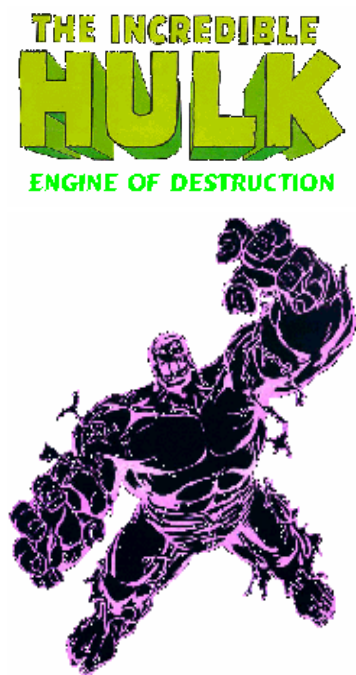


SAMSON: SAVIOUR OR PSYCOPATH?

Judges 13-16

The next super-hero movie in the production pipeline is The Incredible Hulk. Starring Australian actor Eric Bana, The Incredible Hulk is the story of a scientist who, after exposure to too much radiation, gains a superhuman, out of control alter ego. He's a genuine monster who makes Superman and Spiderman look like schoolboys. But after reading the story of Samson, you may find even the Hulk a bit tame. At least he's a normal person when he's not annoyed. Samson is a bizarre character through and through. It is hard to believe God would choose to use someone as psychopathic as him. But not only is Samson a judge, in many ways he's representative of all the other Judges. His story draws together many of the themes that we've seen developing through the book and takes us to the heart of the problem with Israel.



Read Judges 13

1. Do you notice any differences between the start of the Samson story and the start of the Gideon and Jephthah stories?

Background briefing

Have a look at the laws about Nazirites in Numbers 6

2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a **Nazirite**, 3 he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. 4 As long as he is a **Nazirite**, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins. 5 "During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to the LORD is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long. 6 Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go near a dead body. 7 Even if his own father or mother or brother or sister dies, he must not make himself ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of his separation to God is on his head. 8 Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to the LORD. 9 "If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing--the seventh day. 10 Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 11 The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head. 12 He must dedicate himself to the LORD for the period of his separation and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation.

2. What is the primary thing that's supposed to characterise Samson as a Nazirite?

3. Can you see any parallels between Samson and Israel in God's purpose for his life?

Unlike in previous stories in Judges, the Israelites do not cry out for help. God takes the initiative and prepares a rescuer for himself. As a man who is to be specially set apart as a Nazirite, Samson parallels Israel, a nation set apart for God.

Read Judges 14:1-15:8

3. What do you think of Samson's interest in the Philistine woman?

4. How does Samson's interest in Philistine women mirror Israel as a whole?

5. The story about the honey from the lion is a bit strange. What implications would this have for Samson's Nazirite vows?

6. What motivates Samson's slaughter of the Philistines? Is he concerned for the same things God is concerned for?

As a Nazirite, Samson is a complete failure. Both in his relationships with Philistine women and in his contact with corpses he fundamentally breaks his vows. In his relationship with the Philistine women he also mirrors Israel, a nation committed to following Philistine gods. His slaughter of the Philistines is in no way related to any concern for God's plans. It is pure revenge.

Read Judges 15:9-20

7. Who do the men of Judah side with? Does this give any insight into why they didn't ask for a deliverer at the beginning of the story?

Read Judges 16:1-22

8. How committed is Samson to fighting the Philistines?

9. What is Samson really interested in?

10. Is there a reason beyond being tired of Delilah's nagging which motivates Samson to tell Delilah his secret? (If he loses his strength how would his life and responsibilities change?)

11. How does Samson's experience with Delilah give a picture of Israel's experience?

Samson is not really committed to fighting the Philistines at all. He wants to settle down to a life of domestic bliss with Delilah. It is almost as if he hopes telling Delilah his secret will allow him to do this. Once again Samson is a picture of the Israelites. They don't want to get rid of the original inhabitants of their land and serve God alone. They want to settle down in peaceful co-habitation, sharing their gods. The fight is just too hard.

12. What note of expectation is there in v 22?

Read Judges 16:23-31

13. From v 23-24, what are the Philistines celebrating?

14. Why does Samson want to knock down the temple?

15. What statement is God making by allowing Samson to knock down the Temple?

In the end, God won't tolerate rivals. And so as the party for Dagon gets under way, God gate-crashes and shows in an unmistakable way that Dagon has no power. But, as it has been all the way through this story God defeats the pagans in spite of Samson and Israel, not through them. All Samson is doing is getting revenge for his eyes. But God is showing his supremacy over Dagon and the Philistines.

16. In what ways are we like Samson and the Israelites?

17. Does God save us through our own efforts or in spite of our own efforts? Can you think of any New Testament passages that help us understand how we compare to Israel?