

Judges 16:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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.

This verse belongs to the Samson cycle addressing Samson, Delilah, and final victory in death. Samson represents both the heights of God-empowered strength and the depths of human weakness through moral compromise. His Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21) set him apart as holy to God, yet his persistent violations of this vow—contact with dead animals (14:8-9), seven-day feast (likely involving wine, 14:10), and finally revealing his hair's secret (16:17)—demonstrate progressive spiritual decline.

Theologically, Samson illustrates how spiritual gifts don't guarantee spiritual maturity. The Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson repeatedly, giving superhuman strength, yet this empowerment didn't produce corresponding moral transformation. His attraction to Philistine women (14:1-3, 16:1, 16:4) directly violated God's command against intermarriage with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). This demonstrates that God can use flawed instruments for His purposes, but this never excuses or endorses sin.

Samson's final prayer—"O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me" (16:28)—shows genuine repentance and renewed faith. His death

accomplished more than his life (16:30), suggesting that even spectacular failure can be redeemed when we return to God. However, the tragedy is that Samson's potential was largely wasted through moral compromise. His story warns believers that consistent holy living, not merely spectacular spiritual experiences, characterizes faithful discipleship.

Historical Context

Historical Setting: The Book of Judges spans approximately 350-400 years (c. 1375-1050 BCE) during the Late Bronze Age collapse and early Iron Age. This period saw the disintegration of major empires (Hittites, Mycenaeans) and weakening of Egyptian control over Canaan, creating a power vacuum filled by emerging peoples including Philistines (Sea Peoples), Aramaeans, and regional kingdoms. The decentralized tribal structure left Israel vulnerable to external oppression and internal chaos.

Cultural Context: This passage relates to Samson, Delilah, and final victory in death. Canaanite religion dominated the region, centered on Baal (storm/fertility god), Asherah (mother goddess), and Anat (war goddess). Archaeological discoveries at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) have provided extensive information about Canaanite mythology and religious practices. Baal worship involved ritual prostitution, child sacrifice, and fertility rites tied to agricultural seasons. Israel's persistent attraction to these gods demonstrates the strong cultural pressure to conform to surrounding nations' religious practices.

The material culture of this period shows gradual Israelite settlement in the Canaanite hill country, with simpler pottery and architecture than coastal Canaanite cities. Iron technology was beginning to spread, giving military advantage to peoples who mastered it (note the Philistines' iron monopoly, 1 Samuel 13:19-22). The absence of centralized government during the judges period stands in stark contrast to the bureaucratic city-states of Canaan and the imperial administration of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This political structure reflected Israel's theocratic ideal—God as king—yet the repeated cycles of apostasy showed this ideal required more than political structures; it demanded heart transformation.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this passage about Samson, Delilah, and final victory in death reveal God's character in dealing with persistent human rebellion and incomplete obedience?
2. What patterns of spiritual compromise or incomplete obedience in your own life mirror Israel's failures during the judges period?
3. How does understanding the cyclical nature of sin and deliverance in Judges help you appreciate Christ's perfect and final deliverance from sin's power?

Interlinear Text

took	But the Philistines	him and put out	his eyes
H270	H6430	H5365	H5869
and brought him down	to Gaza	and bound	him with fetters of brass
H3381	H853	H631	H5178
and he did grind	house		
H1961	H2912	H615	H1004

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 2:19 (Parallel theme): None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.

Isaiah 47:2 (Parallel theme): Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers.

Proverbs 14:14 (Parallel theme): The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Exodus 11:5 (Parallel theme): And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.

Matthew 24:41 (Parallel theme): Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Psalms 149:8 (Parallel theme): To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron;

Proverbs 5:22 (Parallel theme): His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.

2 Kings 25:7 (Parallel theme): And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

2 Chronicles 33:11 (Parallel theme): Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.