

*DHW*

**BIBLE STUDY CLASS**

**LESSON 12**

**JUDGES 15 & 16**

**INTRODUCTION**

In our previous lesson, we learned that Samson was specially consecrated to the LORD God to be a deliverer of Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. God chose him to save His covenant people because the children of Israel seemed to accept their lot under the Philistines. God still remained faithful to His covenant even at this point of Israel's history. Unlike in all the previous occasions, the children of Israel cried to the LORD for deliverance from the oppression of their enemies, but this time, the LORD took the initiative to deliver His people from the oppression of the Philistines. We shall learn that at one stage, the leaders of Judah also helped the Philistines to apprehend Samson and hand him over to them.

Samson had not lived up to his calling as a Nazarite so that the LORD could use him more greatly and mightily. God had better plans for him but he blew it. He was physically endowed with superhuman strength from the LORD but he became morally weak. Sometimes Christians are like him, who is blessed materially but spiritually weak. The greatest danger for many Christians is to assume that outward blessings or circumstances are regarded to be God's approval of their

inward, hidden moral and spiritual condition. The life of Samson illustrates this sad truth – a strong man but he was revealed to be morally weak. On the other hand, Samson ended with being a weak man, but became stronger than ever he was before.

Society today has deified sex, money, and power. These attractions have usurped the place of God, and Christians are not exempted from being tempted. Samson's defeat did not happen overnight. Self-indulgence may seem harmless but it is doubly dangerous and devastating. It is a true saying: "A thought becomes an action; an action becomes a habit; a habit shapes a character; and character reaps a destiny." In this last episode of the life of Samson, can we find the answer to what is most important in life?

The account of the final episode of Samson's life in chapters 15 and 16 can be outlined as follows:

- 1) Samson avenges the wrong done on him (15:1-8)
- 2) Samson is betrayed by his fellow Judaeans (15:9-13)
- 3) Samson kills a thousand Philistines with a jaw-bone (15:14-20)
- 4) Samson loves Delilah (16:1-20)
- 5) Samson prays to the LORD (16:21-31)

**STUDY THE WORD**

**Samson Avenges**

In the preceding chapter, Samson was angry that he was tricked by the Philistines through his wife in revealing the solution of the riddle which he posed to the wedding guests (14:14). In anger, Samson left his in-

laws and returned to his father's house. Some time later, in the months of April/May, Samson decided to go back to his in-laws to be with his wife. He brought a young goat with him which was customary for him to do so and was also a token of reconciliation. When he reached his wife's home, his father-in-law refused him entry into his wife's bedroom, saying that he had given her in marriage to Samson's best man. His father-in-law gave the reason that he thought Samson was angry, left her daughter and that he would not return. He offered Samson the hand of the younger sister who was prettier if he wanted to. Samson was not interested at all. Samson was furious and he was determined now to settle the score with the Philistines, whom he considered as the real problem. He caught three hundred foxes or probably jackals because the latter run in packs. It was not easy to trap and catch these foxes (or jackals) let alone three hundred of them. It shows that Samson was determined. Obviously, he did not accomplish this catching of the foxes in one day. He might take a few days to catch them. He tied their tails together in pairs; put a torch between their tails and set them loose into the corn fields of the Philistines. The stocks of corn of the Philistines were destroyed including those which were not yet harvested. The vineyards and olives were also destroyed. It was a devastating blow to the Philistine farmers. Already, Samson displayed some great strength and stamina, but this method of retaliation was borne out of his own idea. He could have taken this opportunity to abandon his desire to marry another Philistine woman and

take the earlier counsel of his parents (14:3). Then he should faithfully keep the Nazarite vows. But he was rebellious, stubborn and proud. Nevertheless, while his ways were not good, God turned the event to fulfil His plan and purpose to deliver His people.

It was the Philistines' turn to be enraged as a result of Samson's deed.. They enquired about the person who destroyed their crops. And the people answered that it was Samson, because his father-in-law, the Timnite had taken his wife and given her to another. The Philistines then came and burnt Samson's wife and her father with fire. This was a senseless act of anger and revenge. One sin leads to another. So sin multiplies. This provoked Samson to carry out a vicious slaughter of the Philistines. He single-handedly killed a band of Philistine soldiers. Knowing that the enemies would retaliate, he hid himself in a cave in Etam. All these were unnecessary if Samson had been faithful to God and kept his Nazarite vows. He never would have experienced this kind of personal tragedy in his own life. Samson was glaringly disobedient. One could choose to sin, but the consequences of his own sin would not be within his control. This was not the end yet. Sin begets sin.

### **Samson Betrayed by Judaeans**

The Philistines marched into Judah, pitched their tents in Lehi, preparing to invade. The men of Judah demanded from the Philistines the reason for this aggressive and warring attitude towards them. They told the men of Judah that it was because of

Samson and their objective was to capture and kill him. The response of the men of Judah was not only surprising but shocking. Look at 15:11 – “Knowest not thou that the Philistines are rulers over us? What is this that thou hast done unto us?” They should be proud of Samson, their strong man, who was able to face up to the Philistines and who could deliver and offer them freedom from slavery. But they preferred the status quo of peace and comfort and not to rock the boat. They would rather compromise at any price than to be committed to the LORD God who had given them the land so that they would worship and serve Him and be abundantly blessed in all ways. The children of Israel had so degraded themselves by compromising with their uncircumcised rulers that they were prepared to deliver Samson in exchange for peace and comfort at any price.

The Judaeans came to Samson with 3,000 men to Etam where he had been hiding. Samson justified his action in destroying the corn fields of the Philistines because of what they had done to him. The Judaeans, instead of supporting Samson and recognizing him as God’s man, told him that they were there to bind and hand him over to the Philistines! This is shocking! How low could the Judaeans fall? Samson’s reaction was remarkably gentle with his people. He had every right to be absolutely furious with these traitors. Instead, he did not attack nor kill them. He submitted to them but made them promise not to kill him. They gave

their promise, and bound Samson with two new ropes.

### **Samson Armed with the Jaw-Bone of an Ass**

They brought Samson to the Philistines. Samson knew about it as he had been told. When the Judaeans came to Lehi where the Philistines’ camp was, the Philistines wasted no time. They shouted against him, but at that moment the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. Samson snapped the ropes like weak threads. His arms and hands were immediately freed. He found a jaw-bone of an ass, probably lying on the ground nearby, snatched it and used it as his weapon. He killed one thousand Philistines with it single-handedly! It was no mean feat, and he shared his victory obviously with his people saying that he had killed one thousand Philistines with a jaw-bone. He called the place where he won the battle, Ramath-lehi, which means “the height of a jaw-bone.”

This portion of the account gives testimony of the truth that when a Christian puts his trust in God, he can have the power and strength to deal with enemies victoriously. Samson went along with the Judaeans who bound him but he trusted in the LORD to strengthen him and give him the victory. The LORD did not fail him, and at the right moment empowered him with His Spirit. After the battle, he was exhausted and very thirsty almost to the point of dying. That was what he felt. At that moment, Samson prayed to the LORD (15:18). This is the only prayer recorded beside the one he would pray just before his death. It was a beautiful

prayer. He opened his prayer by acknowledging that it was the LORD who gave him the great victory. He also acknowledged that he was only the LORD'S servant. In other words, if it had not been the LORD'S empowerment, he could not have won the battle and killed so many Philistines single-handedly. At this juncture, Samson was conscious of his calling and he was living up to it. He then asked the LORD for water because he was thirsty and dying. It was a cry of despair. Imagine Samson who had just won a great victory now praying for water to drink to quench his thirst. The LORD heard his prayer. The LORD miraculously supplied the water. The LORD split a spot on the jaw-bone and water flowed out of it. Samson drank the water and was revived. He called the place where he drank the water, "Enhakkore" which means "the spring of One calling." God met his physical need. Moreover, the LORD established Samson's judgeship. He judged Israel for twenty years. No details of Samson's ongoing judgeship are given. The children of Israel were willing to accept him because they now saw that God was with him. Samson stood alone for the LORD in Israel. Samson at this point of his life was willing to believe and trust in the LORD that God was able to use him.

### **Samson and Delilah**

There was a period of silence for twenty years between chapters 15 and 16. Samson went down to Gaza, which was one of the cities of the Philistines. In that city, he saw a prostitute, and went to her, meaning that he was involved in sin. The

Philistines were being alerted that Samson was in town. Apparently, they did not forget what Samson had done to them twenty years ago. They hated him. So, they found this a great opportunity to subdue and kill him. They set a watch over him in the prostitute's house, and surrounded the only gate in and out of the city. They were confident that they had trapped Samson and that he could not escape. For some reason whether they were careless or asleep during their watch, Samson managed to leave the city at midnight. The massive gate could not stop him. Once again, he demonstrated superhuman strength. He lifted the gate out of its posts and carried it "to the top of an hill that is before Hebron" (16:3). The phrase can either mean that he walked the thirty-miles to Hebron or he went to a hill which was towards the direction of Hebron. That is beside the point. Whichever way it is understood, the fact remains that Samson showed tremendous supernatural strength. It also showed that Samson was over confident of himself. He depended too much on his physical strength and believed that he was invincible but he had one fatal weakness, an insatiable sexual lust. This opening portion of chapter 16 provides the background for Samson's eventual downfall and death.

Later, Samson met a woman in the valley of Sorek by the name of Delilah. The meaning of her name is "feeble" but that belies her true character – crafty, deceitful, greedy, and wicked. Delilah must have been an attractive woman, at least to Samson. The lords of the five major Philistine cities must have learned that

Samson was having an affair with her. They came to her. They offered her a large sum of money; each one of the lords would give her eleven hundred pieces of silver (amounted to a total of US\$5,000) if she could find out and tell them where did Samson get his strength. That was a very large sum of money in those days. Delilah could retire for the rest of her life in luxurious living. Delilah agreed to betray the man who loved her. It is not told that Samson and Delilah were married.

The account of Samson's fall can be traced to four downward steps. First,

Samson knew the secret of his strength. However, when Delilah asked him specifically where his strength lay, he teased her by telling her to tie him with seven green fresh reeds. And when she shouted that the Philistines were upon him, Samson broke off the bands. Delilah charged Samson for mocking and lying to her, and again asked him the same question. Samson again teased her by saying that if he were bound with new ropes he would be powerless. But this also did not work. Although she was mocked again by Samson, she persisted and once more asked him for the secret of his strength. This time Samson's answer was near the truth. He said that if she weaved seven locks of his hair, he would be a weakling (16:13). That was dangerously near. Samson was playing with fire now. Again when Delilah pretended and shouted that the Philistines were upon him, Samson woke up from his sleep and fled. Three times, Samson had teased and tricked her. One can be sure that

Delilah would use all her female and persuasive charm to get the truth out of Samson. This time she used the love-strategy to disarm Samson. She kept on pressurizing him daily, and like the drop of water which constantly falls on a granite and eventually makes a dent, Samson's "soul was vexed unto death" and he told her "all his heart" (16: 16, 17) . When Delilah realized that this time he was telling the truth, she sent for the lords of the Philistines. The lords came bringing with them the sum of money agreed upon. Samson came to see her as on any other days. This time Delilah "made him sleep on her knees." When he was fast asleep, she called a man to shave off the seven locks of hair on the head of Samson. She shouted the usual warning. Samson woke up saying that he would escape as at other times, but he did not know "that the LORD was departed from him" (16:20). This last statement was the saddest revelation in the account of Samson. All along, the LORD had been gracious to him. He first broke his Nazarite vow by coming into contact with a dead body. The LORD did not take away his strength. Then he got drunk which he should not, and the LORD again did not take his strength away. One more outward requirement of his Nazarite vow was still retained until now. It was his hair, and when that was gone, the LORD departed from him. He became like any other man. He broke all his Nazarite vows – one who was consecrated to the LORD for His use and glory.

Samson was very foolish. He was a victim of his own pride, over-confidence thinking that he could

overcome any temptation. He could have fled from Delilah the moment she demanded from him the secret of his strength. He had two chances to flee from temptation, but he did not preferring to indulge in teasing her instead. Finally, he succumbed and it did fatal blow to him. These women whom Samson chose to spend his time with had helped to destroy his character. Indeed, nothing shapes a person's character more than the people with whom we choose to spend time. The Bible teaches (1 Corinthians 15:33): *Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.*

### **Samson Prays to the LORD**

The Philistines took him. They gouged out his eyes; bound him with locked metal chains; humiliated him by making him to grind corn in the prison house (16:21). What a pitiful sight. In the following verse, the first word "howbeit" intimates a turning-point or a promising hope. Samson's hair began to grow. It was a sign that the LORD had not entirely forsaken him and that His plan and purpose had yet to be completed through him.

The Philistines had a great gathering to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to their god Dagon and to celebrate their victory over Samson which they attributed to their Dagon. The LORD God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7). At one juncture of their celebration, they called for Samson to be brought out and made sport of. Samson was brought out, ridiculed and humiliated. Then they placed him between two main pillars which supported the house where the people were gathered. The gathering in this public place comprised all the

lords of the Philistines including their women folks, and a further three thousand men and women in the gallery. A lad was made to lead Samson who asked him to bring to a spot between the two pillars where he could feel them. Samson prayed to the LORD. In the years of his imprisonment, he had learned his lesson. He learned it the hard way. This was his prayer (16:28): "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." He used "Lord" meaning "Master" to address God instead of "LORD" the covenant name of God, suggesting that he did not think that he was worthy to remind the LORD of His covenant promise to the children of Israel. Samson was repentant having reflected on his life in prison. He pleaded for mercy and asked God for a last favour to give him the strength to take vengeance on the Philistines. This was the second prayer in his life. The LORD God heard him. He answered his prayer, and gave him the strength he wanted. He asked God to let him die with the Philistines. He bowed himself and with all his might he brought the whole house down, and the number of people he killed was more than he slew in his lifetime.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

The account of Samson and Delilah is very well-known, even a movie was produced although there are some things which do not tally with the Biblical account. But the important lesson and biblical truth which all should have learned is that

*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall* (Proverbs 16:18). The life of Samson aptly illustrates this truth. How many Christians have fallen because of pride and over-confidence in trifling with temptation and little sin. It seems to start “innocently” but soon we are taken captive and ultimately our spiritual life destroyed. Beware, for he who thinks that he is able to stand, should take great care lest he falls.

Samson’s weakness is sexual lust. He had a weakness for beautiful women. Everywhere he went his eyes wander and there would be a woman whom he could not resist. God’s Word teaches us to flee from temptation and not to trifle with it. We are not taught even to fight it, but flee from it. So it is also important to realize that the company we keep with may have a greater influence on us. Therefore, it is important that we should always desire the fellowship of faithful, committed and godly Christians.

In the account of his life, Samson prayed two times. The first time he was so exhausted and thirsty to the point of dying that he prayed to the LORD for water to drink. The LORD answered! God answers prayers. We should be most encouraged to learn this marvellous truth. Satan knows this truth and also that if God’s people do not pray God is not pleased for there is nothing for Him to answer. Is it any wonder that so few Christians make time to attend prayer meetings? Satan will try his best to hinder them from praying and attending prayer meetings. Another thing we learn is that God also cares about our physical needs. Samson was tired and thirsty

and God even performed a miracle to give his much needed drink. It is recorded that after the drink Samson’s spirit was revived. This is very encouraging to all Christians, not the least, those who serve Him wholeheartedly and trust him completely. The danger is always this: that when God has provided all our physical needs, there is a tendency on our part to be complacent and comfortable, and then we stop involving in spiritual things in our life and the work in His church.

Finally, let us not be deceived that while God blesses us with physical and material blessings just as he endowed Samson with superhuman strength, we should not think that spiritually we are all right. Therefore, when God has blessed us, we must take care not to be too complacent lest we become blind to the sins in our life. Bishop Ambrose made this comment about Samson:

*Samson, when brave, strangled a lion; but he could not strangle his own love. He burst the fetters of his foes; but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned the crops of others, and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman.*

Paul’s exhortation to the Christians in Ephesus (Ephesians 5:15): *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise;* is also applicable to us today. AMEN