



## LIFE OF SAMSON Judges 13–16

### BIRTH NARRATIVE

- nearly a whole chapter is devoted to the story of Samson's birth (Judg 13:1–24a)
- only two sentences are devoted to his childhood (Judg 13:24b–25)
- this is the only birth narrative in the Book of Judges
- the story of Jesus' birth follows the same pattern: long birth narrative (Matt 1–2; Luke 1–2) and short childhood (Luke 2:41–52)
- sometimes God plans the deliverance of his people far in advance, as in the case of Samson (Judg 13) and Jesus (1 Pet 1:20)

### SAMSON'S LIFE WAS A MIRROR FOR ISRAEL

- he typifies the nation of Israel: (1) special calling at birth, (2) set apart from birth for the LORD, (3) endowed with unique power, (4) chases after foreign women (foreign gods for Israel), (5) enticed and subdued, (6) loss of strength and God's presence, (7) overcome, taken captive, bound, and blinded, (8) return of his strength and God's presence when he asks God for help
- Israel was to see herself in Samson

### TRAGIC HERO

- a comedy is a story that begins in prosperity, descends into tragedy, and rises again to end happily (Esther, Ruth, Genesis 38)
- a tragedy is a story of exceptional calamity—a movement from prosperity to catastrophe (Esau, Gen 25–27; Saul, 1 Sam 8–31)
- flaws of character make the tragic hero responsible for his own downfall—and to some extent deserving of it
- all biblical tragedies are variations of the theme of disobedience to God

### FIRST OF FOUR DELIVERERS FROM PHILISTINE OPPRESSION

- deliverance from the Philistines began with Samson (Judg 13:5), successfully continued with Samuel (1 Sam 7:2–14), failed under Saul (compare 1 Sam 9:16 with 28:19), and was completed by David (2 Sam 5:17–25; 8:1; 19:9)
- *Seventh Apostasy and Oppression*: the LORD delivered Israel to Philistine oppression for 40 years (Judg 13:1)
- this was the last and apparently the deepest apostasy

- there is no record of national repentance or cry for a deliverer during Samson's twenty-year ministry
- the expected cry of the people for help is absent: the only person to cry out to the LORD anywhere in the story is Samson
- people have acquiesced to bondage: only army mustered by Israel was to capture Samson—not fight Philistines (Judg 15:11)
- Samson weakened the Philistines and kept them in check, but provided no permanent deliverance for Israel

### **PERSISTENT CARNALITY**

- he married a Philistine woman of Timnah (Judg 14)—apparently God's permissive will (compare Judg 14:4 with Deut 7:3–4)
- he visited a harlot in Gaza (Judg 16:1) and had an affair with Delilah (16:4–20)
- he embodies everything that was wrong with Israel: weak will, self-indulgence, the dangers of success, sensuality, overconfidence, bad company, recklessness, misplaced trust, and spiritual complacency
- in spite of his persistent carnality God's blessing of special strength remained with him  
(after visiting a prostitute he was able to carry away the city gate of Gaza some 30 to 40 miles (Judg 16:1–3))
- only when his hair was shaved did the Spirit quit empowering him—a careless violation of his Nazirite vow (Judg 16:19–20)

### **RESULTS OF HIS CARNALITY**

- he gave the Philistines an opportunity to glorify their false god—Dagon (Judg 16:23–24)
- he was blinded, imprisoned, and mocked by his enemies (Judg 16:21, 25–27)
- his last prayer was “Let me die with the Philistines”—a tragic end to a careless spiritual life (Judg 16:30)

### **WORST OF THE JUDGES**

- the spiritual quality of Israel and the quality of the judges declines as the Book of Judges progresses: they mirror each other
- Gideon is the turning point between the best (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah-Barak) and worst judges (Abimelech, Jephthah, Samson)

### **NAZIRITE**

- he was divinely chosen to be "a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death" (Judg 13:7; cf. 13:4–5, 14; 16:17)
- Nazirite vows were usually voluntary and made for a limited period of time (Num 6); except, however, for life-long Nazirites chosen or accepted by God before

they were born—Samson, Samuel (1 Sam 1:11), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15)

- three restrictions: Nazirites may not (1) consume grape products or alcoholic beverages, (2) cut their hair, or (3) touch dead bodies (Num 6:3–8)—they took "a vow of separation to the LORD" (6:2) that regulated their diet, appearance, and associations
- he violated all three: touched a dead lion (14:8, 9), apparently drank wine (*mishteh* 14:10), and allowed his hair to be cut (16:19)
- he also violated the Nazirite principle of being holy to the LORD by his immoral conduct with a harlot in Gaza and with Delilah

## HOLY SPIRIT

- the ministry of the Spirit was the source of his great strength and empowered him to defeat the Philistines (Judg 14:5–6, 19; 15:14–17; ; cf. 15:8; 16:3, 9, 12, 14, 19–20, 28–30)
- the presence of the Spirit did not depend on his personal holiness (Judg 16:1–3, 4–14)
- the presence of the Spirit was not something he sensed or felt moment by moment (Judg 16:20)

## SUCCESSSES

- pattern of success-failure in the 6 episodes of chapters 14–16: a Philistine success followed by a disaster caused by Samson
- Episode 1 (14:5–20), Episode 2 (15:1–6a), Episode 3 (15:6b–8), Episode 4 (15:9–17), Episode 5 (16:1–3), Episode 6 (16:4–30)
- his two prayers were answered at the point where he appears defeated (Judg 15:18–19; 16:28–30)

## JUDGE

- his position as a judge was secured by the Battle of Jawbone Hill (Judg 15:9–20)
- he seems to have acted wisely as a judge for the tribes of Dan and Judah for twenty years (Judg 15:20; 16:31)

## SUICIDE

- five suicides are mentioned in the Bible: Abimelech (Judg 9:50–55), Samson (Judg 16:28–31), Saul and his armor bearer (1 Sam 31:1–6), and Judas Iscariot (Matt 27:3–5; Acts 1:18)
- the prohibition against murder (sixth commandment) applies to self-murder—to suicide (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17)
- two stone pillar bases placed only a yard apart were discovered in the ruins of the first Philistine temple ever found in Palestine—in 1972 at Tell Qasile

- he killed more Philistines in his death than he killed in his life (compare Judg 14:19; 15:9, 15 with 16:27, 30)
- it was the absence of the LORD and not the power of Dagon that accounted for Samson's shame (Judg 16:19–20)
- in his death he made known the impotence of Dagon and the power of the LORD
- suicide does not annul your salvation: after committing suicide Saul joined Samuel in Paradise (1 Sam 28:19; cf. Rom 8:38–39)

**MEMBER OF THE HALL OF FAME (HEBREWS 11:32)**

- he was not excluded because of his immorality, nor included because of his feats of strength: he was included because his faith was great: by faith he went out alone to fight and trusted the Spirit to rush upon and strengthen him in his time of need