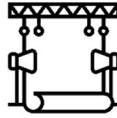


Bible Study on the Life of Samson

Lessons from the Life of Samson, and Truths from the Heart of God



Background of the Bible study

Through a series of 4 Bible Studies, we discovered the intricacies of the life of Samson, one of the Judges who led Israel during the time of the Judges in Israel's history.

Samson's life began in Chapter 13 where we learned more about the circumstances surrounding his birth. His life story continues in Chapter 14 where he met his wife, murdered 30 men in Gaza only to return to a deserted house! In Chapter 15 Samson gave "revenge" a new meaning which led to the destruction of the Philistines wheat, olive, and grape crops. As before, his actions prompted the Philistines to plot their own revenge and it ended very badly for them as this time Samson killed 1000 men. In Chapter 16 we learn again about Samson's preference for Philistine women. The relationship with Delilah became his downfall which resulted in his tragic death. Samson's life come to a sad end in Gaza, whereafter he was buried in the grave of his father.

Before we reflect on the truths and lessons we learned from Samson's life and what we have discovered about God's heart for Israel, let us briefly consider the historical facts of this time period.



The Times of the Judges

The time of the Judges started around 1400 BC when they departed from their long, dusty stay in the Sinai desert. It continued for 300 years until the time that Saul was crowned as the first King of Israel. The time of the Judges was a tumultuous one as the tribes of Israel were experiencing both good leadership and at times, bad leadership. There were 11 Judges, of which Samson was one of the more famous, as we have seen, for good and bad reasons.

The events we encounter in the book of Judges cover the geographical breadth of the Land that was given by Joshua to the tribes of Israel. It was a large area covering present day Gaza, Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. It is not clear if the various Judges ruled simultaneously in different geographical regions or if their life stories are set out in chronological order, covering the whole of the region. What is clear from the the story of Samson is that most probably the Judges ruled specific regions, and not necessarily in chronological order as we find it in scripture. Some of them could have ruled simultaneously while others

might have ruled as the only Judge at that time but then merely over the region given to their tribe.

The tribes of Israel were often at odds with one another, and they did not make good neighbours. This is illustrated in the life of Samson as he was betrayed by the men of Judah. When Israel left the desert, it did not take long for their joy to evaporate as they soon encountered many obstacles. The milk and honey that was on the menu were still in the hands of other nations who had no intention of letting it go easily. In the life of Samson, we encounter the notorious Philistines.

They ruled a large part of the region given to the tribes of Israel by Joshua. In the case of the tribe of Dan, it seems from the story of Samson that they were going along their own way very happily during Samson's rule. We never got the impression that the Philistines were leaving or had any intention of leaving during Samson's rule. It would take a greater effort much later to dislodge them from their territory.

The Philistines worshipped many gods including Baal, Astarte and Dagon. The Temple of Dagon was in Gaza in Samson's time. Dagon was the god of crop fertility, and it is appropriate that this god had prominence in the fertile region in which Samson found himself. No wonder Samson agitated the Philistines so much when he burned their crops! Dagon most probably received some renewed attention by the Philistines in the aftermath of Samson's destruction. On many occasions the gods of the Philistines became the downfall of Israel as they traded them for their own God. This is a rather lengthy story, about which one can read in the books of Kings and Chronicles and the prophets.



Scripture References

Timespan of the Judges: From Joshua 24:29 to 1 Samuel 10:24

Distribution of the Land between the tribes of Israel: Joshua 13

First word about the Philistines: Genesis 10:14

Last word about the Philistines: Zacharia 9:6

More about Dagon: 1 Samuel 5: 2-7



Lessons Learned from the life of Samson

- Samson was fortunate to have had **God fearing parents** with whom he had a good relationship. Samson involved them in his efforts to marry a Philistine woman and although they did not approve the marriage, they still supported him. They must have brought him up in the fear of the Lord, making sure that he understood his role as a Nazarene. What else could you do after two visits by an Angel of God! There is no reference to anyone guiding Samson in his responsibilities of being a Judge. Perhaps his parents also played a role in this? That he was buried in the grave of his father proved that a bond existed between them and that he was honoured by his family who buried him there.
- Samson had a **creative mind**. The only recorded riddle in the Bible was by him. If he had not shared the riddle's secret no one would have found its true meaning. He also devised a clever plan, of which we don't know the detail, to catch, confine, and to tie up 300 foxes two-two together knowing that it was an easy way of ridding the Philistines from their crops! Making his last stand against the Philistines, he calculated that if he could be positioned between the two pillars which supported the roof of the temple of Dagon, he could inflict the most damage upon them. It was a strategic plan leading to the death of more than 3000 Philistines! And that, while he could not see a thing! And who could have calculated that one could kill 1000 men with the fresh jawbone of a donkey!
- Samson **cried out to God on only two occasions**. The fact that he did so in response to being thirsty on the one occasion, and on the other occasion being filled with vengeance, leaves one with many questions! Were these the only times he cried out to God? If so, why? And the lack of any reference of Samson consulting God about decisions which he made is even more puzzling! After all, he was, a Judge, expected to lead his people according to the will of the God of Israel! One therefore tends to doubt the depth of his trust in his God. However, that Samson knew he was a Nazarene and a Judge of Israel, and that God was the God of Israel is certain. It is a matter of how much and to what extent he trusted in his own strength, and not in the strength of the God of Israel. In the end that lack of trust and the failure of an intimate relationship with God, proved to be his downfall.
- That Samson was the favourite to win the Mr Universe title of his day was certain. No other men stood any chance! **His strength** is traditionally attributed to his 7 locks of hair which since his birth had never been shaved or cut. Reading between the lines puts this conclusion in doubt. He was strong, but it was on three occasions when the Spirit of God came down on him that he received supernatural strength which led to the death of more than 4000 Philistines. That he lost his strength after the 7 locks of hair were traded by Delilah for a cart full of money is a popular topic of Bible studies, especially those for children. Studying the life of a Nazarene brings one closer to another interpretation. There seems to exist a much stronger correlation between Samson's hair being a sign that he was a Nazarene, and therefore chosen by God, and enjoying God's presence in his life, than his actual strength being vested in those 7 locks! Simply using common sense makes it difficult to explain. The fact that Samson at first did not realize that God had left him after he awoke minus his hair, is proof that it was the presence of God which had left him rather than the loss of

his hair which caused him to fail. One question remains and that is what Delilah did with all the money?

- Samson's **love for Philistine women** is well known, described and often the favourite topic of any study about his life. This is indeed so! In the end it contributed to his downfall, but it was the lack of trust in, and fear of the God of Israel that ultimately cost him his life.
- We have learned more about Samson's personal life than anything else. How he led the tribe of Dan is a mystery to the reader. There is not a single **leadership lesson** in any of the chapters which cover his life. Perhaps the intention is for us to learn the lessons from Samson's life, and how we can apply them to our lives rather than to learn any lessons about leadership.



Facts we Discovered about the Philistines

- They were **tolerant towards foreigners**. Allowing Samson, whom they did not know, to marry one of their own and attending the wedding showed that they were allowing foreigners to establish relationships with their own people.
- They were **good at agriculture**. Something keenly noticed by Samson. They had an abundance of wheat, grapes and olives. After all it was the promised land that flowed with milk and honey! And it gave origins to the only riddle in the Bible!
- It was an **affluent nation**. It is the only occasion in the Bible where some people, in this instance the lords of the Philistines, traded a lifetime worth of earnings for an answer to a secret!
- They were **feared by Israel**. The men of Judah gathered not less than 3000 men to deliver Samson to them.
- They **served many gods**, one of whom we encounter being Dagon. The Philistines keenly attributed their victory over Samson to this god and to celebrate the held a party in his honour.



Truths Discovered from the Heart of God

- God's plan and purposes with Israel became evident through the life of Samson. Through Joshua God made His intentions clear that it was His will for Israel to strategically possess the land that belonged to many other nations. Samson was a key role player, despite his questionable way of managing these challenges. Through the Judges and the life of Samson, the Philistines became aware that Israel served a God unknown to them, who performs powerful miracles, and which they will encounter for a long time to come to their utter disappointment. Talk about a thorn in the flesh! We discovered a God who had a

clear strategic plan and purpose for the nation of Israel which was to systematically establish a foothold in a foreign territory, even if it meant the loss of 1000's of lives.

- We discovered a God whose plans for us, do not always make sense to us. It was part of God's plan for Samson to marry a Philistine woman. To Samson's parents there was no logic at all in this marriage.
 - To achieve His purposes God chose, on 3 occasions in Samson's life for His Spirit to come down on him. The Spirit and presence of God came down on Samson in a different way than in the way God did in the lives of other Biblical figures. It gave Samson the supernatural strength for which he become known for. We discovered a new "ability" to God's Spirit in the life of Samson.
 - God is merciful to his servants. On both occasions when Samson cried out to Him, He answered his prayer in a way which must have left Samson and his enemies in awe and reverence. God could have responded in a different way since there was little merit in Samson's requests, but God chose to answer Samson's prayer in detail. We discovered that God has a heart of compassion that leans towards, and responds to the plight of His servants.
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