

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.

Twenty-Sixth Week - Wednesday

SAMSON DIES WITH THE PHILISTINES

"Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: 'Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!' . . . So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, 'Call for Samson, that he may perform for us.' So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, 'Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them.' Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there--about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. Then Samson called to Yahweh, saying, 'O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!' And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life" (Judges 16:23-30).

In his captivity Samson's hair "began to grow again," as might be expected; and it is implied that his strength also grew along with his repentance of the sin and weakness which had brought all this calamity upon him. The loss of his hair had deprived him of strength only because it took him out of that condition of Nazariteship with which his strength was inseparably connected. We can only understand, then, that he had repented and renewed voluntarily the vows of devotion which had been imposed upon him before his birth, and which he had so miserably broken. The Philistines knew only that he was still a strong man, not that his human strength was returning to him.

A day finally came when the Philistines held a high feast and sacrifice to Dagon their god, in the belief that he had delivered Samson into their hand. Some think this probably took place in a temple; but although it is probable that the Philistines had temples, we feel quite sure that if Dagon and his temple had been destroyed on this occasion, a circumstance of so much importance would have been recorded. Others think it may have been a sort of palace, but scarcely a royal one since the Philistines had no king; and the chief magistrate of the small separate state of Gaza was not likely to reside in any very extensive or magnificent palace. It is

probable that it was a large building constructed with special accommodation for spectators on the galleries and roofs. In it public business was transacted, assemblies held, and feats and games celebrated.

On this great occasion it is likely there was a great influx of Philistines from all parts of the land. That they held Samson so completely in their power is evinced by the exultation and thankfulness manifested when they saw him. They praised their god, saying, "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, the destroyer of our land, and the one who multiplied our dead" (vs. 24).

These shouts must have struck deep into Samson's heart. He now saw with grave intensity of shame and sorrow how through his own misconduct the name of the Lord had been dishonored, seeing that the Philistines ascribed to their own god that triumph over the covenanted servant of Jehovah. Samson knew that in the view of the Philistines the triumph over him was equivalent to a triumph of their god over the God whose servant he professed himself to be, whose protection he claimed, and whose people he in some fashion represented. Yet out of this despair he gathered hope.

Samson was aware that Jehovah was a jealous God, who knew well how to vindicate the honor of his own great name. The matter was now put upon a different ground--no longer one between Samson and the Philistines but between Dagon and Jehovah. Samson, fallen as he was, might venture to think that he might yet hope for the Divine assistance in any effort which might present itself to strike one great blow in his mission as the destroyer of God's enemies, seeing that thereby he would vindicate the superiority of the Lord over the miserable idol worshiped by the Philistines. The opportunity was presented, and in such a shape as to confirm his purpose by his being compelled to be present at their odious triumph and by being himself the object of their keen taunts and bitter scorn.

After the sacrifice there was much feasting, and amid this exhilaration there was a proposal to "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." Thus he was brought from the prison-house and set in the enclosed area of the building, the roofs and galleries of which were thronged with men and women, apparently those of the highest order, for "all the lords of the Philistines were there." What Samson "performed" for them we do not know. Some think that he was there merely to be seen by this great assembly, to become the object of their mockeries and insults. Others conceive that he was required to exhibit feats of strength for their amusement--of strength still great though no longer thought to be formidable. Perhaps both took place.

After "performing," Samson, under the excuse of weariness, asked that he might lean against the pillars to rest. Thus having secured a position between the two middle pillars on which the temple chiefly rested, he felt that the hour of great and terrible "vengeance for his two eyes" had come. Taking hold of the pillars he breathed a prayer to the Lord to help him but this once, and then with the cry "Let me die with the Philistines!" he bowed himself with all his might and the pillars gave way, the temple falling upon him and all the people. Thus, as the sacred

historian remarks, "*So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.*"