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Judges 15 - 16



Judges - Steve Gregg

In "Judges 15 - 16", Steve Gregg continues his exploration of the story of Samson. Samson's actions are examined, including his capture and use of 300 foxes to damage Philistine crops. The revenge he seeks against his father-in-law after being deceived is also discussed. The story ultimately leads to Samson's downfall, as his secret strength - tied to his long hair and Nazrite vow - is revealed by Delilah, leading to his capture and death.

Transcript

Last time we began looking at the story of Samson in Judges Chapter 13, and we covered chapters 13 and 14. There remain two other chapters to complete the story of Samson. As I said, he is the one who's given the longest treatment.

He's given the most detailed treatment of his life of any of the judges, and yet he's in some ways the most unworthy, seemingly unworthy, to be honored or to be considered a judge. That is, unless all of those scandals in his life, which we read about in chapters 14, 15, and 16, really belong to a relatively short period at the end of his life, at the end of 20 years of judging Israel. And if he had judged Israel honorably in the early portion of his life, then these famous stories about his succumbing to his lusts and his anger and things like that, and his untimely death, would be the results of a late-in-life backsliding.

And his life would then become an example of how a man who had served God could fall away and bring disaster upon himself and on the ministry. We are told that he judged Israel for 20 years, and yet we are not given 20 years' worth of material about his life. We're told in chapter 13 that the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him, apparently when he was a young man.

There's a certain location in Mahana Dam between Zorah and Eshtel, it says in chapter 13, verse 25, where the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him. And this is mentioned immediately after him being a child and growing up. So it may be that in his adolescence or young manhood, that he began to be moved by the Spirit of God in ways that are not specified.

We know that later in his life, these movements of the Spirit of God coming upon him resulted in him doing physical feats of a supernatural nature. And that may be the main spiritual gift or the main characteristic of God's Spirit moving upon him, even at the earlier stages. But maybe not.

We don't know. Because we know that Deborah was not only a judge but also a prophetess, and the Spirit of the Lord obviously was upon her as a prophetess. And so maybe the Spirit of the Lord being on Samson in his earlier years was that which qualified him to be a judge.

And he might have even been a righteous judge for all we know for some of those years. But we find him led astray, whether from an earlier compromised life or an earlier righteous, like we don't know. There are many who feel that the reason that we are given so much attention to Samson in the book is because he is really sort of the epitome of Israel itself.

From birth, he was selected to be set apart for God as a Nazirite. The word Nazirite means one who is separated unto God. Well, so was the nation of Israel.

They were set apart for God among the nations. To be God's own special people. And because of the special calling that they had in their devotion to God, God on many occasions did supernatural feats through them.

The escape from Egypt involved a great number of supernatural phenomena, but also their conquest of Sion and Og and later of the Canaanites and of many other things throughout their history. God has supernaturally used Israel. It was through Israel that the prophets came.

The Spirit of the Lord upon them gave us the Old Testament scriptures. The Spirit of the Lord on John the Baptist and even on Christ gave us the New Covenant. That God's Spirit moving upon Israel and Israel's Nazirite status, we might say, Israel's special set-apart status as a people of God, might be reflected in those stronger and better aspects of Samson's career.

But then also Israel failed. Israel became guilty of spiritual adultery and harlotry. We find Samson being led astray by women too.

One of them is specifically said to be a harlot. We're not given her name, but then Delilah may very well have been a harlot as well. We don't know.

She might just have been a girlfriend, but because he was led away after foreign women, he was compromised and he violated his Nazirite vow. Israel also was led away after foreign gods and foreign religions and God said they played the harlot with many gods. Eventually the Lord departed from Samson just as the Lord departed from Israel.

But later in his life after he was afflicted for some period of time by the Gentiles, Philistines, he apparently turned back to God in faith and God used him and he slew a great number of the enemy in his death. Some might feel like this refers to the highest point in Israel's glory when their representative Jesus Christ, the Messiah, slew the enemies of his people through his death. He cast down the powers of darkness, he conquered them, he disarmed the principalities and powers through the cross.

Samson is seen as a type of Israel and Christ himself the anti-type of Israel. Samson would be like a picture of Israel's career, but Israel itself is a picture and a type of the greatest Israelite Jesus. Things in Samson's life may be thought to be recorded because of the way that his own career as a person often parallels that of the general status and career of Israel.

Now in chapter 14 we saw that the problems between Samson and the Philistines apparently began with a romantic relationship that Samson struck up with a Philistine woman. Actually he saw a woman, he wanted her to be his wife, this was not an affair he was having or a prostitute, this was just a woman he wanted to marry. It was customary in those days if a man wanted to marry a woman that his parents would make the arrangements with her parents.

So he comes to his parents and says I saw this woman I want to get her for me. The parents objected initially because she was not a Jewish woman and she was actually of the Philistine race. But we can see that the Israelites were largely compromised with the Philistines at this time.

We're going to find that the 3000 men of Judah come to arrest Samson to turn him over to the Philistines and say don't you know the Philistines are our overlords we're not supposed to be disobedient to them. The Jews seem to be more or less living in an uneasy peace under the oppression of the Philistines as long as they didn't rebel the Philistines apparently didn't oppress too severely. So there's probably other intermarriage going on because we read in the book of Judges in general that one of the mistakes Israel made many times was that they simply intermarried with the Canaanites.

The Philistines were not Canaanites but they were counted as Canaanites because they were in the land and they were to be overthrown. But the Israelites had not overthrown them and therefore they were living in kind of a maybe an uneasy alliance under the Philistine domination. And so although Samson's father and mother protested about his choice of a wife they at his insistence went ahead and made the arrangement.

So there was this wedding feast or celebration it was seven days long it may have been like a bachelor party Samson didn't have a lot of friends apparently and so 30 young men of the Philistines came to be his attendants at the wedding. And he decided to do something that would make him rich at their expense to pose a riddle to them and if they would lose they'd have to supply him with 30 garments and if he lost he'd have to

supply 30 garments for the 30 of them. He certainly stood to gain more individually than any of them individually did but that may have been why he was found it tempting to do this he posed a riddle which they could not solve.

And so they threatened his wife at the wedding you know that they would burn her and her father with fire if she didn't get the answer for them. And so she pestered Samson until he finally caved in and told her she told them and they answered the riddle which of course obligated him to provide 30 garments for them. And so he went to another Philistine city Ashkelon and he simply killed 30 men and took their clothes and gave them to these 30 men.

Now this of course made Samson an enemy of the Philistines he had gone and killed 30 of them unprovoked by the ones who died anyway. And so it says Samson was angry at this point and left the wedding left his wife there with her father. This led to another provocation because there was a misunderstanding Samson believed she was still his wife and he was just leaving to cool down his anger but her father assumed that he was annulling the marriage because of his anger and had left.

And so her father gave her the daughter to another man actually the one who had been the best man of Samson and she married him. Now Samson didn't know about this initially and when he found out this was not okay with him and so there was more violence to come as a result of this provocation. In chapter 15 it says after a while in the time of wheat harvest it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat and he said let me go into my wife into her room but her father would not permit him to go in.

Her father said I really thought that you had thoroughly hated her therefore I gave her to your companion is not her younger sister better than she please take her instead. Now Samson apparently still wanted this woman even though she had deceived him and he was angry at her he was not willing to take her younger sister who was by the reports more attractive than she was. He just saw it as an affront to himself that without his agreement that his wife had been taken from him and given to somebody else and so Samson said to them this time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them.

Now it is true he was wronged in this situation but he had left the matter rather ambiguous and he could hardly entirely blame her father for the conclusions he had reached. And Samson's reactions were definitely over reactions if we're thinking of them in terms of mere retaliation against an offense an affront because instead of doing something to her father who had done the wrong he goes out and damages property and lives of many Philistines who had nothing to do with the situation. In fact when the Philistines discover that Samson is doing this because of what his wife and her father did they go out and take matters into their own hands and punish the father and the daughter and then Samson takes that as a personal affront even though they're trying to

atone for the wrong that was done.

Samson is angry at them for killing his wife and father-in-law and so the hostilities simply keep escalating and not necessarily over what would be clear cut affronts and offenses in some cases it seems to be a misunderstanding but Samson is in every case reacting we might say over reacting. He certainly is causing more collateral damage than the offenses would seem to justify and so seen simply as a grievance between a man and a nation the Philistines. Samson would seem to be the one in the wrong on the other hand we know that God's intention was to judge the Philistines in fact the whole beginning of this cycle of offense and redress is said to have been of the Lord.

In chapter 14 verse 4 it says but his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord that he God was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. Now I would say Samson was acting in his own motivations sinfully he was just giving in to his anger and you know taking vengeance even on people who were not guilty of the things he had done but it was like when Assyria came and destroyed Israel according to Isaiah chapter 10 the Assyrians didn't have good motives for that they were just nasty aggressors but as far as God was concerned he was acting in his own sinfully. As far as God was concerned Assyria was the tool in God's hands by which he was punishing a nation Israel which deserved to be punished and so also Samson I don't think he had good motives I think he was sinning I think he was just giving in to hurt pride and anger but he was being used by God almost without his paying much attention to that fact.

To judge the Philistines now we might even assume that all the Philistines were like all the Canaanites they were certainly worshippers of idolatrous gods not everything we see about them is seen to be evil in many cases they seem to be just like anybody else but then on the other hand maybe everybody else is evil too. The point is that these people were worthy of judgment and so what came upon them at the hands of Samson is seen as God's judgment upon the Philistines God was moving Samson the spirit of God was coming on him and moving him to do these things although they may not have been things which for an ordinary man to do in ordinary circumstances they might have been unjust things but they ended up in the hand of God being judgments upon the Philistines. God who works behind and through all things brought about his judgment on them.

So Samson said in verse 3 of chapter 15 this time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them. And Samson went and caught 300 foxes or many commentators believe this to be translated jackals jackals were much more common in the Middle East than foxes as we think of foxes and he took torches and turned the foxes tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

Now one might ask how did he get his hands on 300 jackals for one thing catching them would not be the easiest thing in the world although he might have contrived a trap or maybe the spirit of the Lord came on him and he could outrun them. Even so finding that many in a geographical area might seem strange. On the other hand we don't know over what period of time he trapped them.

He might have been trapping them over a period of months and we're just told the story in a few verses time but it may be that he was collecting them and starting his own little jackal zoo and then he tied their tails together and put torches to them. So 150 pairs of jackals with 150 torches running wild terrified by the flames that were tied to their tails just running through the fields and the vineyards and the olive groves just caught just about everything on fire. They didn't have the firefighting equipment we have now this would have been a wildfire in a big way that many torches going through the fields at one time going all different directions.

There must have been hundreds of acres if not more of productive land that was burned up. That would be a tremendously devastating impact on the economy of the Philistines and the Philistines who suffered the loss didn't have any idea why anyone would do this. They had not provoked anybody why would anyone do this.

Now one might argue that for any Israelite to do this to the Philistines would be not unprovoked the Philistines had come and oppressed them. The Philistines were invaders and oppressors so for there to be freedom fighters whether it was Samson or anyone else might not be viewed as unprovoked attack it was more like trying to drive the oppressors out who had already attacked them. In any case the Philistines didn't see it that way they'd been living peaceably for the most part with Israel and for someone to do this to them just seemed like why would anyone do that.

The Philistines said who has done this and they answered Samson the son in law of the Timnite because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion. So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. Now you might think well that's a strange reaction why didn't they do that to Samson but they were apparently trying to appease Samson.

In other words even though Samson had done this damage to them they saw that he'd been wronged and he'd been wronged by this particular family among the Philistines and so they took vengeance on the family more or less to well I mean they could have done it just out of anger. That the family had brought Samson's rage upon them but also it could have been something to appease Samson. You may remember at a much later time in David's reign that a famine or some kind of a plague came on Israel and when David inquired of the Lord he said it was because Saul his predecessor had sought to wipe out the Gibeonites.

That tribe that had entered into the covenant with Joshua and there was a promise made

that Israel would do no harm to the Gibeonites. Saul however in his zeal to eradicate the land of foreigners had sought to wipe out the Gibeonites wrongfully and God was in a sense avenging Gibeon by sending a plague or a famine on Israel. And when David heard of it he called the Gibeonites and said what would you like done that we could appease you and they said give us seven of the descendants of Saul and we'll do them what we want.

And they actually killed seven descendants of Saul and that brought about a redress of the wrong. So in a sense the killing of this man and his daughter who had caused these disasters to come upon them was an appeasement of wrong in a very similar way to that where the Gibeonites were appeased by taking some of Saul's offspring and killing them. Anyway these are very barbaric times that we're reading about and killing people for that kind of thing would certainly not be approved in a modern enlightened age.

But perhaps they thought this would make Samson realize that the Philistines were not you know behind this treachery that had been done by this one family. And that they had now punished that family so Samson ought to just consider that to be you know everything the score has been settled. However Samson took it a different way because that was his wife he believed who had been killed by the Philistines so he's now going to avenge his wife.

Now she really was his companion's wife she had it's hard to say whether they had actually gone through the formalities of a wedding before Samson left. They must have if he thought that she was his wife or maybe they were just betrothed and never got to the wedding and that's why her father felt he could just give her to someone else. But betrothal was binding too and so he had every reason to believe that was his wife though she was now married to another man he still was taking it as she belongs to him.

And Samson said to them since you would do a thing like this I will surely take revenge on you and after that I will cease. So I took revenge on you for the wrong done by my father-in-law and now that you've killed him I'm going to take revenge on you for that. Samson seemed to just be angry and looking for any excuse to be offended so that he can do more harm to the people he's angry at.

So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter then he went down and dwelt in the cleft under the rock of Eton. Now these Philistines that he killed hip and thigh I'm not really sure how we're to understand hip and thigh in this it's obviously an idiom. I'm assuming that it meant that he just was waving his arm maybe with a weapon from hip to thigh I have no idea but the point is that he killed a lot of them.

Their number is not given on a later occasion he killed quite a few more a thousand on one occasion but this time we're not given any detail except he attacked and killed a lot of Philistines. Now the Philistines went up and camped in Judah and deployed themselves against Lehi. Now Lehi is a mountain Lehi means the place of the jawbone it was

probably not called that at this point in all likelihood it was named that afterward because this was the site where Samson killed a thousand Philistines with a jawbone and cast the jawbone off after he was done and that area that mountain was called the area or the mountain of the jawbone after that.

Lehi means jawbone. Now this is called by that name proleptically because at the time of writing that mountain was called that but when they encamped there it was probably not already called Lehi. That's the name it was later known by.

And the men of Judah said why have you come up against us? The people of Judah had been living more or less tranquilly under the Philistine overlords and had not stirred up any trouble so they were wondering why the Philistines were coming against them at this time. So they answered we have come up to arrest Samson to do to him as he has done to us. Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam which is where Samson was hanging out and said to Samson do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us? And he said to them as they did to me so I've done to them.

Well hardly. Many times when people take vengeance on other people they overdo it and yet they justify themselves because they've lost all sense of proportion. That is why Paul says in the twelfth chapter of Romans brethren do not avenge yourselves but give place to God's wrath as he has said vengeance is mine I will repay.

So Paul says don't take vengeance into your own hands let God do that. Because God of course will always do it right. God will not be unaware of what the proper amount of vengeance is that is appropriate.

Samson really overdid it. He killed a lot of people who were more or less innocent just because he was angry at their race for something one family did and then what they did to his family, the family that had wronged him in the first place. And he just says well what they did to me I did to them.

And they the people of Judah said to him we have come down to arrest you. Now he was not of the tribe of Judah he was of the tribe of Dan so they didn't have any particular loyalty to him as a fellow tribesman. But on the other hand he was an Israelite and here instead of recognizing him as somebody that God had raised up to deliver them from the Philistines they wanted to deliver him to the Philistines.

They were more interested in keeping the status quo letting the Philistines rule over them. It was not apparently a grinding kind of oppression like the Midianites had done in the days of Gideon it was more tolerable. And so they just wanted to keep things copacetic.

They just really didn't want stirring up any trouble. So instead of recognizing God had

raised up again a judge in Samson to deliver them from their oppressors they thought well no thanks you're just going to make trouble for us and so we're going to turn you over to them. And they said to him we have come down to arrest you that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines.

Then Samson said to them swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves. Now I don't know whether Samson could have taken on 3,000 men himself. He did take on 1,000 Philistines who knows what the limit would be.

Maybe he could take on 3,000 Judahites too but he wasn't going to do that because they were his countrymen. As a judge he was not there to just fight his own personal battles against his own people. But he was there he could slightly justify all his killing of Philistines by the fact that that's what judges did.

They killed their oppressors. So he did not even attempt to fight off the men of Judah who had come with 3,000 to arrest him. So he said I'll surrender without a fight if you swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves.

So they spoke to him saying no but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand. But we will surely not kill you. And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

Now new ropes because ropes that have been used are sometimes frayed and easily broken. And so we're told that it wasn't just ropes but it was ropes that were in good condition. Strong new ropes.

And they bound him not just with one but with two. And they brought him up from the rock and delivered him to the Philistines. In verse 14 when they came to Lehi the Philistines came shouting against him.

And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him. And the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire. So burnt string really.

And his bonds broke loose from his hands and he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey. Reached out his hand and took it and killed a thousand men with it. Now he was unarmed but he could take up anything that was hard and sharp nearby.

And with that weapon he could take on any number of Philistines. Now I don't know to what degree the Philistines were armed. They probably were armed.

They had come and encamped there. In all likelihood they had swords and spears and things like that. But it would seem that simply the breaking loose of the ropes might have thrown them into a panic.

And set them in disarray. And every Philistine began to feel like it's every man for

himself. Instead of any one of them wanting to rush Samson.

Or being organized enough to rush him as a group. Which probably would have gone badly for Samson. Except for of course the miraculous sense that God gave him power.

But with them all kind of looking out for their own skin. Trying to avoid this madman. He could take them individually.

And probably didn't have to take ten of them ganging up on him at the same moment. Or anything like that. It seems like they were panicked enough that they weren't organized in their assault.

And he just, he knew what he wanted to do. And he was aggressive and he went through and he killed a thousand of them. With this one weapon.

Then Samson said, and Samson did like to write poetry apparently. Because he made up a little poem about this. As he had made about the lion and the honey.

You know, out of the eater came something to eat. And out of the strong came something sweet. So here a little poem he puts together about this to commemorate his victory.

Apparently Samson seems to be a loner. And no one, you know, he fights his own battles alone. Without armies.

He's not leading the armies. He's a one-man army. He's like Rambo.

But he is, because he doesn't have, you know, a backup. He doesn't have anyone to sing his praises. So he sings his own praises.

Instead of waiting for the maidens to come out with their timbrels and celebrate his victory. Like they did David's or like they did Deborah's. He just writes his own victory song.

With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps. With the jawbone of a donkey, I've slain a thousand men. And it was so, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand and called that place Ramath-Lehi.

Which means the jawbone heights. Mount Jawbone. Named after the jawbone.

Even though it had that name. That name was mentioned earlier. It was probably not its original name.

Then he became very thirsty. So he cried out to the Lord and said, You have given this great deliverance by the hand of your servant. And now I shall die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised.

This is the first time I think we read of him praying. First time we really read of him acknowledging the Lord as the source of his survival. He may have prayed, you know, much earlier, but we don't read of it.

But this is the first time we see him actually acknowledging the Lord and his need for the Lord. So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi. In the King James Version, there's a strange phenomenon.

They translated that he split a hollow place in the jawbone. And Solomon drank, I don't want to say Solomon. Samson drank from the jawbone.

So reading the King James, you get the impression that this jawbone actually started spouting water and he drank from it. But that would be really miraculous. Of course, not that this wasn't miraculous, but that's not what's being said.

Lehi is the place. It means jawbone, but it's not talking about the jawbone that he used as a weapon, but as the location, which was now named after that jawbone. So God split the hollow place that is in that mountain there.

And water came out and he drank. And his spirit returned and he revived. Therefore, he called its name En-Hakor, which is in Lehi to this day.

En-Hakor means the spring of the collar because he called on the Lord and God provided a spring out of the ground there. And he judged Israel 20 years in the days of the Philistines. Now, jumping over how much time we don't know from the previous accounts, we have the end of his life now coming.

This is the beginning of the end. He has another romantic interest. This one is in Delilah, although that's not the first woman he meets here.

There's some more. Then Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there. Now, that's not Delilah necessarily.

That could be. We're not told that this harlot was Delilah. But he first is seen going to this harlot, and later we find him being in love with Delilah, which might have been the same woman or not.

And he went into this harlot, and when the Gazites, that's Gaza is the Philistine city where he is, when they 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. And Samson lay low until 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, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. This little incident just points out that it's hard to

keep this man trapped. You couldn't put him behind bars because he could just break the bars off the gate.

A city gate was usually made of very heavy metal and well anchored because it was there to keep enemy armies from breaking into the city. So he was more powerful than an army by himself. He could just remove the gate.

Generally speaking, armies with their battering rams and so forth would not easily be able to remove the gate, and he did so. Now, they locked the gates, knowing he was in there at a prostitute's house, and apparently they decided to just wait until morning, and they must have slept or left the gate relatively unguarded. It does say they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city, but it says they were quiet all night, saying, well, we'll make our move in the morning.

How they slept through this, tearing the gate off the hinges and carrying it up the hill, I don't know. It may be that they had left only a few guards there who were terrified and wouldn't dare to engage him, or that they slept very soundly or something. But in any case, when morning came, he wasn't there anymore, and neither was their gate.

Now, afterward it happened, verse 4, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. This apparently is not the same woman, because she was a Gezite, and this Delilah is not said to be of Geza, but of the valley of Sorek, so we're going to assume this is a different woman. Samson had a number of women that caused trouble for him.

And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, 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 1,100 pieces of silver. I believe 1,100 pieces of silver is something like \$1,500 or something today.

And so if five lords of the Philistines were going to each give her that much, she'd be receiving like \$7,500, a pretty good bribe. Now, they recognized that there was a secret to his strength. As I said earlier, there's no reason to believe that Samson looked strong, that his physique was particularly that of a stronger man.

He may have looked strong, but it was clear that he had strength beyond any natural strength. And they knew there was some secret that he was concealing. And so they found out that he had a girlfriend and they figured that the girlfriend could get to him, just like the 30 men at his wedding had gotten to his wife by threatening her.

In this case, they don't threaten Delilah, but they bribe her. Perhaps if they had threatened her, she would have sick Samson on them. But if they bribe her, she'll be on their side.

That's probably the difference. Back when Samson's wife was threatened with death,

Samson, as far as we know, had not manifested publicly any of his strength. And his wife probably did not know that she could have been protected from those 30 men by her husband, who was capable of handling them.

He had not demonstrated those things. But now Delilah and the Philistines know that Samson can take on virtually any number of assailants. So it'll do them no good to threaten Delilah and say, if you don't find out first, we'll kill you.

If she could say, oh yeah, then I'll have my husband kill you. And they would know he could, no matter how many armies they had trying to stop him. And so instead they try to win her over with money, and they've managed to do so.

They offer her money and she takes it. So Delilah said to Samson, please tell me where your great strength lies and with what you may be bound to afflict you. Now, it would seem the very question would raise suspicions in his mind.

Why do you want to know that? Although, of course, in playful pillow talk, any number of questions might be asked that seem impertinent or that would not necessarily be taken too seriously. And Samson said to her, if they bind me with seven fresh bow strings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man. So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bow strings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them.

Now, whether she did this playfully while they're awake, you know, say, okay, let me test you on this. Or whether he was asleep, as at a later time, he was asleep and his hair was cut. But some of these early tests might have been done when he was awake because he might just be enjoying the game.

Anyway, she bound him with them. Now, there were men lying in wait, staying with her in that room, hiding there. And she said to him, the Philistines are upon you, Samson, but he broke the bow strings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches the fire.

So the secret of his strength was not known. It's not likely the Philistines had shown themselves yet. If they had, then Samson, of course, would be much more on his guard.

They were there waiting to see if he was weak, but as far as Samson knew, this was just between him and Delilah, and it's probably a game he was playing with her in a way. Then Delilah said to Samson, look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now please tell me what you may be bound with.

So he said to her, if they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak like any other man. Well, that's already been proven wrong because he was bound with two new ropes before when he broke them and killed the thousand men. She apparently didn't know that he had been bound with new ropes, and so he said, that's all it takes is new ropes.

These tricks I do are done with ropes that are secretly compromised so that they're easy to break, like a magician telling his secrets to someone. If you use new ropes, I'll be powerless against that. Then, therefore, Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, the Philistines are upon you, Samson, and there were men lying in wait, staying in the room, but he broke them off his arms like a thread.

Then 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 a loom.

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. So apparently he just totally destroyed the loom by pulling his head away and came loose. Now, of course, he's getting dangerously close to the truth now.

He's talking about his hair. And so he's playing with fire here. He's compromising a little more, getting closer to letting her know where the source is.

But then she said to him, 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. And it came to pass when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him so that his soul was vexed to death that he told her all his heart. And he said to her, no razor has ever come upon my head, for I've been a Nazarite 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. Now, she apparently kept pestering him until he finally broke down. Like Solomon said, the contentions of a wife are like a continual dropping.

They erode his resistance until he finally said, OK, listen, I'll tell you. Now, he considered that the length of his hair was the secret of his strength. And it seems from the outcome that it was.

But, of course, it wouldn't be the case that long hair is that what made him strong. It's that the long hair was a symbol of his devotedness to God. As long as he kept his hair long, he was still ostensibly viewing himself as separated unto God.

As soon as he would cut his hair, that would be an act of saying, I'm not devoted to God anymore. Now, he had violated his Nazarite vow by coming near dead bodies and things like that, which Nazarites are not supposed to do. But he had never totally renounced his Nazarite vow, his separation to God.

This is really his relationship to God that was defined by his Nazarite vow. And now he's basically saying, I guess I'll part with that if I must to keep this lady happy. Because he knew she would shave his head.

I mean, everything else he had suggested she had done, he could not imagine that she wouldn't try this too. So he was basically surrendering his hair, surrendering his vow of a Nazarite. And Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart.

Excuse me, when she saw that he told her all her heart, she sent and called 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. Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head.

Now that would be a brave man. It's like walking up to a sleeping grizzly bear and clipping its toenails. I mean, obviously if Samson had awakened in the process, whoever was the barber would find himself tied in a knot and thrown out the window.

So she may have drugged Samson. It says she made him go to sleep. She may have drugged him or got him drunk or something like that.

If drunk, then that would be a violation of his Nazarite vow too. Maybe he'd never drunk before because he was Nazarite. Now that he was surrendering his vow, he may have actually succumbed to a temptation to drink wine and he may have been more or less knocked out so that it was less risky for someone to come and cut his hair while he slept.

And it says she lulled him to sleep on her knees, called for a man to shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him and his strength left him. 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. Now this is quite a statement.

He didn't know that the Lord had departed from him. He knew that he had departed from the Lord by surrendering his hair. But he didn't know that the Lord would really depart from him.

He had compromised in so many other ways before and God had not totally departed from him. He no doubt had gotten cocky, had no doubt gotten self-confident that no matter what I do, God will back me up. And God said, no, I'm sorry, that's the last straw.

You renounce your vow, you're on your own. And he was like any other man. And there are perhaps other men since him, maybe even in modern times, men who are gifted by the Holy Spirit, have abilities, they could be in preaching or in other ways, who have had a power, an anointing on their life, and yet because of their compromises they have become unbeknownst to them like any other man.

They count on God blessing what they do in their ministry, but there has been, because

God has left them and they don't know it. They can keep ministering if there's people that will listen to them, but the anointing is gone, the power is gone, the gift is gone. And the Lord had departed from him and he didn't know it.

When a person has been accustomed to ministering and the power of the Holy Spirit, and the power of the Holy Spirit is gone, but they keep going on because they don't know that they've become like any other man, it's a tragic thing. They think, well, I'm just continuing in the same strength I had before. But when God is gone, no power is there.

And so, verse 21 says, the Philistines took him, they put out his eyes, and they brought him down to Gaza. And they found him, that's where he had torn the gates off the city before. They brought him to Gaza and they bound him with bronze fetters, not new ropes, not seven bow strings, but brass fetters.

And he became a grinder in the prison. Now, I've got a feeling that if his hair had not been shaved, if he had not compromised, if God had not left him, those bronze fetters probably wouldn't have held him either. They had not yet found the limits of what God could do through him when God's power was upon him.

And if demon-possession can break chains, I'm sure that Samson could have broken those fetters off too, had God not deserted from him and him not deserted God. So, he became a grinder. He pushed a millstone, probably like an ox would normally do.

They'd usually use an ox to pull a round wheel of stone over a round flat stone, and they'd crush grain that way. They gave him probably the duties of an animal and probably pretty much left him to himself and paid little attention to him over the period of time while his hair grew back. It says in verse 22, however, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

Now, the length of his hair, as I said, was not the direct source of his strength, but it had a connection because to him, it symbolized his special relationship with God. And as his hair grew back, it was perhaps an emblem that encouraged him to begin to think again about his relationship with God. After all, a person could become a Nazirite after being shaved.

They could shave off their hair and start growing it over again as a Nazirite. And so, he was at liberty to begin to view the growing of his hair again as a renewal of his Nazirite vow. 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 is delivered into our hands. Samson, our enemy. Now, I don't know how long he lapsed since his eyes were put out and he was imprisoned.

His hair had begun to grow, but it might not have been very long. It does sound like his

captivity was recent enough that they were still exulting in it as if it was like a recent victory of their god. It may be that they had these festivals annually and it may be that many months had passed since the capture of Samson, but his capture was the most notable victory they had known.

And so, when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, Our god is delivered into our hands, our enemy, the destroyer of our land, and one who multiplied our dead. Well, he was in captivity with them and now they brought him into the temple of Dagon.

But the Philistines should have known that something like this had happened before. They'd captured the Ark of the Covenant from Israel in battle. It's not been recorded yet.

It happened in 1 Samuel, but chronologically it probably happened before these events. And they had brought the Ark of the Covenant into the temple of Dagon also, as they brought now Samson into the temple of Dagon. And it didn't go well for Dagon.

When they brought the Ark into the temple of Dagon, one night they left it there overnight. The next morning they found that Dagon's statue had fallen on its face prostrate before the Ark of God. They set it back up.

And the next night the statue fell down again, and this time the head and the hands of the statue were cut off and sitting on the lint, on the tread of the door. And so, you know, bringing God's anointed things, the symbol of God's presence into the temple of a pagan god, it's a direct confrontation. It's a provocation of God to bring his thing into the temple of Dagon, just as it would be to bring a statue of Dagon into the temple of Yahweh.

These gods were at war. Dagon was a demon god. God was against Dagon, and therefore to bring the Ark or Samson into the temple of Dagon was to invite Yahweh to rise to the occasion because this is a confrontation between the power of Yahweh and the power of Dagon.

And that's how they even saw it. They said, Our God has delivered Samson into our hands. They didn't say, Yahweh's man, but that's what they knew he was.

He was an Israelite. Samson was an Israelite judge. He was a representative of Yahweh.

And they're saying, See, our God's more powerful than Yahweh because our God has captured this man. So this was, as it were, a thumbing of the nose at Yahweh. And bringing Samson into their temple was really to invite destruction upon themselves, as they should have considered from their earlier experience with the Ark.

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.

Now, we don't know what kind of performing he did. They no doubt were treating him like a circus animal, perhaps afflicting him with armed men around him, poking him and making him do degrading tricks and things for them, making him subhuman. And I don't know what they did, but being the clown.

And so they're all laughing at him. And the man who had been so powerful and macho and so forth was now reduced to putting on a clown show for his enemies. And apparently when he became tired, they stationed him by the pillars.

He did not exhibit any strength during this performance, so they didn't have any suspicion of what he might be able to do. In fact, I don't know if he even knew what he could do at this point. He had lost his strength earlier, but he was going to pray again.

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. I've always tried to picture how this temple was constructed, that there were two major pillars that held the whole roof, and they were close enough to each other that a man's spread-out arms could remove them from their places. They must have been very close together.

It's hard to know what he did with them, how it was constructed. But obviously he knew how the temple was constructed, though he was blind, he'd seen it before probably, or knew how they built their temples. So he was looking for the two pillars, specifically that supported the temple.

And the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there. In fact, there were about 3,000 men and women on the roof who watched while Samson performed.

Then Samson called to Yahweh again, 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. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right hand and the other on his left.

And 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.

We're not told if all 3,000 of the people on the roof died. It doesn't say the percentages, but we know that he killed more on this incident than he'd killed in his life previously. And he'd killed, what, over 1,000, maybe 1,500, so probably more than half of these people were killed, if not all.

And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshter, in the tomb of his father, Manoah. He

had judged Israel 20 years. They buried him in that place where the Spirit of God had once moved upon him, according to chapter 13 and verse 25, between Zorah and Eshter.

They retrieved his body from the rubble and gave him a decent burial in the spot that would most memorialize the better times of his godly life, I assume. And so he died as a hero, a shamed hero, but one who had repented, apparently. He is remembered in the New Testament as a man of faith, in Hebrews chapter 11.

And so his faith probably was not only on this last occasion. He probably was a man of faith through most of those 20 years, in some measure, when he judged Israel. But he is the last of the judges that the book of Judges considers.

There were two other judges that we'll encounter in 1 Samuel, but there are still some more chapters of the book of Judges that are not chronological. They don't record the history of any judge, but they give us snapshots of the character of Israel during that time. And they actually both belong to the early period of the Judges.

The period of the Judges was like 350 years or thereabouts, and the two stories at the end are an appendix, which actually belong to an earlier period in the period of the Judges, as we shall see from evidence within them. But at this point, we need to conclude this lecture.