



Characterization in the Bible

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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- One of the most inviting and engaging ways to delve into scripture is through characters and characterization
 - We identify with and respond to characters in the Bible
 - With what they do and who they are
 - Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Samson

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- The Bible's stories use characters and characterization
 - Characters – the people in the stories
 - Characterization – the way the character is depicted and portrayed

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- ▶ Deuteronomistic = Perspective and Theology
 - ▶ Theology of Deuteronomy: Faithfulness to God leads to blessings and disobedience leads to problems, see Deuteronomy 6:10, ff, 28
 - ▶ The book of Deuteronomy looks forward to life in the promised land, urging the people to remember and not forget

- Story of Judges is both political and theological
- It's not about the land, it's about relationship with God
- Follow the beginnings of this nation in promised land
- No king, just tribal confederations
- 12 tribes

Narrative Shape of Judges

- ▶ Judges 2:11-23
- ▶ People forgot/ worshipped other gods
- ▶ God handed them over to enemies
- ▶ Lord would raise up judge
- ▶ Delivery
- ▶ Forget

Characterization in Judges

- ▶ Judge is a charismatic leader
- ▶ Military
- ▶ Able to galvanize a tribe or tribes to follow
- ▶ Under the Lord's leading
- ▶ Period of Peace, usually lifetime of a judge

Judges: A review

- ▶ Deborah – a longer narrative with little character development
 - ▶ What do we know about Deborah, Jael, Barak?
- ▶ Ehud – a short unit, with little character development
 - ▶ What do we know about Ehud?
 - ▶ Is Eglon a character or a caricature?
- ▶ Gideon
 - ▶ What do we know about Gideon?
 - ▶ How do we know it?

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- ▶ We learn from the characterization in dialogue with the narrative arc
 - ▶ The longer the story, the more information we have
 - ▶ Samson's story is significant because of its:
 - ▶ Characterization – Samson, Delilah, the Philistines
 - ▶ Narrative arc, elements of drama
 - ▶ Theological message

Context



- ▶ Remember a judge is a charismatic military leader
- ▶ Israel is under threat by the enemy
- ▶ The Philistines are the greatest of all the opposing forces
- ▶ The Israelites have to deal with the ongoing “Philistine Threat”

Samson

- ▶ What do we know?
 - ▶ What did we learn in Sunday School?
 - ▶ What is his appeal?
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- ▶ What does the Bible say about him?

Chapter 13 – Birth Narrative

- ▶ Tribe of Dan
- ▶ Father – Manoah
- ▶ Angel comes to his unnamed mother and promises a son
- ▶ Nazarite
- ▶ Samson, 13:24-25

Chapter 14 – Samson's Marriage

- ▶ Samson wants a Philistine wife
- ▶ Episode with the lion – how did he subdue the lion?

Chapter 15 – foxes and donkeys

- ▶ 1-8 Samson's wife
- ▶ 9-20 Philistines respond

- ▶ What is the point of these stories?

Chapter 16 – Delilah

- ▶ 1-3 Prostitute and the gates
- ▶ 4-22 Delilah
- ▶ 22-32 Final act

How would you characterize
Samson?



Samson as Antihero

- ▶ A central character who lacks the traditional heroic qualities, such as honesty, courage, integrity, good looks, etc.
- ▶ An antihero may do the right thing, but for the wrong reason
- ▶ Macbeth, Tony Soprano, Sherlock Holmes, Othello, Severus Snape, Mookie, Valkyrie, Deadpool, Catwoman

Characterization and Theology

- ▶ What do our characters in these stories tell us about Israel?
- ▶ What do they tell us about God?
- ▶ How does God get the glory?
- ▶ What application can we make to our lives?



▶ How do we read the story of an antihero theologically?