

VIII. Biblical Biographies from the Bible

Biblical Biographies: Who? Why? How?

“Portrait #7: Samson”

Judges 13–17, Hebrews 11:32–40

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We will be looking at Samson in this study and I do consider him a ‘B’ character for a couple of reasons, not a main character. Although I would characterize him as the Clint Eastwood of the Bible. He is a saved brut and if there is such a thing as barely saved, he is barely saved. One of my best friends who I had the privilege to lead to Christ in Miami, Florida was a Clint Eastwood aficionado. He kinda looks and sounds like Clint Eastwood and has the dialogue from just about every one of his movies. He and his lady friend were living together before they came to Christ and I had the privilege to separate them, take them through counseling and then they married and have been good friends ever since. One time he said ‘We’re bringing all these young couples with us on Sunday, is that okay Pastor?’ I said ‘Yes.’ He said ‘Most of them are in the same kind of living arrangement we were in and I want them to hear about Jesus but don’t get mad at me because when they come I tell them I want them to come hear my pastor who I call ‘dirty harry.’’ One of my favorite quotes is from the movie The Outlaw Josey Wales and he says ‘Well, chief, I just get to likin somebody and they’re not around very long’ and the chief says ‘I noticed when you get to dislikin people they’re not around very long’ and that’s Samson.

Samson is not like Gideon for he didn’t lead any big armies but boy he dispatched a lot of Philistines – 30 here, 1,000 there, 1500 here, a jawbone of a donkey, anything he could put his hands on. Samson was very creative in his lethal reign as a judge. He was also a man who loved riddles and used riddles. Samson is somewhat a riddle for us as well. So how does Samson make Hebrews 11? Let’s look at that first and then we’ll go to the section of Judges on Samson.

Hebrews 11:32–40 says [32] *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness (Samson), became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. [36] Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— [38] of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

[39] *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, [40] since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

This list is not chronological and it’s interesting that Deborah isn’t mentioned here. I have used this series on Biblical Biographies to spend time in the book of Judges. I love being in the book of Judges for it’s that transitional moment where God’s people have been delivered from Egypt and Moses’ leadership has brought them up to the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb bring them into the Promised Land. They did not yet completely evacuate the Promised Land of

all those who were told to do so to bring judgment upon from the Canaanite nation. They left cities in high places and we see in the book of Judges how this paganism starts coming down into the lives of God's people as we see this rhythm in the book of Judges of peace, apostasy, peace, deliverance, apostasy.

I'm grateful for the Reformation Study Bible and the ESV who I think treat the book of Judges better than any of the other study Bibles that are available. This book is somewhat of a challenge and there are some good commentaries as well. I had a seminary professor who convinced me that the book of Judges contained 12 judges but there is debate among the commentators. I think there are six major judges and six minor judges and I mean minor in the sense that there is not much material given about them. I think three of the six major judges they are given in the book of Judges with virtuous presentation and the top of the three is Deborah. Then there are three that are not given with a virtuous presentation with Gideon and Samson being two of them and they have a mixed report of their life of faith. Not everything by any means is commendable.

Gideon had a great start, stuttered and then finished poorly. He sets up idolatry with the golden ephod after he wins the battles and then idolatry is restored with bad choices. You can see what is in his heart by what he names his illegitimate son from outside of his marriage relationship. He named him Abimelech which means 'my father is king.' This tells you how Gideon really saw himself and what he anticipated but God was not about to let that happen. In fact, part of what God is doing in the book of Judges is setting us up for the King He has promised which starts all the way back in Genesis 17. The promise for a King was given five different times and He even identified the tribe in which He would come from. The scepter would come through the tribe of Judah.

The book of Judges ends with this statement 'the people did what was right in their own eyes because there was no king in Israel.' Their King was God for it was a theocracy but their eyes were not upon the Lord. So God had promised them a king and is about to send them a king but in the meantime in this transition God is highlighting their need for a king, how He could raise someone up to deliver them, what it would be like for that person to simply not just be a judge but a king and there is an anticipation of it.

Samson doesn't start well, sputters along with some good moments and three of them I will point out in this study and then finishes relatively well, unlike Gideon. We see Samson and Gideon in this Hebrews passage along with Barak for who if it wasn't for Deborah we would know very little about him. Now Barak wasn't a judge but he is included in this hall of faith chapter although he wasn't able to step up but we notice the hall of faith isn't a hall of faith because all of their life was virtuous but they by faith did specific things as we see from the list given in this Hebrews 11 passage, where they had called upon the Lord and the Lord enabled them to do that which He was using them to accomplish.

So let's look at Samson in the book of Judges, who is the last of the twelve judges in this book. The book of Judges has two introductions in Judges 1 and 2. Whoever wrote the book of Judges by the Spirit of God also put two conclusions in this book in Judges 17 and 18 and the second in Judges 19 to 21. There is some debate as to who wrote this book. I am indebted to my seminary professor Robert Godfrey and his analysis of the book of Judges. He helped me understand the mixed reports of these judges and because Samson is such a brut they don't read this part of the Bible in Orthodox synagogues. A Rabbi told Robert Godfrey 'We don't read Samson because he has nothing to commend to us as to how we ought to live.' I think there are

things in Samson's life that are commendable to us otherwise God would not have put him in Hebrews 11 but there is another insight.

This religion that won't read about him in their synagogues is a religion based on works and one's salvation is by achieved righteousness. I hope you don't think you're going to heaven because of your achieved righteousness which at best is according to Scripture, filthy rags. We're going to heaven because of an alien righteousness. It is a righteousness that is not ours but has been given to us from outside of us. That's the great Gospel news we see in Romans 1:16–17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* II Corinthians 5:21 says [21] *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* We have an alien righteousness that God has secured and given to us, not an achieved righteousness.

If I'm trying to tell people you have to work your way to heaven then I can see why people wouldn't use Samson because there is a mixed report on his achieved righteousness but I believe Samson is in heaven, not because of achieved righteousness, but even though his faith faltered many times just like ours, he's there because of Christ's righteousness. There was the evidence of faith in his life, calling upon the Lord and that is my only hope that I am saved by faith in the God of glory and because of the work of Christ. I have His righteousness by faith and that is why Samson is in the hall of faith.

We can almost see Samson as Paul says in Romans 7:19–20 which says [19] *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. [20] Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.* The Bible is honest about it and we can see it in Samson's life. I think this is the reason we read about Samson for if you're going to heaven by faith it's also encouraging because his imperfections don't create room for me to sin but creates encouragement that when I falter I can flee to Jesus and He will bring me to Himself in His righteousness which is where my faith is focused, not in my works, but in the One who worked for me. Christ took my sins away and gave me His righteousness. So let's look at how Samson appears.

Samson appears like all the other judges, a time in which the people need a deliverer but this time it's not a seven year time as in the days of Deborah, but this time it's extensive. Samson loves riddles and here the riddle of Samson – what people faltered into sin but God persistently kept delivering them from it? It is His covenant people and one of their deliverers was a living model of the people he was delivering. In other words, Samson is a model of Israel and I would suggest to some degree a model of each and every one of us. So what can we learn about Samson and from him? This deliverer was an instrument of God's grace to deliver His people and a deliverer who needed God's grace to deliver himself.

The Philistines came from the Aegean Sea. They used to be way up north. While Israel is in Egypt in slavery, the Philistines migrate down to what we know today as Joppa on down the Plain of Sharon to what we know as the Gaza, there in the Promised Land. They were a tribe that was so war like that when God brought His people out Egypt He wouldn't let them go near the Philistines because they weren't ready for them yet. The Philistines are constantly showing up in the book of Judges but they aren't the only Canaanite nation that is giving God's people a problem yet they certainly are in context of the days of Samson.

Judges 13:1–7 says [1] *And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.*

[2] There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. [3] And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. [4] Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, [5] for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." [6] Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, [7] but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

Here we see another preincarnate appearance of Christ who appears to a woman, which is symbolic. Also a Nazirite would be one who took certain vows, one being not to cut your hair or to drink strong drink. We can already see some of Samson's problems. Samson didn't volunteer to be a Nazirite but was drafted. Nazirites volunteer but he doesn't and it actually begins during his mother's pregnancy. His Nazirite vow is initiated by her keeping of a Nazirite vow which also shows us the sanctity of life. You can see where Samson's life begins – in the womb and not from birth. Secondly, the Nazirite didn't cut their hair. Samson will get his cut and you don't want his barber. Thirdly, the Nazirite doesn't drink strong drink and we see he does this at his wedding feast. He will end up breaking all these vows that he was called to keep and that the Lord has called him to keep. Let's continue in the text.

Judges 13:8–25 says *[8] Then Manoah prayed to the LORD and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born." [9] And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah her husband was not with her. [10] So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me." [11] And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am." (The covenant name of Yahweh) [12] And Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?" [13] And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. [14] She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe."*

[15] Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you." [16] And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD." (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.) [17] And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?" [18] And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" [19] So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. [20] And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground.

[21] The angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. [22] And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." [23] But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would

not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these.” [24] And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him. [25] And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

I don't have time to give you all of them but there are ten feats of heroism accomplished by Samson in his ministry. Judges 14 through 17 are divided up into ten acts, ten feats of heroism that Samson performs. I am going to go through three of them before we conclude this study, in which it states the Spirit of the Lord is upon him. The first one I want to look at is in Judges 14.

Judges 14:1–3 says *[1] Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. [2] Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.” [3] But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.”*

Do get the idea Samson might be spoiled? The problem here is when Samson says ‘she is right for my eyes’ yet the Lord is sovereign and He is going to use this in Samson's life. This will end up being a strategic move Samson is making as we see in verse 4.

Judges 14:4–7 says *[4] His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.*

*[5] Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. [6] Then **the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him**, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. [7] Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.*

This is not all that happens. Let's see what happens next.

Judges 14:8–20 says *[8] After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. [9] He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion. (This meant he was eating something that was unclean.)*

[10] His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. [11] As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. [12] And Samson said to them, “Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, [13] but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes.” And they said to him, “Put your riddle, that we may hear it.” [14] And he said to them, “Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.” And in three days they could not solve the riddle.

[15] On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, “Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?” [16] And Samson's wife wept over him and said, “You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is.” And he said to her, “Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?” [17] She wept

before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. [18] And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" And he said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle."

*[19] And **the Spirit of the LORD** rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. [20] And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.*

So in Judges 14:19 we see the second time the Lord rushed upon Samson. The third time I want you to see is in Judges 15:4–8 says *[4] So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. [5] And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards. [6] Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." (Because of the treachery and the breaking of the vows this is what Samson did) And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. [7] And Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit." [8] And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.*

Here Samson begins to do his vengeance. So in Judges 14–17 Samson does ten acts of strength and three of them are from the Lord, with the rest not being of the Lord. Three of them accomplish the purposes of the Lord and the rest are those that the Lord uses but Samson is doing them out of personal vengeance. So what are some things we can learn from Samson and this text? Here are a couple of them.

One is when God raises up a deliverer, a man, to deliver His people God is not limited by the limitations of the man. I don't think any leader ought to see this and use this as an excuse to be less than they ought to be and should be as the best instruments we can for Christ. I can tell you that this is encouraging to me that when the Lord uses me He is not dependent upon me, my skills or my abilities for He can go beyond them and so He can with you – as you care for your children. Be the best instrument you can but be encouraged for if God has raised you up then He's not limited by your limitations. He can and will accomplish His purposes.

Secondly, the lives of God's people are always a mixed report. Our motivations in serving Christ are always going to be mixed but that doesn't mean we ought not mortify sinful desires and bad motivations. None of us are perfect on the way to glory but God's grace is persistent. God's grace continues to be at work in our life. Even our shortcomings, sin, frailties, imperfections and liabilities do not stop Lord and the Lord continues to do a great work for His glory.

Thirdly, is the honesty of God's Word. Nobody gets whitewashed. I love the fact that in 2019 there have been five archeological discoveries that have affirmed the historicity of the Bible which we had been told for years wasn't historical. And about 20 years ago they uncovered a Philistine pagan temple near the Gaza. We have been told all along that the temples in the Middle East do not have two center pillars. If you keep reading about Samson, near his death he grabs the two pillars in the middle for he was chained to them and when those two are pulled everything collapses. Unlike all the other temples in the Middle East, in Greece and Turkey, they are constructed differently that begin with two pillars in the middle. Again, just

give scientists, archeologists, historians and philosophers enough time they can get to the mountain of knowledge and shake hands with theologians that have been there all along.

God's Word is true and honest for Samson doesn't get covered over. We see him for what he is – a sinner saved by grace through faith and a very faltering faith yet God uses him. The strength does not come from Samson nor his father, nor his wife, nor his mother and God even overcomes his bouts with prostitutes. Now all of that had costs but God was still able to get done what God desired to get done.

What is your lesson? The lesson is not that you're careless about sin but it is that your God reigns and His mercy is everlasting. His grace is greater than our sins. Thank God for His Word that is honest and true. We even get to see 'heroes of the faith' from Hebrews 11, warts, pimples and all. Praise God Samson finished stronger than he lived as this one who destroyed so many Philistines that in his death he destroyed more enemies of God than even in his life.

Samson was the last judge and we see how God's people can't stay the course without a king. Samson dies and 50 years later they get a king who is Saul. The problem is, they get a king, but he is from the wrong tribe. Then they will get King David who is from the right tribe, which is Judah. Then you and I get a King from the tribe of Judah and His name is Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Samson is the riddle pointing to that Savior, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for this wonderful, glorious passage of Scripture called the book of Judges which is the transition from the occupation of the Promised Land to the king that You have promised, leading to the King who is the fulfillment of all Your promises – Jesus. Lord, as we look at these frail children of dust who send armies to flight, who destroy the enemies of God, we thank You that we see the evidence out of their strength but of Your strength, laid hold of by faith through the Spirit of the Lord who rushes upon us. Thank You most of all that we ultimately look to Jesus who has defeated all of His and our enemies as He has come to save us and He is coming again to destroy those defeated enemies. Until He comes, even with our imperfections, may He find us faithful, walking in the Spirit by faith in Christ for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.