

Samson and Delilah

Samson falls in love with Delilah, who betrays him to the Philistines. After revealing the secret of his strength, Samson's hair is cut, his strength leaves, and he is captured, blinded, and humiliated.

Judges 16:1-22

CHARACTERS: Samson, Delilah, Philistine rulers, Philistines

THEMES: Temptation, Betrayal, Consequences of sin, Loss of calling, Spiritual blindness

AFTER VISITING GAZA and escaping a Philistine ambush by tearing off the city gates, Samson fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek named Delilah. This would prove to be his greatest weakness—not lack of physical strength, but vulnerability to the wrong woman.

The rulers of the Philistines went to Delilah with an offer: 'See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver.' The bribe was enormous—about twenty-eight pounds of silver from each of the five rulers, totaling wealth beyond imagination.

Delilah agreed without hesitation. 'Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued,' she asked Samson.

Samson lied to her: 'If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man.' The Philistine rulers brought her seven fresh bowstrings, and while Samson slept, she tied him up. Men were hidden in the room. 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!' she cried. But he snapped the bowstrings as easily as thread.

Delilah said, 'You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied.'

Samson gave her another false answer: 'If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man.' Again she tied him while men waited in hiding. Again he broke free easily.

Delilah persisted: 'All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied.'

Samson's third lie came closer to the truth: 'If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on a loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man.' While he slept, she wove his hair and pinned it. Once more she cried, 'The Philistines are upon you!' He awoke and pulled up the pin and the loom with the fabric.

Three times Samson had lied. Three times Delilah had tried to betray him. Yet he stayed with her—a man of supernatural strength displaying supernatural foolishness. Delilah had shown herself completely untrustworthy, working openly to destroy him, yet still he returned to her bed.

Then Delilah employed her most effective weapon: relentless nagging. 'How can you say, "I love you," when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength.' Day after day she prodded him with such words until he was tired to death.

Finally, he told her everything. 'No razor has ever been used on my head, because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.'

Delilah realized he had told her the truth. She sent word to the Philistine rulers: 'Come back once more; he has told me everything.' They returned with the silver in hand.

She lulled Samson to sleep on her lap, then called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair. His strength began to leave him. She cried out, 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!'

He awoke and thought, 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.' But the most tragic sentence in Samson's story follows: 'He did not know that the Lord had left him.'

Samson had played with his calling so long that he did not realize it was gone. He had compromised gradually—touching the dead lion, marrying pagan women, breaking his vows repeatedly—until finally, the source of his strength departed. The external sign of his Nazirite vow, his uncut hair, was gone. But the real problem was internal: he had violated his consecration to God.

The Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and took him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze shackles and set him to grinding grain in the prison—work normally done by animals or the lowest slaves. The strongest man in Israel was now blind, bound, and humiliated, doing a beast's labor.

Yet the story notes one crucial detail: 'But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.' Physical restoration was beginning. Whether spiritual restoration would follow remained to be seen. In the depths of darkness and degradation, grinding in circles in a Philistine prison, Samson had time to reflect on how a man called by God from birth had fallen so far. The question was whether this humiliation would lead to repentance, and whether God's grace could redeem even such catastrophic failure.

