

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 16

In this chapter we have an account of Samson's too great familiarity with two harlots; by the one he was brought into great danger, and narrowly escaped, (^{<0710>}Judges 16:1-3), and by the other he was betrayed into the hands of the Philistines, having got the secret out of him wherein his great strength lay, (^{<0714>}Judges 16:4-20) who having him in their hands, put out his eyes, imprisoned him, and in their idol temple made sport of him, (^{<0716>}Judges 16:21-25), where praying for renewed strength from the Lord, he pulled down the temple, and destroyed multitudes with the loss of his own life, (^{<0718>}Judges 16:26-31).

Ver. 1. *Then went Samson to Gaza*, etc.] One of the five principalities of the Philistines, which was ten miles from Ashkelon, as Sandys^{f320} says; who also describes^{f321} it as standing upon an hill environed with valleys, and these again well nigh enclosed with hills, most of them planted with all sorts of delicate fruits; and, according to Bunting^{f322}, forty two miles from Ramathlehi, the place where we last hear of him, (see Gill on "Amos 1:6") (see Gill on "^{<3018>}Zephaniah 2:4") what he went hither for is not easy to say; it showed great boldness and courage, after he had made such a slaughter of the Philistines, to venture himself in one of their strongest cities, where he must expect to be exposed to danger; though it is highly probable this was a long time after his last encounter with them:

and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her; the Targum renders it an innkeeper, one that kept a victualling house; so Kimchi, Ben Gersom, and Ben Melech interpret it; into whose house he went for entertainment and lodging, and very probably in the dusk of the evening; and the woman that kept this house might herself be an harlot, or, however, Samson saw one in her house, with whom he was captivated, and went in unto her, or had criminal conversation with her; it seems as if he did not turn in thither with any such wicked design, but on sight of the person was ensnared to commit lewdness with her; and, as Lyra says, there were many hostesses in some places, and so here, who too easily prostituted themselves to their guests.

Ver. 2. *And it was told the Gazites, etc.*] The inhabitants of Gaza, the principal ones of it, the magistrates of the city, either by some persons that saw him come in, who knew him, or by the harlot into whose company he fell, to whom he made himself known:

saying, Samson is come hither; the man so famous for his strength, and such an enemy to the Philistines; his name was well known for his great exploits, and rung throughout Palestine, and was a terror to the whole country:

and they compassed [him] in; not that they surrounded the house where he was, which perhaps they might not certainly know, but they secured all the avenues and gates of the city, made them fast, and placed guards there, that he might not escape their hands:

and laid wait for him all night in the gate; particularly at that gate, where, if he went out for his country, he must pass:

and were quiet all the night; did not attempt to disturb Samson, or seize on him, if they knew where he was; knowing his great strength, and what a tumult might be raised in the city, they said nothing of it to anybody that passed, what they were placed there for, lest it should come to his ears; they made as if they were deaf and dumb, as some interpret it, and heard and knew nothing:

saying, in the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him; when they should better know him, and make sure their blow at him, and do it suddenly, unawares to him, as he came to the gate, to pass through it.

Ver. 3. *And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, etc.*] Either not being able to lie any longer through the conviction of his conscience for his lewdness, or being warned by a dream, or having an impulse upon his spirit, which suggested to him that wait was laid for him, and the danger he was in; and coming to the gate of the city, which he found shut and fast barred and bolted, and the watch perhaps asleep, not expecting his coming until daylight:

and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all; did not stand to break open the doors of the gate, but took the two side posts up, on which the folding doors of the gate were hung, out of the ground in which they were fastened, with the bar which went across the doors for the security of them:

and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron; if this hill was near Hebron, as the words thus read seem to intimate, he must carry the gates twenty miles upon his shoulders, for so far was Hebron from Gaza; so Josephus says it was over Hebron; but according to Adrichomius^{f323}, it was near Gaza, looking towards Hebron; and so Sandys says^{f324}, in the valley, on the east side of the city, are many straggling buildings, beyond which there is a hill more eminent than the rest, on the north side of the way that leads to Babylon, said to be that to which Samson carried the gates of the city. It is very probable, as some think, that it was between Gaza and Hebron, in sight of both cities, which may be meant by the phrase “before”, or “on the face of”; being so high might be seen as far as Hebron, as well as at Gaza. This was an emblem of Christ’s resurrection, of whom Samson was a type, who being encompassed in a sepulchre, and sealed and watched by soldiers, broke through the bars of death and the grave, and carried off the doors in triumph; and in a short time ascended to heaven, whereby he declared himself to be the Son of God with power. It was usual for doors and bars of gates to be carried in triumph, and laid up in temples^{f325}; and the Jews say these doors were not less than sixty cubits, and suppose Samson’s shoulders to be as broad^{f326}.

Ver. 4. *And it came to pass afterwards, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek*, etc.] Which, according to Adrichomius^{f327} was but half a mile from the brook Eshcol, from whence the spies brought a bunch of grapes, as a specimen of the fruit of the land of Canaan; and this valley of Sorek seems to have been famous for the best wine, and hither Samson retired for refreshment and pleasure; but, according to Jerom^{f328}, it was on the north of Eleutheropolis, where, he says, was shown a village in his time called Capharsorech, near the village Zorah, from whence Samson was; and Bunting^{f329} makes it to be twelve miles from Hebron, and twelve from Jerusalem; where he met with a woman he loved; whether she was an Israelite, or one of the daughters of the Philistines, they now being the rulers of Israel, is not said; most likely the latter, as say Ben Gersom and Abarbinel, since the lords of the Philistines were so intimate with her, and were entertained in her house, and she showed more respect to them than to Samson. The Jews say she became a proselyte, but if she did, there is very little evidence of her being a sincere one: some have thought, that the courtship to her was a lawful conjugal love; that falling in love with her, he courted and married her; but this is not very likely, since no mention is made of his marriage to her, nor did he take her home, but dwelt in her

house: it rather seems to be an impure and unlawful love he had to her, and that she was an harlot, as Josephus^{f330}; and all her conduct and behaviour confirm the same:

whose name was Delilah; the Jews say^{f331} she was so called because she weakened the heart and spirit of Samson, and weakened his strength, and weakened his works; and therefore, if this had not been her name, they say it was one very proper for her.

Ver. 5. *And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her*, etc.] Having heard that Samson kept company with her, she being a noted strumpet, like Lais among the Grecians. These were in number five, as appears from (~~400B~~Judges 3:3) and had under them five principalities, into which Palestine was divided; and these, if not united in their government, which possibly might be the case at this time, yet were united against their common enemy Samson; and being great personages, it is thought by some they came not themselves to this harlot's house, but sent a deputation of five persons in their names, though the text is very express here and after: they are said to come up to her, because their country lay on the shore of the sea, and lower than Judea:

and said unto her, entice him; persuade him with soothing and flattering words; take an opportunity when in an amorous mood to improve her interest in his affections:

and see wherein his great strength lieth; for it might not appear by the size of his body, or from his natural constitution, and in the common actions of life, but only at certain times, and as it should seem when he pleased; and he might have been heard to say that it was a secret he kept to himself, and no man knew it; or they might suspect something of magic in the case, that he carried something about with him, which, if it could be gotten from him, would deprive him of his strength:

and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him; to humble him, bring him low, and reduce him to the common condition of men; they did not propose to kill him, which they might think she would not agree to, and so reject their proposal at once, but at most to distress him, and to chastise him with mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonment, for the mischief he had indeed done them, and prevent him from doing more:

and we will give thee, everyone of us, eleven hundred [pieces] of silver or shekels; it may seem strange that they should promise each 1100: some think their principalities offered each 1000 shekels, and the princes themselves one hundred; but Abarbinel supposes that this was, on some account or another, in those times an usual sum or computation, since the same is mentioned in the following chapter; though it may be observed that these five several sums put together make a round number, 5500 pieces of silver; which, taking them to be shekels, according to Waserus^{f332}: they amounted to 1375 rix dollars, and of Helvetian money 3666 pounds, and a little more, and of our money near seven hundred pounds sterling; a considerable bribe, and very tempting to a person of such a character, and which she readily embraced, as appears by what follows.

Ver. 6. *And Delilah said to Samson*, etc.] At a proper opportunity, when in his hands and caresses, as Josephus relates^{f333}, and introduced it in an artful manner, admiring his strange exploits, and wondering how he could perform them:

tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth; which she proposed seemingly out of mere curiosity, and as it would be a proof of his affection to her, to impart the secret to her:

and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee; not that she suggested to him that she was desirous to have him afflicted, or to try the experiment herself in order to afflict him, but to know by what means, if he was bound, it would be afflicting to him so that he could not relieve himself; she knew he might be bound, if he would admit of it, as he had been, but she wanted to know how he might be bound, so as to be held, and could not loose himself.

Ver. 7. *And Samson said unto her*, etc.] In answer to her pressing solicitations:

if they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried; the word is sometimes used for nerves, and cords or ropes; but neither of these can be here meant, since these, if moistened or made wet, are the less fit to bind with, and the drier the better; but rods or branches of trees just cut off, such as faggots are bound up with, or green osiers, which are easily bent and twisted, and may bind with; Josephus^{f334} calls them vine branches:

then shall I be weak, and be as another man; which cannot well be excused from a lie; for Samson knew full well that being bound would not

weaken his strength; but as he had fallen into one sin, it is no wonder he was drawn into another: unless this can be understood, as it is by some, as jesting with her; however, it shows that he was “*compos mentis*”, as Josephus ^{f335} observes, and was upon his guard with respect to the secret of his strength.

Ver. 8. *Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her*, etc.] To the chamber where she was with Samson, she having acquainted them with what he had told her:

seven green withs, which had not been dried; just such as he had described and directed to:

and she bound him with them; taking an opportunity, very likely, when he was asleep, and drunk too, according to Josephus ^{f336}: the Philistines did not attempt to bind him, supposing that he would not admit them to do it, if aware of them; and they might fear, if asleep, he might awake before they could do it, and fall upon them and destroy them; but as for Delilah, if she had been found at it, she could have excused it as a piece of curiosity, being willing to try whether he told her truth or not.

Ver. 9. *Now there were men lying in wait*, etc.] Very likely some of the servants of the lords of the Philistines, who were placed privately on purpose, that when an opportunity offered, they might rush out, and fall upon Samson; Josephus ^{f337} calls them soldiers:

abiding with her in the chamber; in a private part of it, or otherwise they could not be said to lie in wait; in it may mean near it; perhaps it was in the next apartment to hers, where they were set:

and she said unto him, the Philistines be upon thee, Samson; are just ready to fall upon thee, and seize thee; this she said to arouse him, and try whether he could break the withs or not, before she called in the men that lay in wait, and whether he had told her the truth or not:

and he brake the withs as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire; or “smells it” ^{f338}; as soon as it comes near it; a thread of tow or linen catches the fire presently, it being so weak that it cannot stand before the least force of it; so easily did the withs give way, and were broken, when Samson did but just stir himself, and move his arms:

so his strength was not known; by Delilah, nor by the Philistines; that is, where it lay, so as that it might be weakened; for otherwise it was known by the easy breaking of the withs.

Ver. 10. *And Delilah said unto Samson*, etc.] Not on the same day, but some time after, as Kimchi observes, when an opportunity offered, and he was in like circumstances as before; for had she immediately attacked him, it might have created some suspicion in him of a design against him:

behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies; deceived her with lies, by telling her the other day that if he was bound with green withs, he should become as weak as other men; which she, out of curiosity as she might pretend, had tried, and had found to be false; and which, she might add, was an argument of want of true love to her, to mock her in such a manner:

now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound; so as to be held.

Ver. 11. *And he said unto her*, etc.] Abarbinel presents Samson replying to her, that he had told her the truth at first, only forgot one circumstance, that the “cords”, for so he takes the word for “withs” to signify, should be “new”, such as were never used, as follows:

if they bind me fast with new ropes, that never were occupied; the word signifies thick ropes, which, according to Kimchi and Ben Melech, were trebled, or made of three cords twisted together, and those such as were just made, and had never been put to any use, and so strong and firm:

then shall I be weak, and be as another man; (see ^{וְהָיָה}Judges 16:7).

Ver. 12. *Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith*, etc.] Tried this experiment with him, according to his directions, being very desirous of getting the sum of money offered her:

and said unto him, the Philistines be upon thee, Samson: using the same words, and with the same view as she had done before, (^{וְהָיָה}Judges 16:9)

(and there were liers in wait abiding the chamber); as before, ready upon occasion to rush in upon him, as soon as any notice was given them:

and he brake them from off his arms like a thread; as easily as a thread of linen can be snapped asunder.

Ver. 13. *And Delilah said unto Samson*, etc.] At another time, when she thought it most proper to upbraid him with his deception of her:

hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies; both the times that she had solicited him to impart the secret of his strength to her:

tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound; tell me the real truth, and deceive me no more:

and he said unto her, if thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web; it seems that Samson's hair was parted into seven locks, which no doubt hung down very long; and now he tells her, that if these were interwoven with the warp which was upon the beam in a loom near by; perhaps in the same room, where Delilah used to weave, as was the custom of those times, and in various nations^{f339}; his strength would be weakened; for Braunius^{f340} is mistaken in supposing this to be the beam about which the web was rolled, as he is also in the pin next mentioned, which he takes to be the "spatha", or lathe, with which the threads are knocked together.

Ver. 14. *And she fastened it with the pin*, etc.] That is, after she had interwoven the locks of his hair into the warp, she fastened the beam on which it was with the pin, that it might not roll back; or else her machine or loom to the ground, that it might stand more firmly; or the web into which the hair was woven, with the hair itself; which of them is right, it is difficult to say: but if the addition of the Septuagint version can be admitted as genuine, which supplies some things which seem to be wanting, and which best agrees with what follows, the whole will be plain and easy, and which after the preceding verse runs thus;

“and fastenest “them” with a pin to the wall, then shall I be weak as another man; and it came to pass when he slept, and Delilah took seven locks of his head, and wove “them” in the web, and fastened them with a pin to the wall;”

and then it follows as here:

and said unto him, the Philistines be upon thee, Samson; as she had twice before:

and he awaked out of his sleep; in which he was during her weaving his locks into the web; and this makes it probable that he was in the same

circumstances when she bound him both with withs and ropes, though it is not expressed:

and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web; carried off not the pin of the beam only, but the beam itself, and the warp on it, and the whole web into which his hair was woven. The Septuagint version is, he took the pin of the web out of the wall; and the Vulgate Latin, the pin with the hairs and web.

Ver. 15. *And she said unto him, how canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?* etc.] She took an opportunity, when he was caressing her, to upbraid him with dissembled love, and a false heart: thou hast mocked me these three times; she had urged him to tell her where his strength lay, and by what it might be weakened, first pretending it might be done by binding him with green withs, and then with new ropes, and a third time by weaving his locks into the web:

and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth; the thing so frequently and so importunately requested.

Ver. 16. *And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him,* etc.] Lay at him day after day to communicate the secret to him, gave him no rest, but was incessant in her applications to him:

so that his soul was vexed unto death: could hardly bear to live, but wished to die, being in the utmost perplexity what to do between two different passions, love and fear; on the one hand chained by his lust to this harlot, that was continually teasing him, and whom he had not an heart to leave, or otherwise that would have cleared him of his difficulties; and on the other hand, should he disclose the secret, he feared, and was in danger of losing his strength, in which his glory lay: or

“his soul was shortened unto death”^{f341};

it was the means of shortening his days, and hastening his death. Abarbanel thinks that Samson was sensible of this, that his days were short, and the time of his death at hand; which made him the more willing to impart the secret. This may put in mind of the story of Milo, a man famous for his great strength, said to carry an ox upon his shoulders a furlong without breathing; of whom it is reported, that none of his adversaries could deliver themselves out of his hands, but his whore could, often contending with him; hence it is observed of him, that he was strong in body, but not of a

manly soul ^{f342}; and there are many other things said ^{f343} of him concerning his great strength, which seem to be taken from this history of Samson.

Ver. 17. *That he told her all his heart*, etc.] All that was in his heart concerning this affair, all that he knew relating to it; he had told her something before, or at least what came nearer to the truth of the matter, when he directed her to the weaving of his locks into the web; but now he told her all, which is as follows:

and said unto her, there hath not come a razor upon mine head; his head had never been shaved since he was born; which was the order of the angel that foretold his birth, and it had been carefully observed to that time:

for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb; one condition of which, or what was enjoined a Nazarite, was, that he should not be shaved, and which had been religiously observed in Samson; and whereas abstinence from wine and strong drink was another part of the law of Nazariteship, or what such persons were obliged unto, what Josephus says concerning Samson being drunk in the above cases could not be true; since his Nazariteship would have been made void by it, and so have affected his strength: but it must be owned that there were other things Nazarites were obliged to, which were dispensed with, as has been observed in the case of Samson, a perpetual Nazarite; and therefore it is probable, that the principal thing he was to regard, and upon which his strength was continued, was not shaving his head:

if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man; in which he says more than he ever did before, namely, that his strength should go from him; for though that did not arise from his hair, yet the keeping on of that was the condition of his retaining it.

Ver. 18. *And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart*, etc.] Which she perceived by his countenance, and the serious manner in which he expressed himself; and Abarbinel conjectures that he might swear to her that what he said was truth; and who observes from their Rabbins, as does also Kimchi, that she concluded he had told her the truth, by his making mention of the name of God, saying he was a Nazarite unto God, whose name she knew he would not take in vain; and with the account he gave agreed the long hair he wore:

she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, come up this once; for it seems as they were returned home, finding that she could do nothing with him, and was not able to get the secret out of him; but now, believing she had it, sends to them, and entreats them to come once more, being very desirous of having the money they had offered her:

for he hath showed me all his heart; there is a double reading of this clause; the Keri or marginal reading, which our version follows, is, “hath showed me”, as being the words of Delilah to the lords of the Philistines; but the Cetib or textual reading is, “he hath showed her”, as being the words of the messengers to them:

then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her; that is, from their own country; for it can hardly be understood of their coming up into her room, or chamber; and especially since it follows,

and brought money in their hand; 1100 shekels of silver apiece, the sum they first proposed to give her; and now being pretty well assured of success, brought it along with them to pay her for the service done.

Ver. 19. *And she made him sleep upon her knees*, etc.] Giving him, as some think, a sleepy potion; or however encouraged him to take a nap upon her knees, and by her fondness lulled him to sleep:

and she called for a man; a barber; in former times to shave was the work of a servant ^{f344} and sometimes of a woman; she gave orders for one to be sent for; for Jarchi calls him a messenger of the lords of the Philistines:

and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; this shows that they were not wove into one another, and made but one lock, as some interpret what she was before directed to do:

and she began to afflict him; as his hair was shaving off; though he was asleep, yet he discovered some uneasiness, the effects of it began to appear: though the word “began” here may be redundant, as in (~~Q251~~ Numbers 25:1 ~~Q234~~ Judges 20:40) and then the meaning is, that she afflicted him, or again afflicted him; for she had afflicted him, or at least attempted it, three times before, and therefore did not begin now; this Hebraism is used in (~~Q100~~ Mark 4:1) and frequently in Jewish writings ^{f345}:

and his strength went from him; sensibly and gradually; though some understand it of her shaking him in a violent manner to awake him, and

shrieking and crying out terribly to frighten him, with her old cry of the Philistines being on him, and of her binding him, though not expressed; whereby she perceived his strength was gone, and he could not loose himself.

Ver. 20. *And she said, the Philistines be upon thee, Samson,* etc.] In like manner as she had before, that she might have full proof that the case was really such, that his strength was gone from him:

and he awoke out of his sleep; upon the cry she made: and said; within himself, purposing and determining in his own mind:

I will go out as at other times before; as he had done at the three former times, and did not meet with any Philistines to fall upon him, and so concluded it would be the case now, and he, if he did, should be able to defend himself against them:

and shake myself; that he might be thoroughly awake, and be on his guard and defence:

and he wist not that the Lord was departed from him; might have forgot what he had told Delilah of, and knew not what had been done to him, that his hair was shaved off; or if he did, was not sensible that the Lord had removed from him; but might hope that he would renew his strength, when he should stand in need of it; but he soon found his mistake; he was quickly taken by the Philistines, and ill used, and in a little time lost his life. And from hence it is thought sprung the story of Nisus, king of the Megarenses, who is supposed to reign about this time; of whom it is reported^{f346}, that the hair of his head was of a purple colour, and was told by the oracle, that so long as that was kept on he should be safe, but if it was shaved off he should die; and so it was, that when the Cretians besieged him, his daughter falling in love with Minos, the king of the Cretians cut off her father's hair, and so both he and his country were delivered into the hands of the enemy.

Ver. 21. *But the Philistines took him,* etc.] Being assured by Delilah that his strength was gone from him, of which perhaps she had made trial by binding him, and found he could not free himself from the bonds till she loosed them; or otherwise they would have been afraid to have ventured to lay hold upon him;

and put out his eyes; that should his strength return to him, he might not be able to see where and whom to strike, and so be incapable of doing much mischief any more; the word signifies, they “dug” or “bored them”^{f347} out; they plucked or cut out his eye balls, so that it was impossible his sight should ever be recovered; according to the Arabic version, they blinded him by putting fire to his eyes; the Jews observe, that this was done in just retaliation, measure for measure; Samson, they say^{f348}, went after his eyes; that is, by taking one harlot after another; therefore the Philistines put out his eyes:

and brought him down to Gaza: which lay on the sea coast, and therefore they are said to bring him down to it; here he had been before of his own will, now against it; for in one instance he had acted to his own shame, by going in to an harlot; and in another, to the shame and disgrace of the city, and the inhabitants of it, by carrying off their city gates; through which they now brought him in triumph, in order to repair the dishonour done them: though, perhaps, the true reason of carrying him thither was, that he might be at the greater distance from the Israelites, should they think of rescuing him out of their hands; and especially because it was a very strong fortified city, it had its name from strength; hence Mela^{f349} calls it “Munita admodum Gaza”, and says, that when Cambyses made war in Egypt, he carried his wealth and money to this place:

and bound him with fetters of brass; the Targum calls them chains of brass, and the word being of the dual number, it is probable there were two of them, with which he was bound the greater security:

and he did grind in the prison house; the motion of mills by water or wind was as yet not invented, but it was usual, as it is still in the eastern countries, to grind with hand mills, at which one or more worked; or with mills moved around by beasts or slaves, and was a work prisoners were employed in, (^{<21105>}Exodus 11:5 12:29 ^{<23700>}Isaiah 47:1,2) and Samson being a strong man, they might expect much service from him this way. The Talmudists^{f350} understand this in a criminal sense, as they do (^{<28310>}Job 31:10) but this is justly rejected by Kimchi.

Ver. 22. *Howbeit, the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.*] It began to grow immediately no doubt, as it naturally would do; but it is highly probable it grew in an extraordinary manner, and in a short time became as when it was shaved^{f351}, as it may be rendered, and upon which his strength was renewed; not that his strength naturally lay in his

hair, and so naturally increased as that grew; but he being made sensible of his sin, and repenting of it, renewed his Nazariteship, of which letting his hair grow was a token; and it pleased God, who accepted of his repentance as genuine, of his own good will and pleasure to renew his strength; particularly upon his prayer to him, after related.

Ver. 23. *Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together,* etc.]

The five lords, with their friends, not directly upon Samson's being taken and committed to prison, but some time after; perhaps some months:

for to get a great sacrifice to Dagon their god; in later times their god was called Marnas ^{f352}, which signifies the lord of men, but now Dagon; who also had a temple at Ashdod, another of the five principalities of the Philistines, (^(HHD)1 Samuel 5:2) and seems to have been at this time their common and chief deity: according to Jarchi in the place referred to, it was in the form of a fish, for "dag" in Hebrew signifies a fish; and Kimchi on the same place says, that from its navel upwards it was in the form of a man, and from thence downwards in the form of a fish ^{f353}; and Diodorus Siculus ^{f354} relates that Derceto, a goddess of Ashkelon, another of the five principalities of Palestine, its face was human, and the other part of its body resembled a fish; and the same Lucian says of the Syrian goddess; and Cicero ^{f355} testifies, that the Syrians worshipped a fish, and Porphyry ^{f356} says they will not eat any; and Gaza being a maritime city, a sea port, this might be their sea god in this form: but Ben Gersom in the above place says, it was in the form of a man; and Sanchoniatho ^{f357} making mention of Dagan, a brother of Saturn, Philo Byblius, who translated his history into Greek, interprets it by Siton, which signifies corn, deriving it from Dagan, which so signifies; as if this deity presided over corn, as Ceres in other nations, and Jupiter Frumentarius, or Aratrius; yea, he says he invented corn and the plough; however this be, the Philistine princes met together to sacrifice to him, not a common offering, but a great sacrifice. It is very probable that this was a public festival of the Philistines, as Josephus ^{f358} says, an anniversary one; and perhaps was held in a more grand manner on the present occasion, since it is added,

and to rejoice: for they said, our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hands; for though Samson's harlot had done it, and they had paid her for it, yet they attribute it to their god, such was their blindness and stupidity; and yet this may shame us believers in the true God, who are so backward to ascribe to him the great things he does for us, when such

Heathens were so forward to give glory to their false deities, without any foundation for it.

Ver. 24. *And when the people saw him*, etc.] In the condition he was, blinded and fettered, of whom and of his great exploits they had heard so much: they praised their god; as Belshazzar did his, (²⁷⁸⁴Daniel 5:4) in hymns and songs composed for them, the substance of which was as follows:

for they said, our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country; as he had been, by tying firebrands to the tails of three hundred foxes, and letting them go into their cornfields, vineyards, and oliveyards:

which slew many of us; thirty men at Ashkelon, more at Timnath, and 1000 with the jawbone of an ass at Lehi.

Ver. 25. *And it came to pass when their hearts were merry*, etc.] With wine, for which Gaza is famous in many writers^{f359}; with eating and drinking, dancing, and music; for it was usual for the Heathens to feast in their temples, and especially no doubt they would on such an occasion as this:

and they said, call for Samson, that he may make us sport; by which it seems that what is before said, “when the people saw him”, (⁴⁷⁶²⁴Judges 16:24) is said by anticipation; for as yet he was not in the temple, but in the prison; and therefore a motion was made by some of the great personages, that he might be fetched from thence, and they might have some diversion with him:

and they called for Samson out of the prison house; sent some messengers to fetch him from thence:

and he made them sport; not actively, but passively; it cannot well be thought, that a man of so great a spirit as Samson was, and in such circumstances as he now was, would ever, either by words or gestures, do anything on purpose to divert his enemies, and make them laugh; but he was the object of their sport and scorn, and he bore it patiently, their cruel mockings, buffetings, and spittings; in which he was a type of Christ. It was a diversion to them to see him in his rattling chains, groping, and blundering along from post to pillar, one perhaps giving him a box of the ear, or a slap of the face, another plucking him by his nose or beard, and

another spitting in his face, and others taunting at him, and reproaching him:

and they set him between the pillars; that he might be the better seen, and in which there was the direction of Providence to bring about what follows.

Ver. 26. *And Samson said to the lad that held him by the hand*, etc.] And led him about; as nothing is more common now than for a blind man to be led by a boy:

suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth; he might by information know in what manner the house was built, that it was supported by pillars, if he had never been in it before when he had his sight; and he might understand, by some means or another, that he was near these pillars, and placed between them, though being blind, did not know which way to direct his hands towards them to feel them, as he proposed to do, and therefore desired the lad that led him to guide his hands towards them:

that I may lean upon them; being, as he might at least pretend to be, weary, as Josephus says ^{f360}; either by grinding at the mill, or through being led to and fro in this house, that all might see him, and cast their flouts and jeers at him,

Ver. 27. *Now the house was full of men and women*, etc.] Within it, who were gathered together from all parts of the city, and perhaps from other places on this occasion:

and all the lords of the Philistines were there; their five lords, the lords of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron:

and there were upon the roof three thousand men and women; it being a flat roof, as the houses in Canaan and Phoenicia, and the places adjacent, were; (see ¹²¹⁸Deuteronomy 22:8) and there might be some openings or windows in several parts of it, through which the people might see who were below them, and were within the house, and what was doing there, and particularly could have a sight of Samson through them as follows:

that beheld while Samson made sport; or was made a sport of; while he was buffeted and used in a ludicrous manner.

Ver. 28. *And Samson called unto the Lord*, etc.] In an ejaculatory manner, by mental prayer; though he might possibly express it aloud, without being heard and observed by the people, amidst their noise and mirth; and if it

was heard, it might only furnish out more ridicule and contempt; and be it as it may, the prayer must have been preserved by the Lord himself, and given by inspiration to the writer of this book; since there were none that heard it that lived to relate it to others, no, not Samson himself:

and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee; the office that I bear as judge of Israel, the reproaches cast upon me, and which fall upon thy people, cause, and interest; remember thy lovingkindness, formerly expressed to me, the gracious promises made unto me, and the help and assistance I have had from thee:

and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God; and it was a prayer of faith, as appears by its being heard, accepted, and answered; and shows that his strength did not come with his hair, but was owing to the immediate communication of it from the Lord:

that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes; once for all, and no more; take his last and final vengeance on them; or one vengeance for his two eyes, or vengeance for one of his two eyes; either senses will bear. This was said not from a private spirit of revenge for personal injuries; but as a civil magistrate, a judge of Israel, whose office it was to be a revenger, to execute wrath; and though he mentions only his own eyes, yet he suffered the loss of them, and every other indignity and injury, as a public person, the common enemy of the Philistines, and destroyer of their country, and protector of Israel; and in this character he now acted.

Ver. 29. *And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars, upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up,* etc.] Some have objected, that a building so large and so capacious as this was could not be supported by two pillars, and those placed in the middle, and so near to each other that Samson could lay hold on them; on which it has been observed, that the architecture of the ancients is little known to us, and they might have curious and ingenious arts of building, now lost; and several authors have taken notice of two Roman theatres built by Curio, that held abundantly more people than this house did, which were supported only by a single pin or hinge, as Pliny^{f361} relates; and our Westminster hall, which was built by William Rufus, and is two hundred and seventy feet long, and seventy four broad^{f362}, and has a roof the largest in all Europe, is supported without any pillars at all; add to all which, that mention being made of the two middle pillars of this house, supposes that there were others in other parts of it,

though these were the main and principal ones, on which the weight of the building chiefly lay. Kimchi observes, that the word signifies to incline or bend, as if Samson made the pillars to bend or bow; but it is a better sense that he laid hold of them:

of the one with his right hand, and the other with his left; and thus he stood with his arms stretched out, as Jesus on the cross, of whom he was a type, as often observed.

Ver. 30. *And Samson said, let me die with the Philistines,* etc.] He sought their death, and was content to lose his own life to be avenged on them; in neither of which did he act a criminal part as a judge of Israel; and from a public spirit he might desire the death of their enemies, and seek to effect it by all means possible; and was the more justifiable at this time, as they were not only insulting him, the representative of his nation, but were affronting the most high God with their idolatries, being now in the temple of their idol, and sacrificing to him. As for his own death, he did not simply desire that, only as he could not be avenged on his enemies without it, he was willing to submit to it; nor did he lay hands on himself, and cannot be charged with being guilty of suicide, and did no other than what a man of valour and public spirit will do; who for the good of his country will not only expose his life to danger in common, but for the sake of that will engage in a desperate enterprise, when he knows most certainly that he must perish in it. Besides, Samson said this, and did what he did under the direction and influence of the Spirit of God; and herein was a type of Christ, who freely laid down his life for his people, that he might destroy his and their enemies:

and he bowed himself with all his might, having fresh strength, and a large measure of it given him at this instant, which he had faith in, and therefore made the attempt, and for which he is reckoned among the heroes for faith in (⁸¹¹²Hebrews 11:32)

and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein; who were all killed, and Samson himself; an emblem this of the destruction of Satan, and his principalities and powers, by the death of Christ:

so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life; for besides the lords, and they that were in the house, there were 3000 men and women on the roof, which fell in, and lost their lives also, so

that it is very likely there were at least 6000 or 7000 slain; Philo Byblius says 40,000, which is not probable; whereas in his life we only read of 1000 slain by him with the jawbone, besides thirty men at Ashkelon, and the slaughter made when he smote hip and thigh, the number of which is not known. As this house pulled down by Samson is generally thought to be the temple of Dagon, a traveller ^{f363} in those parts tells us, that there is now extant the temple of Dagon in half demolished, and the pillars of it are yet to be seen; but he doubtless mistakes an edifice of a later construction for it: and another traveller ^{f364} of our own country says, on the northeast corner and summit of the hill (on which the city is built) are the ruins of huge arches sunk low in the earth, and other foundations of a stately building; the Jews, adds he, do fable this place to have been the theatre of Samson pulled down on the heads of the Philistines; but he takes it to be the ruins of a later building; (see Gill on “~~OR~~1 Samuel 5:2”).

Ver. 31. *Then his brethren, and all the house of his father, came down,* etc.] To Gaza, having heard of what had befallen him there. This must be understood of his kindred and near relations, those of his father’s family; though it is not unlikely that he had brethren in a proper sense, since though his mother was barren before his birth, yet afterwards might have many children, as Hannah had, whose case was similar to her’s:

and took him and brought him up; took his body out of the ruins of the house, and brought him up on a bier, or some proper carriage, to his own country; and perhaps in great funeral pomp, as a judge of Israel; nor need it be wondered at that the Philistines should admit of it, it being usual in all ages, and among all people, to allow even an enemy to bury their dead; besides Samson’s friends had done them no injury, only Samson himself, and the Israelites in general were quiet and peaceable under their government; add to this, they were now in distress themselves for their own dead, and might be in some fear of the Israelites falling upon them, and attempting to deliver themselves out of their hands, since their five lords were dead, and no doubt many more of their principal men with them; so that they might judge this was not a proper time to refuse such a favour, lest it should occasion a quarrel, which they were not in a condition to engage in; and had Israel taken this opportunity, in all likelihood they might have freed themselves from them:

and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the burying place of Manoah his father; the former of these seems to have been his native

place, and the other was near it; and between these the Spirit of the Lord first began to move him, and here his father's sepulchre was, in which he was laid; (see ^{f361}Judges 13:2,25) and he judged Israel twenty years; by distressing and weakening their enemies; and though he did not complete their deliverance out of their hands, yet no doubt their oppressions were fewer, and their burdens easier, on his account; the time of his judging Israel is observed before, (^{f362}Judges 15:20) and here repeated for the confirmation of it, and the rather because they were now ended by his death. Ben Gersom observes, that this is said to show that the time that Samson dwelt in the land of the Philistines is included in these twenty years; some would infer from hence that he judged Israel forty years, twenty in the days of the Philistines, as it is expressed in the above place; that is, when they had the dominion over Israel, and twenty more afterwards; but it does not appear that their dominion over Israel ceased in his time. In the Jerusalem Talmud ^{f365} it is also said that he judged Israel forty years, but for it there is no foundation; nor is the reason given of any force, that the Philistines feared him twenty years after his death; the other Talmud ^{f366} says he judged Israel twenty two years; but the word "two" is put into a parenthesis.