



# THE BOOK OF JUDGES

## AMAZING GRACE

### **What about Samson?**

1. Is there anything that stood out for you from the passage or message?
2. Anything that wasn't clear or needs clarification??

### **We are to see Samson covenantally**

God's covenant with his people Israel figures significantly throughout the Old Testament. It is first expressed explicitly with Abraham in Genesis, but then reaffirmed through Moses, the Prophet Samuel and King David. We understand God's covenant to be grounded in his grace alone by which he remained faithful to his people, despite their rebellion and idolatry. The New Covenant was made through the Lord Jesus by the shedding of his blood and is previewed in Jeremiah 31.

3. It is not uncommon to use the Samson narratives for teaching children how NOT to behave. What are the dangers of this moralistic approach to the Old Testament? What should we teach children about Samson?
4. Under the covenantal model, who is the hero of the account? (Read for example Judges 14:4)
5. What is the Bible's assessment of Samson (Hebrews 11:32)? How can this be reconciled with his character flaws? Which other 'heroes of faith' listed in Hebrews 11 have failings?

### **We are to see him as commissioned**

5. Why has Samson often been depicted as big and muscular? What problems does this cause?
6. Was faithfulness a required condition for Samson's strength?
7. How does 14:6 and 16:28 help us to keep things in the right perspective?

### **We are to see him ultimately**

8. Do you recall the significance of typology in the Bible? Refer to Peter's sermon notes to remind you.
9. What is the ultimate significance of Samson's dying act?
10. Recall and discuss these words from the sermon: *Samson brought down the gates of a pagan temple (great work) but Jesus smashed the very gates of hell (hallelujah)! The death of Christ is the death of death. The head of serpent was crushed and everlasting life secured for all God's people.*
11. Do you understand the significance of Samson more deeply now?

### *Prayer suggestions:*

- > *Praise God for faithfully keeping covenant for his undeserving people*
- > *Give thanks that our weaknesses do not stop him from using us (even greatly) in his kingdom*
- > *Ask for continuing understanding of the Bible's 'big picture'*

**Date:** 21 August 2016  
**Services:** 7.30, 9.30 (SB, T)  
**Series:** Judges – Amazing Grace  
**Title:** What about Samson?  
**Passage:** Judges 14:1-6 & 16:18-30 (readings for the church service)  
**Aim:** To show the key principles for correctly interpreting Samson.

## WHAT ABOUT SAMSON? (Judges 13-16)

Coming to a correct interpretation of Samson is not easy. He is one of the most enigmatic, characters in the whole Bible. He is the major Judge in the Book of Judges. One minute we see him acting foolishly, the next minute he is doing great things for the Kingdom of God. So what about Samson? How should we evaluate him?

Today I want to show you the pattern for safe Biblical interpretation. To understand Samson correctly we must ...

1. See him covenantally
2. See him commissioned
3. See him ultimately

### 1. See him covenantally

We need to avoid the common tendency to approach Scripture moralistically. Samson's sins, including sexual immorality, are candidly mentioned in the text. So readers find it easy to moralize. The moralistic approach goes like this:

*Look at Samson marrying a Philistine unbeliever - blatant disobedience. And there he is at a harlot's house ... bad boy! Then Samson keeps bad company with Delilah – beware, bad company corrupts good morals! And look at him tying foxes together – how cruel, ring the R.S.P.C.A. And with his eyes gouged out after breaking his vow, a moralist says – beware your sins will find you out ... he was asking for trouble!*

The moralistic approach leads to the conclusion that Samson is a negative example, not a positive one, an example of how we should *not* be rather than how we should be. It makes Samson an *anti-hero*, instead of a hero. Some people have even wondered if he will be in heaven! But this is **not** the way to interpret Scripture. Whether the moral lessons I have just mentioned are right or wrong is irrelevant to the issue of right interpretation of this book. This is not the author's purpose for devoting four chapters to Samson. (If four chapters of the Bible were written about your life, sins included, how would you look? Would people wonder if you were going to heaven?).

The correct way to approach the Old Testament is seen in the New Testament Book of Hebrews. It takes a broad covenantal view of the Old Testament. It shows the covenant acts of God in history, working mightily in his chosen people – ordinary, sinful people, who belong to God's covenant community. So Israel's priests and sacrifices, its judges and kings, its tabernacles and temples, even its real estate (Promised Land) are all interpreted *covenantally* not moralistically. What does it say about Samson?

It regards him as eminently fit for heaven, a hero of faith. He is a great champion of the covenant, an example of faith in action, part of that great cloud of witnesses. He is not perfect, but his life is truly characterized by allegiance to God, courage, and covenant keeping. *“And what more shall I*

say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies" (Hebrews 11:32-34).

Notice also the interpretive clue from the writer when Samson marries a Philistine. It was contrary to the Law of Moses (Deut. 7:3) and his parents were quite right to oppose it. But then the author says: *'His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel'* (14:4). This is not an endorsement of Samson's decision. He is telling us (readers) not to lose sight of the big picture by moralizing. Yes Samson was wrong here but Samson is not the main issue. God is! He rules and overrules in all events. He will use even Samson's disobedience as an occasion for advancing his covenant plans. Central to that covenant plan is the promised savior (seed of the woman). So God is preserving Israel until the great Son of David comes. This is not *mere* history – it is *covenant* history.

There is a big difference between making proper moral assessments and imposing a moralistic grid for interpretation. The former is impossible to miss - in the author's nearly monotonous words ... *"Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord"*. But for all his weaknesses the New Testament tells us Samson was a man of faith (see the evidences next week).

## 2. See him commissioned

What is your mental image of Samson? He is often depicted as muscle-bound, as if his strength was human. But the book of Judges disagrees, plainly and repeatedly. Samson's great acts of strength are due to the power of God the Holy Spirit. Three times we are explicitly told that, for example: *"The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat"* (14:6). At the end Samson himself acknowledged where his strength came from: *"O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more"* (16:28).

Keep that in mind as we consider the lion attack (14:1-6). On his way to live in Timnah, Samson got as far as the vineyards when suddenly a lion came charging upon him. Verse 5 literally says it was *"a savage young lion."* That means it was at the peak of its lethal strength. Its teeth and claws were sharp and strong. Samson was completely unarmed (verse 6). What was in his mind at that moment?

Like any normal man, he'd assume the worst. He certainly was not thinking - *'Big mistake pussycat! Your nasty attack leaves me no choice. I'm going to tear you apart like a rag doll!'* Unarmed men (no matter how strong) do not survive the charge and mauling of a savage lion. But suddenly, something occurred that had never happened before – the Spirit of God came mightily upon him. Divine power rushed upon Samson, and he found himself doing something only **God** could do – something he would never have believed – ripping a lion to pieces with his bare hands! I'm not surprised to read *"But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done."* Why not? Who would believe his story?

*'Hey Mum and Dad, I was walking in the vineyard today when an Alpha-male lion attacked me ... but no worries, I tore it from limb to limb with my bare hands, and hurled the carcass down near the Chardonnay vines. Check it out!'* Even seeing the lion's body would still leave them skeptical ... a team of 50 men could not do that. Moreover, Samson himself would have been utterly amazed. *Wow! What have I done? What is happening to me?* He hadn't read the book of Judges! But from our privileged position we can see the outworking of the author's clue (13:24-25):

*"The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan".* The boy has now grown into a man and it was time for him to begin his role as Judge-Deliverer. What we see here is God 'commissioning' Samson, starting him off in the work ahead of him. Empowering Samson to save himself from a lion was an unforgettable token from God that he would empower Samson to save Israel from the Philistines. This day would come to mind with every new danger he faced from the Philistines. God was with him to deliver Israel. What about Samson? See him covenantally, see him commissioned, and ...

### 3. See him ultimately

Is *this* version of Samson the only one there is? No! Samson is part of a larger paradigm (though he could not have known that). He is a pattern or preview of a much greater Samson. In Biblical studies this is called *Typology* ... where a person, event, or institution in the Old Testament prefigures a much greater reality in the New Testament. Examples:

1) The judgement of the entire human race in Noah's flood prefigures judgement of the entire human race when Christ returns: *"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man"* (Matt 24:37).

2) For 40 years Israel survived on Manna, *"bread from heaven"* (Exodus 16:4), but that great gift was a mere preview of Jesus who said *"your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever"* (John 6:49-51).

3) The unblemished lambs sacrificed for the sins of God's people are ultimately seen in Jesus ... *"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29).

Likewise, Samson is typical, a preview of a larger paradigm. The main clue for this is the description of Samson's death. After being mocked and humiliated ... *'Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived'* (16:30). Samson's greatest victory came in his death.

Have you seen that paradigm again? Does it remind you of another man, a savior greater than Samson, a man who was mocked and humiliated and whose greatest victory occurred in his death? A man who *"was numbered with transgressors"* (died with the Philistines)? Yes ... it is Jesus Christ. Samson brought down the gates of a pagan temple (great work) but Jesus smashed the very gates of hell (hallelujah)! The death of Christ is *the death of death*. The head of serpent was crushed and everlasting life secured for all God's people.

I hope this message has helped you to interpret Samson correctly ... but how sad (even pointless) if someone understands Samson yet is not one of God's people like Samson. So I urge you to see him covenantally and ask yourself 'am I also one of God's covenant people?' See him commissioned by the Holy Spirit, and ask if you have that same Spirit. See him ultimately connected to Christ and ask if you are connected to Jesus by faith. If so, you are blessed forever. If not, you forfeit everything, even if you gain the whole world. If that describes anyone here let me urge you to rectify it. And here is good news from God who cannot lie ... *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you"* (Matt 7:7).