

I. Judges 13: Child of promise

- After Gideon, several men judged Israel (Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon) for a period of about 80 years. After Abdon, Israel again turned away from God and the Lord allowed the Philistines to rule over them for 40 years.
- An angel of the Lord appears to the barren (and unnamed) wife of Manoah, a man from the tribe of Dan. She is promised a son and given explicit instructions for behavior during pregnancy. She is also told that the son will be a Nazarite (Hebrew means consecrated or devoted one) and that no razor shall touch his head. The regulations for these consecrated individuals are set forth in Numbers 6:1-21. They include:
 - Cannot drink wine or wine vinegar
 - Cannot drink anything in which grapes have been steeped
 - Cannot eat grapes, fresh or dried
 - His hair cannot be cut until the completion of his term (unless someone dies near him suddenly)
 - Cannot go into the presence of the dead (even family)
 - Upon completion of his term, he must bring several sacrifices and his shaved hair to the priest as an offering.
- She is promised that her son will deliver Israel from the Philistines. She informs Manoah of the visit, adding in that the child will be consecrated until death (not said by the angel). Manoah pleads with the Lord for His messenger to return and explain to him what is going on.
- The angel appears again to the woman while she is alone in the field. She runs and gets her husband and Manoah quizzes the angel about what he told his wife before. The angel restates the rules regarding his wife's restrictions during pregnancy. Manoah offers to feed the angel, but instead the angel suggests that Manoah make a burnt offering to the Lord instead.
- Manoah inquires as to the angel's name, but the angel responds that his name is unknowable. The angel departs from them in an amazing fashion, riding the fire from Manoah's offering back into the heavens. Manoah fears he will perish after seeing God's messenger, but his wife comforts him with sound logic.
- Samson is born and is blessed by the Lord while growing up.

II. Judges 14: A wife, a lion and a riddle

- Samson, now a grown man, picks out a woman from the city of Timnah to be his wife. She is a Philistine and this causes his mother and father grief. They do not realize that the Lord had a plan in this and Samson was seeking a reason to rise up against the Philistines.
- Samson and his parents set out for Timnah, but on the way, a lion attacks Samson (somehow his parents do not witness the event). The spirit of the Lord comes on Samson and he kills the lion bare-handed.
- Samson meets the woman from Timnah and she is pleasing to him. As he returned later to marry the woman, he notices the skeletal remains of the slaughtered lion contain a beehive and honey. Samson eats the honey and also gives some to his parents, but again lets the lion situation remain a secret.
- Samson and his father (mother not mentioned here) get to Timnah and Samson holds a feast per the custom of the time. 30 men are designated to be his companions while there. Samson proposes a riddle to them based on the lion and the honey. The wager is thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. They are unable to piece together an answer for three days. They approach his wife to see if she can coax the answer out of Samson.
- There is a disagreement between translations about the day that the men approach Samson's wife. The Masoretic Text, Targum and Vulgate say "seventh" while the Septuagint and Syriac say "fourth". Fourth makes more sense in light of verses 17 and 18.
- His wife nags him continually until he explains the lion incident to her. She, in turn, informs her countrymen. They answer the riddle and he realizes what they have done. He goes down to the Philistine city of Ashkelon and kills thirty men there. He uses the garments of his victims to pay the bet off in Timnah. He storms home to his parents. His "wife" then marries one his companions at the feast.

III. Judges 15: Fiery foxes, hips, thighs and a jawbone

- Samson returns to Timnah after the harvest only to find out that his wife's father has given her to another man. The father thought that Samson hated his wife and didn't want her. He offers Samson his younger daughter

instead. Samson captures three hundred foxes and ties them into 150 pairs with a torch attached to the tail of each pair. Lighting the torches, he sets the foxes loose among the standing grain of the Philistines (unsure what grain is left based on verse 1). The foxes burn up the standing (and stacked) grain, vineyards and groves of the Philistines. They learn of the reason Samson did this and kill his wife and father-in-law.

- Samson is again enraged and takes revenge on the Philistines by “smiting them hip and thigh”. The Hebrew wording is unclear if this is a sound beating or actual killing. Whatever it is, it is enough that the Philistines form a group (at least 1,000) to take vengeance on Samson.
- Samson has gone into Judah and the men there ask the Philistines why they are massed there. Upon learning of their quarry, 3,000 men of Judah go to find Samson and deliver him to the Philistines. 3,000 men go to get one guy, so Samson’s reputation must have preceded him. Samson agrees to allow his kinsmen to bind him and take him, as long as they swear not to kill him.
- As he is being delivered to the Philistines, the “new” ropes used to bind him became like burnt flax and drop from his hands. He finds the fresh jawbone of a donkey (not even hardened bone) and kills 1,000 Philistines. It is interesting in Samson’s song of victory that the Lord is not mentioned.
- Samson does, however, acknowledge that he is God’s servant and that God has provided him deliverance when he appeals to God for something to drink. God provides Samson relief by “splitting a hollow place in Lehi” and bringing forth water.
- It is noted that Samson led Israel for 20 years “in the days of the Philistines” indicating that he provided neither relief or deliverance from their rule (see also 16:31)

IV. Judges 16: Gaza, gates and the infamous Delilah

- Near the close of his leadership, Samson ventures into the Philistine city of Gaza. In keeping with his normal behavior, he finds a woman he likes (this time a harlot) and sleeps with her. Upon learning that he is there, the men of the city plot to kill him. They vow to keep quiet all night and kill him in the morning. Samson, however, rises at midnight and rips the gates, posts, and door bar off the entrance of the city. He hauls them into the mountain area of Hebron (approx. 35-40 miles from Gaza). It appears the would-be ambushers either witness the event and are frozen with fear, or they arrive after Samson has left. We are not told of their fate.
- Samson falls in love with a woman named Delilah who lived in Sorek (a valley in Palestine near Timnah and Zorah). She is the first of his women that it says he loved and that we are given her actual name in the Bible. It is never stated that she is a Philistine.
- The rulers of the Philistines offer her 1,100 shekels of silver per ruler if she can determine the source of his fearsome strength. This would amount to 5,500 shekels if the rulers are the lords of the five major Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron and Ashdod. This equates to about 2,200 oz. or \$60,000 in today’s money. Remember that Abraham paid less than 10% of that for a burial field and overpaid.
- Delilah begins to prod Samson about the source of his strength (in reality it is the spirit of God, not anything on Samson’s physical body). Samson deceives her three times:
 1. Tie him up with seven fresh cords or bowstrings (perhaps tendons of animals) that have not been dried.
 2. Bind him with brand new ropes (the men of Judah would know better than to believe that).
 3. Weave the seven locks of his hair into a web.
- She tries each of these while setting up Philistine ambushers each time. Samson obviously is unhindered by any of these vain attempts to restrain him. Each time, he overpowers his would-be captors.
- She wears Samson down by telling him that he cannot possibly love her and be deceptive to her. She presses him daily for the truth and finally “wearies his soul to death”. He confides in her that a razor has never touched his head and relates all of his heart to her.
- Delilah senses that she now knows the truth, lulls Samson to sleep in her lap and has a man cut off his hair. His miraculous strength is gone and his captors subdue him. Samson’s eyes are gouged out and he is installed as a grinder in prison. His captors neglect to keep his hair trimmed...
- They praise their gods for delivering Samson into their hand and arrange for Samson to be the showpiece at a celebration with 3,000 in attendance. Samson rests against the supporting pillars of the house and prays to God to allow him the strength to have vengeance. God grants him the power and Samson brings the whole house down, killing more in his death than during his whole lifetime. His body is recovered and buried by his brothers and family.