

## **Judges 16**

The first Spiderman film is one of my favourite films of recent years. Perhaps because I can resonate with the slightly weedy Peter Parker. But as we all know, Peter Parker, after being bitten by a spider, inherits these awesome powers and spider-like abilities. Pretty cool, really. And it means he wins the attentions of a beautiful girl, Mary Jane, and all seems set for a happily ever after romance with lots of children – perhaps with strange spider-like powers of their own. Though spiders tend to have lots of children, so I don't know if Peter and Mary Jane did have children how many they'd have at once and quite how it would all work. But unfortunately, we never get to know the answers to those questions because they never actually end up together.

But remember the tag line of the film? "With great power, comes great responsibility".

Peter, who loves this beautiful girl, who loves him back, shuns the relationship because he has another mission, another task, and he knows that to go out with her would compromise it. He must use his gifts wisely. "with great power, comes great responsibility".

It's quite a striking thought, isn't it, that someone could be so serious about their mission that they'd shun the attentions of Kirsten Dunst, no less, in order to save people's lives.

But Peter Parker knows about responsibility. He knows that great power needs to be used wisely. He knows that if he has a mission to save loads of people, he mustn't let anything get in the way of it.

Unfortunately, though, Samson appears to have been busy when Spiderman was out at the cinema. Washing his hair, perhaps. He certainly doesn't understand that with great power comes great responsibility. And we see that in verses 1-20.

### **With great power comes great responsibility.**

Because Samson does have great power, doesn't he?

Remember all the people he's killed already, the victories he's won from unlikely situations. Then look at what he does in verse 3 of this chapter – carrying a whole city gate – pretty hefty affairs, those – to the top of a mountain. Not just any old mountain, one of the highest in Israel, and 38 miles away!

Later in the chapter when we have this strange series of episodes with his new flame, Delilah, we see his power again. He can't be bound with thongs, v9, (and I don't think that's anything kinky, thongs were probably some kind of stringy plant), or with rope, v12. Even his hair is strong – with it he rips up a whole loom, v14. No split ends on him.

And remember where his power comes from? We've been told several times in this story already that Samson's power is God given, and it's given to him because he has a mission, a task, to save the Israelites from the Philistines.

So bearing in mind Samson has been given this amazing gift of power to help him carry out his vital mission, what about responsibility?

Well, unfortunately, 10/10 on the power stakes, but 0/10 when it comes to responsibility.

We see that several times in this chapter.

We find him literally sleeping with enemy, in verse 1. In bed with a Gentile, Philistine prostitute. How responsible.

Then in the episode with Delilah, we see it again. Let's run through what happens.

She's been bribed by the philistines to get him to tell her the secret of his strength, and so begs him to tell her.

To be fair to him, initially at least, Samson is having none of it, and just pretends to go along with it. 3 times he tells her what to do, but 3 times he breaks free and makes her look silly.

But after a quite brilliant and ruthless display of nagging and emotional blackmail from Delilah, eventually Samson gives in.

V17 – so he told her everything.

So in verse 18 Delilah calls back the Philistines, saying "he really has told me now". And while he's asleep, his hair is cut off, and, v 19, his strength leaves him.

So, what has all this got to do with responsibility, you may be asking? Hasn't just Samson been outfoxed by a beautiful woman, a femme fatale? Hard luck Samson, it's happened to the best of us, better luck next time.

Well, I don't think so.

You see, by telling Delilah all about his Nazirite vow and why his hair was long – and practically inviting her to cut it off, Samson was effectively giving her an open invitation to release him from his dedication to God.

Samson, God's appointed saviour, wants to abandon his responsibilities and his God given task, and be a normal man again. Never mind how strong he shows himself to be – in reality he's showing that he's actually weak and pathetic. It's a blatant abdication of responsibility.

For all his power, all his physical prowess, Samson had no sense of responsibility. Or, if he did have a sense of responsibility, he didn't have the sense to live up to it. He'd rather please his floozy than carry out his God-given task.

### **?illustrate**

I think if we're brave enough to admit it, we're all rather like Samson too. We too are easily distracted from living as God asks us to. We, too, as Christians, have been given an awesome and privileged task, that of being God's ambassadors in this world. And yet we, too are distracted. Perhaps most often, it's like Samson, relationships that distract us, but it can be anything. But it's not just distraction, is it. Sometimes – always, perhaps – we're actually looking for a way out. Looking for an excuse not to be obedient. Desperate to abdicate our responsibility. Men since Adam have always been good at that.

Well, all men except one, that is. Because Samson's failures here serve to highlight to us where Jesus is different. Jesus, who also had a mission to save his people from their enemies. Jesus, who also had great power – power to heal, to calm storms, to subdue demons. Jesus, who was also tempted and tried, not by a woman, but by the devil himself. And who never, ever shirked his responsibility. Who never abused his power, who only ever used it to accomplish his mission.

One of the things that people look for in their leaders is the ability to use their power wisely, not to abuse it, not to indulge themselves, but to do what's best for the country.

I don't think the Israelites would have been too pleased at the way Samson behaved in leading them. I think they would have looked at him and been angry that the person who was meant to save them was more interested in sex and revenge.

But if we're Christians here, our leader is completely trustworthy. He will only ever use his power for our best interests. We're on his side, and he is for us, and that should make us rejoice and thank God, that Jesus is powerful – he's Lord of all the earth – and yet he uses his power wisely and never shirks his responsibility.

Well after looking at Samson's lack of responsibility, let's now look at Samson's death, in the rest of the chapter, where we'll see that Victory comes through death.

### **Victory comes through death. (?giving game away?)**

So picking it up again in verse 20, Samson's looking for a way out, and in verse 20, God gives it to him and leaves him. The Philistines, verse 21, seize him, bind him and take him back to Gaza, where this whole story began, minus his eyes.

There they hold a great party celebrate Samson's capture. And not just celebrate, but to thank their god, Dagon, for his victory. Look at verse 23-24. READ.

All the excitement gets them in the mood for gloating and getting their own back on Samson. The one who's humiliated them is now going to be humiliated himself.

Well, the humiliation is clearly too much for Samson. He's had enough, and he thinks of one last way to get revenge on the Philistines. Verse 28 READ.

He prays, he realises his need for God's help, and asks for one more dose of supernatural strength. And God graciously gives it to him. He pushes against the pillars, and the temple, already weighed down by thousands of people, collapses, killing all of them, Samson included, and importantly the rulers of the Philistine, too - effectively in one fell swoop he destroys the whole Philistine nation.

God, as we've seen countless times, is sovereign and will achieve his purposes no matter how hard his people try to mess things up. It's ironic, isn't it, that Samson, who shirked his responsibility and seemed now incapable of fulfilling his mission, actually did achieve it in his death

And there's actually loads of irony in this chapter, I don't know if you noticed it.

Before Samson's death, it seems that Dagon really has got the upper hand. The Israelite's God appears utterly defeated. Here's their rescuer, their judge, their deliverer, the one who's supposed to defeat the Philistines and bring Glory to God. And here he is, performing for the baying crowds, who are shouting "Dagon, Dagon, Dagon".

But with hindsight, the appropriate shout was not "praise Dagon, for he has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands", but "praise Yahweh, for he has delivered 3000 philistines and their rulers into Samson's hands".

The irony of Samson's final hours reminds us of the irony of Jesus' final hours. In his trial and as he was dying on the cross, people mocking him, chanting, jeering. He seems utterly defeated, yet we know that actually he was winning a great victory.

You see, Samson's death **is** in this book as a reminder to us that God is sovereign, and uses weak and foolish people to do his work, and turns good situations for bad.

But it's more than that - this story is here because there's a new twist. In the circumstances of his death, he's different to all the other judges. In the rest of judges, it's while they're alive that they do their best work, their death is bad news for Israel. And you'll remember that what we're left thinking is "we need a judge who never dies".

But Samson is different. In his life, while he killed thousands, he never actually achieved the deliverance that he was destined for. His death, though, DID accomplish his mission.

So what we're left thinking from Samson, is "yes, we need a judge that never dies, but perhaps we also need a judge who does die and in his death brings victory".

How can a judge be victorious in death, yet still live forever? Well that, of course, is the strongest pointer to Jesus in this passage. Jesus is the perfect judge whose mission is to die to defeat his enemies, yet who also rose again to live forever and to rule and lead his people forever.

There ends Samson, then. He has given us lots of lessons for ourselves. We must learn from his mistakes, avoid his sin. Be people who take our mission seriously, who are responsible. But if we're to really learn from Samson we must be people who are grateful for Jesus. We must be thankful that Jesus is a judge who never shirked his responsibility, who knows that with great power comes great responsibility. Who rejoice in his death, which brings victory, yet also in his everlasting life.