



**VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH**  
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

Dr. Ray Pritchard | June 22, 2014 | Judges 16



*The Life of Samson | Part 4*

There are certain stories in the Bible which fit into a very special category. Those are the stories which reveal the essence of the people in the story. That is to say, if you know the story, you know what the people are like even if you don't know anything else about those people. A handful of Bible stories fall into this category: David and Goliath. Cain and Abel. Abraham and Isaac. Samson and Delilah.

It is a story which is altogether true, and yet has become legendary. It has been told and retold and told again throughout the course of a hundred generations. There is in the story of Samson and Delilah the stuff of real human drama. It is one of the great classic tragedies of all literature—sacred or secular. It is a story that fathers tell their sons and mothers tell their daughters and Sunday School children learn soon after they start coming to church. It's one of those stories which having heard it, you realize you are coming to the essence of the man and the essence of the woman. Just to know the story is to know what the people are all about.

### Didn't You Used To Be Samson?

The story of Samson and Delilah, found in Judges 16, really could be titled "Didn't You Used to Be Samson?" It's the story of a man who, having reached the pinnacle of his career and having accomplished everything a man would want to accomplish, in one sudden, violent turn went from the top right down to the bottom. It's the story of a man whose name was a household word, whose picture was on every wall, whose deeds were celebrated by poets and priests. It's the story of a man who had it all and who in a moment lost it all.

The amazing thing about the story of Samson and Delilah is that it comes at the height of his career. That really is the most shocking fact. In the end, Samson was tricked by the same thing that tricked him in the beginning. And in that one fact is the shock and surprise. Or perhaps it is no shock and no surprise at all that after all these years, the thing he struggled with in the beginning—that thing reached out and bit him on the heel and finally brought him down.

### Samson's Mid-Life Crisis

The key to the story is found in the last verse of Judges 15. "Now Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines." (15:20) That's exactly the kind of verse which we would tend to pass right over, but it's very crucial to properly understand the story of Samson and Delilah. Samson, from such a great beginning, went down, down, down and then came back and won that great victory and delivered his

people. He was about 20 years old when he burst on the scene. This verse is telling us that he led Israel for 20 years. From the time he was 20 until the time he was about 40: twenty years of peace, twenty years of prosperity, and twenty years of relative freedom from the Philistines. So it was that Samson, as he approached the mid-life years, began to feel restless. He began to feel ill at ease. He began to wonder if there wasn't more to life. And Samson at the age of 40 begins to take a turn for the worse.

Not that it appeared obvious. I imagine his old friends looked at him and said, "At last he has conquered his problems." They would have said, "When he was growing up, he had quite a temper. Back in those days, you didn't want to get him mad at you." And when his old buddies would get together, and talk would turn to the old days, someone was bound to say with a snicker, "He used to be the biggest skirt-chaser in town." They would laugh and then somebody would say, "I guess he just grew up or something." It truly looked like Samson had finally put all his problems behind him.

## **The Hardest Thing You Will Ever Say**

The truth of the matter is, Samson hasn't put all his problems behind him. He's covered them up. He's ignored them. He's played them down. He's pushed them away. He's managed to live a pretty straight life. Samson, you see, never really dealt with the problems that plagued him way back there at the beginning. And now at the end of twenty years, those same problems are about to come out and trip him again. Only this time they're not just going to trip him. The same problems he refused to deal with are the same problems that are going to bring him down now.

That's the way it always is, isn't it? The hardest thing that you will ever say in your life is, "I have a problem." Nobody likes to say that. Samson is just like you or me. He wanted to forget what had happened. He wanted to just kind of rock along peacefully. He wanted to pretend the things of the past were in the past. And as long as they were twenty years away he didn't want to have to worry about them anymore. But the jig is up. It's time to pay the piper. Because he hasn't dealt with his problems, they're going to come up again, and this time they are going to destroy him.

## **One Wild And Crazy Night**

The story begins in [Judges 16:1](#) where Samson does a very unusual thing. One day Samson went down to Gaza where he saw a prostitute. Gaza was a Philistine city. It was about 25 miles away from Zorah, where he grew up. Gaza was not only a Philistine city, it was also the headquarters for the Philistines. It was the place where they had the temple of Dagon.

It was a crazy thing for Samson to do. It would be like Mikhail Gorbachev coming to Washington, D.C. one Friday night, and hoping he wouldn't be recognized. The odds weren't in his favor. Everybody in Gaza knew Samson; he was Public Enemy Number One. Maybe he thought he was far enough away that either they wouldn't recognize him or maybe word wouldn't get back to Israel. Who knows? It was a crazy, insane chance to take. In one sense it wasn't a "chance" at all, because there was absolutely no chance the mighty Samson could slip in and out of the capital city of the Philistines unobserved. No chance. None whatsoever. It's like the stories we sometimes hear about certain preachers and politicians who take such reckless chances with their private lives that it almost seems as if they have a professional death wish. Maybe that's what is happening here. Maybe Samson is fed up with the unending pressure of 20 years at the top of the heap. Maybe he's so fed up with the humdrum that he almost doesn't care if he does get caught. That kind of thing happens all the time, and more so as successful men approach the mid-life years.

So Samson leaves his own people again. He goes to the capital city of the Philistines and there he sees a prostitute. He went in, the Bible says, to spend the night with her. By the way, Samson is the only man in the Hall of Fame of Faith in Hebrews II, who ever slept with a prostitute. This famous man of God went in to spend the night with a prostitute.

The word got out. No surprise. When the people of Gaza found out that Samson was in their city, they surrounded the place where he was and they lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. It's not hard to read their thinking. They think Samson's going to go in, do his thing, and when it's all over he's going to sleep all night, so they're going to get him at dawn. Verse 2 says, "They made no move all night saying, 'At dawn we'll kill him.'" But Samson crossed them. He stayed with the prostitute only until the middle of the night.

Then he got up and he took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and he tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill which faces Hebron. (16:3)

There are two things you need to know about this. First, when it says he ripped up doors of the city gate, it doesn't mean a hollow core door. It means it was a thick wooden door anchored by iron posts on either side and held in place with iron hinges. To rip out a door like that would take enormous strength. To pick it up and carry it even one foot would be a tremendous feat. The door would have weighed almost 700 pounds. Second, by carrying off the doors of the city gate, Samson was humiliating the Philistines once again. Nearly all the ancient cities were surrounded by a thick wall, which meant the gate was the main entrance. The gate symbolized the safety and security of the city. And for Samson to take the city gate and to put it on his shoulders and to carry it away like that—not only was it a feat of incredible strength—it was also his way of humiliating the Philistines and saying, "See, not only can you not catch me, I'm going to destroy the symbol of your security." He carried the doors and put them on top of the hill which faces Hebron. Hebron was in the land of Judah. That was where the people of God were. He put them up there as if to say, "See, you can't stop me. You can't catch me. I can do anything I want."

## **A He-Man With A She-Weakness**

You may wonder why this little episode is in the Bible. How does this story of Samson and the prostitute fit in with Samson and Delilah? The answer is transparent. Samson had a problem with women. He never liked the Philistines. He hated them all his life. But he could never stay away from the Philistine women. He hated the Philistines, but he could never stay away from their women. What Samson wanted, by going down to the prostitute in Gaza, was sex without commitment. He wanted love without any strings attached. But there's no such thing as sex without commitment or love with no strings attached. He thought he was going to get it by going to a prostitute and getting his physical needs satisfied. Then he would slip out during the night, rip off the gate, set it down on the hill, pay his own price to the Philistines, and go back home, wash his hands and nobody would be the wiser. But let me tell you what's really going on in Samson's heart and mind.

Do you remember what happened way back there when he was 19 years old? He went down to that woman in Timnah and he made an engagement with her and he liked her and he wanted her. Do you remember what she said to him in order to get him to tell her the riddle? She said to him, "You don't really

love me.” As a matter of fact, that happened to be exactly true. He didn’t love her. And that struck Samson in his ego and that’s why he gave up the secret.

Samson is now trying to prove that he is capable of real love. But he can’t do that by going to a prostitute. It seems at first as if Samson has gotten away with it. It seems that the man of God has gone into a prostitute, has ripped off the doors of the city gate, has gone back home and now he’s back there laughing with the boys. It looks like Samson has really gotten away with one here.

## **No Free Sex**

When Samson went into that prostitute the real price he paid was the price on the inside. Not on the outside, but the price on the inside, because the woman had said, “You don’t really love me.” And in just a few moments Delilah is going to say, “How can you say, ‘I love you.’” It’s the same old cycle repeating itself over and over again. Try as you might, you can’t prove that you love somebody by going down to a prostitute, because that’s just sex for money. And strangely enough, when Samson did that, it drove him into the arms of Delilah. Do you understand what I’m saying? By going to a prostitute, not only did his real needs go unmet, he just inflamed his passions and drove himself into Delilah’s arms.

That’s why this story is in the Bible. Society tells us, Go ahead, you can have a one night stand, you can have your fun, you can walk away from it, and you can just move on. The world says, “You can say it was just for fun.” But it’s not true. It’s never just for fun. There’s no such thing as sex without commitment. There’s no such thing as love with no strings attached. That’s what Samson is about to find out.

Samson’s done two things that are going to get him into trouble. First, he has enraged the Philistines by ripping off their city gate. Second, he has inflamed his old passion for women and for illicit sex. He has inflamed it now, and there is going to be nothing but trouble ahead. This is the little fall on the way to the big fall. This is the little fall that sets him up for the big one.

## **How It All Happened**

Now we come to the story of Samson and Delilah. I’m going to give you the four principles that open this story up and tell you how one thing led to another.

### **1. Samson got involved again in another wrong relationship.**

In verse 4 the story begins to unravel:

Some time later he fell in love (this is the first time, the only time Samson fell in love) with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah.

Delilah was a Philistine. But the name Delilah (which means something like Darling) is of Semitic origin. He falls in love with a Philistine woman whose name is of Semitic origin, meaning she was half his people and half their people. She lived in the Valley of Sorek, which is right by the city of Zorah, Samson’s hometown. It’s all very convenient. Samson is on familiar territory. And Delilah was beautiful and sexually attractive to him. Don’t misunderstand. Delilah was no Tugboat Annie. She was a beautiful woman. I think it’s possible that Samson had known her for years. Perhaps known Delilah for all his life. Why not? They grew up in the same area.

It's all too familiar by now. He sees her, he wants her, he falls in love with her, and suddenly he's beginning to go down, down, down again.

## **The High Price Of An Unequal Yoke**

Samson only got involved with three women in his life. All three of them were Philistines. All three of them got him into trouble. The first was the woman of Timnah. That was simply an infatuation based on physical beauty. The second was the harlot in Gaza. That was pure lust. The third was Delilah, and that was love. But all three times they were Philistine women. Don't you see what's going on in Samson's life? First, he's just fooling around and then he's playing around and then he's sticking his toe in and then he's jumping in. In every case he gets himself into trouble. Only this time he's gone too far.

Let me state the point plainly. God's people are not to get involved romantically with unbelievers. God's people are not to do that. That's one of the hardest principles for teenagers to grasp. It is also one of the clearest lessons that comes out of the life of Samson.

Why do the people of God continue to make this mistake? For one thing, unbelieving men and women look so attractive. They look so exciting. They look so fun-loving. They look so free. It is the work of Satan which makes Christian guys look boring and nerdy and Christian girls look dull and homely. It shouldn't surprise us that in this world, it's the Philistines who have the money, the power, the prestige, the connections, the sex appeal, and all the other stuff. It shouldn't surprise us. Satan set it up that way. The problem comes when you go out and marry a Philistine. It's not until you get married that you discover they are uncircumcised. And by then, it's way too late.

Samson once again gets himself involved in a wrong kind of relationship. This one is going to get him in nothing but more trouble.

### **2. As the relationship develops, Samson begins to toy with temptation.**

He begins to toy with temptation when he should have run from it. Judges 16:5 tells us what happens next:

The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into telling you the secret of his great strength, and how we can overpower him so that we might tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

There were five Philistine rulers, so they were offering her 5,500 shekels of silver to betray Samson. That would be an amount equal to perhaps \$50,000 today. It was an enormous sum of money they were offering to Delilah. It shows how desperate the Philistine leaders were.

Before we go any farther, don't forget that Delilah is a Philistine. He's in love with her, but she's a Philistine. And her first loyalty is to her own people. So she first tries the straightforward approach. "So Delilah said to Samson, 'Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.'" (16:6) This strikes me as a pretty blunt way of doing it. There's nothing very subtle here. It's a very strange relationship. She's saying, "I want to know the secret of your strength so you can be tied up and subdued." What kind of woman would say that? And what kind of man would be fooled by this?

Samson decides to play around with Delilah for a while. He says, "If anybody ties me up with seven fresh thongs that have not been dried I will become as weak as any other man." (16:7) So the rulers of the

Philistines brought in seven fresh thongs and she tied him up with them. I think he thought it was some kind of game. With the rulers hidden in the room (it's hard to imagine why Samson didn't notice 20 armed soldiers sneaking into his bedroom) she cried to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you." And he snapped the thongs as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes back through a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

## **Rope Tricks**

That made Delilah mad, so she said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me. You lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied." (16:10) She just asked him again. No problem. Let's play the game again. So he says, "Use new ropes." New ropes this time, not fresh thongs. You can see Samson grinning as he makes up these ridiculous answers.

Same song, second verse. She ties up Samson, the soldiers get ready to pounce, and she calls out, "Here come the Philistines." No problem. He snaps those new ropes just like they were threads. He's grinning and loving this. This is wonderful. Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. (A quite accurate observation, by the way) Tell me how you can be tied." (16:13) If she can't talk it out of him, she's going to coax it out of him. His third reply is very telling: "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." (16:13)

## **Living On The Edge**

What's just happened here? Has he told the secret? No. But now he's coming very, very close. The secret is in the hair. All that stuff about the thongs and the ropes was misleading, but now he's saying, "Hey, I've got this thing under control." What's going on in Samson's life? Here's a man who likes to play close to the edge. He's a man who likes to push the edge of the envelope. Samson is feeling so self-confident and so cocky. He thinks he's invincible. Now he's letting her touch his hair. She doesn't know the secret yet, but he is letting her get closer and closer and closer.

So it happens the third time. She cries out, "Here come the Philistines," and he wakes up and pulls his hair free of the loom. And he's laughing his head off. He thought this was the funniest thing he'd ever done. He's got this girl wrapped around his finger. Or maybe she's got him wrapped around hers.

Now Delilah plays her trump card: "Then she said to Him: 'How can you say, "I love you," when you won't confide in me.'" (16:15) Bingo. She's got him now. That's exactly what the woman of Timnah said 20 years earlier. Her words stuck right in his ego. Now the secret's about to come out.

But there's more. She complains that he has made a fool of her three times. Notice verse 16: "With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death." Samson could never keep a secret when there was anything important at stake. And the two women who brought him down used two convenient tools. The first one used a flood of tears. The other used an avalanche of words. She stuck him in his ego and she just talked and talked and talked and talked until he finally was ready to tell her.

### **3. Samson reveals his secret in order to save face.**

Underline the first five words of verse 17: "So he told her everything." The rest, as they say, is history. He told her about the Nazirite vow. He explained why no razor had ever touched his hair. And he told her

point blank, . "If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man." (16:17)

When I studied that, I learned something I didn't know. I thought Samson had been tricked. He hasn't been tricked. Samson knew exactly what he was doing. Do you see that? He knew exactly what he was doing. He said, "My hair's never been cut. I've been a Nazirite to God. I've always been dedicated to God." He didn't just tell her about the hair. He told her what the hair represented. He revealed his dedication to God.

Samson, you fool. You weren't tricked. You weren't deceived. Like Adam, you knew exactly what you were doing. He told her in order to save face because she had said, "You don't really love me." And Samson has to prove that he's capable of real love, so finally he tells her.

We read on now. "When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines. 'Come back once more; he has told me everything.'" (16:19) So here come the rulers of the Philistines with the silver shekels in their hands, and she puts him to sleep on her lap. Can you imagine that scene? As Samson rests his head in Delilah's lap, she talks to him, cooing little sexy things in his ear. They're playing kissy face and giggling together. She rubs his neck and massages his shoulders. Just getting him to relax. Eventually the old boy drifts off to sleep, and he feels great. He's feeling wonderful. He doesn't have a clue of what is about to happen.

## **"He Did Not Know That The Lord Had Left Him"**

As soon as he's sound asleep, she calls a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. Verse 19 says it plainly: "His strength left him." Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you." He awoke from his sleep and thought, "No problem. I'll shake myself free again." But his strength was already gone. The last phrase of verse 20 is one of the saddest statements in the whole Old Testament: "But he did not know that the Lord had left him."

### **4. He didn't realize what had happened until it was too late.**

He didn't realize what had happened. I wish I had power to speak what this really means to me. Too many Christians drift away from God through stupidity and folly, and they don't realize what they have lost until they've lost it. They don't appreciate what they had until it's gone. They don't see where they were until they slide down into the pit. Why is it that Christians don't appreciate what they have until they lose it and go into sin?

Do you see what's happening here? Delilah has done what the army of the Philistines could never do. Delilah has brought Samson down and he's as weak as any man. Samson, unbeatable in combat, brought down like putty in the hands of a cunning woman. Brought down. Brought down. Brought down.

What happens now is ugly. The Philistines have been waiting for 20 years to get their revenge.

Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison. (16:21)

Notice the four things that happened to Samson. First there is mutilation. They gouged out his eyes. Then there is deportation. They took him down to Gaza. Oh, Samson, when was the last time you were in Gaza? That's right. When you came to visit that harlot. Now you're going to go back down there. In chains this

time. Then there is incarceration. Binding him with bronze shackles. Finally, there is humiliation. They set him to grinding in the prison. Grinding in the prison was the work of slaves. It was the work of animals.

So they bound him. His head has been shorn. His eyes gouged out. On his hands and his knees the mighty Samson pushes the pole that powers the press that grinds the grain. O, how the mighty are fallen. The empty sockets in his eyes bear mute testimony of his unfaithfulness to God.

Samson, Samson, Samson. How could you end like this?

Verse 22 contains the only note of grace in the whole passage. "But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved." Hope for better days to come.

## **Pride Goes Before A Fall**

I want you to write two verses of Scripture over this tragic story of Samson and Delilah. The first is Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." The second is I Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore if any man thinks that he is standing firm, let him take care lest he fall." Why did Samson give in to Delilah? Because he was self-confident. Because he had lived for twenty years without ever dealing with his basic problem. And since he'd lived problem-free for twenty years he felt like he didn't have a problem anymore. Oh, Samson, what a fool you were.

Let me give you three applications from this story. Two for the entire congregation. One just for the men.

### **1. Unless we deal with our problems they will come back to haunt us again and again and again.**

Unless we deal with the real issues in our lives, unless we really get down to ground level with our problems, unless we get down to the level of "this is what I'm really like," until we do that, those problems will come back again and again and again. Many of you have never dealt with the real problems in your life—like anger and bitterness, like an unforgiving spirit, like an undisciplined life, and like lust and uncontrolled passion.

You've never really dealt with it. You have lifted up the carpet and you have swept it under the rug and you have said, "That hasn't bothered me for four or five years or six years, so I'm basically okay now." I beg you not to say that. Some of us need to take a good look in the mirror and see the way we really are. The hardest thing you'll ever say is, "I need help, I've a problem I can't handle." But isn't that the first step in any recovery program? Step Number One: Admit you have a problem. You'll never get better until you are willing to say, "I really need help in this area of my life." Unless we learn to deal with our problems now, we are going to deal with them later. They're going to come back to haunt us again and again. Samson is Exhibit A of that principle.

### **2. Unless we learn the difference between being empowered by the spirit and controlled by spirit we will fall just like Samson did.**

Does that sound odd? It shouldn't. It is very possible for a Christian to be empowered by the Spirit of God to do certain things and yet not to have his life yielded to the full control of the Holy Spirit. How else do you explain Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker? I do not doubt that they were empowered by the Spirit of God, but at the point of their fall they were not controlled by the Holy Spirit. Samson at certain points was empowered by the Spirit of God. But there was never really a point in his whole life when for a long period

of time he was under the control of God's Spirit. Unless we learn that difference, we're going to fall just like Samson.

It's not enough just to be able to accomplish good things. It's not enough to be able to win stunning battlefield victories. Unless your life is under control of the Spirit, you're going to fall just like Samson did.

The final application is for men only.

### **3. Men, unless we yield our sexual desires completely to God, we risk falling prey to the Delilahs of this world.**

To say it that way makes Delilah look pretty bad. I really don't mean to. I suspect that she was just a woman who was hungry for a relationship. She was looking for love. She wanted somebody to spend some time with her. And who better than the handsome, powerful, famous Samson? I don't really blame Delilah too much. She was ready, but he was willing and they were both able. I don't blame Delilah. Samson was the one who went down and found her. Men, unless we take that sexual area of our lives and lay it before God, we risk falling prey to the Delilah's of this world. It can happen to you, it can happen to me.

We need men who will be men of God through and through. We need men who will be men of God on Monday just as much as they are on Sunday. We need men who will bend their powers toward righteousness. We need men who will take their intellect and put it into the service of the King of Kings. We need men who will take the fires of worldly passion and turn it into passion for Jesus Christ. We need men who will invest in the Kingdom of God. We need men who will use their time and talent and energies to win others to Jesus Christ. We need men who will believe that their greatest accomplishment in life is to be a faithful husband, a loving father, a godly businessman and a loyal Christian. We need men who will say no to temptation and yes to Jesus Christ. We need men who will be as strong morally as they are physically. And we need men who will understand that the real bottom line in life is not how much you take in but how much you give out. Not what you keep but what you give away.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Rise up, O men of God. Have done with lesser things. Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of Kings. Rise up, O men of God. The church for you doth wait. Her strength unequal to her task. Rise up and make her great.

We read this story, Lord, and a thousand fugitive thoughts go through the mind. We watch Samson throwing his life away and we say, "How stupid."

Grant that we might have a better estimate of our own weakness. Help us to see that what happened to Samson could so easily happen to any of us.

Renew within us the spirit of self-discipline. Show us anew the danger of dabbling with temptation. Lead us to the place where we will yield our desires to you.

Thank you for the alchemy of the Holy Spirit, through which the base metal of our passions is transformed into pure gold for your kingdom. Amen.