

Dangerous Liasons: Delilah's Story

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Details for meditation:

The annunciation:

the narrator has Manoah's wife changed the announcement from the angel when she reports it to Manoah:

Judges 13:3–5 (NASB95):

...5 *“For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; **and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.**”*

Judges 13:7 (NASB95): 7 *“But he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb **to the day of his death.**’ ”*

Of course, this rephrasing could be taken to mean “his entire life” but given that the narrator is considerably removed in time from the events, and that every detail is purposeful, we the careful readers can take this deletion from the prophecy as foreboding. Indeed the day that his nazirite vow ended was in a sense the day that he died. This tragic end instead of delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Vineyards and Lion

Nazirites are not supposed to go near grapes. The lion coming out of the vineyard is reminiscent of sin, the croucher that Cain is supposed to master. Empowered by the Spirit, we see Samson defeat the croucher in the place of temptation and folly, the vineyard, and everything is looking good for Samson. Things go downhill from there, and we learn what kind of people Samson is dealing with. The humiliated philistines take revenge on the Timnite woman and her father, by burning them alive. This is the risk of becoming Samson's wife.

The Young Goat

Judges 15:1 (NASB95): Samson Burns Philistine Crops

1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, "I will go in to my wife in her room." But her father did not let him enter.

Genesis 38:16–17 (NASB95): 16 So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, "Here now, let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

17 He said, therefore, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." She said, moreover, "Will you give a pledge until you send it?"

The Fire Motif

Judges 13:20, 14:15, 14:19, 15:5, 15:6, 15:14, 16:9, culminating in the rubble (figurative fire) of the Philistine mansion 16:30

Water from the rock motif

Judges 15:18–19 (NASB95): 18 Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the Lord and said, "**You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now shall I die of thirst** and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"

19 But God **split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it**. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

The Narrative arc marked by the three women

(Sham) Marriage to the Timnite, philistine, part of God's design. The lion may have been a warning to stay focused on bringing judgement on the philistines, but Samson's lust and pride derailed him.

Prostitute in Gaza - Samson's lust brings him to a turning point. This was not "of the LORD" and ended up with an ambush. No mention of the Spirit rushing on Samson here.

Falls in love with Delilah - totally ignores his calling to rescue Israel from the Philistines, comes to his ultimate demise.

The Unceremonious Termination of the Nazirite Vow

Numbers 6:18 (NASB95): 18 ‘The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head of hair at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings.

Judges 16:19 (NASB95): 19 She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him.

The ambush in the vineyard

Judges 14:5 (NASB95): 5 Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him.

Judges 21:20–21 (NASB95): 20 And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, “Go and lie in wait in the vineyards,
21 and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

The Debt Money used to set up idols, and the end of the Judges rest

beginning of chaos

After the tragic conclusion of the Delilah arc, we see that some of the blood money is used to set up cultic worship of idols. There are no more Judge stories after this, and it is chaos as we the readers are told to look out for a king in Israel. The use of the phrase *rest for the land* evokes creation and new life language (see Exodus 20:11, 33:14). The scroll of the judges is the gradual de-creation of Israel because of their chaos-inducing decisions.

“Right in their own eyes”

Judges 13:1 (ESV): The Birth of Samson

13 And the people of **Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord**, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

Judges 14:3 (ESV): 3 But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for **she is right in my eyes.**”

Judges 14:7 (ESV): 7 Then he went down and talked with the woman, and **she was right in Samson's eyes.**

Judges 16:21 (ESV): 21 And the Philistines seized him and **gouged out his eyes** and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.
28 Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, **that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.**"

Judges 17:6 (ESV): 6 In those days there was **no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**

Forty Years Motif

From the first Judge, Othniel, the standard is set at 40 years.

Judges 3:11 (NASB95): 11 Then **the land had rest forty years.** And **Othniel** the son of Kenaz died.

Judges 5:1 (NASB95): The Song of Deborah and Barak

1 Then **Deborah and Barak** the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying . . . 31 "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord;
But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might."
And **the land was undisturbed for forty years.**

Judges 8:28 (NASB95): Forty Years of Peace

28 So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And **the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.**

Judges 13:1 (NASB95): Philistines Oppress Again

1 Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that **the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.**

Judges 15:20 (NASB95): 20 So **he judged Israel twenty years** in the days of the Philistines.

Judges 16:30–31 (NASB95): 30 And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.

31 Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had **judged Israel twenty years.**

Samson, the last Judge, only does 20, and what is recorded gives much more air time to his love life.

Questions to consider, discuss or journal.

1. Has your view of Delilah been “updated” by this article? If so, how?
2. Reflecting on if your view of Delilah has changed, do you feel that your previous portrait of Delilah was colored by popular culture, Sunday school, or perhaps some of both?
3. What are some of the literary features from the Samson story and the larger Judges scroll that interest you?
4. In the ancient TaNaKh arrangement of the Hebrew bible (“the Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms/writings”), Judges is included in the middle section, among the prophets. We usually lump the Judges scroll into something like “history” when we try to apply modern categories to these ancient works. Thinking about the function of a prophetic scroll, and the prophets in general, how do you see the scroll of Judges fitting in with this arrangement? In what way(s) is the Judges scroll prophetic?
5. Samson is often viewed as a hero of the Bible, at least in the popular imagination. His empowerment by the Spirit seems to confirm this status, and he does get “honorable mention” in Hebrews 11. When the Bible portrays male characters engaging in destructive sexual behaviors, do we find ourselves more likely to overlook their bad behavior compared to someone like Delilah? What does this tendency reveal about us? What does this reveal about God and his commitment to partnering with humans as his images in the world?