

JUDGES 16:21-31 | SAMSON'S FINAL FEAT

Verses 21-23 - see session 11

Verses 24-28 - see session 12

VERSE 29 -

As in verse 26, the text goes out of its way to let the reader aware of the architectural weakness upon which samson was about to capitalize.

The narrative of Samson bringing down a building by displacing two central pillars, as described in the Biblical account, finds echoes in archaeological discoveries in the ancient Levant. In particular, ruins of Philistine temples have been unearthed which exhibit a design reliant on two central pillars for structural support, akin to the edifice described in the Samson narrative.

Below are the archaeological evidences from different regions:

1. **Tel Qasile and Tel Miqne (Ancient Ekron):** Temples excavated at Tel Qasile, located in northern Tel Aviv, and Tel Miqne, which is ancient Ekron situated 21 miles south of Tel Aviv, were found to share a distinctive architectural feature - their roofs were upheld by two central pillars. These pillars were fabricated from wood and were positioned on stone support bases, serving as critical structural elements of the temples¹
2. **Ancient Ekron:** In a separate excavation some 20 miles from the Philistine site of ancient Ekron, archaeologist Trude Dothan uncovered another temple during the 1990s. This temple, too, showcased the same architectural characteristic of having two central pillars supporting the roof. It's noteworthy to mention that the city of Gath, where the account of Samson is believed to have transpired, has yet to be excavated due to a modern city overlaying the ancient remains.²
3. **Philistine Temple at Tel Qasile (11th century B.C.):** In 1972, archaeologists unearthed a Philistine temple from the 11th century B.C. at Tel Qasile near Tel Aviv. Within the main hall of this temple, two round stone bases were discovered, which originally served as the foundations for wooden pillars supporting the temple's roof.³
4. **Hall with Two Wooden Pillars:** In a publication, Wood describes a hall with dimensions of 18 1/2 feet by 23 1/2 feet, wherein the roof was originally supported by two wooden pillars. These pillars were set on round, well-crafted stone bases, positioned along a central axis, aligning with the depiction of the temple in the Samson narrative.⁴

These archaeological findings resonate with the biblical account of Samson and the two central pillars, providing a tangible backdrop to the narrative. The recurring architectural motif of two central pillars in the temples of the ancient Levant underscores the plausibility of the Samson narrative within its historical and geographical context.

The pillars are invariably pictured as stone pillars in art, but it is believed that there were stone bases with cedar posts on the bases, with only the weight of the building holding the pillars in place. This makes the Samson scenario entirely plausible.

VERSE 30 -

¹ Christian Answers. "Samson - Does archaeology shed any light on the story of Samson pulling ...", christiananswers.net. Accessed on Oct. 20, 2023. <https://christiananswers.net/q-abr/abr-a006.html>

² United Church of God. "God, Science and the Bible: Archaeology supports story of Samson and ...", ucg.org. Accessed on Oct. 20, 2023. <https://www.ucg.org/the-good-news/god-science-and-the-bible-archaeology-supports-story-of-samson-and-philistine-temple>

³ National Catholic Register. "Did Samson Really Destroy the Philistine Temple With His Bare Hands?", ncregister.com, 1972. Accessed on Oct. 20, 2023. <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/samson-and-temple-of-dagon-historically-plausible>

⁴ Associates for Biblical Research. "Between the Pillars - Revisiting Samson & the House of Dagon", biblearchaeology.org. Accessed on Oct. 20, 2023. <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/chronological-categories/israel-in-the-era-of-the-judges/3800-between-the-pillars-revisiting-samson-and-the-house-of-dagon>

Samson's final prayer is to "die with the Philistines." It is a prayer of faith in that he is confident in the death of the Philistines. It is also a prayer of sacrifice and repentance, as he gives his own life to bring about the destruction of the enemy.

According to the account, Samson "bowed himself with all his might." There are different interpretations of this action, with some suggesting that he pulled the pillars inward and others proposing that he pushed them outward. Regardless of the specific action, the result was the collapse of the "house," causing more casualties than all of Samson's previous exploits combined. It is worth noting that the Hebrew word translated as "house" has a broad meaning, similar to the English word, and can refer to a family (as in the next verse), nation, temple, or common home.

VERSE 31 -

The burial of Samson demonstrates the love and respect he received, even in light of his failures. It is unfortunate that Samson's life is often remembered more for Delilah than for anything else. Yet, through his physical strength, intellectual vigor, and spiritual commitment, Samson served as a judge for Israel for twenty years, delivering them from forty years of Philistine oppression. For this, he should be remembered with grace.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE LIFE OF SAMSON

SAMSON'S PLACE IN SCRIPTURE

Samson's narrative is indeed unique in the Book of Judges for its length and detail. It spans four chapters, from Judges 13 to 16, and provides not just an account of his deeds but also a more in-depth look into his life, personality, and flaws. This is unlike other judges such as Ehud, Deborah, or Gideon, whose stories are comparatively shorter and more focused on specific deeds or military campaigns.

For example:

- Ehud's story is primarily contained within Judges 3:12-30.
- Deborah and Barak are featured in Judges 4-5, but the narrative also includes a song that is not strictly about them, and the text is shared between multiple figures.
- Gideon has a relatively extended narrative in Judges 6-8, but even then, it's shorter and less personal compared to Samson's tale.

Outside of Judges 13-16, Samson is only mentioned one other time, but it is in the "hall of faith," in Hebrews 11:32, where he is mentioned alongside men such as Gideon, David, and Samuel.

SAMSON IN CULTURE

The length and detail of Samson's story have made it a subject of extensive interpretation and discussion, not just in Jewish tradition but also in Christian thought, art, and literature. The complexity and multi-dimensionality of his character, coupled with the dramatic events of his life, seem to have captured the imagination of religious scholars, artists, and laypeople alike for generations.

Here are just a few of highlights of the cultural significance of Samson.

LITERATURE:

1. **John Milton's "Samson Agonistes"**: This 17th-century tragic closet drama delves into the final days of Samson, offering a nuanced psychological portrait.
2. **"The Riddle of Samson" by Ze'ev Jabotinsky**: This novel explores the psychological facets of Samson, dissecting his strengths and weaknesses.

ART:

1. **"Samson and Delilah" by Peter Paul Rubens:** This Baroque painting captures the pivotal moment when Delilah cuts Samson's hair, leading to his downfall.
2. **"Samson and the Lion" Sculptures:** Various artists, including Gian Lorenzo Bernini, have depicted Samson wrestling with a lion, a testament to his legendary strength.

MUSIC:

1. **"Samson" by Handel:** This oratorio lends musical grandeur to the biblical narrative, emphasizing its emotional and spiritual dimensions.
2. **Popular Songs:** Modern interpretations in popular music, like Regina Spektor's "Samson," continue to draw on the story's rich themes.

FILM AND TELEVISION:

1. **"Samson and Delilah" (1949):** This classic Hollywood film interprets the biblical narrative with cinematic flair, featuring Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr in the leading roles.
2. **"Samson" (2018):** A recent film adaptation that attempts to bring a modern sensibility to the ancient story.
3. **Documentaries:** Numerous documentaries have sought to delve into the historical and archaeological elements of the Samson narrative.

DRAMA/THEATER:

1. **Plays:** Theatrical renditions, both modern and classical, often focus on the relationship between Samson and Delilah, exploring themes of love, betrayal, and redemption.
2. **Opera:** Camille Saint-Saëns's "Samson et Dalila" brings the story to the operatic stage, emphasizing its dramatic elements.

Through these various mediums, the story of Samson continues to be a vibrant part of cultural discourse, illustrating its enduring relevance and the multiplicity of ways it can be interpreted and understood.

POLITICS

It has often been reported that during a critical moment in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when Israel's existence was in jeopardy, Prime Minister Golda Meir phoned President Nixon in the middle of the night. Her plea for help included a reminder of the story of Samson, particularly its conclusion. She reportedly told the President that she was willing to be like Samson, sacrificing herself to save her nation. This was a thinly veiled threat to use nuclear weapons against Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and other Arab nations that posed a threat to Israel's survival. In response, President Nixon immediately initiated 'Operation Nickel Grass,' sending supplies and materials to the besieged nation and altering the course of the war. In Operation Nickel Grass, 22,325 tons of tanks, artillery, and ammunition were sent to Israel in a 32-day period. This action led to OPEC enacting the 1973 oil embargo that drastically shaped the 1970s and future energy policy as well as relations with Arab countries.

SAMSON AS A TYPE?

Some have seen Samson as a type of Christ, noting the similarities. Both Samson and Christ had their births announced by angels, were anointed by the Spirit, betrayed by someone close to them, and died sacrificial deaths that brought hope to their respective nations. However, I believe that the argument for typology falls short with Samson, as there are too many aspects of his life that do not foreshadow the work of Jesus Christ.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The study of Samson has given us insight into the human condition politically, spiritually, and psychologically. We have seen a powerful reminder of how God can use flawed people for His plans. His grace covers human weakness, but also calls us to sobriety and faithfulness with the gifts we are given. Samson's life story encourages us to honestly assess our own strengths and blind spots, humbly depending on God's mercy and wisdom to properly use all He has entrusted to us for His glory.