

August 6, 2016 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Judges 13-16 Rated R for Relevance: The Bible's Superman by
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Last Week

Let's Pray, Father, Son and Holy Spirit we don't know how to pray or what to pray for as we ought, so we just come in surrender parroting part of the prayer you taught the disciples, we trust you enough to ask that your will be done in our lives, in this place, on this earth as you will is done in heaven. We ask for your peace to come into the hearts of all people. We pray for healing, for restoration, for you to set us each in our right mind as you ordained. And now as we open your word we seek for you to reveal yourself to us that we might know you, whom to know is life eternal. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

There are certain stories in our Bible that, were I writing the family history of God and his people, I might just gloss over or leave out completely, and today's story, famous as it is, might be one of those.

It has some quaintness too it.

It has parallels to Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus

It supports the idea of a consecrated life

But it certainly fails to model any kind of ideal path we might wish to emulate.

Of course there is the possibility of learning from other's mistakes!

Before we go there I think it's important to consider our sermon title, "The Bible's Superman". I'm not sure it's accurate. When Will did the interviews we saw a moment ago he asked about favorite superhero's . It is so good he didn't ask me about my favorite! This is a whole genre of stories and literature and pop culture where I am really disconnected.

But because of the sermon this week I read up a little and when it comes to the superhero Superman, there are some similarities to Samson but maybe even more contrasts.

Superman, as I understand, was much more humble, more of a servant mindset, much more Messianic in his arrival and work. He wasn't just "for" some small parochial clique he was about making the whole world a better place, about saving the world. He was for truth, justice and the American way. Unlike our biblical character, he seemed focused on others, protecting and defending way more than retaliation or aggression.

Super heroes are an interesting phenomena. Some have proposed that we need them and that we focus on them most when things seem doomed or out of our control. We need to believe there is hope and a better tomorrow and super heroes help us believe.

It is interesting though how super heroes have evolved. From ones that were from beyond us, outside of our humanity, the trend has moved to wanting our superheroes to be more human. To be able to feel and hurt and fail, to have some super powers but be more like us.

So maybe that's why we get the story of Samson he is certainly gifted with extraordinary strength and he is about as flawed as any human model could be.

His story begins with Israel at the bottom of one of their cycles. Here's how the Bible Project explains: The people would rebel in sin, suffer oppression, come to repentance, God would raise up a judge to deliver them, there would be a time of peace, but eventually they would return to sin etc.

So Judges 13 opens with the revelation that the people are in the oppression place. "Again the people of Israel did what the Lord said was wrong. So he let the Philistines rule over them for 40 years."

The solution to free them from oppression comes with a message from an angel to Manoah's wife. We never know her name. Her place in history is held by the designation of being Manoah's wife and Samson's mother. Actually with the way this story turns out it may have been a blessing to not actually be named!

She hasn't be able to have children and the angel knows this to be the case and tells her she is going to have a son. And during her pregnancy she's not to have anything that grows on a grapevine, no wine, no beer, nothing unclean, because the boy she is delivering will be a Nazarite from his birth until the day of his death.

What did it mean to be a Nazarite? I remember as a kid I thought it had to do with being from Nazareth. If a person from Israel was an Israelite, then I imagined a person from Nazareth would be a Nazarite of course it would really be a Nazarethite!

The reality is that in Numbers 6 it explains that a Nazarite vow was a special vow, usually for a set period of time, when the one vowing would be separated or consecrated to the Lord. And as a symbol of this vow of consecration, of being separated to the Lord they were to simultaneously, as a sign of this vow, to separate from three things:

Wine and strong drink or even wine vinegar, actually nothing from the grapevine.

No cutting your hair.

No getting near a corpse even if your father, mother, brother, or sister died.

Somehow separating yourself from these things was some kind of demonstration that you were separated from regular life to the Lord!!

So the prophecy of the angel came true the boy was born, his mother named him Samson and Judges 13 ends with telling us he grew and the Lord blessed him . The Spirit of the Lord began to work in Samson.

I don't know where the gap happened, I just know it happened. This misunderstanding seems to so easily occur with us humans. Something about our fallen human nature easily pushes us toward self focus and self interest.

Here we have Samson. Predicted by God before his birth. Chosen to be a Nazarite to be separated out to God for God's purposes. The Spirit brings gifts abilities special powers or graces. And God does all this so that we might partner with him to accomplish his purposes and we humans look at our gifts, our abilities, our blessings and imagine that they are for our benefit when they are meant for the world, for some larger purpose than just our consumption or bragging rights.

You see, Samson wasn't blind to his gifts. He knew he was blest. He knew his was no ordinary strength. When attacked by a lion he rips it apart as if it were a young goat.

Samson goes to Timnah and catches the eye of Philistine girl and he tells his parents to get her for his wife. They plead for him to find a woman from Israel to marry, but Samson insists "Get that woman for me! She's the one I want."

You may remember that it's on the way to the wedding feast that Samson stops by the carcass of the lion he killed and there was a swarm of bees in it and he enjoyed some honey.

During the 7 day feast he throws for the wedding he challenges the men who are there to make sure he stays in line, with a riddle that if they can solve by the end of the feast he will give them 30 changes of clothes and if they can't they give him 30 changes of clothes.

These men go to the bride and tell her to find the answer or she and her family will be burned up. She begs and pleads and cries and finally Samson tells her the answer, which she immediately shares to protect her family.

When they give the answer and demand the payout Samson is furious. "If you had not plowed with my heffer, you would not have solved my riddle." He goes over to Ashkelon, kills 30 guys and brings their clothes to pay his debt and he went back to his parents home very angry. And his bride was given to his best man at the wedding.

When he goes back to get his wife he discovers she's been married off to his bestman. This is when he captures 300 foxes ties them in pairs with a torch to their tails and they catch all the fields of wheat on fire, and the vineyards and the olive groves.

Later he's hiding out and the men of Judah, worried about the Philistines reprisal deliver him to the Philistines. But once in their supposed control he breaks his bonds, picks up the jawbone of a donkey and killed 1000 Philistines. Afterward he's thirsty and God opens up the ground and water was provided for him.

Later he goes to Gaza to visit a prostitute and the Philistines are sure they can get him there. But he gets up at midnight and rips up the city gate and its pillars and carries it to a nearby hill.

Of course the best known part of his story is his love for Delilah and her obvious treachery as she asks him the secret to his strength and to what would end it.

Bow strings are used and she wakes him with-“The Philistines are upon you” and he breaks the bowstrings and defends himself

New ropes are his next story and he finds himself tied with new ropes when she again says the Philistines are upon you. And he breaks the ropes and defends himself

Weave my hair in to the loom and my power will be gone, and so she does. But in response to the Philistines are upon you he pulled up the loom and defended himself, His strength was still there.

He should have known. It was obvious. She was going to try whatever he told her. But she was so persistent. Questioned how he could say he love her and not tell her. And finally he did and she cuts his hair as he sleeps. She wakes him with “The Philistines are upon you.”

The international children’s bible put it like this:

He woke up and thought, “I’ll get loose as I did before and shake myself free. But he did not know that the Lord had left him. I’m afraid we too often give the Lord credit for making the move, but I’m pretty sure he’s rock solid. Samson and left the Lord. Now with the last of the signs of his vow violated he had made his choice.

Samson is capture, his eyes are torn out and he is put in chains and made to grind grain. But his hair began to grow again.

He is brought out at a feast to the Philistine god Dagon. They are praising Dagon for giving them Samson their enemy. When they saw Samson they praised Dagon! They made him entertain them and then he rested against the pillars that supported the temple.

Then Samson prayed.

Not for salvation for his people,
not for salvation of their enemies.
Not for the vindication of God

Listen: “Lord God, remember me, God, please give me strength one more time. Let me pay these Philistines back for putting out my two eyes.”

All God’s gifts, All of God’s calling. Samson had chosen to be about him rather than for God’s purposes.

As strong and gifted and powerful as Samson was physically, he was weak morally and spiritually.

His strength was related to God. God’s selection, God’s blessing, God prophecy, God’s plan.

He had broken every part of the Nazarite vow to be God’s man. He threw a weak long drunken feast for the wedding of the girl from Timnah.

He had eaten honey from a corpse as well as the 30 corpse he created getting the 30 garments and the 1000 he created with that donkey’s jawbone. And finally his hair was cut.

But inspite of his self absorbed abject failure morally and spiritually, he was a 20 year judge of Israel and he began the relief of the Philistine oppression.

Samson reminds us of the limitations of even God given talents and gifts and abilities. With every blessing comes the temptation to rely on the gift and the blessing and ignore the discipline and commitment to personal growth in holiness.

One commentary said that “Often the very area in which a person is most gifted proves to be his or her weakness.”

Samson’s great strength masked great weakness.

It is so easy to rely on our gifts our strength to our own detriment.

God told Paul, My strength is made perfect in weakness.
Scripture reminds us :Be careful when you are too sure of your standing, take heed you may be about to fall.

When I am weak then I am strong. Self reliance combined with self interest or self interest combined with self reliance is a road to disaster.

In spite of his selfishness, in spite of his abusing his gifts and not developing the inner moral strength to match his physical prowess God still used him to crack the Philistines.

God’s problem is that if he doesn’t use messed up humans he has no one. Read through the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 from Genesis to Revelation they are all a mess. And if God can use them he can use you and me.

So let him. Whatever gifts he has poured into you they aren’t just for you to enjoy but to share with the world. And unlike Samson lets remember to not focus on the gifts given but on the one gives the who who is himself the best gift of all.

And then maybe we can be a little more like Superman than Samson and be concerned like God with saving the world.



What stories surround your birth?

How sure have you been that God has a purpose for you?

What gifts has God put in you?

How can your gifts get in your way?

What do you believe was Samson's greatest failure?

Which superpower would you most like to have?

What are safeguards to protect us from selfishness?

What place does retaliation and revenge have for Christians?

How can you focus on the giver rather than the gifts?

What is the greatest potential corresponding weakness that comes with your best gifts?

How can you build discipline for developing moral and spiritual strength?



Join the conversation at @FloridaHC #fhcTAKEAWAY
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