

**“THE TRIUMPH OF  
GOD’S POWER AND GRACE”:  
*THE CHURCH’S LIFE IN AND THROUGH DEATH*  
PART ONE  
JUDGES 16  
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In our passage from Holy Scripture today, we see that tragedy becomes comedy because of the triumph of God’s grace. In the ancient world of literature a tragedy and a tragic figure were those who were greatly gifted and powerful who had a weakness that when found out would be that great and powerfully gifted person’s end.

When we read tragedy the reader sees the tragedy coming- -it’s just a matter of time until the weakness of the hero gets the best of his or her strengths. Tragedies end in a sad way, yet the sad ending is expected from the very beginning of the story. Folks are to learn from tragedies and see the human plight and condition through them.

In contrast, comedy in the ancient world (and today) was a person who was not necessarily that gifted, and has mean/average circumstances, who wins against the world, or lives happily ever after in the end.

In God’s redemptive story, only God can turn tragedy and a tragic figure into a comedy. Only God by his power and grace can triumph over man’s inherent and sinful weakness so that something good might come of it.

The cross of the LORD Jesus Christ is the great tragedy of God’s son dying a horrible death as a sad ending, only to be realized as a comedy with an ending that is actually a new beginning.

In our story of Samson, we have tragedy, but we also have comedy in that God is victorious over His and Israel’s enemies in the end.

The author of Judges ends formally the Samson story in a literary way: “And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years” (15:20). This is the way each judge story ends; we should understand that this is the end of the story.

## **GOD'S POWER AGAINST THE GATES OF HELL – 16:1-3**

But it is not the end of Samson's story because Samson's story is a tragedy that by God's grace becomes a comedy and victory of God's power and grace over sin.

The author wants us to see to ponder this sad fact that chapter 15 does not end the Samson story. After this incident of Samson being helpless and humbled and needing water in his time of trouble (15:18-19) seems indeed to be the end of the old way of Samson's and perhaps the beginning of the new. Samson could have relied upon God's power and grace, and lived in dependence upon God knowing that he would answer him, and start anew.

But Samson would not learn from this completely. His eyes would not remain fixed on YHWH. In fact, we're told at the beginning of the next chapter (16:1):

“Samson went to Gaza, and there ***he saw*** a prostitute, and he went in to her.”

Samson's on the move again: “Samson went to Gaza...” (v. 1a). Look at map; Samson has gone really far South (or “down”) from the allotment of the Tribe of Dan to Gaza. He is close to the Tribe of Judah, but in Philistine territory.

Samson sees again; Samson fixes his eyes on another ungodly woman: “...There he saw a prostitute, and he went into her” (v. 1b). Samson continues to “go down” or *yarad* spiritually:

***ESV Proverbs 23:27 For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress is a narrow well.***

This is an inspired commentary on Samson's and our sins and how our sins make us insane. Remember how insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results the next time. Well Samson thinks that women or satisfying his lusts over and over will finally bring satisfaction and fulfillment to his life.

Samson like Israel is still doing what is right in his own eyes. Doing what is right in one's eyes is forgetting what their eyes have seen covenantally revealed in God's Gospel to those who believe (Deuteronomy 4).

Although Samson is practically surrounded and ambushed while he is making love with the world (v. 3), he nevertheless is able in his strength to make a break. Notice how Samson is extremely strong and able, but has not much power virtuously and over his sin problem (just as Israel). *Samson has become friends with the world again at this point in his life.*

Samson rips the very gates of hell off its hinges (16:3). However, he's breaking the gates in order to escape from sinful circumstances and consequences. But in God's grace he is

making the city that represents the Serpent open to vulnerability and attack. Christ in contrast opened the gates of hell for the Church to evangelize, not to become like.

Application: the Gates of Hell have been ripped open by God's power and grace for the Israelites now to conquer and take the land, but there is too much Canaanization- -Israel has become too much like the world to notice and recognize their true enemies (as we saw in the last sermon, represented by the Tribe of Judah's weakness, 15:11ff).

***The Church will not prevail if it is no different from the world.*** We are consecrated, set apart, made holy in Christ, so that we will go forth the Gospel and overcome God's and our enemies by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of our testimony. Jesus in his authority, power and grace has opened wide the Gates of Hell in His earthly ministry of binding Satan so that the Church might go forth on the march:

***ESV Revelation 12:10-11: And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers<sup>1</sup> has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. <sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.***

When the Church of Jesus Christ becomes like the world, we will forget our identity and our mission as both Samson and Israel illustrate for us at this time in redemptive-history.

If the Church does not corporately as well as individually deal with persecution and suffering because of her stand for God's truth and the Gospel then something might be wrong with their witness and their faith!

### **SAMSON'S FOLLY WITH WOMEN – 16:4-17**

As we learned last week, Samson can reflect on God's power and grace revealed in his life for a season. He called upon the Name of the LORD in his time of trouble and helplessness. Samson's helplessness opened up the door to the Gospel of God's power and grace (15:18-19), but Samson so easily forgot what God could do.

Yet again, Samson forgets God's power and grace over indwelling sin, and he forgets to keep his eyes on the LORD, maker of heaven and earth. Samson, like the Psalmist had learned to say in chapter 15:

***Psalm 63:1-3: O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. <sup>2</sup> So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. <sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.***

But then Samson forgot to fix his eyes on YHWH as the Psalmist also demonstrates our responsibility to God in light of his grace for the Church. Samson as representative of the

Church is to fix his eyes on what God has done (Deut. 4), remember who God is, and remember His word- -NOT to do what is right in his own eyes!!

### **FOCUS ON EYES IN THE BIBLE:**

*ESV Psalm 119:6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.*

*ESV Psalm 119:15 I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.*

*ESV Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

*ESV Psalm 119:37 Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.*

*Psalm 121:1 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?*

*Psalm 123:1 To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!*

Enter Delilah, a woman in the Valley of Sorek (v. 4).

This time there will be great consequences for Samson's failed memory and divided heart!

We're not sure whether Delilah was an Israelite or a Philistine. The fact the author does not tell us is perhaps to say either that she is an Israelite that is more faithful to the Philistines (as the Tribe of Judah was tempted to be), or that she is indeed a Philistine and is yet another Philistine woman who seduces Samson and causes him to take his eyes off His LORD and his consecrated calling.

We do know that Delilah's commitment and loyalty were to the Philistines, and so that makes her by confession an enemy of Israel and of God.

The lords of the Philistines use her as a trap for Samson. They say to her: "Seduce him!" (16:5). The lords of the Philistines want to know how to defeat Samson by knowing his weakness. Irony: the woman *is his weakness*. The ungodly Philistines know more about Samson's sinful weakness than they fully understand by sending a woman to do the work of deception (vv. 5-6).

Whether Delilah was Israelite or Philistine really doesn't matter; her god was Mammon with a capital "M"! She loved riches rather than God; she was rich toward worldly things and NOT rich toward God (cf. James 2:5). The Philistines offer her a whole lotta loot:

They promise her for her deception and betrayal of God's Anointed: "We will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver!" (16:5c); that amount was a lot of money back in the ancient Near Eastern day! This betrayal would be over great riches in the eyes of the world, and

that was where Delilah had fixed her heart: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be” we should remember.

Like Judas many years later who would also betray the LORD’s Anointed- -the LORD Jesus Christ- -so here Delilah takes the cold hard cash! ***The Philistines make her an offer that “she cannot refuse”!*** In comparison to Judas’ betrayal which was a mere thirty pieces of silver, here at this time in redemptive-history God’s sinful Savior-Deliverer is apparently worth a whole lot more in worldly concepts of worth!

This shows that Samson’s work against the Philistines was known broadly in their land; Samson was notorious in the Philistine headlines, he was a wanted man posted at Philistine post offices for warring against and killing them (cf. 16:24).

The Philistines feared the work of YHWH that was being performed through Him. The Philistines had a high price on his head- -because he was a threat to their Kingdom. They desired to bind the “strong man” so that by binding the “strong man” they could destroy Israel forever.

The Philistine goal is to bind the strong man so that they can take God’s Kingdom and prevent God’s Anointed One from being enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords (cf. Psalm 2).

Destroying Israel would also destroy the hope of Genesis 3:15: The Seed of the Woman that was to come through Israel would be snuffed out forever. The Devil and His Seed would gladly pay handsomely for this - -1,100 pieces of silver- -*apiece!!*

***Repetition to show folly of Samson’s playing with sin***

Samson is somewhat wise about this situation and deceives Delilah as to what is his weakness- -at first (vv. 7-9)! When the Philistines try to ambush him he breaks through the bowstrings, so they did not find out the secret of Samson’s great strength.

Again, Delilah tries to manipulate Samson to get the information for the lords of the Philistines so that they can ambush and overcome Samson (vv. 10-13). But again, Samson has the last laugh and bursts his bonds, snapping the ropes that held his arms like thread.

Again, Delilah tries to manipulate Samson, but Samson deceives her and again prevents the lord of the Philistines from overcoming him (vv. 13-14).

Now she uses subtle woman-like manipulation- -or the kind of manipulation that only a woman can do successfully- -with tears! (vv. 15-17), and Samson tells Delilah how he can be made to be just like all other men in strength and ability. Note again that like the Philistine woman of Timnah (chapter 14), Delilah “presses him” or nags him in a manipulative way to get her way (14:17; 16:16).

The woman at Timnah had manipulated Samson in the same way; you would think that Samson would have learned wisdom from his bad incidences and the deception of Philistine women (or sinful women in general), but he did not. Samson in reality feared losing the sinful woman he wanted so much. Samson wanted Delilah at this point more than he wanted a joyous and obedient fellowship with YHWH; Samson didn't want to lose what made him the happiest in life (in his own estimation and in his own eyes, cf. 14:3).

Isn't this just like us who have idols and fix our eyes on something or someone other than God? We continue foolishly to the end serving our idols, even though we have learned before that they do not love us and our love for them will only end in our ruin.

Nevertheless, like Samson and his idol for lust and sinful women, we go on kidding ourselves that this lust, this thing, this person, this idol will eventually bring us the happiness and hope that we are dreaming of!

We convince ourselves and will do anything to keep our relationships with the idol "happy" - while forgetting our true relationship and calling to love God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength!

We so easily forsake the Living and True God to serve and worship those things that we should not have, believing that they will one day change and we will be happy. This kind of sinful nonsense we have all seen in destructive relationships between men and women or between two friends.

Destructive relationships cause both of the people to convince themselves that the other is going to change; both convince themselves that they cannot live without the other - and their relationship with God suffers, and they grow distant from him!

Samson has convinced himself that he needs badly this woman Delilah and he will do whatever it takes to keep her happy (16:17).

### **ISRAEL IN CAPTIVITY, IMPRISONED AGAIN BY THE EGYPTIANS – 16:18-22**

Because Samson had become a functional idolater in desiring a woman that God had forbidden to him, Samson "told her all his heart" (v. 18) and Delilah deceived Samson as she had tried to do many times. Delilah betrays Samson and takes the money for the betrayal. And while Samson lies sleeping in the lap of an ungodly woman, Delilah calls an ancient Near Eastern barber to shave off Samson's hair (vv. 18-20).

We should remember that the hair that Samson had symbolized the strength of the LORD; the hair wasn't the source of Samson's strength, just a symbol of the strength of the LORD and His Spirit.

Again we see Samson's great weakness against his indwelling sin. This is a man that has been consecrated and set apart for God's service before he was born; he has torn a young strong lion to shreds; he has destroyed a lot of Philistines and struck at Dagon their false god- -but he could not resist this woman.

We are told in the passage that Samson was asleep "on her knees" (16:19a). This "asleep on her knees" is a Hebrew way of saying that he was having sex with her. This is what Samson could not resist. You remember the answer to Samson's first riddle against the Philistines (14:18) and how the Philistines not only answered Samson's riddle but told a lot about Samson's heart?

***"What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?"***

For Samson what was sweeter than honey was his lusts for women. What was stronger than a lion was Samson's indwelling sin. Samson was strong on the surface, but his heart was weak and his ability to keep his eyes off women was weak.

Samson would forsake his God and his own safety for another night with a sinful woman! LUST! Satan ruins men by rocking them to sleep singing lullabies about dreams and lusts that are forbidden by God. We must remember the wisdom of the Puritan Matthew Henry who wrote: "When we sleep in the lap of our lusts we wake up in the hands of the Philistines!"

The LUST of the eyes- -the pride of life- -the world's idea of pleasure that will never satisfy- -but try telling the person who has been overcome by LUST and sin- -especially sexual sin (1 John 2:16).

All kinds of excuses will be made: "I love God, but for now I want to enjoy a few more moments with pornography." "I know as a woman I should be working on my relationship with my husband, but the romantic idea of a man from a Jane Austen novel, or some modern trash novel, is so much more important." "I know I should repent of my sexual sin with my boyfriend or girlfriend, but I so desperately need their approval."

All of these statements are uttered very close to our homes (even in them- -perhaps not aloud!). All of these statements have one thing in common; they say: "I will live for LUST and my idol of pleasure rather than the Living God; I realize I cannot have both, Jesus says I can't have two gods, but if I must choose, I will serve this LUST idol now, and then repent later."

By the way that's the height of Antinomian nonsense and arrogance, and you might not have a chance to repent. You might not have another chance to repent and make God your LORD and to grow in the power and grace of the LORD, being assured if you are one of God's children. You may not even be a Christian if you consistently think this way because you may be trampling over the work of Christ in your continued unrepentant sin; we all must make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:3-11; cf. Hebrews 6:4-9).

Cheap grace- -there's no such thing. Repent now of your folly- -learn from Samson's mistakes. His mistakes are to remind us as part of God's covenant story that idolatry does not pay! Idolatry will cause great blindness and even death.

And so as Samson had already become a functional slave of the Philistines; his spiritual slavery is now fully realized in his actual and physical slavery. Samson will suffer the great consequences of his sins; Samson will receive the temporal punishment of the LORD.

We started this Samson story by reminding ourselves that God was using Samson for an occasion to destroy the Philistines as we are taught in chapter 14, verse 4. Samson's sin God did not prevent, but allowed it to bring about good. However, we learn here that there are great consequences to sin.

Sin shall not be our master; we shall not go on sinning so that grace may increase (Romans 6:1-14). *And if we do*, yes, God will bring about his will and purpose! BUT we will suffer the consequences of our disobedience against God.

Let us not play with God's sovereign will and purposes- -let us not deny his power and grace that has been given to us for all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3ff)- -but let us repent and in utter reliance upon God, serve him as we were called to do.

The LORD leaves Samson (16:20). This does not mean that Samson ceased to be a believer, or that his regeneration was revoked (as if that were possible, Heb. 11:32-34). What it means is that God had left Samson as His Warrior-Deliverer-Savior of His people. God would allow Samson's sin to get the best of Him- -God will allow Samson to be humbled and helpless again.

God loves Samson and us so much that he will allow temporal chastisement and punishments and afflictions in our lives so that we might come to learn and love His Word alone!

*ESV Psalm 119:65-72: You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word. <sup>66</sup> Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. <sup>67</sup> Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. <sup>68</sup> You are good and do good; teach me your statutes. <sup>69</sup> The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts; <sup>70</sup> their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law. <sup>71</sup> It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. <sup>72</sup> The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*

God loves Samson and us that he will allow our sins to have great and sometimes embarrassing consequences because he wants to humble us to helplessness so that we might seek the LORD. As Matthew Henry said: "Afflictions are often sent to bring unthankful people to God."



God loves his people so much that he will not sit back idly as a Heavenly Father and do nothing when he sees his children sinning. As we are taught in Hebrews 12:

*ESV Hebrews 12:4-11: In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." <sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

Because the LORD had left Samson, his strength was gone and he was unable to resist the attack of the lords of the Philistines this time- -Samson had been conquered- - overcome- -bound to serve the ungodly enemies of God and Israel.

The lords of the Philistines seize Samson and gouge his eyes out. The very eyes that have caused Samson so much trouble in that he has seen women he liked and gone after them; he has done what is right in his own eyes and not kept his eyes on God the Author and Perfector of his faith (16:21a).

Samson is humiliated and made to serve Dagon (16:21b). Samson serves as Dagon's slave at the grain mill prison: "And he ground at the mill in the prison." Samson is yoked in bondage serving Dagon and walking around and around like a dumb ox treading grain. Moment after moment, hour after hour, day after day, Samson slaves away blindly, thinking about what he has done (and not done) before God.

*ESV James 1:13-15: Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

Israel represented by Samson has gone back to enslavement under Egypt. Only God can redeem him now. Samson is without the strength from the LORD by His Spirit that his hair symbolized.

Samson has gone down now further than he ever imagined. Samson has gone from a man whose life was governed by his sight (in good and bad ways) and now he is a blind man with eyes gouged out.

Samson has gone from being the life of the party and the man of riddles and jokes to a man who is insulted and humiliated in his low estate. Samson has gone from being a man

with a high and consecrated calling and mission to God, the very deliverer-warrior-savior of Israel to the low slave position of grinding grain for “Pharaoh” and God’s enemies, the Philistines (adapted from Block, pg. 462).

What has happened to Samson is a lesson for Israel as well as for all of God’s people. Moses told the people what would happen to them if they were to break covenant with YHWH. Samson as representative of Israel is realizing the covenant curses that God had warned Israel about (Deuteronomy 28:13-15, 25, 32-34, 45-48):

***And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them,<sup>14</sup> and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.<sup>15</sup> "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you....***

***<sup>25</sup> "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies....***

***Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless.<sup>33</sup> A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually,<sup>34</sup> so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see....***

***"All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.<sup>46</sup> They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever.<sup>47</sup> Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things,<sup>48</sup> therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you.***

Samson’s only hope will be from the LORD, Maker of Heaven and Earth. This points God’s people to the reality that sins have consequences. What began as a misuse of Samson’s eyes by looking at women and allowing his lusts to get the best of him, has become a real loss of his eyes. As Our Lord says thinking of Samson’s sin and its consequences in Matthew 5:

***<sup>ESV</sup> Matthew 5:27-29: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.***

The eyes and where they will focus or whether they can see is revealed over and over in the Bible. The very lie that caused the Fall was a lie by the Serpent that if Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit that God knew that their “eyes would be open” and the lie was that God didn’t want that (Gen. 3:5-7). Since the Garden, and even more so after the fall, the Deceiver-Accuser prowls like a roaring lion seeking to devour God’s people with their eyes.

That is why God teaches His people to keep their eyes on Him throughout redemptive history; the salvation of God’s people is a salvation from blindness: “I once was blind but now I see...”:

*ESV Exodus 15:26 saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer."*

*Deuteronomy 4:9: "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children..."*

*ESV Leviticus 26:16 then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.*

*ESV Psalm 19:8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;*

*ESV Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

*ESV Psalm 141:8 But my eyes are toward you, O GOD, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless!<sup>1</sup>*

*ESV Isaiah 6:10 Make the heart of this people dull,<sup>1</sup> and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

*ESV John 9:32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*

*ESV John 12:40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."*

*ESV Acts 26:18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

*ESV Galatians 4:15 What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.*

*ESV Ephesians 1:18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*

*ESV 1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions- is not from the Father but is from the world.*

### **Honestly: Where are your eyes fixed?**

Samson has experienced temporal punishment and chastisement. In His sovereignty, God has allowed Samson to lose his eyes altogether to the Philistines. The Philistines in their wickedness gouged out his eyes and left him blind as a slave to Dagon.

Have the gates of hell prevailed now against the church?

**THE LORD DOES NOT FORGET HIS PEOPLE - 16:21-31**

**THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S POWER AND GRACE – The Church's Life in and Through Death**

Samson is blinded and bound in bronze shackles- -but his hair began to grow as he served the lords of the Philistines (vv. 21-22).

Here we see the triumph of grace in one line: **“But the hair of his head began to grow against after it had been shaved...”** We are told in verse 22 that God is still in charge and that unbeknownst to the Philistines and their evil power, God will raise up his warrior victoriously again! We must remember

We are left with a bit of a spiritual “cliff hanger” so that we might ponder God's power and might. If God's people were left to themselves, their own power and strength, then they would be as mere slaves serving the enemy.

Although Israel and Samson struggled with remembering their LORD and His gospel to them, here we see the great hope that God has not forgotten his gospel to his people. Samson will be strengthened and rise! But how?

***How will the bronze shackles be broken?***

Remember: Our helplessness is a door to God's grace!

As John Owen wrote:

“Behold, the Lord Christ, that has all fullness of grace in his heart (John 1:16), all fullness of power in his hand (Matt. 28:18), he is able to slay all your enemies. There is sufficient provision in him for your relief and assistance. Jesus can take your drooping, dying soul and make you more than a conqueror” (Rom. 8:37).

Samson was “stricken, smitten and afflicted” as a result or as a consequence for his sin against God, his blindness and his forgetfulness of God’s call and mission on his life. Contrary to the LORD JESUS Christ who was stricken, smitten and afflicted for our sins as God’s elect, Samson’s sins were because of his own sins.

Samson was stricken, smitten by God and afflicted *for his own sins*. That is, Samson’s sins of his eyes became his permanent affliction and temporal judgment from God.

Jesus Christ was stricken, smitten by God and afflicted *for our sins* (and Samson’s!). Jesus took God’s eternal wrath upon himself so that we might have eyes to see and might be heirs of all God has granted to us in Jesus.

Jesus was taken prisoner under the power of Satan and his minions so that his people might know and realize their adoption as sons- -as children. Jesus was enslaved and tormented so that we might be fully delivered, saved and joyful in Christ!

Through the LORD Jesus Christ, God also triumphed by His power and grace. His Beloved Son laid down his life too so that His Church might be delivered not merely from the Philistines but from death, hell and the devil.

Jesus like Samson willingly laid down his life for his people. Jesus like Samson conquered the Church’s enemies through death:

***ESV Colossians 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.***

The Apostle Paul calls this joining our bodies to a harlot (1 Cor. 6:12-20). Therefore since we have been bought with a price, we ought to offer our bodies to God because we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

All the people of God should know that when we suffer for doing wrong in a covenantal context, YHWH is faithful and will chastise us as sons (Heb. 12:7ff). Samson endured chastening and was brought to repentance, but the people had to wait until the light of NT revelation made this clear.

The church is called to be a holy and consecrated people to the LORD; we must remember our identity as we be not conformed to the mold of this age, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we might do the will of God and fulfill the commands of God by the Spirit living within us (Rom 12:1 ff).

Now, the Apostle Paul teaches the people of God to stand in the power of YHWH and of his might, and to resist the devil and his forces of evil (Eph. 6:10ff). Perhaps the Apostle Paul also had Samson's story in mind when he wrote:

*ESV 1 Corinthians 16:13 Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*

CRB

[www.aplacefortruth.org](http://www.aplacefortruth.org)

### **Bibliography for Further Reading**

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