

" THE INCREDIBLE HULK "

Observations on the life of Samson

Judges 13:24-16:31

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One thing about Scripture--it never pads the score. Even though it abounds with amazing and often downright supernatural stories, its character remains trustworthy. Putting it rather bluntly, one Missouri Synod Lutheran said in 1973 that "if the Bible had said that Jonah swallowed the fish, I would believe it." As we read through the histories and narratives of the Bible, we can rest assured that we are reading accurate accounts. So, it is even more amazing when we come, in Judges 13:24-16:31 to the story of Samson, the last of Israel's Judges proper (before the transition period to monarchy under Eli and Samuel). Under the inspiration of the Spirit, the writer of the book of Judges gives us an "all stops out" description of this man Sampson. His 20 years of judging Israel were highlighted by a number of interesting, compelling and often sadening events. In a number of ways, he provides a picture of the Christian's often inconsistent walk with a gracious and never-failing God.

Samson was born, sole son to Manoah of Zorah and his wife, and lived in the period around 1070 B.C. (Unger). He was given to Israel as a type of savior, to afflict the Philistines (not having been driven out during the Occupation as they should have been). It is evident from the earliest words recorded about Samson that he was a regenerate man, blessed of the Lord, and given to particular manifestations of the Holy Spirit (13:24, 25). Again, the record of Samson is penned in such a way as recounting several highlighting events of his life. The stories are not typical biographical white-washings (such as we see today in many Christian

biographies), but tell the story of a real man, saved by God, but struggling with his flesh, often blinded by it. Chapter 14 recounts Samson's desire for the Philistine woman of Timnah. She is not Hebrew, and apparently the attraction to Samson is on a physical level only (14:2, 3, 7). He disregards the Mosaic precept to retain marriage among their own race (indeed, he was not only an Israelite, but a Nazirite), and disregards his parents' suggestion to look among the ranks of Israel for a wife--but even makes what appears to be a demand of his father that he should obtain her for him. This is reminiscent of Genesis 3:6 where Eve is overcome with the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh; and is a reminder of man's susceptibility to his own desires, regardless of the law of God. But the Lord was using the waywardness of Samson to prepare an affliction of His enemies, the Philistines. God prepares Samson, by putting a lion in his path. Matthew Henry comments, "Many decline doing the service they might do, because they know not their own strength. God lets Samson know what he could do in the strength of the Spirit of the Lord, that he might never be afraid to look the greatest difficulties in the face." David also had the same kind of preparation (I Samuel 17:36). As the account goes, Samson ends up killing and plundering 30 Philistines, having been beguiled by his former wife and enraged by her faithfulness to her own countrymen (14:17). Apparently, she is never fully consummated as his wife, for Philistine treachery is again in the way (she ends up being given to Samson's best man, vs. 20). Chapter 15 continues the story, showing the bitterness brought upon all

by Samson's disobedience. He loses his wife, she and her father are burned, the Philistines get no Wheat Chex or grape juice in the morning (15:5), (the method illustrating the ingenuity of inspired vengeance), and he strikes them "leg on thigh" with a great slaughter--again given unusual strength of the Lord, for the accomplishment of His purpose. The story goes on to show Samson completely detached from the nation he was raised up to deliver (he got no help from the 3,000 from Judah, so also, Christ stands alone as the Savior of the world).

God's faithfulness and patience again come on the scene as He provides water and refreshment for His judge. Through it all, though he cannot justify the opening cause of this drama, Samson does see enough to declare (15:18) that it is God who wrought His and Israel's deliverance. But his vision is blurred by his own hypocrisy as he now, in his own interest, decries the concept of falling "into the hands of the uncircumcised." Yet, he surely did praise the Lord some for he named the place where God provided water En-hakkore, "the spring of him who called."

Chapter 16 gives the second and final chapter in the account of Samson. We can't but feel some pity and affinity for this man, acquainted with God and His grace, used mightily by Him, and yet leading a tragis life, seemingly enslaved to his passions. We can only speculate to what degree God might have blessed the whole if Israel had Samson as its Judge, been able to secure more victory in his own walk with God. Christian leaders today should take note of this. Again Samson falls to sin, upon seeing

forbidden fruit (16:1). He sees a harlot, goes into her (as the Scripture so tactfully puts it), and walks right into a Gazite trap. By a rather raw display of his power, Samson puts the city gates onto the hill of Hebron, some distance away. Surely this scared off his would-be killers.

He just doesn't seem to learn, though, for now he becomes enraptured with a Sorekan woman (another foreigner) named Delilah. She agrees to sell him out to the Philistine lords for 1100 pieces of silver (the world will never, or at best rarely, side with the representatives of God, when financial gain is at stake). This final love story ends in defeat for Samson, as Delilah woos him into revealing that his hair, a sign of Nazirite consecration, and the sign of God's visitation of power is not the source, but the badge of his power given him by God. Since he allows her to have opportunity to shave him, the Lord removes his blessing of power evident for years in Samson. It is with God alone that all hope of spiritual power rests. Samson had so little protective regard for his appearance of Nazirite separation, that the Lord gave him over to his own design. The Lord's plan was not malicious nor vindictive. But He will not be made a folly of in the midst of his enemies. So He will shelve a servant first, before His truth is compromised.

Samson comes to grizzly end, having his eyes gouged out, and becoming a mere grinder in the prison, a living symbol of defeat and tragedy among the enemies of God, giving them cause to praise their false god, Dagon. But Samson's life ends in a great display of God's power, and though his desire seems to

be for vengeance for the loss of his sight, the reputation of the living God is what is truly avenged. The Scripture (16:30b) reads "so the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life." God's glory was evidenced in the end.

Though his life seems marked by tragedy and the bitter end of sin, Samson is marked out in Hebrews 11 with the other Old-Testament heroes as a man of faith. He is a riddle himself and a paradox (Henry), perhaps a type of God-provided savior, though what not to be in practice, rather than an example of how to live. Scripture is not limited to neatly-tied-up stories of heroes who never fall, never sin, and never end up defeated. The Christian life's end was ultimately decided by the atonement of Christ, but will in this life be determined by how the race is run. The story of Samson confirms that what we sow, we shall reap,

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