the places the flesh has the advantage
    - And once you identify them, cross them off your map and as they say, don't go there
    - Make decisions to place barrier between you and your Gaza before you find yourself in the midst of it
    - Because by that point it's simply too late

- This is Samson's chief weakness, his principle conceit
  - He knows he's physically strong and anointed by the Spirit
    - So he assumes he's also spiritual strong, at least strong enough to sin without consequence
    - To tempt the Lord to rescue him if he gets in over his head
  - But he's no match for his flesh, and over the years it's diminished Samson
    - Consider how much more Samson could have achieved without the weight of sinful flesh pulling him backward
    - Without his tendency to feed it
    - Consider how much you can do to defeat the enemies of the Lord when you're not busy fighting your own flesh
    - Set boundaries, seek help from within the body of Christ, recognize the lost opportunities and recommit to serving the Lord
    - Seek to develop spiritual strength in ways Samson never did
- And so as Samson seeks to please his flesh, the enemy has opportunity

**Judg. 16:2** When it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him."

**Judg. 16:3** Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.

- To no one's surprise, the Philistines in Gaza take note of Samson's arrival and decide they have their chance to kill their enemy
  - So they late in wait for him all night at the gate of the city
    - The gate of the city is the main entrance into and out of the city
    - The gate was much more than merely a door
    - It was a multi-chambered room usually with a second story that connected to the walkway atop the city wall

- So the Philistines assume that in the morning, Samson will walk through the gate on his way home
  - They were either expecting to leap upon him from a hiding place or perhaps from above
  - Either way, they think themselves capable of defeating Samson in this way
- But somehow Samson is alerted to the plan, perhaps the Spirit gave Samson the insight supernaturally
  - So at midnight, once the men in the gate were likely asleep, Samson takes his leave
  - He's going to leave before the men expect him so he can avoid their trap
  - There's only one problem with this plan: the city gates were locked shut at night
- No problem for Samson, since he merely grabs the gates and rips them away, complete with the door posts and the horizontal bar used to car the doors closed
  - Even imagining such a thing is difficult for us
    - These doors would have been quite large and extremely heavy
    - These are Philistine doors, which means they were likely wood beam overlaid with iron
    - You can safely assume hundreds if not thousands of pounds
  - And if that weren't enough he carries them up to a mountain some distance away
    - Gaza is a long way from Hebron, about 40 miles uphill
    - While we can't say it wasn't possible to go that far, since if he could uproot them at all, he could carry them anywhere
    - But the purpose in carrying them away was to place them on a hill in full view of the city
    - Which would argue that Samson carries them to a hill in the direction of Hebron

- Samson's point to the city including the men sleeping in the gate is that he can't be felled by their schemes
  - It was a dramatic display of the Lord's anointed
  - And true as it was, it was also an ironic display
  - Because while Samson's physical victory is overshadowed by his spiritual defeat
  - It's an abuse of his position as judge
  - And he's tempting the Lord to bring defeat to subdue his pride
- But this whole story is merely prelude to what comes next
  - Samson's spiritual weakness especially with women becomes opportunity for the enemy to seek his downfall
    - Samuel told us about the harlot to help understand how Samson is eventually brought down
    - The Lord is forgiving and patient but He's not permissive
    - He will eventually bring discipline against His children
  - And so if Samson insists on staying close to Israel's enemy and to their women, then the Lord is just to use that sin to bring a measure of discipline

**Judg. 16:4** After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

**Judg. 16:5** 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."

- The valley of Sorek lies in – you guessed it – a Philistine controlled territory north of Beth-shemesh
- It was a major east-west thoroughfare connecting the hill country of Judah to the coastal plain of the Philistine cities
- Apparently, Samson was moving through this valley perhaps to visit more Philistines cities when he meets a woman called Delilah

- The name Delilah is Jewish, indicating that this woman was not a Philistine
  - Still, the town existed on the border where the two cultures mixed freely, so we don't know her origins for sure
  - And considering what she is willing to do for the Philistines, it seems more likely she was a Philistine woman
  - In that sense, she serves as the poster child for these days
  - She personifies the way Jewish and Philistine culture is combining, because of the weakness of the people
- The Philistine leaders see the perfect opportunity to discover Samson's secret
  - The very fact that they need to understand where his strength came from confirms something I mentioned a few weeks ago
    - I said that we mustn't imagine Samson some muscular body builder type of man, as he's often portrayed in pictures
    - More likely, he looked ordinary, like Clark Kent
    - But when the time came he could do amazing things
    - And they want to understand how to defeat this power, what his kryptonite was
  - The fee they offer Delilah for the information is 1,100 pieces or coins of silver
    - In that day, a person could live a comfortable lifestyle on ten pieces of silver per year
    - So she's being offers a fortune for life
    - That tells you how important this information was to the Philistines
  - So they pay a woman to get the secret out of him, and we've seen this story before
    - Earlier, Samson lost a bet over a riddle because he couldn't say no to a crying woman
    - This time he's going to give away much more
    - And it seems he's willing to do it for much less

[Judg. 16:6](#) So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you."

[Judg. 16:7](#) 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."

[Judg. 16:8](#) Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

[Judg. 16:9](#) 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.

- So Delilah's first attempt yielded a false answer
  - Samson obviously knew better than to hand over the secret to some Philistine woman
    - Instead of divulging the real secret, he gives her a false answer
    - Tie me up with seven fresh cords and I'm yours, he tells her
  - Obviously, Samson knew that she was planning something so he was merely toying with her
    - After she reports this "secret" to the Philistines, the leaders get her the cords
    - And she binds Samson
    - How does she manage this? Maybe while he was sleeping or through some other deception
    - But of course, Samson was probably playing along
  - Then she announces the ambush and Samson proceeds to snap the cords
    - We don't know what happened to the unfortunately Philistines at this point, but we assume they just left
    - This seems to be Samson's principle defense: no one dares challenge him knowing his power
- Of course, Delilah did not appreciate being deceived by Samson
  - There was a lot of money on the line for her, yet Samson was just making a fool of her

- So she complains of his bad treatment

[Judg. 16:10](#) Then Delilah said to Samson, “Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound.”

[Judg. 16:11](#) 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.”

[Judg. 16:12](#) 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.

- Delilah makes Samson out to be the bad guy here, overlooking her own conspiracy against him
  - What’s even more remarkable is Samson’s willingness to continue his relationship with this Jezebel
  - She’s obviously intent on bringing Samson down, and yet he shows no concern
  - He should have recognized the threat and moved on
- Instead, he continues to toy with her
  - She asks again and he gives her another false answer
  - Again she and the Philistines fall for it
  - And again he wins and presumably chases off his adversaries
- Now at this point any reasonable person would leave, right?
  - Scripture says flee from temptation
    - But Samson isn’t fleeing
    - He’s almost daring the enemy to find a way to beat him
    - It’s as if he thinks he’s invincible
  - What explains his behavior?
    - It’s simple...his pride and lust has clouded his judgment
    - He’s confident in his strength with no regard for the strength of the enemy to say nothing of the Lord
    - He’s depending on his anointing like it’s a superhero power

- He forgets that his power had a source outside himself
- And the same Lord who gave Samson these powers could remove His blessing at any time
- The Lord didn't raise Samson to serve himself, and so his strength was a tool the Lord intended to use to accomplish a specific purpose
  - Such is the life of every believer
  - We haven't been saved for our own sake but to seek for the glory of God among the nations of the world
  - Don't let your flesh send you off track, into enemy territory
- Next week we'll see how the Lord brings Samson low because of Samson's pride