

# OpenTheo

## July 5th: Judges 16 & 1 Corinthians 4:18—5:13

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Samson and Delilah. Delivering the sexually immoral man to Satan.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Judges 16. Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went into her. The Gazites were told, Samson has come here.

And they surrounded the place, and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, Let us wait till the light of the morning, then we will kill him. But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

After this he loved a woman in the valley of Sorak, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him, and we will each give you one thousand one hundred pieces of silver. So Delilah said to Samson, Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might

be bound, that one could subdue you.

Samson said to her, If they bind me with seven fresh bow-strings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man. Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bow-strings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber, and she said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson.

But he snapped the bow-strings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire, so the secret of his strength was not known. Then Delilah said to Samson, Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound.

And he said to her, If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man. So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber.

But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread. Then Delilah said to Samson, Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound.

And he said to her, If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man. So while he slept Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin, and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson.

But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web. And 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 you have not told me where your great strength lies. And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.

And he told her all his heart, and said to her, A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazarite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man. When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.

Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him 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. 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 left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said, Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.

And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us. And when their hearts were merry, they said, Call Samson that he may entertain us.

So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.

Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there. And on the roof there were about three thousand men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.

Then Samson called to the lord, and said, O lord god, please remember me, and please strengthen me only this once, O god, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one, and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines.

And he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. Then his brothers and all his family came down, and took him and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshterol, in the tomb of Manoah his father.

He had judged Israel twenty years. At the beginning of Judges chapter 16, Samson pursues a harlot. And it's a story similar to the story of Joshua's spies that are sent to the city of Jericho.

An Israelite goes into a city and goes to a prostitute. The men of the city hear about the Israelite in the city and try to capture him. The man escapes, and then there is damage done to the defences of the city.

In the story of Jericho, the city walls are brought down, and in the story here Samson takes the gates of the city. However, unlike the spies in the story of Joshua, it seems that Samson is not being faithful here. He is being driven by his lusts once again.

And while he takes the gate of the city, no victory is won. It is a great exploit, but apart

from irritating the Philistines, it achieves nothing. After this escapade, Samson goes to the valley of Sorek, where there is a woman that he has fallen in love with.

A woman named Delilah. Delilah's name might remind us of night, Leila, which has been mentioned a number of times in the chapter already. Samson's name associates him with the sun, and this relationship between the sun and the lady of the night is not an auspicious one.

Indeed, Delilah's whole purpose in this chapter is to lull Samson to sleep, to cause the sun to sink, and finally that Samson's eyes that have been closed in sleep might be plucked out, and Samson be left in complete darkness. Delilah may be a Philistine, but not necessarily. She does seem to be known to the lords of the Philistines though.

Maybe she is a woman of high status. They each offer her 1,100 pieces of silver to betray Samson. In the next chapter, Micah takes 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother.

This surely is not an accident. At the request of the lords of the Philistines, Delilah seeks to discover what the source of Samson's strength is, and he plays a game with her. He keeps misleading her, quite likely knowing that she has some design against him, but taking his chance.

He is flirting with extreme danger here. And the details of this game are interesting. They're strange.

It should suggest to us that the details are important, that there's some significance in the specifics. The first suggestion is seven fresh bowstrings that if they're tied around him he will be unable to release himself. The second is using new ropes, and then the third, and then the third involves weaving the locks of his hair and fastening it with a pin.

What is the significance of all of this then? The most compelling explanation I've heard is that these are symbolic ways of representing the encounters that he's had with the Philistines to this point. The first, the seven fresh bowstrings, represents his marriage, the seven days of his marriage. It seemed at that point that the Philistines had the upper hand.

At the end of those seven days, they solved the riddle and Samson had to get them thirty sets of clothes. However, Samson can snap the bowstrings as flax is snapped by the fire. The second episode, the one with the new ropes, has a more obvious parallel that's connected with his deliverance over to the Philistines by the men of Judah.

In Judges chapter 15 verses 13 to 14, they said to him, So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that had caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.

This is the exact same attempt to subdue him as Delilah tries for the second time. The third attempt, the weaving with the web and the pin, connects with the episode at the beginning of this chapter. The broken gate pulled up with the bar.

Samson's hair is woven into the loom, and that verbally plays off Samson being ambushed at the gate. Hair and gate connected, and woven and ambushed connected. He plucked up the doorposts, and he plucked out the pin.

So in these three episodes, Samson is representing the previous attempts of the Philistines to subdue and overcome him. This final attempt, however, is a bit more concerning, because it involves his hair. Delilah is getting closer to the truth.

Finally, like the woman at Timnah extracted from him the meaning of the riddle, Delilah extracts from Samson the secret that was first revealed to Samson's mother in chapter 13, and once again she gets him to fall asleep, and now she gets him to shave his head, and the result is that he loses his strength. Delilah is in many respects like Jail. The word for tent peg and the word for the pin that's used for the weaving, they're the same.

She does much the same thing. She defeats a man by putting him off his guard. She sends the man to sleep.

Judges chapter 5 verses 24 to 27. Most blessed of women be Jail, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed. He asked for water, and she gave him milk.

She brought him curds in a noble's bowl. She sent her hand to the tent peg, and her right hand to the workman's mallet. She struck Sisera.

She crushed his head. She shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank.

He fell. He lay still. Between her feet he sank.

He fell. Where he sank, there he fell, dead. The Philistines then capture him, and his eyes are removed.

Samson is like Israel. He defeats the lion in the vineyard, yet he falls for the bees in its carcass. He calls out to the Lord and receives water from the rock.

He overcomes the walls or the gates of the prostitute city, but as he seeks after prostitutes and unfaithful women, just as Israel sought after false gods, he ends up grinding grain for his enemies and being made a mockery in a false god's temple. In the distress of exile, however, his hair begins to grow again, and he calls out to the Lord to remember him. Blind Samson is directed to the pillars that are holding up the temple, and in his final act, with a great feat of strength, he brings it down.

The upper and the lower levels of the temple collapse, with all the Philistines in it, the

three thousand men. Perhaps there is some connection between the three thousand mentioned here and the three thousand men of Judah mentioned in the preceding chapter. If there is, I'm not sure what it is, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were something to discover.

Samson wins this great victory in his death, but his story is ultimately a tragic one, a story of failure. Chronologically speaking, it is also probably the last story in the book of Judges. The stories that follow are all flashbacks, stories that give some greater indication of where it all went wrong for Israel.

A question to consider, what similarities and contrasts do we see when we hold the stories of Samson and Christ alongside each other? 1 Corinthians 4.18-5.13 Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people, but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power.

What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother, if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.

Purge the evil person from among you. Paul is sending on Timothy to the Corinthians as his faithful son, to remind them of his ways in Christ. And Paul ends chapter 4 by warning those in Corinth who are puffed up, as if Paul wasn't coming to visit and test them.

However, he will visit them soon, if the Lord wills. At that point it will become clear whether the troublemakers in Corinth are more than just pompous talk. The substance, or as it seems more likely the lack of substance, of the puffed up troublemakers will soon be made manifest.

They are full of pompous talk of elevated spirituality. But the kingdom of God isn't about fine yet empty talk. It's about power, about efficacy, about what is actually carried out.

These Corinthian troublemakers are like a product that promises the most dramatic effects and transformations on the packaging, in the most extreme and hyperbolic language. However, the packaging isn't the point. What matters is what effect the product actually has when it's taken.

They have a choice at this point. Will Paul have to come with a serious rebuke and judgement to them? Or will they take his warning, deal with the issues and receive a visit from a gentle and loving Paul? Word has gotten around of an especially egregious sin among the Corinthians. A man is having relations with his father's wife, presumably his stepmother.

This is an ongoing situation too. It's not just a past sin. It's the sort of thing that would be scandalous even among Gentiles.

And far from mourning this sin in their midst, the Corinthians remain complacent and arrogant. They're proudly confident in their superior spirituality. They still see themselves as reigning like kings and being rich, even as this grave wickedness is being practised in their midst.

Such an offender must be removed. Paul, while he is physically absent from the Corinthians, is present in the Spirit. Anthony Thistleton makes a strong case that it is the Holy Spirit, rather than Paul's human spirit, that is in view here.

Paul and the Corinthians share the same one Spirit of God, and by that Holy Spirit Paul is present to them. As present in such a manner, Paul has already pronounced judgement upon the man, and the Corinthians need officially to assemble together as the Church, gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and formally to deliver this offender over to Satan, with Paul participating in their judgement by that one Spirit. This is to the end that that which is fleshly might be destroyed, and that which is spiritual might be saved.

Delivering him to Satan is formal excommunication. It removes the man from the protective realm of the Church, the protected realm of Christ's kingdom. It declares that such a man belongs outside, is one excluded, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

True excommunication is an application of the keys of the kingdom, and the keys of the kingdom are the powerful word of Christ that is entrusted to the Church. This isn't a

blank cheque of authority that's written out to the Church. Rather it is the task of proclamation of Christ's judgement that is entrusted to the Church as his stewards.

This is something that the Church has a duty to perform in instances like this. When flagrant sin is committed, the Church is responsible to proclaim Christ's word of condemnation, not creating a condemnation of its own, but delivering Christ's judgement. And they need to act, as Paul emphasises here, in the name and the authority of Jesus Christ.

What is fleshly clearly refers to the man, but probably not merely to him. It refers to the fleshly character of the Corinthian Church in general. They need to deal with that as a matter of urgency.

Likewise, the salvation of the spirit is not necessarily referring to the man. Although excommunication can have a chastening effect that humbles sinners and brings them to repentance, the sinner may not be the chief person in mind here. It could refer to the spiritual life of the Church, which would be seriously threatened if the offender was permitted to remain in it.

All of this is done in anticipation of the Day of the Lord. The excommunication of the Church is a temporal and anticipatory judgement by which the Church formally and faithfully proclaims Christ's condemnation of the impenitent sinner, in order that the holiness of the Church might be preserved and the sinner brought to repentance. Paul teaches something similar about anticipatory judgement later in the Epistle, in relation to the Supper, in chapter 11 verses 28-32.

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned along with the world. One of the purposes of Church discipline is to prepare us to stand before Christ at the final judgement. As we confess our sins, repent and seek absolution, we keep short accounts with God.

We ready ourselves in this way for that great day. Every week we present ourselves before the Lord, rehearsing for the final judgement. An excommunication excludes someone from the assembly, proclaiming their standing before God, or lack of standing, something that is evidenced by their behaviour and their impenitence.

Some have seen 2 Corinthians 2 verses 5-11 as referring to the restoration of the sinner mentioned in this passage. Paul wants the Corinthians to be clear. In the Church, no man is an island.

The unaddressed sin of one man compromises the entire congregation. Paul's thinking



here is deeply rooted in the Old Testament teaching. When a man like Achan sinned, even secretly, the entire congregation could suffer as a result.

When an egregious sin was committed and the congregation failed to punish it, the whole congregation would face the judgement. Sin is contagious, and its guilt is something that can lie upon everyone when it is not dealt with. Communities need to deal with sin in their midst with the utmost seriousness.

Leviticus chapter 20 verses 2-5 expresses some of this. Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech, shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones.

I myself will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man, when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his clan, and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech. In this chapter Paul uses the example of leaven.

This recalls the feast of unleavened bread and the Passover. Leaven is something small that when introduced can change the character of the whole lump of dough into which it is placed. The cutting off of the leaven of Egypt represented the cutting off of the old principle of life that Israel had followed in that land.

Jesus elsewhere uses leaven to illustrate the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees. It's their tradition that's passed on from one generation of scribes and Pharisees to the next. And each generation has that culture, that way of life, that principle of behaviour that they have inherited from those who went before.

And this poisonous principle keeps perpetuating itself. That is why the leaven must be cut off. Now there is a new cutting off that must take place.

Christ is our Passover lamb and we are part of a new exodus event. In the Gospels Christ is spoken of as the Lamb of God in chapter 1 verse 29 of John. He's the one who takes away the sin of the world.

He is the one who was crucified when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed. Like the Passover lamb, none of his bones were broken. Just as the Passover lamb was part of the deliverance of Egypt, so Christ our Passover lamb is the one by whom we are redeemed from this new Egypt, delivered from the clutches of the Pharaoh of Sin.

To participate in this new Passover and enjoy this new exodus however, we must utterly cut off the old patterns of life and start anew. The old leaven is the leaven of malice and

evil. It spreads that principle in our lives and in the lives of our communities so that it ends up working its way out into everything that we do.

This is the leaven of the flesh. Rather than living according to this leaven, we must purge it out and act in sincerity or purity and truth. This is clearly not Paul's first letter to the Corinthians as he references another letter here, one in which he instructed them not to associate with sexually immoral persons.

Here he makes clear what he meant by that. Not sexually immoral people in the world, but those who purport to belong to the Church. A task of judgment is committed to the Church and it is essential that it separates from any who are characterized by such wickedness to the extent of not even eating with them.

Those in the world are left to God's judgment, but the Church must exercise judgment in its own house. Paul concludes with an allusion to a repeated expression in Deuteronomy used for sins committed that involve complete expulsion or the death penalty. Deuteronomy emphasizes the same principle as Paul does here.

By their very presence in the assembly, the evil person corrupts and their guilt is contagious. If the congregation does not deal directly with the evil person, they will all suffer as a result. Paul lists six sins in verse 11.

Sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness and swindling. Brian Rosner argues that these correspond with the six passages in Deuteronomy that call for the death penalty. Passages that are followed by the same expression as Paul uses in verse 13.

Richard Hayes notes that Paul doesn't say that, just as God told Israel to drive out the evil person, so you should do. Rather, he simply directly applies the Old Testament command on this point to the Church, as a word that is addressed to them every bit as much as Israel. While these commands are not being fulfilled with the death penalty, the Church's practice of excommunication has a similar force within its life.

A question to consider. Within this chapter we see various indications and expressions of the profound union enjoyed by God's people, along with exhortations to protect it from corruption. What are some of the ways in which the fact of such a union transforms the way that we think about Christian behaviour and about ethics more generally?