

## **Samson's Call**

### **Summer Quarter: God's Urgent Call**

#### **Unit 1: Called to be Strong**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of June 25, 2017**

**By Rev. Denise Walton**

**Lesson Scripture:** Judges 13:1-7, 24-25

**Background Scripture:** Judges 13-16

**Key Verse:** You are pregnant and will give birth to a son. Don't allow a razor to shave his head, because the boy is going to be a Nazarite for God from birth. He'll be the one who begins Israel's rescue from the power of the Philistines. (Judges 13:5)

**Purpose:** To remember that God created each person for a purpose that may involve circumstances not of our choosing.

#### **A praying mother and father**

The story of Samson's call began before he was born. Samson's mother and father were faithful people of God who desired to have a child. The couple had not conceived but God was about to do a new thing in their lives. Samson's mother received a visit from a messenger from God. The instructions were clear; she was pregnant and was to follow very strict guidelines for her care and the care of the unborn child. After sharing with her husband and a subsequent encounter with God's messenger, the couple set about to raise the child in the ways of God. Even before he was born, Samson was called.

It is important for us as students of the scripture to understand just what God was calling Samson to do for the Israelites. According to Judges 13, the Israelites were disobedient and God had delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years. As you take a look at the larger scope of the Book of Judges, note the level of destructive disobedience within the relationship between Israel and God. From the time of Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah and the many judges in between, Israel has grown increasingly worse in turning away from God, being oppressed, repenting and being delivered. Not only has the behavior worsened, but the moral fabric of the judges sent to deliver Israel has grown worse over the years.

We can be assured that God kept his promise and Samson's parents brought him up in the faith and taught him the ways of the Lord. Samson, though called at birth, tragically responds to the call of God with Samson's will first and then God's call. As readers, we witness Samson's life choices and his death. In the end, God was glorified and Samson helped to liberate the Israelites from Philistines. (Judges 16)

**Let's review the entire Book of Judges and be reminded of what Samson was called to be as a judge:**

### **Background: The Book of Judges**

In the book, "People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible," authors Henry Jackson Flanders, Jr., Robert Wilson Crapps, and David Anthony Smith provide an overview of the book of Judges. This is helpful as readers begin to understand the term "judges" and the relational impact of judges to Israel's history in relation to God.

The book of Judges is a deuteronomistic interpretation of Israel's history during the days of confederacy. The historian (writer of the text) uses stories about heroism of various local military leaders to emphasize Yahweh as the deliverer of Israel during times of distress. The deeds of the heroes are told through the literary device of a cycle that reflects the Deuteronomist's understanding of Israel's judgment based on infidelity to Yahweh and Israel's blessing based on Yahweh's faithfulness.

#### *What is **Deuteronomistic History**?*

The **Deuteronomistic History (DH)** is a modern theoretical construct holding that behind the present forms of the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (the Former Prophets in the Hebrew canon) there was a single literary work.

#### **What is the tribal confederacy?**

Bible scholars differ in the definition and extent of religious and socio-political involvement within the 12 tribes of Israel. However, some common themes appear when discussing the tribal confederacy. There was some organization of the 12 tribes of Israel into a loose tribal confederacy held together by a religious confession of Yahweh as the one and only true God. "The confederacy gave Israel a political-life that lasted for around 200 years... Later the kingship, which replaced confederacy was possible only because in confederacy the tribes had been loosely, but significantly, united as one people under God, Yahweh, with the judge as the symbol of unity." "People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible," pg. 245-246.

#### **What is the literary cycle discussed in the previous section?**

There are four major pieces to the writers understanding of the literary cycle found in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Each part of the cycle should be viewed as matters of relationship between God and God's people. In addition, there are relational matters within Israel and between other groups of people.

- Apostasy – The Israelites fall away from Yahweh (God).
- Oppression – Yahweh (God) permits enemies to fall upon the Israelites.
- Repentance – Under oppression, the Israelites repent and call upon Yahweh.

- Deliverance – Yahweh (God) calls out a leader and delivers the Israelites.
- The cycle then begins all over again. This is the central theme running through the book of Judges.

### ***What is the Shophet?***

“People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible” provides a basic definition of the term “judge.” The name judge is used for a type of military leader in Hebrew. In contemporary English language, “judge” refers to “someone who decides or renders a verdict.” However, in Hebrew the term judge translated *shophet* means “deliverer” or “one who sets things right” or “one who rules.”

*Although not elected, the shophetim of Israel were both civil and military rulers over those who acknowledged their leadership. They should not be confused with the “judge of Israel,” who was a sanctuary official. The shophets were military heroes. Their status was temporary and not subject to inheritance. They acquired and held their position by virtue of the fact that “the Spirit of Yahweh was upon them” – that is, they were charismatics.*

As you read Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, the shophetim of Israel has a basic cycle with some variations to details in the story from one person to the next person. (The cycle for the shophet taken from “People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible”)

- Dire oppression of sinful Israel by a non-Israelite enemy
- A commoner appears endowed with the spirit of Yahweh (God)
- The charismatic leader summons one or more tribes in Yahweh’s battle
- Yahweh delivers the Israelites from their oppression
- The ultimate proof of the shophet then becomes Yahweh’s victory in the battle.

### **Samson’s Call**

Samson had a large responsibility as a judge that required him to focus on God’s will and be obedient to God’s instruction. In many ways, his personal life and poor personal choices was a distraction to his call. The scripture indicates that Samson’s family never gave up on him and even in death he was brought home to rest. “His brothers and father’s entire household traveled down, carried him back up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Monoah.” (Judges 16:31)

Samson reminds me not to give up on those who choose their own path. God can use us at any stage of our journey that His will and purpose be glorified!

Glory, hallelujah!

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