



Super Flash Kryptonite

A revisit of the Samson Story
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I grew up in a world of comics (Marvel, DC) and most of these comic characters have now been converted into film and television superheroes. Among my favourites are Superman and Flash; the former for his immense strength, the latter for his amazing speed. I have also learnt that every superhero has an Achilles' heel which made the superhero partly vulnerable. Arguably, the most famous superhero weakness is Superman's kryptonite.

I would like to introduce you to a biblical superhero who was as strong as Superman, as speedy as Flash and possessed a genuine 'kryptonite' vulnerability. His name was Samson.

Beginnings

Two things about Samson's birth stand out in the biblical text. First, he was born in a time of chaos and anarchy. This was the Period of the Judges, Israel's equivalence to the 'Dark Ages'. The resettlement of the land of promise did not go as well as was expected and the passing of Joshua left the tribes without central leadership. The surrounding nations took full

advantage of this, and Israel lived on a precipice, or at least a slippery slope. This was compounded by their failure to live up to the terms of the covenant made with God and suffered the consequences.

Second, Samson's birth was extraordinary, a miracle baby to match the birth stories of Samuel and Jesus. The author clearly intended to highlight Samson's special gifts and the subsequent failures to properly use those gifts. Also significant is the idea that he was the last of the Judges; those amazing 'Samurais' God sent as deliverers of Israel during the 300 hundred some years of the period.

Super Man

Most people who read the Bible quickly recognise that Samson was super strong, like the Superman comics. We need to examine certain episodes in his life to fully appreciate this.

- On one of his trips, Samson was attacked by a lion. A wrestling match ensued. Samson got hold of the lion and ripped him to pieces as if he was nothing (Judges 14).
- His first major battle with the Philistines, his lifelong nemesis, occurred at Lehi. He allowed himself to be captured and bound with strong ropes which he easily snapped. Then grabbing a jawbone of a donkey, he killed 1,000 philistines (Judges 15).
- At another incidence, the Philistines thought they had him cornered in Gaza. Samson did not try to run but remained with his female consort all night. The Philistines planned to arrest him in the morning. However, at dawn, Samson walked up to the city gate and pulled it up 'doors, posts, lock and all', carried them up the nearby hill and planted them there in plain sight (Judges 16).
- His final feat of strength also led to his demise. He pulled down the two central pillars of Dagon's temple at Gaza causing the entire structure to collapse, wiping out the Philistine government and killing thousands of civilians (Judges 16).

We should note that Samson's strength was portrayed as divine gift with his uncut hair as the symbol of that connection. Whatever we may suppose about this, the Bible writer presented it as a given. This fits the superhero genre of strength being largely external to the individual and it certainly made a legend of Samson.

Super Flash

Much less attention has been given to Samson's amazing speed, a definite rival to the Flash superhero. I am certain someone is wondering how this could be so. There was a brief episode in his life which illustrates this (Judges 14-15).

Samson had married a Philistine woman from Timnah. At the wedding feast, he shared a riddle with the Philistines which they could not solve. They threatened his new bride and she in turn found a way to extract the answer from Samson. He was so enraged by this treachery that he burnt down the wheat fields and olive orchards of the Philistines.

How he accomplished that feat is simply astonishing. He caught 300 foxes, tied them up in pairs (by the tails), attached torches to their bound tails and released them into the fields. Everything went up in flames. In retaliation, the Philistines burnt the woman to death and torched her parents' house.

The mystery here concerns the catching of the 300 foxes. Either we dismiss this story as pure myth or suggest that Samson had incredible speed to chase down 300 foxes. If so, he would be the Bible equivalent of the Flash superhero.

Kryptonite

The third piece of Samson's life was his kryptonite, Philistine women. Samson knew his uncut hair and the other restrictions of his life were part of God's plan to set him apart, possibly as a Nazirite, a rather mysterious group dedicated to serve God (Judges 13). Nevertheless, Samson was unable to contain his fascination with Philistine women. Perhaps he was infatuated

with the fact that the Philistines were non-Asiatic (most likely European ancestry) and was enamoured by the obvious differences.

Both of the women he married were Philistine, the Timnah lady (Judges 14-15) and the infamous Delilah (Judges 16). Both marriages ended in tragedy with Samson taking many lives in acts of vengeance. Both women succeeded in extracting secrets from Samson, and, in the case of Delilah, the revelation proved fatal to Samson.

How might biblical history have played out if Samson did not succumb to his kryptonite? We can only conjecture!

Contemplation

Everyone is secretly a superhero. Everyone is a superhero with his or her own version of kryptonite. The only thing we can ever do, in life or faith, is to beware of and learn to overcome our personal kryptonite. I strongly believe that God promises to help us find the solution to our personal kryptonite. As Superman needs the recharge of the yellow sun to restore his strength after a kryptonite attack, we also need the recharge of the Son to restore us when we are kryptonited.

Shalom!