The strange biography of Samson

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Abstract

The biblical story of the life of Samson hides much from the reader and the Book of Judges has deleted from the story elements that were deemed improper for the book’s placement among the Holy Scriptures. In this article, the author shows how the Bible transforms Samson from a mythological hero, the son of a god, to a mere mortal whose extraordinary strength came through the spirit of God that rested with him so long as he kept his Nazirite vows. The biblical storyteller could not prevent the story of Samson from entering into the biblical corpus since it was a tale of tremendous popularity. He thus told it in such a way as to bring it closer to his monotheistic beliefs and world-view. In its ‘biblical’ form the story does not bring honor to the figure of Samson, and so his placement as the last of the judges in the Book of Judges prepares the reader for the establishment of the institution of kingship, in the Book of Samuel.
Samson is the third to last of the Judges of the ancient Children of Israel mentioned in the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) and the Talmud. He is described in the Book of Judges chapters 13 to 16. The Book of Samson also appears in Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews, written in the last ten years of the 1st Century AD, as well as in works slightly earlier. Samson is known for being given great strength by God to use against those who do not like him and to do great things that regular people cannot do.

Samson, legendary Israelite warrior and judge, or divinely inspired leader, renowned for the prodigious strength that he derived from his uncut hair. He is portrayed in the biblical Book of Judges (chapters 13–16). Learn more about the legend of Samson in this article.

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