



1. Classes on the Book of Judges <https://www.yutorah.org/search/?teacher=81072&collection=8423>

2. Samson = Shimshon

- שימוש (*shimush*) Service
- שממה (*shemamah*) Desolation
- שמש (*shemesh*) Sun

3. Rabbi Levi ben Gerson (Gersonides) to Samuel I 12:6

As a result of Gd's great generosity, He rescued Israel from their enemies – sometimes via those who were very imperfect even though they did not deserve it themselves, as with Yerubaal and Yiftach, for Yerubaal worshipped idols until Gd called him to rescue Israel, and in Yiftach we have not seen a great level other than might. And sometimes He rescued them via the very complete, as with Bedan and Samuel, for Bedan – Samson – we find in him completeness, for Gd performed miracles via him, and when he called Gd answered him, demonstrating his complete nature and level associated with prophecy, for Gd does not perform wonders other than via the worthy...

4. Don Isaac Abarbanel to Samuel I 12:10

It is also possible that he mentioned from the judges one who was a prophet on a low level, like Yerubaal/Gidon, and one of weak intellect like Samson, and one who was insightful and wise like Yiftach, who was not a prophet, and one who was a brilliant prophet like Samuel. And so he mentioned all kinds of judges – a small prophet Gidon, a great prophet Samuel, an insightful judge Yiftach, a foolish judge Samson. This informs us that nothing prevents Gd from rescuing via great or small...

Great expectations

5. Genesis 49:1-2, 16-18 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

And Jacob called his sons and said, "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come. Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob; Hearken to Israel your father..."

Dan shall govern his people, As one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the road, A viper by the path, That bites the horse's heels So that his rider is thrown backward. I wait for Your deliverance, O Lord!

6. Talmud, Sotah 10a

And Rabbi Yochanan said: Samson judged Israel like their Father in Heaven, as it says, "Dan shall judge his nation like the One."

And Rabbi Yochanan said: Samson was named with Gd's Name, as Psalms 84:12 says, "Gd is a Sun and shield." But if this is Gd's Name, it may not be erased! Rather: his name is *similar* to Gd's Name. Just as Gd protects the entire world, so Samson protected Israel in his generation.

7. Talmud, Sotah 9b

This teaches that the Shechinah knocked before him, like a clapper. It says here "to be *po'eim* for him in the camp of Dan," and in Shemot 39:26 it says, "a *paamon* and a pomegranate."

"Between Zorah and Eshtaol" – Rabbi Asi said: Zorah and Eshtaol were two mountains, and Samson uprooted them and ground them against each other.

8. Judges 13:3-5, 24-25 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

An angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "You are barren and have borne no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now be careful not to drink wine or other intoxicant, or to eat anything unclean. For you are going to conceive and bear a son; let no razor touch his head, for the boy is to be a nazirite to Gd from the womb on. He shall be the first to deliver Israel from the Philistines."

The woman bore a son, and she named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. The spirit of the Lord first moved him in the encampment of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

9. Judges 15:20 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)
He led Israel in the days of the Philistines for twenty years.

Samson's career

- 14:1-20 Samson marries a Philistine woman, and brawls with her Philistine friends
- 15:1-8 The Philistines do Samson wrong, and he punishes them – his father-in-law, and then the rest
- 15:9-20 The tribe of Judah hands Samson to the Philistines; he kills 1000 of them with a donkey's jawbone
- 16:1-3 Samson is ambushed in Aza, and he uproots the city gates
- 16:4-20 Samson and Delilah
- 16:21-31 Samson avenges his eye

10. Judges, Chapter 14 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

Once Samson went down to Timnah; and while in Timnah, he noticed a girl among the Philistine women. On his return, he told his father and mother, "I noticed one of the Philistine women in Timnah; please get her for me as a wife." His father and mother said to him, "Is there no one among the daughters of your own kinsmen and among all our people, that you must go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson answered his father, "Get me that one, for she is the one that pleases me." His father and mother did not realize that this was the Lord's doing: He was seeking a pretext against the Philistines, for the Philistines were ruling over Israel at that time.

So Samson and his father and mother went down to Timnah. When he came to the vineyards of Timnah [for the first time], a full-grown lion came roaring at him. The spirit of the Lord gripped him, and he tore him asunder with his bare hands as one might tear a kid asunder; but he did not tell his father and mother what he had done. Then he went down and spoke to the woman, and she pleased Samson.

Returning the following year to marry her, he turned aside to look at the remains of the lion; and in the lion's skeleton he found a swarm of bees, and honey. He scooped it into his palms and ate it as he went along. When he rejoined his father and mother, he gave them some and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scooped the honey out of a lion's skeleton.

So his father came down to the woman, and Samson made a feast there, as young men used to do. When they saw him, they designated thirty companions to be with him. Then Samson said to them, "Let me propound a riddle to you. If you can give me the right answer during the seven days of the feast, I shall give you thirty linen tunics and thirty sets of clothing; but if you are not able to tell it to me, you must give me thirty linen tunics and thirty sets of clothing." And they said to him, "Ask your riddle and we will listen." So he said to them: "Out of the eater came something to eat, Out of the strong came something sweet." For three days they could not answer the riddle.

On the seventh day, they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband to provide us with the answer to the riddle; else we shall put you and your father's household to the fire; have you invited us here in order to impoverish us?" Then Samson's wife harassed him with tears, and she said, "You really hate me, you don't love me. You asked my countrymen a riddle, and you didn't tell me the answer." He replied, "I haven't even told my father and mother; shall I tell you?" During the rest of the seven days of the feast she continued to harass him with her tears, and on the seventh day he told her, because she nagged him so. And she explained the riddle to her countrymen.

On the seventh day, before the sunset, the townsmen said to him: "What is sweeter than honey, And what is stronger than a lion?" He responded: "Had you not plowed with my heifer, You would not have guessed my riddle!" The spirit of the Lord gripped him. He went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of its men. He stripped them and gave the sets of clothing to those who had answered the riddle. And he left in a rage for his father's house.

Samson's wife then married one of those who had been his wedding companions.

11. Judges, Chapter 15 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

Some time later, in the season of the wheat harvest, Samson came to visit his wife, bringing a kid as a gift. He said, "Let me go into the chamber to my wife." But her father would not let him go in. "I was sure," said her father, "that you

had taken a dislike to her, so I gave her to your wedding companion. But her younger sister is more beautiful than she; let her become your wife instead." Thereupon Samson declared, "Now the Philistines can have no claim against me for the harm I shall do them."

Samson went and caught three hundred foxes. He took torches and, turning [the foxes] tail to tail, he placed a torch between each pair of tails. He lit the torches and turned [the foxes] loose among the standing grain of the Philistines, setting fire to stacked grain, standing grain, vineyards, [and] olive trees. The Philistines asked, "Who did this?" And they were told, "It was Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, who took Samson's wife and gave her to his wedding companion." Thereupon the Philistines came up and put her and her father to the fire.

Samson said to them, "If that is how you act, I will not rest until I have taken revenge on you." He gave them a sound and thorough thrashing. Then he went down and stayed in the cave of the rock of Etam.

The Philistines came up, pitched camp in Judah and spread out over Lehi. The men of Judah asked, "Why have you come up against us?" They answered, "We have come to take Samson prisoner, and to do to him as he did to us." Thereupon three thousand men of Judah went down to the cave of the rock of Etam, and they said to Samson, "You knew that the Philistines rule over us; why have you done this to us?" He replied, "As they did to me, so I did to them." "We have come down," they told him, "to take you prisoner and to hand you over to the Philistines." "But swear to me," said Samson to them, "that you yourselves will not attack me." "We won't," they replied. "We will only take you prisoner and hand you over to them; we will not slay you." So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

When he reached Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Thereupon the spirit of the Lord gripped him, and the ropes on his arms became like flax that catches fire; the bonds melted off his hands. He came upon a fresh jawbone of an ass and he picked it up; and with it he killed a thousand men. Then Samson said: "With the jaw of an ass, Mass upon mass! With the jaw of an ass I have slain a thousand men." As he finished speaking, he threw the jawbone away; hence that place was called Ramath-lehi.

He was very thirsty and he called to the Lord, "You Yourself have granted this great victory through Your servant; and must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" So Gd split open the hollow which is at Lehi, and the water gushed out of it; he drank, regained his strength, and revived. That is why it is called to this day "En-hakkore of Lehi."

He led Israel in the days of the Philistines for twenty years.

12. Judges, Chapter 16 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

Once Samson went to Gaza; there he met a *zonah* and slept with her.

The Gazites [learned] that Samson had come there, so they gathered and lay in ambush for him in the town gate the whole night; and all night long they kept whispering to each other, "When daylight comes, we'll kill him." But Samson lay in bed only till midnight. At midnight he got up, grasped the doors of the town gate together with the two gateposts, and pulled them out along with the bar. He placed them on his shoulders and carried them off to the top of the hill that is near Hebron.

After that, he fell in love with a woman in the Wadi Sorek, named Delilah. The lords of the Philistines went up to her and said, "Coax him and find out what makes him so strong, and how we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless; and we'll each give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me, what makes you so strong? And how could you be tied up and made helpless?" Samson replied, "If I were to be tied with seven fresh tendons that had not been dried, I should become as weak as an ordinary man." So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh tendons that had not been dried. She bound him with them, while an ambush was waiting in her room. Then she called out to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" Whereat he pulled the tendons apart, as a strand of tow comes apart at the touch of fire. So the secret of his strength remained unknown.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Oh, you deceived me; you lied to me! Do tell me now how you could be tied up." He said, "If I were to be bound with new ropes that had never been used, I would become as weak as an ordinary man." So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, while an ambush was waiting in a room. And she cried, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he tore them off his arms like a thread.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have been deceiving me all along; you have been lying to me! Tell me, how could you be tied up?" He answered her, "If you weave seven locks of my head into the web." And she pinned it with a peg and cried to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" Awaking from his sleep, he pulled out the peg, the loom, and the web. Then she said to him, "How can you say you love me, when you don't confide in me? This makes three times that you've deceived me and haven't told me what makes you so strong."

Finally, after she had nagged him and pressed him constantly, he was wearied to death and he confided everything to her. He said to her, "No razor has ever touched my head, for I have been a nazirite to Gd since I was in my mother's womb. If my hair were cut, my strength would leave me and I should become as weak as an ordinary man." Sensing that he had confided everything to her, Delilah sent for the lords of the Philistines, with this message: "Come up once more, for he has confided everything to me." And the lords of the Philistines came up and brought the money with them. She lulled him to sleep on her lap. Then she called in a man, and she had him cut off the seven locks of his head; thus she weakened him and made him helpless: his strength slipped away from him. She cried, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" And he awoke from his sleep, thinking he would break loose and shake himself free as he had the other times. For he did not know that the Lord had departed from him. The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and shackled him in bronze fetters, and he became a mill slave in the prison. After his hair was cut off, it began to grow back.

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to make merry. They chanted, "Our god has delivered into our hands Our enemy Samson." When the people saw him, they sang praises to their god, chanting, "Our god has delivered into our hands The enemy who devastated our land, And who slew so many of us." As their spirits rose, they said, "Call Samson here and let him dance for us." Samson was fetched from the prison, and he danced for them. Then they put him between the pillars. And Samson said to the boy who was leading him by the hand, "Let go of me and let me feel the pillars that the temple rests upon, that I may lean on them."

Now the temple was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and there were some three thousand men and women on the roof watching Samson dance. Then Samson called to the Lord, "O Lord Gd! Please remember me, and give me strength just this once, O Gd, to take revenge of the Philistines, if only for one of my two eyes." He embraced the two middle pillars that the temple rested upon, one with his right arm and one with his left, and leaned against them; Samson cried, "Let me die with the Philistines!" and he pulled with all his might. The temple came crashing down on the lords and on all the people in it. Those who were slain by him as he died outnumbered those who had been slain by him when he lived.

His brothers and all his father's household came down and carried him up and buried him in the tomb of his father Manoah, between Zorah and Eshtaol. He had led Israel for twenty years.

Samson is a unique brand of leader

13. Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak) to Judges 13:4

Israel did not fight them, only Samson alone, and therefore the Philistines had no basis for warring with Israel due to Samson, for he was not in [Jewish] control and he alone harmed the Philistines. He lived with the Philistines when he harmed them. And also due to fear of him they refrained from warring with Israel...

14. Don Isaac Abarbanel to Judges 14:4

Gd created a reason for Israel to take vengeance upon the Philistines – not by their own hand but by Samson's hand – and Samson would not act in Israelite areas but in Philistine areas even when taking revenge, so that the Philistines would not have a claim against Israel for this. It would be associated with Samson alone, and the Philistines would [also] refrain from battling Israel out of fear of Samson, for the Philistines ruled over Israel at that time.

Review Questions

- 1) What does the name "Samson" mean?
- 2) What do the Rabbis of the Talmud learn from Jacob's blessing of the tribe of Dan?
- 3) What did an angel or prophet promise Hatzlelponit that her son Samson would do?
- 4) Where does Samson seem to spend most of his career?
- 5) According to Don Isaac Abarbanel, why are Samson's battles solo vendettas?