

Lesson 8: Endurance



Introduction

During the time of the Judges, God raised up local leaders to defend the Israelites from their Canaanite enemies. Chief among them were the Philistines, with whom the proud and arrogant Samson spent his life in conflict, resulting in his death.

Read: Judges 16:4-31

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

Old Testament

New Testament

Where in the Bible?

Judges is the book of the Old Testament that follows Joshua.

The Old Testament: History

The historical books of Joshua and Judges include some of the most violent stories in Scripture. These two books, as well as the Book of Ruth, are all set in the time prior to the Israelite Monarchy.

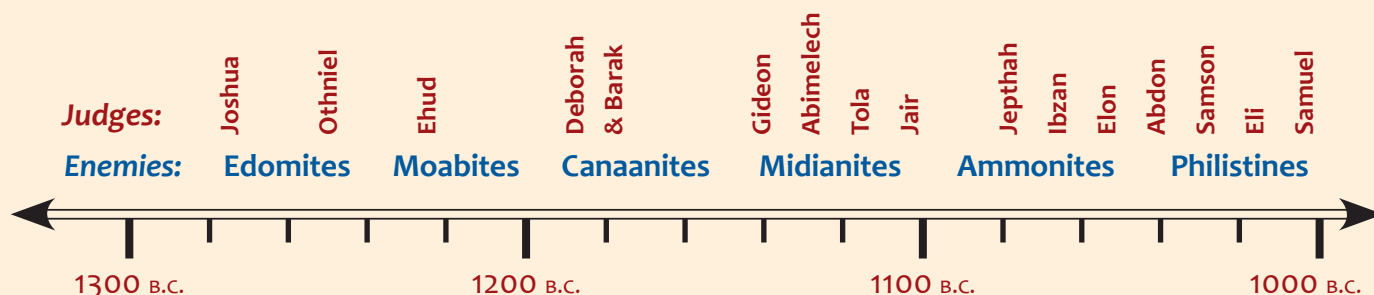
Biblical Time Period: Judges

In Bible storybooks, Samson is often portrayed as a kind of “superhero” — the image of a man of faith who was strong and brave. The real Samson was not such a paragon of virtue. The Bible does say he had great strength, but it also describes him as an arrogant bully who caused trouble and conflict just for the fun of it.

Samson did not keep the peace but provoked fights with the nearby Philistines. Often involved in affairs with foreign women — like Delilah in today’s story — Samson’s lack of self-control and belligerent attitude were what led to his demise.

When in Time?

During the time of the Judges, the Israelites were harassed and oppressed by many different local tribes in Canaan (shown on the timeline below). During this time, God raised up a number of warrior judges, listed below in chronological order by the approximate date they lived.



Discuss: Judges 16:4-31

1. The Israelites and Philistines were enemies. Why did Samson (an Israelite) let Delilah (a Philistine) get close to him? What did Samson want from her?
2. The Philistines saw this as an opportunity to get the advantage over Samson. What did they ask Delilah to do? What did they promise her?
3. Why did Samson lie and keep putting off Delilah's questions? According to verses 15-17, why did he finally give in and tell Delilah the source of his strength? Have you ever done something wrong because you stopped resisting?
4. Go back and read about Samson's origins in Judges 13:1-5. From what you see here, what does it mean to be a Nazirite? (Look this up online or in a Bible dictionary for further information.)
5. Do you know other stories from Samson's life? Why were the Philistines so angry with him? Skim through Judges 14-15. What impression do you get of Samson's personality and temperament?
6. Did Samson's strength come from his hair, or did it come from something else? After a self-centered life, at what point did Samson finally realize that he needed God (v. 28-31)?
7. Read Isaiah 40:28b-31. Whom does the prophet say is giver of true strength? In what ways is the strength described here more than just physical?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. As Christians, why are we able to admit our own weaknesses, as Paul did here? Who was speaking to Paul in verse 9? On whom do we rely when we feel powerless? Why is this greater than any power we have on our own?

Where in the World

With the collapse of what is known as the Bronze Age (c. 1200 B.C.) and the rise of the Iron Age, there was a great vacuum of power which was exploited by people in a position to do so. The Philistines were part of a larger group (known as the Sea Peoples) that had invaded the land of Canaan and gained a foothold along the coast. They fought intermittent wars with the Israelites over the next several hundred years.

The map shows the area where the Philistines lived (shaded orange), along with the location of some of their major settlements (shown in red).

- a. Samson grew up in the Israelite town of Zorah, very near Philistine-controlled lands.
- b. Circle the city of Gaza, where our story for today takes place. This was where Samson was imprisoned and where he died by bringing down the house on the Philistines.

