

First Responders Week Three- Samson and Deborah

Day One

Before Saul became king, judges ruled the nation of Israel. This period occurred after the Israelites entrance into the promised land and Joshua's death. A repeating pattern of idolatry, judgement, (God usually used an enemy nation) repentance and restoration loops through ancient Israel's history and certainly during the time of the judges. The book of Judges contains some of the most violent scenes in all of Scripture.

The stories of Samson and Deborah are part of that bloody history. Both led Israelites to victory over their enemies but for Samson, the final victory came at an extremely high price.

Read: Judges 13:1-5, 24, Judges 14-entire chapter (it's a great story and reads fast!)

1. How did God specifically set apart Samson from other Israelites?
2. Make a list of character qualities that describe Samson.
3. How did his first marriage end?
4. Chapter 13 ends by letting us know that "the Spirit of the Lord stirred" Samson. As you consider all of Samson's actions and attitudes in Ch. 14, which ones do you think the Holy Spirit inspired and which ones weren't?
5. When someone betrays you, how does that make you feel? Do those feelings tempt you to act in a certain way?

Verse to ponder: No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Prayer: Jesus remind me, when I feel betrayed, angry, that you know precisely how I feel and will provide me with an escape route so that I don't sin while I'm still hurting.

Day Two- Samson and Deborah

Read: Judges 15- entire chapter (this is a tough R-for-violence read, but God chose to put it in his word which means it's important for us to understand his purposes in doing so.)

1. In verses 3-5 would you describe Samson as reacting or responding to the news about his wife's remarriage? Explain.
2. How did the Israelites behave when they heard about Samson's judgement on the Philistines for killing his wife? What does this tell you about their opinion of this judge?
3. How do you think God viewed Samson's subsequent battle with the Philistines in verses 14-15? Do you think the Holy Spirit inspired these actions? How did God answer Samson's cry for help, afterwards?
4. Can you make some inferences about what life might have been like for the Israelites under Samson's 20-year rule? Why do you think God allowed Samson to rule for so long? (Hint in Day One intro)
5. After his victory, Samson nearly dies of thirst. God provides water from a rock, just like he did for Moses. Can you think of a time when God allowed you a victory, then shortly after, something smaller nearly took you down? What was your water from the rock?

To ponder: -"With that simple minded faith which was so characteristic of Samson, who was nothing but a big child, he turned his eye to his heavenly Father, and cried, 'O Jehovah, thou hast given me this great deliverance, and now shall I die for thirst? After all that thou hast done for me, shall the uncircumcised rejoice over me because I die for want of a drink of water?' Such confidence had he, that God would interpose on his behalf." (Spurgeon)

Prayer: Thank you God, that you are always my Father and will always provide for me regardless of how immature my faith might be.

Day Three- Samson and Deborah

Read: Judges 16 -entire chapter

Another tough read, yet it's inclusion in the scriptures compels us, right?

Key background material on Gaza, where the beginning of this chapter takes place:

Gaza lay on the sunny Mediterranean coast in the heart of Philistine territory. It was probably a popular vacation site for compromising Israelites as well as the Philistines. Perhaps Samson went there to enjoy the amusements that flourish in such places and to show off his physique on the "muscle beach" of his day. As the judge assigned to destroy the Philistines, his presence there for recreational purposes was inappropriate to say the least. It also reveals his great self-confidence since after 20 years of judging Israel he was undoubtedly a wanted man in Philistia. In contrast, Samuel, who was only a few years younger than Samson, was at this time ministering as a faithful circuit-riding judge." (Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable)

1. Using the background material and the first 22 verses of chapter 16, write a description of Samson's character at this point.
2. What sad fact about Samson's relationship with God is revealed in verse 22?
3. Most of the time Samson reveals himself as a reactor, not a responder. Do you think his final act on earth was a reaction or a response? Explain your choice.
4. Does it surprise you to know that Samson turns up in the Bible's Faith Hall of Fame? (Hebrews 11:32) Considering all you've learned about Samson's character, what does this reference in Hebrews say to you about God's view of your character and your faith?

Prayer: Lord, may my humility and faith grow together equally, that you may use me for many years.

Day Four- Samson and Deborah

Deborah's name means "bee" in Hebrew. Names had great meaning in Hebrew culture. As you read Deborah's story, ponder why God might have impressed her parents to choose that name.

Read: Judges 4:1-10

1. What was the status of the nation of Israel at the beginning of Deborah's rule as judge?
2. Describe the way Deborah carried out her duties as judge. Compare this to Samson's style.
3. What does it say about Deborah's standing in Israel that King Barak came as soon as she summoned him? Compare that to the way you think people felt about Samson.
4. In verse nine, Deborah is confronted with a challenge and makes a quick decision. Explain why you think this was a reaction or a response.
5. When life-changing, have-to-be-decided-right-now, decisions come at you, what happens? What do you feel? How do you decide? Would you categorize yourself in those moments primarily as a reactor or a responder? Why?

Prayer: Thank you God, that you already exist in my future, and nothing comes at me that hasn't passed through your hands first. Thank you for providing all my needs for every challenge, no matter how unexpected it might be

Day Five- Samson and Deborah

Read: Judges 4:11-24, Judges 5:1-5

1. Who heard the word from the Lord and declared Israel needed to go to battle with Sisera's army? Who obeyed that word? What character qualities are revealed in both Deborah and Barak?
2. Paraphrase, in your own words, what happened in the battle between Sisera's army and Israel.
3. Recall Deborah's prophetic word to Barak in verse nine. How was this word fulfilled?
4. Based on everything you've read in this chapter, make some observations about:
 - a. Israelite life under Deborah's rule
 - b. Israelite's opinions of Deborah during her 40-year reign.
5. What qualities, that you see in Deborah, do you desire for God to strengthen or develop in you? What qualities of Samson did you find personally convicting?

Prayer: God, as I consider these two judges, I ask you to grow me as a wise decision maker, able to confidently face challenging situations with your wisdom, insight, skill and knowledge.