



Judges - Chapter Sixteen

II Judges 3:7-16:31 - The Downward Spiral of Israel's Apostasy (continues/concludes)

II.m Judges 13:1-16:31 - Samson (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Sixteen

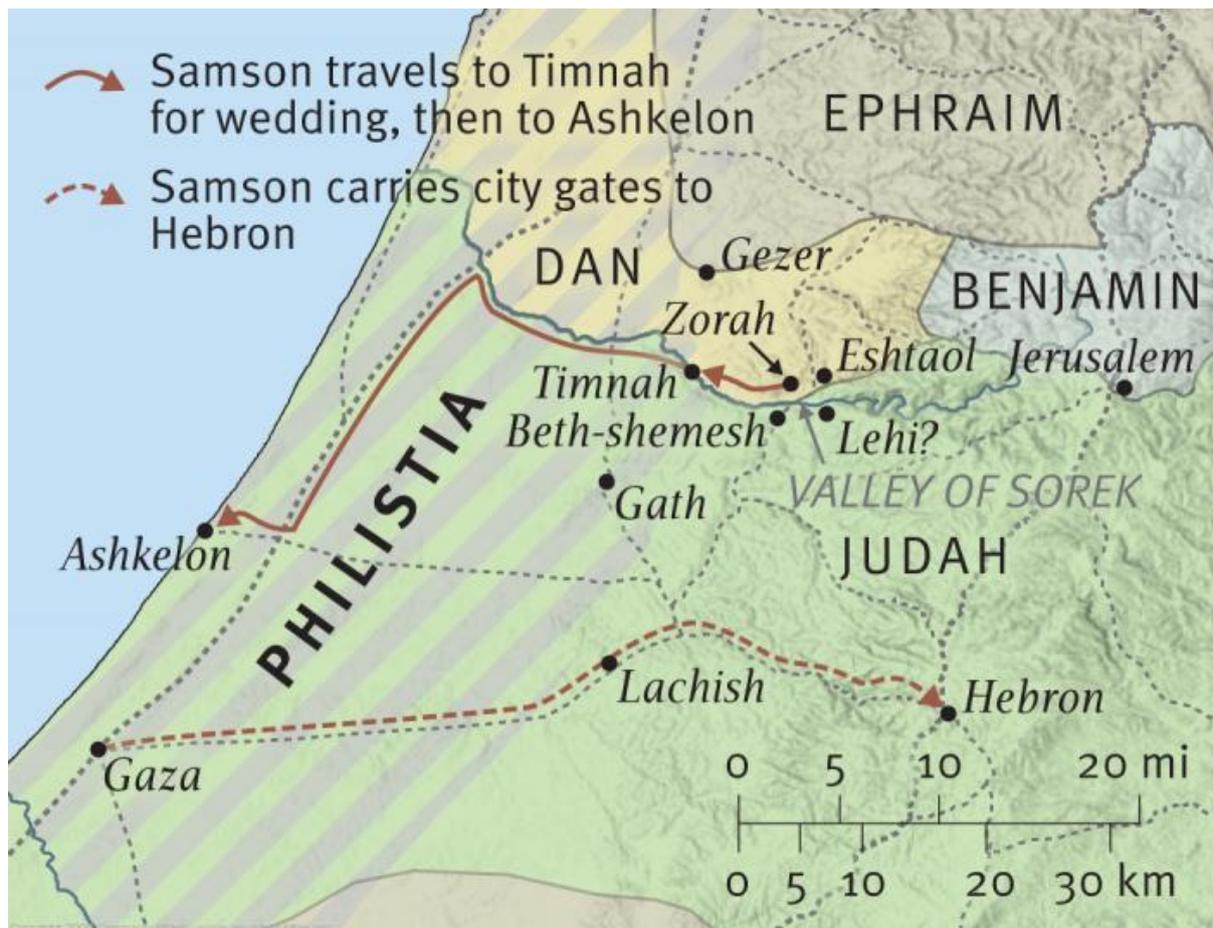
The second segment of the Samson stories details his fateful involvement with yet two more Philistine women – a prostitute (vv.1-3) and Delilah (vv.4-22) – and his final revenge on the Philistines and their god (vv.23-31). Significantly, the Spirit of the Lord is nowhere mentioned in this chapter. Finally the Lord departs from him (v.20), and Samson's miraculous strength is gone.

II.m.iii Judges 16:1-31 - Samson and the Philistines, Part 2

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.m.iii.1 Judges 16:1-22 - Samson and Delilah

A trap was set for Samson in Gaza but Samson evaded their plan, took the city gates off and carried them away to Hebron. Then Samson fell in love with Delilah but she betrayed him to the Philistines for money. Three times she nagged him to tell her the secret of his strength and three times he lied to her. She followed the lie, called in the Philistines and each time Samson defeated them. Finally, he gave in to her persistence and told her that the secret of his strength lay in his Nazirite vow to God of never having his head shaved. Delilah let Samson fall asleep in her lap, called in a man to save his head and then allowed the Philistines to take him captive. They blinded and then took him in chains to Gaza.



Samson's Exploits

¹ Once Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute and went in to her.

Judges 16:1

Once Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute and went in to her. Samson was in obvious sin here. This is a clear example of how a man so used of God can also sin and sin blatantly. This is the second of three inappropriate relationships with women that led Samson into conflict.

Hebrew has two words for prostitutes. One (*qadesh*) refers to 'cultic prostitutes' who served pagan gods; refer to examples in Genesis 38:21-22, Deuteronomy 23:17 and 1 Kings 14:24. The word here (*zonah*) signifies a second type, the common, 'secular' variety as used in Genesis 38:15.

Samson wanted to be used by God, but he also yielded to the deceitfulness of sin. He kept the external features of his Nazirite vow zealously, while at the same time sinning blatantly with a prostitute.

Samson did what nearly all people do when deceived by sin. He put his life into categories, and figured that some categories God cared about, and some

categories God did not care about. Understanding that Jesus has claim over a Christian's entire life is a radical change of perspective.

² The Gazites were told, 'Samson has come here.' So they encircled the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They kept quiet all night, thinking, 'Let us wait until the light of the morning; then we will kill him.'³ But Samson lay only until midnight. Then at midnight he rose up, took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

Judges 16:2-3

At the city gate. Gates from this period, the Early Iron Age, were elaborate complexes, at least two stories high, with guardrooms flanking a narrow opening. The two posts were set deep in the ground to support the doors.

Let us wait until the light of the morning; then we will kill him. It was a common tactic to set the ambush under the cover of darkness and then spring the trap at first light, making it easier for the attackers but still catching their prey unawares: <<*Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep watch over him, planning to kill him in the morning. David's wife Michal told him, 'If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed'*>> (1 Samuel 19:11), and: <<*Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off*>> (Hosea 10:15). Thus the advice is to guard the heart well during periods of spiritual darkness: <<*So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*>> (2 Peter 1:19).

Put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron. Despite his sin, God still gave Samson supernatural strength to escape from the Philistines. God did this because God's purpose was bigger than Samson himself, and because God used Samson despite Samson's sin, not because of it.

The hill that is in front of Hebron. The ancient route connecting Hebron and Gaza was a journey of about 40 miles or 64 km. It was a superhuman feat to carry the doors for such a distance.

⁴ After this he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, 'Coax him, and find out what makes his strength so great, and how we may overpower him, so that we may bind him in order to

subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.'

Judges 16:4-5

Delilah was the third Philistine woman with whom Samson had become entangled; the first became his wife in Judges 14:1, and the second was the prostitute (v.1). Samson fell in love again, and fell for a woman completely wrong for him. This is another example of the pain and ruin that came into Samson's life because he did not guard his heart.

The lords of the Philistines came to her and said. As in Judges 14:15, the Philistines seemed to recognise that Samson had a weakness for women and that they could use this route to entrap Samson.

We will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver. Delilah was also deeply in love; but she was in love with money, not Samson. Eleven hundred shekels made up more than 140 pounds or 63 kgs of silver.

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, 'Please tell me what makes your strength so great, and how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you.'

⁷ Samson said to her, 'If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that are not dried out, then I shall become weak, and be like anyone else.'

⁸ Then the lords of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not dried out, and she bound him with them. ⁹ While men were lying in wait in an inner chamber, she said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he snapped the bowstrings, as a strand of fibre snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

Judges 16:6-9

Please tell me what makes your strength so great. The source of Samson's strength was not obvious. This means that he probably was not a large, heavily muscled man like a modern day bodybuilder. He may have looked small and skinny, and unlikely to have such strength.

And how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you. Delilah knew that Samson was strong; yet she also knew that he could be bound with something, and this was indeed true of Samson. One might say that the honest answer to her question would be, "I may be bound with the attention and affection of an ungodly yet attractive woman."

In the first test of Samson's strength, the seven fresh bowstrings, made of animal gut, were weaker than dried and aged strings. Samson's suggestion of these

inadequate bonds shows his contempt for his adversaries, and their credulity indicates their haste to capture him.

She bound him with them. Samson could have easily seen Delilah's heart by the way she immediately tried to bind him with what he deceptively said he could be bound with. The fact that he did not tell her the truth proved that he knew she had devious and dangerous intentions.

The Philistines are upon you, Samson! Delilah had made no secret that she wanted Samson bound and the sole purpose of this was to subdue him so that he would be captured. Why then did she shout a warning on each occasion the men came in to capture him? It seems that she delighted in the moment of his capture.

A strand of fibre is a thread of flax. The ropes that were used to bind Samson in Judges 15:14 were described as being like weak flax when he broke free from them with apparent ease.

¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, 'You have mocked me and told me lies; please tell me how you could be bound.' ¹¹ He said to her, 'If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak, and be like anyone else.' ¹² So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' (The men lying in wait were in an inner chamber.) But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

Judges 16:10-12

You have mocked me and told me lies; please tell me how you could be bound. It would seem that romantic attraction made Samson lose all sense. There was no good or rational reason Samson continued this relationship with Delilah or entertained her prying into the secret of his strength. Samson is a good example of how an ungodly relationship can warp thinking.

All sin is equally abhorrent to God and Christians should not focus on any one type of sin being worse than others. However, Scripture repeatedly warns against sexual sin as it often draws people into sin more readily than others, and is so often damaging to appropriate relationships. David wrote: <<*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers*>> (Psalm 1:1 NIV), showing that it is essential for Christians to choose their relationships wisely.

If they bind me with new ropes. In the second test, Samson toyed with the Philistines, suggesting that they use the same bonds that the men of Judah had previously found to be worthless in Judges 15:13.

So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them. Samson allowed this bondage because he refused to escape from the situation. Many today are in similar places of sin, compromise, and bondage, yet refuse to escape the situation.

¹³ Then Delilah said to Samson, ‘Until now you have mocked me and told me lies; tell me how you could be bound.’ He said to her, ‘If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and make it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak, and be like anyone else.’ ¹⁴ So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web, and made them tight with the pin. Then she 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.

Judges 16:13-14

Tell me how you could be bound. Delilah obviously cared nothing for Samson. His continued commitment to her is a remarkable testimony to the power of blind, irresponsible love or probably sexual desire.

If you weave the seven locks of my head. The third test, involving Samson’s hair, got closer to the true source of his strength.

Made them tight with the pin translates the same Hebrew phrase that was used when Jael drove a tent peg into Sisera’s head in Judges 4:21. The exact scenario here is unclear, but Samson obviously had no trouble escaping once more. Samson, like Sisera, was unwary in the presence of a woman, naively not suspecting her of posing any danger to him.

¹⁵ Then she said to him, ‘How can you say, “I love you”, when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me three times now and have not told me what makes your strength so great.’ ¹⁶ Finally, after she had nagged him with her words day after day, and pestered him, he was tired to death. ¹⁷ So he told her his whole secret, and said to her, ‘A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me; I would become weak, and be like anyone else.’

Judges 16:15-17

How can you say, “I love you”, when your heart is not with me? Tragically, Samson’s heart was with Delilah. Her accusation was a manipulative projection of her own heart, which was not with Samson.

Finally, after she had nagged him with her words day after day, and pestered him, he was tired to death. Delilah did precisely what Samson's wife had done earlier with regard to the riddle he had set the Philistines at his wedding feast: *<<She wept before him for the seven days that their feast lasted; and because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her. Then she explained the riddle to her people>>* (Judges 14:17). Samson's weak character shows yet through again: he did not learn from his previous mistake, but yielded in both cases.

I have been a nazirite to God from my mother's womb. Samson claimed to be a Nazirite and yet he had failed to keep the requirements of his vow time and again. He may have been a Nazirite outwardly, but his heart had failed. Delilah's previous complaint was that Samson's love for her was empty and a hollow protest. Delilah had no love for him, and she expected Samson to destroy himself and his service for God to prove his love for her.

¹⁸ When Delilah realised that he had told her his whole secret, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'This time come up, for he has told his whole secret to me.' Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. ¹⁹ She let him fall asleep on her lap; and she called a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. He began to weaken, and his strength left him.

Judges 16:18-19

He had told her his whole secret. Delilah knew that Samson was finally telling the truth. Earlier, he had withheld his heart from her (v.15). When Samson did this, it was a very sad scene. He had to know what was to come. He faced the choice between faithfulness to God and continuing an ungodly relationship. In this is seen the strongest man in the world weak under the power of an ungodly relationship. Perhaps Samson figured that because he was strong in one area of his life, he was strong in all areas. In this he was desperately wrong. The words of Moses should have warned him: *<<But if you do not do this, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out>>* (Numbers 32:23).

She let him fall asleep on her lap. No doubt, Delilah used sweet words to lull Samson to sleep. Her pretended love for Samson for the sake of money is deeply troubling. It is the way of the world that Scripture warns Christians against: *<<Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; 16 for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches – comes not from the Father but from the world>>* (1 John 2:15-16).

Charles Spurgeon wrote: "As long as he is consecrated he is strong; break that, he is weak as water. Now there are a thousand razors with which the devil can

shave off the locks of a consecrated man without his knowing it. Samson is sound asleep; so clever is the barber that he even lulls him to sleep as his fingers move across the pate, the fool's pate, which he is making bare. The devil is cleverer far than even the skilful-barber; he can shave the believer's locks while he scarcely knows it."

His strength left him. There was nothing magical in Samson's hair. It might also be said that Samson began breaking his Nazirite vow before this. Yet there came a time when Samson finally had to reckon with his rejection of God's mercy. Spurgeon also comments, "Not that his hair made him strong, but that his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of God's favour to him. While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him."

Thus Samson's inappropriate relationship with this deceitful woman became his downfall: <<*For many are those she has laid low, and numerous are her victims. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death*>> (Proverbs 7:26-27). Yet the reality of his situation was down to the fact that **Samson failed to keep his relationship with God:** <<*I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned*>> (John 15:5-6).

²⁰ Then she said, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' When he awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

²¹ So the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles; and he ground at the mill in the prison.

Judges 16:20-21

I will go out as at other times. Samson did not know things were different. He had lived in compromise for so long that he thought it would never make a difference. This is a tragic example of wasted potential and rejection of God's warnings. Samson thought he could get away with sin and escape its consequences. He misinterpreted the merciful delay of God's judgement or correction as a sign that he really did not care. He therefore presumed on God's mercy and continued on in his sin, making things far worse.

But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Samson's strength was not in his hair, it was in his relationship with God. He worked against that relationship to the point where God finally departed from him, in the sense that he no longer blessed

Samson with supernatural strength. Therefore, he could not prevail against his enemies, just as Moses had warned the Israelites: <<***Do not go up, for the Lord is not with you; do not let yourselves be struck down before your enemies***>> (Numbers 14:42).

So the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. The practice of blinding an enemy and then forcing him to grind grain at a **mill** is known from ancient Near Eastern texts, e.g. the Tapikka Letters, from a 14th Century BC Hittite administrative city. The Philistines may have adopted this practice from the Hittites. It was fitting that Samson was first blinded in his imprisonment. He was attracted to ungodly relationships through his eyes. His failure to restrain this attraction to women brought him into bondage.

The Philistines bound him with bronze shackles. Samson did not humble himself in obedience before God, he insisted on the freedom of doing what he wanted to do. This left him with no freedom at all. Sin has its wages, and this was Samson's payday. His sin left him blind, in bondage, and a slave. Before Samson's blindness, bondage, and slavery were only inward, but they eventually became evident outwardly.

Samson's fate was similar to that of King Zedekiah: <<They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon>> (2 Kings 25:7).

²² But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Judges 16:22

But the hair of his head began to grow again. There was no magical power in Samson's hair, for his strength came only from the Lord. But the growth of his hair indicates that God was renewing his previous power. Samson may also have begun to renew his faith (v.28).

II.m.iii.2 Judges 16:23-31 - Samson's Death

Despite Samson's humiliation, his life ended with vindication. His hair grew back (v.22), and he slaughtered 3,000 Philistines (v.27), more than he had killed previously (v.30). Samson demonstrated a measure of faith by calling upon God and believing that God could and would help him, thus he is remembered as a man of faith in Hebrews 11:32. However, Samson seems to have desired God's intervention more for personal revenge than for the protection of God's people.

²³ Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, and to rejoice; for they said, 'Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.'²⁴ 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.'²⁵ And when their hearts were merry, they said, 'Call Samson, and let him entertain us.' So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. They made him stand between the pillars;²⁶ and Samson said to the attendant who held him by the hand, 'Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, so that I may lean against them.'²⁷ 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 performed.

Judges 16:23-27

The Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. The image shows that the idol was represented in the combination of both man and fish. The name Dagon is derived from 'dag' which means fish. Although there was a deep affection from Dagon's worshippers to their deity, the symbol of a fish in human form was really meant to represent fertility and the vivifying powers of nature and reproduction.



The Philistine Idol Dagon

Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand. When Samson pursued his ungodly relationships he might have justified it to himself by thinking that the only harm was done to himself. Yet here it can clearly be seen that his disobedience led to giving glory to false gods and not God, the only one who deserves glory. Samson became a trophy for worshippers of false gods.

When the people saw him, they praised their god. They were having a party to celebrate their apparent victory: <<*They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone*>> (Daniel 5:4). The message preached by the followers of Dagon was clear. They said, “Our god is stronger than the God of Israel, because we have conquered Samson.” Often the disobedience of God’s leaders leads others to deny God and strengthens their unbelief.

Samson said to the attendant who held him by the hand. The Philistines continued to mock Samson. At this large demonstration, they used a boy (the meaning of the word translated attendant here) to guard him. This indicates all the more that Samson was not a muscle bound man who was naturally strong. His strength was truly supernatural, not natural.

²⁸ Then Samson called to the Lord and said, ‘Lord God, remember me and strengthen me only this once, O God, so that with this one act of revenge I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes.’ ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Then Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines.’ He strained with all his might; and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life.

Judges 16:28-30

Lord God, remember me and strengthen me only this once. Just as the Israelites had allowed themselves to be subdued by their enemies for many years before turning to God, so Samson did too. Yet, at last, he realised that it was God who gave him strength and his prayer was the right thing to do.

So that with this one act of revenge I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes. Sadly, his prayer was to avenge himself and not the reputation of God that he had tarnished. Samson’s end was both bitter and sweet. God answered his last prayer, and he achieved his greatest victory against the Philistines at the cost of his own life: So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life. In this, Samson is a picture of the believer in disobedience. God used him, but he did not benefit from it. His life ended in personal tragedy, shadowed by the waste of great potential.

Samson grasped the two middle pillars. A temple from the period of the judges has been unearthed at the Philistine site of Tell Qasile. It was built with two central pillars to support the roof of the entire structure, a design distinct from either Canaanite or Israelite temples.

Let me die with the Philistines. This was suicide, but different from suicide in the strict sense in that his purpose really was not to kill himself, but to kill as many Philistines as he could. There is a sense in which Samson was like modern suicide-bombers, although their deaths are senseless suicides based on the lies of people who pervert the truth.

Suicide is clearly sin, the sin of self-murder. Yet Christians are wrong if they regard it as the unforgivable sin. Almost all people who commit suicide have given in to the lies and deceptions of Satan, whose purpose is to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10).

He strained with all his might; and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. This could only happen with God supernaturally empowering Samson. This shows that God never forsook Samson, even when he was disobedient: *<<for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you'>>* (Hebrews 13:5b). God's mercies were there for Samson even in a Philistine prison. All Samson had to do was to turn his heart back towards God and receive them. It could be said that Samson was restored with self-renunciation. This last great victory came only as he was broken, humiliated, and blind. He could no longer look to himself. Prior to this Samson is not seen as a man of prayer, but here he prayed. He was humbled enough to allow a boy, his attendant, to help him.

³¹ Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel for twenty years.

Judges 16:31

He had judged Israel for twenty years. The main body of the Book of Judges now ends, with a final editorial comment about Samson's judging. Samson, the last judge, had been empowered by God's Spirit, just as the first Judge Othniel had been. However, much had happened in the interim. Samson and most of his predecessors certainly were not paragons of virtue. Yet, despite the generally poor examples of the judges themselves, God had worked to deliver Israel and to protect his own name and reputation. However, the book's message is not yet played out. In the following chapters, the nation's apostasy sinks to even deeper levels, and the stage is set for the coming of a faithful king who will restore moral order.

In summary, Samson shows the danger of underestimating our own sinfulness. He probably figured he had things under control with his own fleshly lusts, but his desire for love, romance, and sex led directly to his destruction. Samson was the great conqueror who never allowed God to properly conquer him. Samson had to be deceived to keep going back to tempting and dangerous places. It seemed that just about every time he went to the land of the Philistines, he fell into moral compromise. He should have learned from this. Instead of putting himself in tempting situations, he should have fled from youthful lusts: *<<Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart>>* (2 Timothy 2:22) just as Joseph did when confronted by Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:12. Rather than break his relationship with Delilah, he allowed it to break him. Samson also shows the danger of being a loner as a leader. Everything Samson did he did alone. He judged for twenty years and never sought or used help from others. Most of all, Samson is a powerful picture of wasted potential. He could have been and should have been one of the greatest men of God in the OT; but he wasted his potential.

Spurgeon concludes: "The Old Testament biographies were never written for our imitation, but they were written for our instruction. Upon this one matter, what a volume of force there is in such lessons! See, says God, what faith can do. Here is a man, full of infirmities, a sorry fool; yet, through his childlike faith, he lives. The just shall live by faith. He has many sad flaws and failings, but his heart is right towards his God; he does trust in the Lord, and he does give himself up as a man consecrated to his Lord's service, and, therefore, he is saved. I look upon Samson's case as a great wonder, put in Scripture for the encouragement of great sinners."