

SAMSON

JUDGES 13-16

Back in the 'ol' days', storybook superheroes were people with supernatural power, but they were also generally all-round nice guys—people who would help an old lady across the road, display nice manners, always take a stand against the dastardly deeds of the bad guys. But then more recently, Hollywood has hit onto the idea that heroes shouldn't be all together lilly-white—they should have a dark past, be conflicted, and sometimes go too far. In other words they need to be 'more real'!

Today we get to probably the most famous of all the Old Testament judges—Samson. Here has supernatural ability, but here is a man with character flaws galore! When you get into these chapters of Judges, you'll begin to wonder if there is *anything* to like about Samson? But God still has plans for him and the nation of Israel that he loves....



Read Judges 13

1. When you think about the 'judges cycle' that we've seen previously (for instance Judges 3:7-9 or 3:12-15), what is missing with the Samson story?
2. What does this suggest to you?

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Have a look at the laws about Nazirites in Numbers 6:

² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite,³ he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins.⁴ As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.

⁵ " 'During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to the LORD is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long.⁶ Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go near a dead body.⁷ Even if his own father or mother or brother or sister dies, he must not make himself ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of his separation to God is on his head.⁸ Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to the LORD.

3. What's the primary thing that's supposed to characterise Samson as a Nazirite?

Unlike previous times in Judges, the Israelites do not cry out for help. We can wonder, do they even care this time about their idolatrous ways that have led to being overrun by a foreign nation? But despite that, God takes the initiative and prepares a rescuer for himself. As a man who is to specifically set apart and be holy, Samson's role as a Nazirite is a model of what the nation of Israel should be like.

Read Judges 14:1-15:8

4. What do you think of Samson's interest in the Philistine woman?

5. How does Samson's interest in Philistine women mirror Israel as a whole?

6. The story about the honey from the lion is a bit strange. What implications would this have for Samson's Nazirite vows?

7. What motivates Samson's slaughter of the Philistines? Is he concerned for the same things God is concerned for?

As a Nazirite, Samson is a complete failure. Both in his relationships with Philistine women and in his contact with corpses he fundamentally breaks his vows. Rather than being a *model* for Israel in his holiness, he simply *mirrors* Israel in his keenness to compromise with foreign people and their gods. His slaughter of the Philistines is in no way related to any concern for God's plans. It is pure revenge.

Read Judges 15:9-20

8. Who do the men of Judah side with? Does this give any insight into why they didn't ask for a deliverer at the beginning of the story?

Read Judges 16:1-22

9. How committed is Samson to fighting the Philistines?

10. What is Samson really interested in?

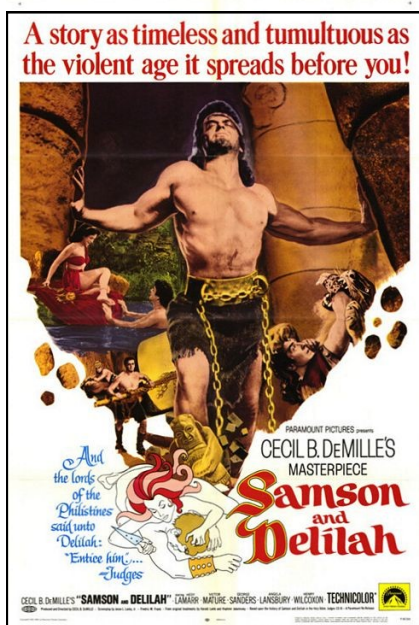
11. How does Samson's experience with Delilah give a picture of Israel's experience?

Samson is not really committed to fighting the Philistines at all. He wants to settle down to a life of domestic bliss with Delilah. Once again Samson is a picture of the Israelites. They don't want to get rid of the original inhabitants of their land and serve God alone. They want to settle down in peaceful co-habitation, sharing their gods. The fight is just too hard.

12. How do the Philistines interpret their capture of Samson (v23-24)? What is ironic about this (v20)?

13. How is the line in verse 22, like a 'to be continued' moment?

Read Judges 16:23-31



14. Why does Samson want to knock down the temple?

15. What statement is God making by allowing Samson to knock down the Temple?

In the end, God won't tolerate rivals. And so as the party for Dagon gets under way, God gate-crashes and shows in an unmistakable way that Dagon has no power. But, as it has been all the way through this story God defeats the pagans in spite of Samson and Israel, not through them. All Samson is doing is getting revenge again.

16. Samson is the only judge who is promised before he was born. Read Luke 1:12-17, and Luke 1:26-33. What are some similarities between the story of Samson and the gospel accounts of John the Baptist and Jesus? What are some big differences?

17. In what ways does the story of Samson add to your understanding of God and how he works?

18. Human evil is not a barrier to God's plans to bring salvation. How does Acts 2:22-24 show this?