

Delilah

The Woman Who Betrayed Her Husband for Silver

Scripture Reference: Judges 16:4- 21 (Read Proverbs 5)

Name Meaning: Delilah is a sweet sounding name which any vain woman would covet, for it means "delicate" or "dainty one." Because of the foul deed of which Delilah was guilty, no other female in Scripture appears with such a tarnished name. In fact, it is rare indeed to find a woman bearing this name.

Family Connections: The Bible gives us no knowledge of her parentage and background save that she came from the valley of Sorek which extended from near Jerusalem to the Mediterranean, and which entrance was beautiful with rare flowers perfuming the air with sweet odors. The record of Delilah, the heartless wrecker of a mighty man, is given in eighteen verses; and the description of Samson's betrayal, fall, bondage and death is one of the most graphic in the Bible. We cannot, of course, write of Delilah without mentioning Samson. What a contrast they present, and how symbolic they are of characters in the world today! Samson was physically strong but morally weak. Although able to rend a lion, he could not fight his lusts. He could break his bonds, but not his habits. He could conquer Philistines but not his passions. Delilah was a woman who used her personal charm to lure a man to his spiritual and physical destruction, and she stands out as one of the lowest, meanest women of the Bible – the female Judas of the Old Testament. This Philistine courtesan was a woman of unholy persistence and devilish deceit, who had personal charm, mental ability, self-command, and nerve, but who used all her qualities for one purpose: money. She and womanly honor and love had never met, for behind her beautiful face was a heart as dark as hell, and full of viperous treachery. "Her supreme wickedness lay not in betraying Samson to his enemies but in causing him to break faith with his ideals." Shakespeare might well have had Delilah in mind when he wrote -

O Nature! What hadst thou to do in Hell,
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend
In mortal Paradise of such sweet flesh.

Deluding Samson into believing she really loved him, Delilah sold him to blindness, bondage and death. The ease with which she betrayed her husband revealed that she belonged to the enemies of God's people, the people of whom Samson was the recognized leader at that time. The Philistines did not like Samson around because he was the champion of Israel and as such interfered with their practices. Therefore he must be got rid of, and in Delilah, the Philistine prostitute, the Philistines had one who was willing to be bribed to act as their agent. She had one purpose and that was to secure money, and had no qualms of conscience to trifle with love for the sake of wealth. Thus, as Kuyper expresses it, "All the while she kept a police force quartered in her rooms and awaited the moment in which she could surrender her lover into his enemies' hands." Samson became a traitor to himself because he could not resist a woman's charm. First one woman and then another took advantage of this deep-seated weakness and basic sin of his, and Delilah was the most effective in destroying him. She remains as a warning to all men to beware of the charm and wiles of a wicked, scheming woman. As one unknown writer puts it - The women of the Bible pass before the imagination in the vision of antiquity, like pure and radiant stars, their frailties scarcely more than the wing of a transparent cloud upon these beautiful spheres. Delilah rises suddenly from darkness, as a glorious meteor, describes an arc of romantic and fatal light, and goes down in a horizon of awful gloom. The lords of the Philistines offered an enormous sum as a bribe, namely, 1,100 pieces of silver. Jesus was sold by Judas for only 30 pieces of silver. Such a fortune was no small temptation to Delilah, and sharing her tempters' passion for revenge, she set about, in a subtle way, to earn the price of blood. She tried four times in her cunning, evil way to get Samson to reveal the secret of his supernatural power. The first three times Samson humorously lied in answering Delilah's question by enumerating the green withs or twigs, the new ropes, and the weaving of the hair. Thrice deceived, Delilah the enchantress employed her final weapon - tears. Sobbing, she said, "How canst thou say I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth." Samson was conquered. A weeping woman melted his heart, and he confessed the truth of his Nazarite vow, and how, if shorn of his long hair, his strength would depart and he would become like any other normal man. Recognizing that the truth had been told, Delilah lulled Samson to sleep. As he slept, the waiting Philistines destroyed the sign of the vow, and when Samson awoke, although he tried to exert his power as before, he found it had deserted him. The rest of the tragic story belongs to Samson. His foes gouged out his eyes, bound him in fetters and in Gaza, where his God-given strength was manifested, he was made to grind corn. The spiritual Hercules had been reduced to the very depth of degradation. Samson knew that his bitter servitude was the result of his sin and could confess -Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave.

Prison within prison,

Inseparably dark!

Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me

But justly; I myself have brought them,

Sole author I, sole cause. If aught seems vile,

As vile hath been my folly.

But out of the depths Samson cried unto the Lord, and, as we read, his hair began to grow. Forsaken by all, there was One near at hand, and the God of grace restored unto His sinning and now repentant servant, the power he had lost. Samson's extremity became God's opportunity. While Samson was in prison, in the palace, three thousand Philistines gathered to honor their god Dagon for victory over their feared enemy. As hearts beat high and warm, with banquet wine and dance, the cry goes up to have blind Samson brought in to be made the butt of their jests and ridicule. A lad brings the giant in and places him between the pillars of the heathen temple where all eyes could see him. The mockery of the drunken crowd begins. They ask for a riddle and Samson acted one they did not expect. With his arms around the pillars, and deeply penitent for his sins, he prayed, "O Lord, remember me and give me strength only this once." Then shaking himself as of old, he threw his arms around the pillars, the massive temple tottered and the 3,000 Philistines, including the treacherous Delilah perished. It was a victory that cost Samson his own life, and we find that he slew more at his death than he had in the heyday of his power. There is no evidence for John Milton's idea that Delilah was deeply repentant for her crime against Samson, and visited him in prison imploring his forgiveness, or of his stern reply - Out! out! hyena, these are thy wonted arts, And arts of every woman false like thee; To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray. Then as repentant, to submit, beseech And reconciliation move with feigned remorse. In his drama, Samson Agonistes, Milton goes on to describe Delilah's further efforts to secure forgiveness and at last throws herself upon her reserved resource and pleads her love of country and the grateful esteem in which she will be held by her posterity. But a woman like Delilah did not know how to repent; and as Judas went out and hanged himself, so it would seem as if Delilah, gloating over the price received for Samson's betrayal, died a terrible death when buried beneath the frightful ruins of the temple her husband's restored, divine strength had caused. What are the lessons to be gathered from Samson and Delilah ... The question may be asked, How can we learn any lesson from such an unpleasant story? Why is this sordid record to the last degree in the Bible? The reading of the man under a vow to God and of great physical strength and mental agility choosing a woman of no morals may be deemed unfit for inclusion in Holy Writ. Yet all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and the writer of the Book of Judges was guided by the Spirit to set forth the details of the amorous life of Samson. Our answer is that the Bible would not be true to life and to its mission in the world if it did not hold up the mirror and reveal to us, in restrained language, workings of evil, and the boundless love and grace of God toward those whose lives are so bankrupt of virtues pleasing to Him. As the biography of humanity, the Bible is most up-to-date for us, as H. V. Morton reminds us - The police courts are always telling the old story of Samson and Delilah. It comes up in a number of ingenious disguises, a theme capable of infinite variation, but the main motif throughout is that of a man who plunges deeper and deeper into his own lack of self-control until the moment arrives when, trapped and shorn of his strength he is blinded and branded.

This same writer goes on to say that Delilah vanished, as such women do, when her task was completed and she received a reward. Morton then relates a conversation he had with a criminal lawyer about the prosecution in a recent case when certain charges were brought against a man who ruined him.

"It is simple," said the lawyer. "A girl pretended to be in love with him and gave him away." "You mean his enemies bribed her?" "Of course," he said.

This incident, like the story of Delilah, needs no moralizing. The record is sufficient in itself. Delilah was not concerned about the weakness of Samson, but his strength. Once a man betrays his strength, he has no reserve, and courts disaster. A further lesson to be learned from the story before us is that true feminine charm and the appeal of love are gifts received from the Creator, and that when these fairest and most effective of gifts are misused or deliberately trifled with, divine retribution overtakes those who prostitute such gifts.

Another lesson to be gleaned from the ancient record before us is that of the folly of being unequally yoked. Samson married outside his own country, people and religion. Had Samson, hero of Israel, married an Israelitish maiden, the tragedy overtaking him would never have happened. But he took to wife a devotee of a heathen god which, for a judge of Israel, was against the divine decree, and he paid the fatal price of his action.