

The Hebrew Corner

The period that the judges ruled in Israel, was a time when the Israelites had fallen away from favor with God because of their worship of the man-made gods that the nations around them worshipped. For after Joshua made the declaration that he and his household would worship God, and all the congregation of the Israelites agreed to do so, very few people of the succeeding generations followed through with that pledge. So what we see is that it was necessary for God to elevate to the judgeship a series of highly flawed individuals to deliver Israel, when the people cried out to God for help. One of the most unusual and unlikely of these judges was Samson. The name Samson in Hebrew is shimshon (שמִּשׁוֹן, shihm-SHOHN). Samson appears in the Tanach as a self-centered man, who was concerned only about what pleased him at the time, He used the gift of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in ways intended to promote himself and not God.

In Deuteronomy 7:1-4; God made it clear how the Israelites were to deal with the nations that worshipped false gods:

“When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt

thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.”

Yet the first action of Samson recorded in the Tanach was to take a wife of the daughters of the Philistines (Judges 14:1-3):

“And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife. Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. ”

Philistia was one of the nations that the Israelites failed to drive out during the leadership of Joshua and those following, as noted in Judges 3:3. Philistine in Hebrew is p'lishti (פְּלִשְׁתִּי, puh-leesh-TEE). The nation constituted an alliance of five lords (Judges 3:3), and were constantly at war with Israel. Samson, being in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol (Judges 13:25), was apparently in a Philistine-controlled territory. But, as we will see, every action of Samson incited hostility from the Philistines, yet they were unable to stop him due to his super-human strength. Continuing in Judges 14, we see that travelling with his family to Timnath to see the Philistine woman, a roaring lion comes out in front of him, which he kills with his bare hands. On the way back, he notices that bees had made a hive in the carcass of the lion, and he takes some of the

honey from the carcass and eats it. This gives him the idea for a riddle, in which, during his return trip for the wedding feast, he makes a bet with the members of the wedding party that they cannot solve the riddle that he has devised about the lion and the honey. Thirty changes of clothing and thirty sheets are to be given to the winner of the bet. The next passage shows that hostilities are starting to build up, as Samson's wife is approached by the Philistines (Judges 14:15-17):

“And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? is it not so? And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee? And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.”

The Philistines of the wedding party were provoked because they thought Samson and his wife were tricking them out of their property, so they threatened Samson's wife and her family. The situation further escalates after the Philistines tell Samson that they have found out his riddle. To get revenge against the Philistines, he goes to the Philistine city of Ashkelon, and kills thirty men and takes their clothing to pay off the bet. Samson then goes back to his father's house. In the meantime, the woman's father gave his daughter to a friend for his wife.

Later, at the time of wheat harvest, the situation escalates further, as Samson comes back with a young goat to claim his wife, but her father breaks the news to him that he has given her to his friend. Samson takes out his anger by burning grain fields, orchards, and vineyards of the Philistines. The Philistines in turn burned up the father and her daughter with fire. Samson in turn slaughters a large number of Philistines, then goes up in the top of a mountain.

After these acts, Samson apparently became widely known as an enemy of Philistia (Judges 15:9-16):

“Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock. And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson

said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.”

There is some underlying Hebrew that is not evident to the someone reading the last phrase of this passage in English. The word translated as ass (donkey) in the passage is the Hebrew word hamor (חמור, chah-MOHR), which also happens to be the Hebrew word translated as heap. Thus there is some word play in Samson's taunt. A more direct translation would be, “With a jawbone of an ass, one heap (of men), twin heaps (of men), with the jaw of an ass I have slain a thousand men.” Samson at this point clearly believes he is invincible. However, God is about to show Samson where his true strength comes from.

Looking back to Judges 14:4, a glimpse of what God had intended for Samson is given:

“But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.”

This occasion that God had planned for Samson is revealed in Judges 16. The Philistines were aware from the events at Timnath that he could be gotten to through the women that he was involved with, so they used his consort Delilah to find out his weakness (Judges 16: 4-6):

“And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein

his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver. And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.”

Notable here is that the situation among the Philistines had escalated to the point that Philistine lords were now involved. The story continues with the enticement of Samson (Judges 16:7-16):

“And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known. And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liars in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread. And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web. And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto

him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web. And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth. And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;”

At this point, due to Delilah's constant wearying of Samson, he tells her of his Nazarite vow, but it is clear that this means nothing to him, for he believes that his strength belongs to him and cannot be taken from him. Here is where God must humble Samson so that he can use him for his intended occasion (Judges 16:17-27):

“That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and

bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house. Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven. Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.”

Now for the first time revealed in the Tanach, and likely the first time in his life, he called upon God for help, realizing where his strength came from. Now he was operating in God's will, as the Philistine sacrifices to the false god Dagon were a direct affront to the power and sovereignty of God (Judges 16:28-30):

“And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me

die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.”

Thus God showed the Philistines that their god was powerless, and the Israelites that theirs was the true God that could deliver them. So he was able to use Samson as his vessel to realize the occasion that he sought against the Philistines. In turn, Samson was listed a man of faith in Hebrews 11:32:

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:”

The prime lesson to be learned from the Samson story is that is never too late to come to God and find out what he has planned for our lives. He has provided a means to come to him, through his son Jesus, our Yeshua. May you all have a great month, a merry Christmas, and a happy and shalom-filled new year!