

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Samson at Gaza 16:1-3

Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there a harlot, and went in unto her.

2 And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it *is* day, we shall kill him.

3 And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that *is* before Hebron.

JUDGES

1. Where was Gaza? 16:1

Gaza was in Philistine territory west of Israel, It was one of the most ancient towns of the world. Modern Gaza serves as the capital of the Gaza strip, that elongated piece of land which was controlled by Egypt along the seacoast of the modern state of Israel. The land was taken by the Israelis in the six-day war of June, 1967, Gaza is a rather modern community and is southernmost of the cities which made up the Philistine Pentapolis, The ancient city was situated on the Mediterranean seacoast.

2. How did Samson escape? 16:2

The men of Gaza thought that Samson would stay all night in the house of the harlot, but he escaped by arising in the middle of the night. The Philistine men of Gaza had taken too much for granted. They had supposed that Samson would spend the entire night in the house of the Philistine harlot. As a result, they did not take the precaution of setting a guard at the house during the middle of the night. It was their false conclusion that they would be able to fall upon Samson after daybreak. Because of the carelessness of the Philistines, Samson left Gaza unharmed.

3. What kind of gate was this? 16:3

According to Keil and Delitzsch, Samson took hold of the folding wings of the city gate, as well as the two posts and tore them out of the ground (p. 418) . Most gates were entranceways through which carriages might enter but the fortified cities in ancient times had not only the large they also had smaller gates which might be opened to admit people on foot. It was evidently the two smaller doors of the city gate along with the two bars or posts which went with them which Samson carried away from the city.

4. How far did Samson carry the doors? 16:3b

Samson carried the doors of the city gate to the top of a hill which was on the road from Gaza to Hebron.

The Scripture does not say that he carried the doors all the way to Hebron. He simply took them up the road to the top of the hill which was on the direct route to Hebron. This is the meaning of this verse which says he carried the doors to the top of the hill before Hebron.

Samson and Delilah 16:4-22

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

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.

6 And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

7 And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withes that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withes which had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

9 Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in' the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withes, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.

10 And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

11 And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be

as another man.

12 Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson, And there were hers in wait abiding in the chamber, And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.

13 And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

14 And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awakened out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou bast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.

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 unto 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.

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 showed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their 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.

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.

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.

5. *Where was the Valley of Sorek? 16:4*

The Valley of Sorek lay almost directly west of the city of Jerusalem. It runs from the heights near the city of Jerusalem down through the hills and valleys leading to the Mediterranean seacoast. Two different branches come together at the edge of the Philistine plain and continue westward until the mouth lies on the Mediterranean coast. This valley lay north of the Valley of Elah where the Philistines and Israel went to war at the time when David vanquished Goliath. It lay south of the Valley of Ajalon over which Joshua prayed the moon might stand still in his time of battle with the Canaanite kings. The Valley of Sorek was near the home of Samson.

6. *Who were the lords of the Philistines? 16:5*

Probably these men were the leaders of the cities which made up the group known as the Philistine Pentapolis. In the days of the captivity of the Ark there were five of these lords (I Samuel 6:16) and each of them made an offering to send back to Israel with the Ark of the Covenant. If there were five in the days of Delilah and each of them promised to give her 1100 pieces of silver, the price which they put on Samson's head was sizable. The total of the pieces of silver would be 5500; and when the Christian Bible

student remembers Judas betrayed Jesus

for thirty pieces of silver, some kind of idea of the extent to which these lords of the Philistines were willing to go, is seen,

7. *What were the seven green withes? 16:7*

Delilah was willing to betray Samson by wheedling from him the secret of his strength, When Delilah first approached Samson he told her he would 'not be able to break green withes if he were bound with them. He indicated it would take seven of these strands, and Delilah believed him. The green withes were probably strips of bark which had been woven together to form a kind of rope: It has been suggested that the withes were made from strips of bark which were peeled from trees.

8. *What is a thread of tow? 16:9.*

The American Standard Version calls this a string of tow. Tow is defined as a tuft of wool ready for spinning. It is sometimes in the form of yarn spun from tufts of wool. In either case a string of tow would be a highly flammable cord, and Samson broke the seven green withes as easily as one might burn a string of wool in the flame of a candle, In this way Samson escaped from the Philistines who were hiding in the chamber of Delilah's house. 9. *Why would Delilah think. Samson might be bound*

with new ropes? 16:11

When Delilah learned Samson had mocked her by telling her a lie, she was more insistent about his telling her the secret of his strength. When he was pressed for an answer the second time, Samson told Delilah that if he were bound with new ropes he would not be able to escape. Ropes would be made from seasoned materials. The green withes were made of fiber which was green and unseasoned. Delilah believed Samson when he told her a second lie. It was as easy for him to break the new ropes as it would be for an ordinary person to break a thread.

10. Why did Samson tell Delilah to weave his hair? 16:13

Samson was coming very close to revealing the reason for his super-human strength when he told Delilah to weave the seven locks of his head with the web of a loom. These words are difficult to explain. Several technical terms are used which have more than one meaning. The account itself is brief and new information is given both in Samson's advice and in Delilah's fulfillment of his instructions. His reference to the seven locks of his head is no doubt an allusion to the seven plaits or braids of his hair which had been allowed to grow since his birth. He doubtless meant for Delilah to weave his hair along with the warp on the loom. Some commentators believe the pin was used to fasten his hair to the cloth or to the loom. Samson's hair was thus not only woven with the material on the loom, but it was fastened with a pin, thus making it doubly secure. The beam was a flat piece of wood used in an upright loom to press the material together and increase the substance of the cloth.

11. What was the source of Samson's strength? 16:15

Samson finally revealed the source of his great power. He was a man completely dedicated to the service of God. He had been a Nazarite from the time of his birth. His strength did not reside in his hair, but in the fact that the Lord was with him. The Lord was with him as long as he maintained his dedication as a Nazarite. When he broke away from this vow by allowing his hair to be cut, the Lord departed from him. When the Lord went away, his strength left.

*12. Why was his strength gone with the loss of his hair?
16:17*

Samson had broken other parts of his vow when he took honey from the carcase of a lion. He may have also broken a third part of his vow by drinking strong drink when he participated in the wedding feast in Philistia.

Neither of the latter two breaches of his vow made any noticeable difference in his appearance. When he allowed his hair to be shaved from his head, however, he was openly saying to everybody that he had broken his vow. This open and flagrant violation of a Nazarite vow caused Samson to be forsaken of the Lord.

13. What difference was noticed by Delilah? 16:18

Delilah could tell when Samson finally told her the real source of his strength. There was no doubt in her mind. After Samson had told her that he was a Nazarite, she sent with confidence to the Philistine lords and told them to come up again because Samson had revealed everything in his heart. As a result, the lords of the Philistines came up with the money they had promised.

*14. Why did Samson not know that the Lord had departed?
16:20*

The overpowering influence of the Spirit of the Lord evidently made no physical impression on Samson. He was not able to tell by any of his feelings when the Lord was with him. As he first awoke from his sleep, he would hardly realize his hair had been cut. As a result he intended to go out and to deliver himself from the hands of the Philistines as he had done many times before. It *is* a sad commentary on his fallen condition which is recorded in the Bible. The Scripture says, "He wist not that the Lord was departed from him."

15. How did the Philistines treat Samson? 16:21

The Philistines captured Samson after he had told Delilah he was strong on account of being a Nazarite. They put out his eyes so that he would not be able to see ways in which to use his great strength. They had already tried binding him with seven green withes. He had been able to break these. They were not able to hold him with ropes and so in this final effort-to capture him they bound him with fetters

of brass. He was then made to serve in

16:23-30 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

the prison house as a beast of burden. He was forced to turn the millstone which ground the flour for the despised Philistines.

The Death of Samson 16:23-31

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.

25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

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.

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.

31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying place of Manoah his father. And he judged' Israel twenty years.

16. What was the occasion for the sacrifice to Dagon?

16:23

The lords of the Philistines went together to proclaim a time of national rejoicing among the Philistines. Since they had been able to capture Samson they believed God had wrought a great victory for them. They wanted to praise Dagon their god for this great accomplishment. Samson had been a great enemy of their country, and they rejoiced when he was captured.

17. In what way had he destroyed their country? 16:24

On account of Samson's presence among them the house of the father of his wife had been burned by the Philistines themselves. He had sent foxes among their crops to burn down the standing grain and the vineyards. He had personally broken down the doors to the gates to the city of Gaza. In all of these instances he had proved himself indeed worthy of the title of "destroyer," as they said he had also slain many of them—on one occasion, a thousand men; on another occasion, thirty men.

18. In what way did Samson make them "sport"? 16:25

The wicked Philistines with a sadistic turn to their nature summoned Samson and required him to entertain them. They probably tormented him. Since he was blind, they would be able to trip him. They could come at him from all sides without his being able to prepare himself for their attacks. No doubt, they had a riotous time as they humiliated the great man from Dan who had won many

victories over them.

19. *In what house were the men and -women? 16:27*

These Philistines must have gathered themselves in the great temple which was dedicated to Dagon. Three thousand of them were on the roof, and others must have been inside the house. It was customary for these heathen peoples to have these centers of worship where they could gather for such festive occasions as the feast made to Dagon in honor of the capturing of Samson.

20. *What was Samson's final prayer? 16:28*

Samson prayed, "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." This was a prayer of great desperation, but it was a prayer made from a long period of meditation. Samson had let his hair grow in order again to proclaim he belonged to the Lord. Throughout these days he must have repented of the great wickedness he had committed and the headstrong way in which he had walked. As a result, God answered Samson's prayer and strengthened him for one great, final victory over the Philistines.

21. *How did Samson know the location of the pillars?*

16:26, 29

Samson had asked the young lad who had led him from the prison house to the temple to let him lean upon the pillars which supported the temple. Some have supposed that this may have been a lad who was friendly to Samson's cause. Others have even believed it to be such a great Biblical character as Saul, the son of Kish, who later became the king of Israel. It is better to view the lad as one who was given the responsibility of leading Samson from the mill where he ground the grain of his captors to the temple where he entertained the raucous and impious devotees of Dagon.

JUDGES

22. Was Samson justified in his final act of destruction?

Ancient commentators have discussed this question without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion. Many believe he actually committed suicide in this act. Others have called his deed the act of a hero. Samson felt it was necessary for him to plunge into the midst of his enemies although it certainly meant his own death. In this way he did effect the deliverance of his people and decide the victory which was the greatest of all his career. If Samson had been able to deliver himself in any way out of the hands of the Philistines, he would always carry about with him the mark of his shame in the blindness of his eyes. This would be a reminder of the unfaithfulness of a servant of God as well as of the triumph of his foes. Even through Samson's death the Lord was working a victory for Israel in Philistia. He may not have justified himself completely by this final feat, but he did die in an hour of triumph.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 16

1. What was the name of the city whose gates Samson carried away?
2. Where was Delilah's home?
3. With what did Samson first tell Delilah to bind him?
4. With what did Samson next tell Delilah to bind him?
5. How many pieces of silver did each of the lords of the Philistines promise to give to Delilah?
6. To what city did the Philistines take Samson after they captured him?
7. What was the name of the Philistine god?
8. About how many men and women were on the roof of the temple to which Samson was brought?
9. Where was Samson buried?
10. How long did Samson judge Israel?