

These chapters continue the story of Samson. Verse 20 of Chapter 15 tells us that Samson was a judge in Israel for 20 years, and indeed he is the last of the judges named in this book. Samson's temperament is far from judicial. He takes power from the Spirit of the Lord (14:19) but his motives seem to be based on impulse, lust, anger, and vengeance.

The action packed tales of Samson seem more suitable to a comic book superhero than a leader of God's people. Like a superhero, Samson operates on his own. He leads no armies against God's enemies. His Israelite brothers, far from helping Samson, conspire to hand him over to the Philistines. The result is Samson's solo battle using a donkey's jawbone as his only weapon.

One of the main points of Judges is how God can work His purposes even when man fails. Samson is emblematic of a period when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." How fitting that he selects a Philistine wife because she is right in his eyes (Judges 14:7, ESV). Samson never even appears to struggle against his impulses. But God uses him in a powerful way.

We might think of testing God in a similar way, knowing that "if we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2 Tim. 2:13). But do not forget the trials, defeats, and groaning of the children of Israel all during the time of

the Judges. What blessings did God have in store for them if they had followed His will instead of their own? How much we can lose, or the Lord's church can lose, by not following the paths laid out by Scripture.

In the end, Samson finds his nobility only when blinded, enslaved, and humiliated. God must bring him low before He can lift him up. There is wisdom for us in that.

Notes

15:2 The story of Samson's wife is a continuation from Chapter 14.

15:17 Ramath Lehi means Jawbone Hill.

15:19 En-Hakkore means The Spring of One Who Called.

16:4 The Valley of Sorek in the Judean hills would be the boundary between the Philistines and the tribe of Dan. It is not clear to which group Delilah belongs. She has a Hebrew name but secretly serves the Philistines (and their money). It would not be surprising if the many generations of forbidden intermarriage had produced offspring who held divided loyalties.

16:23 Dagon was a fish-man, or merman, a god of the region of Canaan.

16:25 We are not told exactly how Samson entertains the crowd. Remembering the seventy kings without thumbs scrabbling for scraps under Adoni-bezek's table (1:7), we can be certain it was a cruel and inhuman spectacle. The heartless enjoyment of the 3000 watchers should temper our sympathy when Samson brings the temple down upon them.

Questions:

1. Who takes vengeance upon whom in Chapter 14?
2. Why do the Israelites agree to hand Samson over to his enemies?
3. Does Samson show faith in the Lord?

4. Why doesn't Samson get suspicious after three nights of Delilah attempting to bind him?

5. Is there any scriptural basis for a Nazarite saying his long hair gives him superhuman strength? If not, why does God allow Samson to lose his strength when his head is shaved?

6. Are women the cause of Samson's troubles?

7. What prayers of Samson are recorded before his prayer for vengeance in 16:28?

8. All of Samson's troubles occur when he goes down to Philistia for some purpose. Is there a symbolic lesson for us?