

Judges 16

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[0 : 00] All right, we're in Judges 16, Judges 16 this evening. We will read the entire chapter because it's not one really that is very beneficial to break apart.

We have to see it as a grand story. We are finishing up the account of the individual Samson. But when we wrap up Samson's life, we are also bringing to a close what we refer to as the period of the judges.

The title this evening, if you have to have one, was The End of an Era, The Last Great Effort of Israel's Judges. Now, I say that with kind of a little bit of asterisk beside it because while Samson is the final judge in the book of Judges, and then we run through the last several chapters which kind of really show us the detriment and the downward spiral of the nation of Israel, he is not the final judge per se or the final individual that would judge the nation of Israel.

That would be one who would offer guidance and deliverance. That individual is actually Samuel. In the book of 1 Samuel, we find that Samuel is judging the nation. Now, by that, it does not mean he's a militaristic leader, but he is one who offers wisdom and guidance.

But here we find, throughout the book of Judges, if you remember, man is seeking to free himself and redeem himself and to set themselves free from those who rule over him.

[1 : 34] Sure, by the power and presence of the Lord, as the Lord is raising up these individuals, but one recurrent theme we have found is that deliverance by man is vain and that what man desperately needs is a redeemer who will last, one that will stay, one that is faithful, one that is true.

And as in all things in Scripture, the ultimate fulfillment is pointing to Christ. He is our judge and our deliverer. The word judge in the Old Testament is the same word we get for redeemer or deliverer throughout Scripture.

So we find here that we need a greater deliverer than ones we encounter in Scripture. But we'll read Judges 16 and we'll see the end of this error and kind of in its tragic conclusion.

It does not end with a smile, though the last of this chapter seems to be better than the beginning. Judges 16 says, It says, After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

The Lord 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.

[3 : 18] So Delilah said to Samson, Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you. 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.

Let me just stop right here. You know what those cords are? It's bow strings. It's bow strings. They are the sinews from the intestines of animals that they would string out to make bow strings.

I was just so kind of, you see the irony of this? They didn't get their strength until they were dried.

Okay, so it's kind of a mockery that Samson didn't say fresh sinews because being fresh they would break real easy.

So anyway, there's just things we lose in our translation. Anyway, let me get back on track. Okay, then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

Now she had men lying in wait in the inner room, and she said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. But he snapped the cords as a string of toe snaps when it touches fire, so his strength was not discovered.

[4 : 26] Then Delilah said to Samson, Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies. Now please tell me how you may be bound. And 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.

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.

Then Delilah said to Samson, Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies. Tell me how you may be bound. And he said to her, If you weave the seven locks of my hair with a web and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man.

So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web. And she fastened it with a pin and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson. But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.

Then she said to him, How can you say I love you when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is.

[5 : 28] It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him that his soul was annoyed to death. So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazarite to God from my mother's womb.

If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.

When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart.

Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands, and she made him sleep on her knees and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair.

Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. Then 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 departed from him. Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes, and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains.

[6 : 36] And he was a grinder in the prison. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off. Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their God, and to rejoice, for they said, Our God has given Samson, our enemy, into our hands.

And when the people saw him, they praised their God, for they said, Our God has given our enemy into our hands, even the destroyer of our country, who was slain many of us. It so happened that when they were in high spirits, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may amuse us.

So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them, and they made him stand between the pillars. Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, Let me fill the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.

Now the house was full of men and women, and the lords of the Philistines were there. About 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them. Then Samson called to the Lord and said, O Lord God, please remember me, and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be a vengeance of the Philistines from my two eyes.

Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. Then Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines.

[7 : 56] And he bent with all his might, so that the house fell on the lords, and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life. Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshterol in the tomb of Manoah his father.

Thus he had judged Israel twenty years. The end of an era. The final great push of Israel to deliver themselves really reaches its pinnacle and its conclusion in the person of Samson.

As we have said, when we look throughout the book of Judges, we are not looking at individuals whose lives we seek to emulate or follow. As a matter of fact, the further we go into the book of Judges, the worse the individuals that we have before us are presented.

We have the greatest judge, the one that is probably that we would at least be a little bit compelled to follow, is the very first one that we have introduced to us.

He is, there is an example seen of an individual who does no wrong, and he is one who is used of God and does some mighty deeds. But the further we go, the more we see that man is really on a downward spiral until we get to Samson.

[9 : 15] And Samson, though, has a special calling upon his life, and he is called by God for a specific purpose, is definitely not an individual we want to follow. We kind of are kind of caught between some difficult places because we see the Samson that's recorded for us in Scripture, and we have to say, he's just not right.

I mean, just to say it bluntly, we don't want to be like Samson. But then when we turn the pages of our Bible, we find in the book of Hebrews he's recorded in the hall of faith.

So he was an individual of faith, and we'll get to that in just a moment. So we're kind of caught between how we interpret the life of Samson. It is with a list of other individuals that we find in Scripture that we kind of had this wrestling because we find no individual but one which we can hold up and say, there's a life we want to follow.

It seems like every time we find a great champion or a great individual that we also are exposed to their failures, their weaknesses, and their missteps, and their mistakes. And each of the judges is just that way.

And it's until we find the person of Jesus Christ that we find the one who is worthy of our following and worthy of our emulating and worthy of our mimicking his life.

[10 : 36] Paul says, imitate me as I imitate Christ. He did not say, imitate me as I am. He says, imitate me as I imitate Christ. And we see this that runs true throughout Scripture.

But there are a number of things that we need to see from this passage, and it will bring the period of the judges to a conclusion. The first thing we're introduced to is the fame of Samson. Samson has begun to judge the nation of Israel after the debauchery of his marriage, which was really never official, recorded for us in the 14th and 15th chapter when things go south really quick, and he ends up having to go out in a hot, ink fit of rage, and he kills 30 individuals, and he brings back their clothes.

These are the Philistines. And then he goes back, and he goes back to his wife's house, and his father-in-law has given her to someone else, and then he's really mad. He sets the fields on fire, and then there was this battle. You remember, there's Lehi, which means jawbone, and he kills 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey.

So up to this point, he's killed 1,030 individuals recorded in Scripture. And then he begins to judge. The nation of Israel says, you know what? You're a pretty valiant warrior. We'll make you our judge. And this is the thing that God had called him to.

God had called him before he was ever in his mother's womb. God had told his mother, we don't know her name, that he would begin to deliver his people from the hand of the Philistines.

[11 : 59] This is the reason Samson was raised up to begin with. Yet, even in his judgeship, his popularity begins to grow. And we find that throughout this passage.

He goes down to Gaza, which is some distance away from home. There is really kind of speculation of how far away from home he was. But Gaza is one of the five major cities of the Philistines.

This is the place he will be brought back to once his eyes have been gouged out and he's bound.

This is where he will make his last stand. But the first time he visits Gaza, he goes there. We do not know why, but while he is there, it says that he sees a harlot and he does the unthinkable and does what he shouldn't do and he breaks every vow that anyone has ever dedicated to God.

But what we pay attention to is when the Gazites, the individuals of Gaza, heard that he was there, they knew of him to such an extent that they decided that it was worth waiting beside the gate all night long to capture him when he left the next morning.

Samson's fame had preceded him and they so wanted to catch him that they decided that since he was there, they were going to wait on him and they shut the gate of the city. Now, if you go to, evidently, if you read some books and historical records and you go to the city which was formerly Gaza and you go there today, it's an ungated city, but you can also see where the gates of the ancient city used to be.

[13 : 21] So at night, they would shut the gates for security purposes and wouldn't open them until the next day and that way nobody could come in, nobody could go out. So they would camp beside this gate and they decided that when he leaves, we have him.

It says that Samson gets up in the middle of the night about midnight and he takes that gate. It says he took the gate and the post of the gate along with the bar of the gate and he ripped it up. People have stated, archaeologists have stated that if you go to that ancient city ruins, they would take you to the gate where Samson theoretically ripped it up.

As scripture says, that it is still empty now, it's void. So he takes these two gates and the bars of the gates and the two posts and he rips them up and it says he puts them on his shoulder and he takes them to the hills of Hebron.

Now, that's 38 miles away. That's some distance. There's some kind of misunderstanding. We don't know if this is a hill which faces Hebron or if this is a hill in Hebron.

But either way, to rip the gates and their posts down, this isn't like a barn gate, right? These are city gates. These are massive gates. And he takes these and he puts them on his shoulder and he carries them and he just implants them on the hills.

[14:31] That makes no sense. J.D. Greer once said, that's just a cool event that you can kind of put a check mark down. Like, yeah, I've done that. But we also understand that biblically, to possess the gates of your enemies was to rule over them.

Right? To possess the gates of your enemies was to claim dominion over them. The gate was so much more than a place of security. The gate was also a place of business transaction and a place of judging. So this is where the people would gather at the gates in order to make decisions.

So if you possessed the gates, that meant that you were seating yourself in a position of authority.

When we find Sodom and Gomorrah, the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, do you remember where Lot was sitting when the angels of the Lord found him?

Lot was sitting at the gates of the city, right? Which means that Lot had become a place, a person of importance in that city. Lot was a decision maker. He was someone.

You didn't just set it to gates. You had to be someone of importance to set it to gates. Well, Samson takes the gates. He literally, physically possesses the gates of his enemies.

[15:34] And he begins to show his power. And this is something that just increases his fame because he becomes a very wanted man after this. He was surely doing something he shouldn't have done. We don't know why he was there originally, but we know what transpired while he was there.

And then we go forward a little bit longer and there's the third woman that gets him in trouble, which is Delilah. He goes into the valley of Sorek. And we understand how popular he has become, the fame which has surrounded him because now we have the five lords of the Philistines, that is, the five leaders of the five major cities of Philistia.

The five lords of the Philistines come to Delilah and offer her an amazing amount of money, 5,500 pieces of silver. 1,100 apiece.

If she will hand over Samson to them. This just further reinforces the fame which Samson has accumulated over the years.

Remember, by this time he had judged Israel 20 years. We don't know what has happened and transpired in those 20 years, but surely what God had done with him during those 20 years according to the purposes had been such a point that he was a most wanted man, a man of the uppermost desire from the enemies of God, that is, the people of Philistia.

[16:56] And the fame of Samson had spread to such a point that they were willing to pay a grand scheme. We notice that each time that Samson goes into the area of the Philistines, he is always going down.

It was Warren Wiersbe who pointed out that every time you go into the enemy's territory, you're always going down. You always go down. No matter geographically if you're traveling up. When you go into the presence of God, you always go up, right?

You always go up to Jerusalem or up to the temple and you always go up. You never go down into the presence of God. You always go up into the presence of God. Anytime Samson went into the enemy's territory, he was always going down to Gaza or down to the Valley of Sorek or down, down, down.

So we notice that anytime we hang out with the enemy, we're always going down. What we see is the fame of the people of God surely is spread among the people of our enemy and the enemy so desires us that they're ready to do whatever is necessary and we see with this really unbelievable amount of money that is offered to Delilah.

Now, we have some problem with the interpretation of Delilah's name and I know we're a little academic tonight but that's okay. Some people will tell you that Delilah's name is a Jewish name or Hebrew name which means faithful one.

[18:10] So there's this question is she a lady of Philistine descent or is she a lady of Jewish descent? We really don't know. But the other interpretation of her name is that it could mean like a

temple prostitute to the god Dagon.

So there's this kind of dual interpretation but yet we do see that she is used by the lords of the Philistines so it seems to be the latter one and there's this really grand problem that Samson has which leads us to the second thing and that is the fall of Samson.

Because an individual who walks in his own fame will eventually find himself in his own fall. Samson was called by God and used by God and empowered by God but Samson could not control himself. And his lack of self-discipline is really the thing that leads to his great fall. The thing which he could not master was self and he could not master sin.

And since he had no mastery over his own sin or his own actions the fall was inevitable. It was going to come. It says that Samson fell in love with a lady named Delilah in the valley of Surak. [19:18] Now we read the story it's almost amusing because how can someone not see what Delilah is doing because she asked him questions and it's just like the first wife. Remember when she asked questions and she persisted and it says annoyed him to the point of death that daily kept asking this question kept asking this question but the same thing is happening here with Delilah and you would think that Samson would have learned his lesson some 20 years prior but it's not the case and she keeps asking and she keeps asking and every time he gives an answer she tries to do the very thing that he states and then she calls out behold the Philistines are upon you Samson and he gets up so you say well how in the world can you not figure this out because man walking in sin is often blinded to the realities that are obvious to everyone else how could he not realize that Delilah was actually betraying him rather than being faithful to him it's because in our sin when we don't master self and we allow sin to rule over us and we don't submit ourselves to the lordship in our case the lordship of Christ in his case to the lordship of God when we don't submit ourselves to lordship the rule over us when we do what is right in our own eyes and sin becomes our master then we are blinded to realities which we should clearly see because he keeps giving an answer now we know he's kind of toying with her at first the first three answers are not genuine answers

I mean the first one the sinew of an animal's intestines we know that that's not true the second one's not true he said if I'm bound with a new rope that can hold me we know that's not true because they tried that once at Lehi I remember they bound him with two ropes and then the third one is almost amusing if you'll weave the braids of my hair into the loom of a weaver's loom and you kind of you know put it together and it's homing so he's getting as someone said he's getting a little closer to the truth but he's still not telling the truth because at least now he's talking about his hair but yeah we know all these are not true but why would he ever really give an honest answer it's because the fall is often preceded by self-trust when we don't discipline and we don't master our own sins and he is here being led by the lust of the eyes and all of a sudden he begins to divulge more than he should and he finally shares all of his heart with her he says a razor has never touched my head for I've been a Nazarite from birth now we need to catch something in the text the hair of Samson was not the strength of Samson right the Nazarite vow when one took a vow of a Nazarene or a Nazarite it says that the hair should be a crown the wording in the first time it's mentioned the hair should be a crown upon his head to remind him of the vow which he had taken so the hair was representative of a reality it was representative of a spiritual reality that my life has set apart his hair hair was never the source of his strength but it was a representation of the source of his strength the fact that he had been dedicated and surrendered to God this is the last Nazarite vow to be broken as a shaving of his head he's broken every other one up to this point we don't know how many dead things he's touched we know he's touched a lion and jawbone of a donkey and surely at least 1,030 men probably more than that because we don't know how many he killed when he slew them with a great slaughter remember that hip and thigh slaughtering he did when they burned his wife and her father and when he slew them with a great slaughter that was like a hand-to-hand combat that's kind of bad for a Nazarite to do we know he's also taken of the fruit of the vine at least a couple of times the one vow he has not broken yet is the shaving of his head and he finally shares his whole heart so Delilah says hey this seems to be real and calls and has someone else shave his head but notice what it says and his strength left him but you have to connect that down with the end of verse 20 because verse 19 tells us his strength left him when his hair was shaved she began to torture him just a little bit and she noticed that he was no longer as strong as he used to be and his strength left him but look at the very next verse it says for the Lord had departed from him if you remember it tells us that when God begins to use him the spirit of the Lord overcame him or overpowered!

the spirit of the Lord departs from him the fall of Samson had really nothing to do with the shaving of his head it had everything to do with the departure of the Lord because he had allowed himself to get to a point of sin where the spirit of God had departed from him and the sad reality of it is when man gets that far in sin when man gets to the point of the fall he doesn't even realize God has left him because it says that when he got up he said I will go out as other times and shake myself free but he did not know that the Lord had departed from him the sad reality is that he had become so self confident so self absorbed and so self embedded in sin that Samson himself did not realize that the Lord was no longer with him that's when man gets to a place of a fall when we realize that our dependence has always been on our self remember how we said after chapter 15 no longer is depending on the

[24 : 50] Lord he begins to depend on himself here God leaves him and he doesn't even realize it Ichabod could be written across him the spirit has departed remember that it could be and he had no idea he had no idea what a sad reality it is when man gets to the place in his own sin and gets to the place in his own suffering that he doesn't even realize that God's presence is no longer with him and attempts to go forth in his own strength and anytime man walks in his own strength he is certain to fall because Samson gets up in his own strength and he goes in his own strength sure he's minus a few pounds of hair but he goes in his own strength and he's immediately bound his eyes are gouged out and they take him to Gaza and they make him a grinder that means he's doing the work of slaves and women he's grinding grain in the prison the irony of the whole ordeal is this his battle with the Philistines began when he set their grain fields on fire and they bring him in to grind the grain in their prison it's come full circle but we don't end there because we've got to get to this final epic picture and this kind of ties in what we find in

Hebrews 11 I think it's 32 the faith of Samson so we see the fame of Samson the fall of Samson now we see the faith of Samson there's that word that phrase there in the 22nd verse however the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off however the hair!

his hair began to grow again after it was shaved off again the strength is not in his hair remember that the hair is representative of the presence of God and we praise God for this God is not only a God of second chances God is a God of redemption God is a God of turning things around for his good not Samson's good but for his good for his glory for his power and God had a purpose on Samson's life and God's purpose was that he would begin to deliver his people from the hand of the Philistines God is not yet through now we know God is not yet through because Samson is alive we don't know why the Philistines did not kill him other than the fact that God still had an ongoing purpose and plan for him and the hair of his head began to grow again now here's one of the great tragedies of Samson's life and you notice it what happens in verses 23 through 24 I'm not going to read it but Samson was to so overpower the

Philistines that the people of the world would praise the Lord God but in contrast to that now the people of Philistine were praising their God Dagon because they had overcome Samson Samson's life was to bring glory to Yahweh but rather his life had led to other people giving glory to Dagon he had lived a life in such a manner rather than causing people to praise the Lord God they would praise and false gods but God will not allow that to be the end of the story because our God is a jealous God he is a consuming fire right God will never allow another God to rule over him Samson is still there so the hair of his head began to grow again he's still there which means God still has an instrument of use God still has a purpose to bring about so as they're praising their

God and they're gathered in this temple which is in Gaza remember Gaza right that's where Samson had went and took the gates with him and he had possessed the gates of his enemies he had been there before the time he had been there before his eyes were still in his head he could still see and when he was there there was this temple in which 3,000 people could stand on the rooftop almost missed this for years we say that he killed 3,000 people to his death no that's just how many people were on the top of the roof do you notice that all the other people were under the roof says the rooftop would hold 3,000 men and women all the leaders and the rulers were under there was this great cathedral and there there's still some archaeological ruins of these type of buildings that were very unique to the Philistines very unique to them where they would take two center pillars and hold a roof structure up that would stick this one was massive building and surely he would have seen it the first time he was there because

[29 : 35] God uses even our past mistakes to give us present victories so while he's there and he's grinding and we don't know how long he's grinding but we do know his hair is growing and we know

as his hair is growing there's some memories that are there they've taken his eyes but we don't know how many are under the roof and he's there and he's to entertain them and he's to dance before them and all this stuff and he kind of much like David and his feigning insanity here we have Samson feigning weakness and he's being led around by that boy by his hand and he he finally asked the boy put me against the pillars that hold the roof structure Samson called to the Lord and said oh Lord God now we in our reading we say okay then

Samson called to Yahweh and said oh Lord Yahweh he calls God by name he uses the covenant name of God in his prayer names are important somehow or another he had went from being the Lord of his own life while grinding that wheat to allowing there was a covenant God who was keeping his promises now this is not a New Testament faith of love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you and turn the other cheek we understand that but this was the faith of that day this was the faith of that time of that epic and that calling for God's purposes then right this is the other side of the cross it's not this side of the cross we're not justifying the reality we're just saying that God is raising up here showing us a standard a judge that even in his death will defeat the enemies and we're not lifting up

Samson as being one that we need to follow but rather we're lifting up the God that Samson calls out to and he calls out to him as the covenant God a God who is faithful to his covenant promises and God had made a promise that Samson will begin to deliver his people and as he does that he puts his hands his right against one pillar his left against another pillar and he bows with all his might and he presses out and again his strength didn't come from his hair his strength came from anything else his strength came from the presence of the Lord so when we see what happens we have to testify God here's the prayer he ends his own life as well someone said there are three men in scripture that we are introduced to that operate in the shadows of darkness Samson takes the gates down at midnight King Saul goes to a witch in the middle of the night and Judas goes in the middle of the night and conspires all three men took their own life all three all three men got a little too close to darkness and carried things just a little too far but yet here we see

Samson crying out in faith and it says that at his death he killed more than he did in his life but we end this error of judges with this one sad reality Samson died so all of his kinsmen and his brothers came and buried him the great hope of deliverance is once again in a grave and until we can find a judge who the grave cannot hold man man still stands in desperate need of a redeemer we don't find him until we turn to the pages of the new testament and we find one that died was put in a tomb and came back out that's when we find him but until this day until that day we're still confronted with this reality Samson may have slain his thousands and in the end he at least did it with a little bit of faith but yet he died still the same and was dead buried laid in a tomb the hope of deliverance found in

Samson is no more he judged past tense Israel 20 years our judge is still judging he does not come down off his throne and he reigns eternally we have one that at his death conquered greater enemies than Samson and he took the gates of hell and carried them out and planted them on his own hill too because he possesses the gates of our enemy we have a judge who is eternal and we praise him for that but here we see the end of the error in the book of judges for the remainder of the book we will see just how desperate the situation has become and how wicked man can be when they do things according to their own ways but for the moment we see that all hope of deliverance by man is vain and even the greatest of warriors come to an end because they cannot control their own selves and their own desires and their own sin nature man needs someone greater than him to deliver him from the wickedness that captures us let's pray lord we thank you so much for this night god so thankful for an opportunity of gathering together lord we thank you for your word and we pray that as we read it and we study it lord we're always drawn closer to you lord as we enter into a season of thanksgiving lord many of us will be gathered we're friends and family we pray that our hearts would be so may our hearts be turned to you and our minds think of you often may our lives be lived for your glory and surrendered to your purposes and your calling lord may we not tread the path of

[36 : 07] Samson and wait to the final day and the final moment lord may our lives be dedicated to you each and every step along the way be with us now as we prepare to leave this place and we ask that you would lead us through the remainder of this evening and lord through this week we want to give you glory and honor through all that we do and may our actions be pleasing in your sight we ask it in Jesus name amen so Thank you.

Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.