

Chapters 13-16 of Judges tell the story of a man mightily used by the LORD but one who also fell victim to his carnal passions. Samson was to be a Nazarite his entire life but he seems to have broke virtually every rule required for a Nazarite vow. Samson was used mightily by the LORD in spite of his tendency to follow his sinful fleshly desires and those desires eventually led to his downfall.

Judges 13

5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

“For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son” – Israel has once again been doing evil in the sight of the LORD and as a result He has allowed the Philistines to oppress Israel for the past 40 years (v. 1). The angel of the LORD appears to the wife of Manoah, a woman who was barren, and promises that she will bear a son (vs. 2-3).

“and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite [to separate] unto God from the womb” – A Nazarite was someone who had taken a vow of dedication to the LORD for a period of time. The law of a Nazarite is given in Num. 6:1-21 and includes such restrictions as not being allowed to drink wine, cut his hair or touch a dead body. Usually a Nazarite vow was taken voluntarily only for a limited period of time but Samson was to be a permanent Nazarite for his entire life. The angel even instructs the woman to not drink wine or eat anything unclean during the pregnancy (v. 4), beginning Samson’s life as a Nazarite while he was in the womb.

“and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” – The oppression of the Philistines will continue into the time of David, so Samson will not rescue Israel completely from under their hand of oppression. However, Samson will begin the process by being a champion in Israel’s resistance against the Philistines.

Judges 15

14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

“And when he came unto Lehi” – Samson is now an adult and has had an eventful life thus far. He has been engaged to be married to a Philistine woman but was cheated out of his marriage (Judges 14:1-20). When he discovered that he had lost his wife, Samson took revenge by burning up the wheat fields of the Philistines (Judges 15:1-8). The Philistines brought a force of men to Lehi (near to Etam where Samson was staying) in preparation to capture Samson. The local people of Judah convinced Samson to allow them to tie him up and take him to the Philistines. Now the Judeans have brought Samson, restrained with ropes, to the camp of the Philistines at Lehi.

“the Philistines shouted against him” – As the party bringing Samson arrives, the Philistines come out to meet them and begin shouting. They were probably celebrating the fact that Samson was now at their mercy (so they thought) and were mocking him.

“and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him” – Apparently Samson only had his great strength when the Spirit of the LORD came upon him. This was one such occasion as the LORD chose to give Samson the strength to escape his restraints and the Philistines.

“and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands” – Flax was the linen thread that was woven into garments. When the Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson, he was able to break the ropes that bound his arms and hands as easily as we might break linen thread that had been exposed to fire. The Philistines had believed that Samson was restrained but now he suddenly stood among them unrestrained with the Spirit of the LORD upon him.

15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

The tables quickly turn against the Philistines since instead of having the upper hand, they suddenly find themselves the target of Samson’s assault. He finds the jawbone of an ass to use as a weapon and attacks the Philistines until 1,000 of them were dead.

Judges 16

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

Samson has apparently now been a judge over Israel for 20 years (Judges 15:20). He obviously has been a thorn in the side of the Philistines this whole time considering their strong desire to subdue him (v. 5). Samson falls in love with another Philistine woman who lives in the valley of Sorek, which was in Philistine territory. The exact location is not known, but commentators believe it to be nearer to Gaza than other chief Philistine cities since that is where they imprison Samson once they capture him.

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

The lords of the Philistines are desperate to subdue Samson and so when they hear that Samson has become involved with Delilah, they come to her to bribe her to discover Samson’s weakness so that they can capture and torture him. There were apparently five Philistine lords according to Judges 3:3, so a total of 5,500 pieces of silver was a handsome and compelling reward for Samson’s capture.

Verses 6-15: In her desire to collect the money promised by the lords of the Philistines, Delilah begins asking Samson to tell her the secret of his great strength. He appears to be amused by her questions and plays with her by giving her fictitious methods to weaken him, likely because he believes he is too strong for anything to happen to him. As a result, Samson doesn’t seem to take her efforts seriously and his amusement may explain why he does not become suspicious of her persistent efforts to discover his secret.

16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; 17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I *have been* a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.

Delilah had a strong motivation for learning the truth so she continued day after day nagging him to tell her the secret to his strength. Finally he had had enough and told her the truth so that she would leave him alone. According to the law of Moses, the shaving of the head is how a Nazarite would end his vow (Num. 6:18). Shaving his head may have been the one Nazarite rule Samson had not broken thus far and to do so would break his Nazarite vow. Once his Nazarite vow was broken, his strength that came from the LORD would be gone as well.

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

Delilah apparently could tell from Samson's demeanor that he was being honest with her at last, so she felt confident enough to call for the lords of the Philistines to come and be ready to pay her for the information. These men arrive with the money in hand.

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

She lulls Samson to sleep in her lap and while he is asleep, she calls for a man, that she apparently had waiting in the next room, who enters and shaves Samson's head. The Hebrew word translated "afflict" means "to humble or humiliate." Delilah was the instrument of Samson's downfall, for, by having his head shaven, she initiated the series of events that humbled and humiliated him as his strength left him.

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

"And she said, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson" – Delilah used this statement to waken Samson each of the previous times when he had given her a fictitious means of weakening him (vs. 6-14). She uses it here again, apparently to test whether his strength was truly gone.

"And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself" – Samson apparently never realizes that Delilah was working for the Philistines. Even after telling her the truth about the secret of his strength, he apparently still thinks that he is too powerful to be captured by the Philistines. Samson seems to have depended on his strength rather than on his relationship with the LORD.

"And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him" – The difference this time is that the LORD was no longer with him. The sad part is that Samson did not realize that the LORD had departed. He seems to have conducted his life however he liked, seemingly sinning with impunity, without reaping the consequences since the LORD was always with him to give him strength against the Philistines. This situation has changed, however, and Samson will pay the price.

21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house. 22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

We see evidence of the hatred that the Philistines have for Samson (and also the sovereign protection of the LORD) in the fact that they do not kill him, but capture him, put out his eyes and humiliate him by putting him to work grinding grain in prison. They seem intent on making him suffer because of the anguish he has caused them over the past 20 years. During this time, however, Samson's hair begins to grow back. One commentator suggested that Samson has had time to reflect on his sin and renew his Nazarite vow. As his hair grew with his repentance, so did his strength.

23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. 24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

The lords of the Philistines gather one day for a festival in honor of their god Dagon, giving Dagon credit for giving them victory over Samson. Their rejoicing over Samson gives us an indication of how much he had tormented the Philistines over the past 20 years.

28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

Samson has been brought from prison to the house where the celebrations were being held so that the Philistines could gloat and ridicule him as they glorified Dagon (vs. 25-27). Samson, who was blind, had asked the boy leading him to take him to the main pillars that supported the building. Samson then prays to the LORD for strength one last time so that he may avenge himself on the Philistines for blinding him.

29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. 30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with *all his* might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that *were* therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than *they* which he slew in his life.

The building must have had an open roof architecture with places on the roof for observing the festivities inside the building. Verse 27 tells us that the building was full of people and that there were around 3,000 people on the roof watching Samson and mocking him. The LORD answers Samson's prayer and gives him the strength to dislodge the main support pillars and collapse the building. Samson dies as a martyr, killing more Philistines in his death than he had killed previously. Hebrews 11:32 includes Samson as a hero of faith, who demonstrated his faith at the end. Despite an undisciplined lifetime of following his flesh, Samson was used by the LORD to begin a resistance in Israel against the Philistines. However, the consequences of Samson's sin shortened his life.