

Mass Chaos

A Study of the Book of Judges

Session 8: Samson & the Philistines

Introduction

Watch a clip from the 2025 strong man competition. Of all the judges, Samson is the most famous. What's his allure?

Samson's Birth

13:1-7, 17-25

List other women in the Bible who had children who were “nothing short of a miracle.”

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Read the article on the Nazarite vow. Normally it was temporary (see the regulations in Num 6:1-21). What was the point of making a lifelong vow?

Person who was either chosen or consecrated for life or for a set period of time to complete a vow to God. The Nazirite devoted himself to self-imposed discipline in order to perform some special service. Israelite tradition viewed the Nazirite as consecrated for life. Samson was the ancient hero of the Nazirites. He was “consecrated to God” through the vow of his mother (Jgs 13:5; 16:17), and remained under that vow to the “day of his death” (Jgs 13:7). As long as Samson’s hair was not cut, he was able to receive the “spirit of the Lord” and thereby perform amazing physical feats.

Early Nazirite vows may have been associated with holy-war ceremonies. Combatants were consecrated to God and perhaps wore long hair (Jgs 5:2). The prophet Samuel did

not cut his hair because of his mother's vow that no razor would touch his head (1 Sm 1:11; the Septuagint adds that he was not to drink wine). The Nazirite vow of uncut hair was associated with being consecrated to God's service and was especially common during the charismatic days of Israel's early leaders.

Naziritism developed into a ritual for those who sought to consecrate themselves temporarily to God. During the period of consecration the devotee abstained from drinking wine, allowed his hair to grow, and avoided all contact with dead bodies. Uncut hair symbolizes strength and life. ... Vineyards which were not pruned in sabbatical or jubilee years were said to be *nazir*.

In later times, touching or coming in close proximity to a dead body was the most serious offense against the vow. Should anyone die in his presence, a Nazirite became impure. Such a contaminated Nazirite was expected to shave his "defiled head" on the day of cleansing. Next he would bring two young pigeons to the priest who would offer one as a sin offering. And finally he must bring a male lamb for a guilt offering (Nm 6:9–12). Because of this defilement the Nazirite must begin his days of separation again. At the end of his period of separation, he "desecrated" himself through a ceremony: he offered a sacrifice for sin and a communion sacrifice; he shaved his head and burnt the hair. Thereafter the Nazirite returned to his normal life and could drink wine (Nm 6:13–21).¹

Samson's Marriage

14:1–20

To review, the phrase, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him," occurs frequently in Judges (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14), with the majority of the times referring to Samson. Improve on the Sunday school explanation, "God made Samson really strong." What else was the Holy Spirit up to (see 14:4, Acts 10:38)?

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Nazirite," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1531–1532.

Samson's Victory over the Philistines

15:1-20

In the ancient world, battles were fought, not necessarily by complete armies, but by champions or warriors who represented each side (a concept known as “corporate solidarity”). Read the article below on “The Archaeology of Philistia.” In what ways was Samson vs. the Philistines part of the broader biblical battle of good vs. evil (much like David vs. Goliath)?

Egyptian texts suggest that the Philistines were part of a large-scale emigration of various tribes from the Aegean, referred to as Sea Peoples, who attempted to enter Egypt. As they made their way by land and sea down the Mediterranean coast, they left a swatch of destruction behind them. The tribes arrived at the border of Egypt around 1177 B.C. but were repulsed by Rameses III. They retreated to Canaan and settled in previously conquered areas. The Philistines seized one of the choicest parts, the southwestern coast, which became known as Philistia.

The Philistines had five major centers: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath (1 Sa 6:17). Excavations at these sites have revealed a common pattern of Philistine settlement—the previous city was violently destroyed and a larger, well-planned, fortified city built in its place. The Philistines brought with them their native Aegean culture in the form of architecture, pottery, cultic items, metallurgy (1 Sa 13:19-22), burial customs and language.

Soon the Philistines expanded eastward and dominated the Israelites (Jdg 13:1). The tribe of Dan was directly impacted, since its allotment was in the northern sector of Philistia. Samson was the first Israelite military leader to counteract the Philistine oppression, probably in the later part of the twelfth century B.C. (v. 5).²

Conclusion

Typology is the study of how certain Old Testament people, events, and institutions prefigured Christ. In other words, the life story of these people prefigured the life story of Christ, and all along, God was teaching his people about what the life of his Son would be like. To sum these chapters up, demonstrate how Samson was a type of Christ.

² “The Archaeology of Philistia,” in Walther Kaiser & Duane Garrett, ed., *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 370.