

## **Judges 16:1-31.**

### **Dedicating our Gifts to the LORD**

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Have you ever given much thought as to what it is that defines you? Many adults will, if asked, respond to such a question with a description with the simple, “I am a \_\_\_\_\_” where the blank identifies their position of employment or socially-defined engagement. “I am an engineer”, “I am a teacher”, “I am a wife and mother”, etc. We often tend to define ourselves based upon our perception of how the world sees us, and they see us most as one who wears such a label. We tend, then, to spend our lives operating within the context of that label.

The truth is, if you define yourself in this manner, you are actually describing what you have chosen to do with the resources, gifts, talents, and interests that the LORD has given you. This begs the question, “What does the LORD want you to do with the resources, gifts, talents, and interests that He has given you?” The LORD has given to some the gift of extraordinary musical talent, yet they use it for personal gain, and have acquired millions of dollars in record and video sales. To some he has given extraordinary leadership skills, and they have become bullies and dictators. To some he has given great intellect, and they have become secular educators and researchers. To some he gave the skills to write and they have become successful novelists and movie writers. We can probably consider how every gift and skill can be used for personal gain rather than for the purpose that it was intended: to glorify the LORD. The LORD created you for a single purpose: to love Him and to glorify Him as you develop a relationship with Him and with others with the intent of serving as His ‘hands and feet’ to reach the lost souls of this world.

There are few souls whom the LORD has created who have been more gifted than Samson, the last of the Judges of Israel. Unlike any of the other Judges, who were called to serve the LORD at the point in Israelite history when they were needed, called as adults who were already prepared for that service, Samson was called before he was born. Samson was the son of Manoah, who like Abraham and others, had experienced barrenness, the inability to conceive children. As with Abraham, an angel came to Manoah’s wife with the announcement that she would bear a son. This announcement came with an unusual proscriptio: that Samson would be dedicated to the LORD from birth with the express purpose of being part of the redemption of Israel from the Philistines who were now vexing the apostate Israelites.

This dedication would take the form of a Nazirite vow. Such a vow was traditionally taken by an individual, man or woman, as a vow of piety and

dedication that would last for a finite period, typically ninety days.<sup>1</sup> During that time the disciple of the LORD would not cut their hair as a public sign of their vow. During that period of time they are to maintain ritual purity by neither eating or touching any unclean thing. Also, the disciple was to refrain from eating or drinking any product of the vineyard, specifically referring to “wine or strong drink”. The unique aspect of this application of the vow is that it was not taken by Samson, but rather by his mother before he was born. Also, during her pregnancy, Samson’s mother also took the vow of the Nazirite. Samson was prepared by the LORD to serve Him in a very powerful and specific way.<sup>2</sup>

**Judges 13:24-25. *And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. <sup>25</sup>And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.***

Samson’s youth was also unique. Blessed with godly parents who were teaching him in the ways of the LORD, Samson was also “moved” by the Holy Spirit frequently during his growth from adolescence to adulthood. Because of this, there was a significant difference between Samson and the other children and young men in the community. First, one would notice his hair. Bring a Nazirite from birth, his hair would be quite long. The Nazirite vow did not prohibit trimming the hair, though the rules on trimming were somewhat strict. A second characteristic of Samson, the one for which he is probably the most famous, was his unusual physical strength and agility. We will also find that Samson was gifted with confidence, and a passionate heart. Since the Spirit “moved” him, he was also open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit if he chose to be.

Given these gifts with which to honor the LORD and to deliver Israel, the potential that Samson had to serve God was beyond anyone previously born. When we look at the experiences of the other Judges of Israel we observe examples of how the LORD used them and their unique gifts to deliver Israel, yet it was the LORD who did the delivering. The Judges served to simply put into place the sequence of events that the LORD would use to deliver the nation. The statement by the angel that Samson would “begin to deliver” Israel implies that Samson would have a more active part in that deliverance. However, because of his basic character, though he would judge Israel for a generation, he would only “begin” that deliverance.

The scriptures are silent about his leadership as a Judge in Israel for twenty years. Instead, the scriptures focus on his self-centeredness and his use of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of the Nazirite vow, refer to Numbers 6.

<sup>2</sup> Judges 13:14.

gifts that the LORD gave him for his own selfish purposes and the consequences of his choice to do so. We will find from the chronicle of Samson's choices that, even though we may be blessed with all gifts, if those gifts are not used to glorify God, we will never realize the full potential that the LORD has planned and provided for us.

Samson's primary issue was his lack of commitment to follow the LORD. Samson did not make the vow of the Nazirite: his mother did. Samson was raised under the set of Nazirite rules, but there was one important property missing from Samson's preparation: his piety was in the form of his appearance rather than the character of his heart. Samson would come to believe that his appearance and physical power defined who he was, while at the same time he was free to use his gifts to serve his own purposes and passions.

The first references to Samson's adult experience illustrates an individual who knows few boundaries, believing that he can do anything he wishes. We quickly find that he despises the true purpose of the Nazirite vow as he easily breaks its restrictions by immersing himself in that which is ceremoniously unclean, including the touching of a carcass, eating unclean food, and unbridled affairs with Philistine women. The only tenet of the Nazirite vow that remained was his long hair.

**Judges 16:1. *Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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 an hill that is before Hebron.***

As the Judge for Israel, what is Samson doing in the middle of Gaza, deep in the territory of the Philistines, over forty miles from his home between Zorah and Eshtaol? His self-imposed freedom to do as he chooses led him to follow his base impulses to engage himself in physical relationships with pagan women who had few if any of the cultural restrictions on their behavior that was common to Israelite women. The scriptures chronicle several of his relationships with these women and in every case the consequences were dramatic. In this event, his dallying deep into the region of the Philistines left him unprotected. When the Philistines heard of his presence, they found an occasion to ambush him.

Samson's arrogance is demonstrated in his response to the threat. Those who sought to ambush him were sleeping at the gates of the city, apparently assuming that he would spend the night with the prostitute. City walls were typically constructed as a row of buildings. It was probably in one of these structures, and near to the main gate, that the Philistines slept while Samson quietly disassembled the door structure of one of the city gates and carried it back to an Israelite camp as a form of vindictive prize. Though the details of this narrative serve to leave many questions unanswered, its purpose is to reveal in more detail the type of person that Samson had become. He thought nothing of "fraternizing" with the enemy, particularly their women. Throughout this event there is no reference to YAHWEH: Samson is totally on his own, ignoring the LORD who certainly is not leading him at this point in his life. Though the feat of removing the city gates and carrying them forty miles seems impossible, he likely left through a small, undefended gate. Yet his feat does point to his considerable strength. This narrative also reveals that Samson has become a national target of the Philistines. Finally, we find revealed a man who has the strength to carry the door and post from a Gaza city gate all the way to Israel, but does not have the wherewithal to defend himself against the wiles of a woman.<sup>3</sup> This short narrative simply sets the stage for Samson's next dalliance in the city of Gaza.

**Judges 16:4. *And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.***

The wording of this narrative brings to completion the description of Samson's disposition as a womanizer. The phrase "he loved" is not as much a reference to his desires as it is to the object of his desire: a woman in the valley of Sorek, another Philistine region. Also, the Hebrew word for love is not *hesed*, but *ahab*. Samson did not love Delilah as a man loves a woman, but was overcome with a lustful desire for her, and efforts to satiate that desire would blind him to anything else that surrounded him. We have seen this same pattern in those relationships that led up to this final dalliance. Furthermore, this is the first time the name of the woman of his desire is revealed, Delilah. It may be curious that the name *Samson* is a homophone<sup>4</sup> for another Hebrew word that refers to light, and Delilah, though a Philistine name, is also a homophone, but for a Hebrew word that refers to darkness.<sup>5</sup> The stark contrast between their basic nature is dramatically presented through the Hebrew text by the writer.

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<sup>3</sup> Block, pg. 451.

<sup>4</sup> Homophones are words that have the same sound but different spellings and/or meanings, such as "hair" and "hare."

<sup>5</sup> We miss the wonderful literary devices that are used in the Hebrew when we translate to other languages. This narrative of Judges, chapter 16 is full of literary devices that would serve to bring a deeper context and understanding to the Hebrew reader that those who rely on translations can often miss.

**Judges 16:5. *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.***

Each recorded occasion of Samson's dalliances with pagan women results in a trap that is set for him. One would think that Samson would take at least some notice of this repeating pattern. However, his arrogance and belief of his own invincibility seems to produce in him a spirit of complete denial of the reality of the dangers that surround him, and of his irresponsibility as the Judge for Israel. Samson does not seem to know or care about the dangers of dabbling in a sinful lifestyle.

Though Samson's desire for Delilah is well-stated, there is no evidence that she had any interest in him that was greater than her desire to take part in the national agenda to entrap him. She would find great profit in doing so, with an overwhelming bounty offered by the "lords" of the Philistines, presumably the leaders of each of the primary cities which numbered at least five.<sup>6</sup> Delilah would be recruited in a conspiracy by the lords to capture this arrogant leader of the Israelites, and to demonstrate their hatred for Israel by subjecting him to "affliction," a gentle word to express the torturous brutality that they had in mind.

The world is a dangerous place for those who would dabble outside the protection of the LORD's hand. The LORD has promised His protection and provision for those who "seek Him" and place their faith in Him. However, all such promises can be rejected by those who choose to reject His protection and provision by seeking after and immersing ones' self in the vagaries of this pagan and secular world culture. For example, the LORD will not protect us from the consequences of drug abuse when we choose to abuse drugs. Samson deliberately left his position as the Judge of Israel, and left the protection of the LORD when he chose to leave both for the self-gratification, the excitement, and the danger of his ventures into Philistia.

These were willful choices that Samson made, and he would suffer the consequence of those choices, as would Israel. When we leave the hand of the LORD's protection, the consequences we experience often reach far beyond ourselves, and impact virtually everyone who we have a relationship with. Ventures into infidelity bring the consequence of broken trust and broken relationships. Ventures into drug and alcohol abuse cause no shortage of heartbreak and loss for those who care for and seek to help the abuser.

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<sup>6</sup> Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

**Judges 15:6. *And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.***

When we reject our trust in the LORD and give it to people, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment, particularly when those people also reject the LORD. It is evident that Samson's woman of darkness had no more love for Samson than he did for her, immediately seeking to find out how his power can be taken from him. She is even bold enough to give the reason for her wanting to know how his strength can be controlled: so that he can be "afflicted," or tortured.

When we choose to wander away from the LORD we find ourselves travelling into some dangerous territory. Godly wisdom and prudence would lead one in such circumstances to be both vigilant and careful of those dangers. We can see that Samson is in complete denial of his vulnerability, playing a dangerous game with an even more dangerous woman.

**Judges 15:7-9. *And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. <sup>8</sup>Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. <sup>9</sup>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 withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.***

Delilah's response to Samson's false confession certainly reveals her true heart: that of a Philistine woman who has both feet planted in this pagan world. As soon as Samson tells her that he can be bound with seven green "withs"<sup>7</sup> she informed the Philistines of his weakness and they put in place a plan to subdue Samson, even to the point of putting him in the bonds he spoke of, and lying in wait for the opportunity to attack. Making the plan no secret, Delilah announced to Samson that the Philistines were ready to pounce, and he broke the bonds, foiling their attempt at subduing him.

For Samson, this had been a game, albeit a dangerous one. It may be likely that the sparring that he was doing with Delilah served to excite him in ways that his other dalliances did not. There are many stimuli in this pagan world that would serve to boost our adrenaline level, stimuli that are an inappropriate testimony for

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<sup>7</sup> The exact identity of the green withs is not well-established, and has been open to several ideas. C.f. A. Kozlovic.

a person of faith, or simply a form of foolishness that places us in unnecessary danger. God has promised to protect those who place their faith and trust in Him, but the Word of God also teaches us not to put the LORD to the test. If we are foolish enough to lay down on the railroad tracks thinking that God will stop the train to save us, our foolishness will likely be short-lived.

This is the type of person that Samson had become, and now he was playing a game with some very dedicated pagan people who did not play by the rules.

**Judges 16:10-12.** *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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liars in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.*

At least two things are obvious: first, Delilah reposes the identical challenge that produces identical results, and second, Delilah is not to be trusted in any way. If this is not obvious to Samson it should be so shortly...

**Judges 16:13-15.** *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. <sup>14</sup>And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web. <sup>15</sup>And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.*

The results of the third challenge was the same. When Samson told her of his weakness, she immediately pounced on that weakness to subdue him. It should be rather evident to Samson that, if he were to have any real point of weakness, and if he were to reveal it to her, she would not hesitate to put his confession to the test.

The irony of this whole narrative is that even Samson did not know the source of his strength. It is evident that Samson did not call upon the LORD for anything at this point in his life. He came through his youthful years acutely aware of the influence of the Holy Spirit on his life. He knew the nature and purpose of the Nazirite vow, and found himself supremely gifted by the LORD during this time.

We do not know at what age Samson became a Judge in Israel, but we do know that he served in this capacity for about 20 years. The narrative of Chapter 16 takes place at the very end of these years, so we might assume that Samson started his years of service with a strong dedication to the LORD as he was called to lead Israel.

However, we see what became of Samson in his later years. He became more and more self-confident, finally coming to the point where he was beyond self-reliant. We now see no sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, no sincere prayer, and no testimony of faith among anyone he encounters. Still the LORD did give to Samson the wonderful gifts that he possessed, and just as easily, the LORD can take them away.

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

Somewhere in Samson's youth, he was never taught, or at least rejected learning, of the true source of his strength. His belief in his source of strength was a pagan as Delilah's belief in her mythical God, Dagon. Samson attributed his strength to his maintenance of his unshorn hair, illustrating his shallow understanding of the connection between the unshorn hair and the vow, attributing its power to the hair, not to the vow.

Here was an opportunity for Samson to tell Delilah the true nature of his Nazirite calling: that his strength came from the LORD who had blessed him so that he could use his gifts to lead Israel, (and to defeat the Philistines.) Had he done so, with his gifts and sincerity to the LORD he could have brought Delilah and many other Philistines to faith in God.

However, Samson's faith in God had long ago been replaced by his faith in himself. Three times now, he had told Delilah of his point of weakness and she immediately put it to the test. Why would it be any different this time? Of course, his hair was not the source of his strength, it was the LORD who gave him the gift of strength. Now, for the first time, he had literally denied the LORD, and in front of the Philistines Samson attributed his strength wholly within himself. His rejection of God as his LORD was complete, and he made a public testimony of this to a very vocal Delilah who had already proven her intent to do all she can to betray him.

**Judges 16:18-19a.** *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. <sup>19</sup>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;*

Are we surprised? This is simply the fourth time that Samson told her of his weakness, and like with the other three, she immediately put it to the test. Had Samson acknowledged the true source of his strength, this test would have been identical to the others. He would have simply awoken unfettered as he did the other three times. However, his rejection of the LORD would not be without consequence. The LORD's promises are predicated upon our obedience to Him, and Samson's disobedience had now become complete.

**Judges 16:19.** *and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.*

Why was Samson's strength gone? From the very beginning of his life, his strength always came from the LORD. God has a purpose for the gifts that he gives us, purposes that will always serve to benefit His kingdom. When we reject Him and use those gifts for our own personal gain, there is no reason for the LORD to continue to gift us so. We often observe people who have been given wonderful gifts who then use them for their own purposes, thinking that those gifts are intrinsically their own, and deny the LORD. Even people of faith can be caught up in this lie, and think that their gifts are an intrinsic part of their own character, and rather than dedicate them to the LORD, they dedicate them to their own agenda, using them entirely for their own gain. Many times, we see gifted people consumed, and even destroyed, by their own pride and self-confidence. We sometimes see these as seemingly believing that they are better than everyone else, and somehow are privileged to live outside the boundaries of the LORD's guidelines for living. I am always particularly disappointed when I see people who have been given a gift of leadership and use it to bully and intimidate others in the body of Christ so that they can experience the rush of controlling others. Such people have served to diminish the witness of the organized church in this world to the point that many reject it.

Now that Samson had placed himself in a position where he was no longer useful to the LORD as a Judge of Israel, the LORD would teach him just how strong he is without the power of the Holy Spirit working in his life.

**Judges 16:20-21. *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. <sup>21</sup>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.***

Samson had wandered so far from the LORD, had become so insensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life, that he did not even take notice when the Holy Spirit was no longer empowering him. This circumstance may be true for many who have used their God-given gifts for their own personal agenda. They are so caught up in themselves that they are not considering the LORD in any real way. They may voice great public prayers, calling upon the name of the LORD a dozen times in each sentence, but their heart is simply overjoyed to hear their wonderful words that are heard by others. In truth, they are not praying to the LORD, but rather performing for the public a behavior that reinforces their self-empowered agenda, but the LORD is not in it.

We will always observe a couple of consequences in the lives of such people. First, though they may accomplish great things because of their great gifts, they will never accomplish anything greater than themselves. They cannot accomplish true God-sized tasks because they are not being used of the LORD to accomplish His purpose, but instead they are driven by their own desires to accomplish their own purposes. Second, we will often observe the consequences of stepping outside of the LORD's providence and hand of protection as, in their true human weakness that they share with all of us, they will stumble and fall; and the higher they have lifted themselves up, the harder the fall can be.

Samson had a long way to fall. He was overpowered by the Philistines, and blinded. The word that is used for "blinded" is curious, as it is a form that is broader than simply visual acuity. Samson was blinded in many ways because of his own pride and self-confidence. Those who are so self-absorbed, and particularly those who are successful in exercising their gifts outside of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, are likewise blinded. They simply do not see that they are outside of the Holy Spirit's hand, and are living in denial of His rejection of their behavior.

**Judges 16:22-25. *Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>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.***

Samson had fallen so low that he was now being used of the Philistines to lift up their own mythical god, Dagon.<sup>8</sup> Samson's defeat was being viewed by the Philistines as Dagon's victory. People's faith in a mythical god was strengthened because of Samson's disobedience to the LORD.

The consequences of self-reliant and pride-filled behavior can be devastating to the kingdom of God. When churches get caught up in the infighting that comes from bullying leadership, they become a laughing-stock of their community, and to the pagan and secular members of that community, the testimony of the LORD is nullified. The community can and will use the church to defend their belief in its lack of relevance.

***Judges 16:26-27. 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. <sup>27</sup>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.***

Though such leaders in those churches that are consistently experiencing internal conflict are often in denial of this dynamic, having been dragged in front of the community-wide celebration of Dagon's victory, Samson was no longer in denial. Though he could not see, he fully understood what was happening around him. Where he had spent a life leading others, he was now being led by a child into the Philistine center of pagan worship. The scriptures refer to about three thousand who were on "the roof," or more literally, the spectator's stands. This would infer many more who were in the worship center itself, including the most prominent members of the Philistine communities.

***Judges 16:28. And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only***

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<sup>8</sup> Dagon was the supreme god of the Philistines. Originating as seamen, the cultic Philistines gave Dagon the form of a fish. Some have grossly misunderstood this similarity to the fish symbol that was used in early Christendom and remains today, attributing it to a continuance of pagan worship. In truth, the early church adopted the fish symbol simply because the first letters in the Greek description of Christ, "Jesus, Christ, Son of the Living God" form an acronym, *ΙΧΘΥΣ*, transliterated *ichthoi*, the word for fish.

***this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.***

This is the first reference in this narrative of Samson's acknowledging the LORD at all. It was not until Samson was at his lowest point, and at a point where his personal gifts were either gone or useless, that he finally turned to the LORD of his youth. Yet, we can also observe that Samson still did not understand God's purpose for Israel. He asked for his strength to return, not for the glory of Israel, or to demonstrate the glory of God, but rather to avenge his injury. However, it is not God's purpose to serve as our avenger, but rather to stay consistent with His original plan, and in this event it is the demise of the pagan Philistines.

It was God's purpose, revealed to many of Samson's predecessors, that God's purpose in the taking of Canaan was to destroy the Canaanites because of their wickedness, using the faithful of Israel to accomplish that purpose. Many today do not understand this, and become confused as to why the LORD might destroy the Philistines in order to avenge Samson's abuse. This is not what is happening at all. What Samson would do in the worship center of Dagon was not vengeance for the injustices done to himself. It was God's judgment upon the Philistines, worked through Samson. Ultimately, Samson would die, never fully understanding this truth.

***Judges 16:29-31. 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. <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>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 buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.***

The biblical-historical account of Samson is one of its great stories, and one of its great tragedies, a tragedy brought about entirely because of Samson's apostasy in his later life. Samson came to trust in himself rather than in the LORD. Turning away from God, he left his God-ordained service to Israel and began to serve his own desires. This would ultimately lead him away from his anointed ministry, and to his own violent demise.

The message of Samson is not a message about his strength. It is a message to us all that (1) the LORD has given all of us wonderful gifts that are intended by Him to be used for His purpose as we and the kingdom of God are edified by

their use, and (2) the foolishness of abusing those gifts by using them to lift up ourselves rather than to lift up the LORD.

Let us never fail to (1) acknowledge that it is the LORD who as gifted us, so that we do not despise those gifts by diminishing them, but rather by dedicating them to Him and using them (2) for His glory, and not our own. It is then, and only then, that we will be able to fully understand the promise of the LORD of an abundant life,<sup>9</sup> in Him.

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<sup>9</sup> John 10:10.