

Made-in-SA 'Sampson' movie not to be missed – Movie Review

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"...for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Samson 13:5

It's a story many of us grew up hearing. It's the story of a man with unusually long hair, set apart, chosen by God, and given the gift of extraordinary strength. He was a Nazirite who had to live by a different set of rules: never to drink any wine, touch a dead body, or shave his head. We all know him by the name of Samson, and his story has just been brought to the screen unlike ever before.

Pure Flix (producer of *God's Not Dead*) has just released the movie *Samson*, which gives us a unique glimpse into one of the

most legendary narratives of the Bible, found in Judges 13-16. The film is filled with exciting drama and plenty of action sequences.

The story begins with the Hebrews under the tyrannical rule of the Philistines. Samson is the champion, divinely chosen by God to deliver the people of Israel from their oppressors. Armed with herculean strength, Samson is keenly aware of his calling, and yet he is reluctant to accept the life God has for him. His brother, Caleb, continually encourages and reminds him of his purpose in an attempt to keep him focused on his life's mission. His physical proclivities do land him in trouble time and time again with the Philistines, however.

King Balek and his psychopathic son, Rallah, demand inflated tributes from the Hebrews, diminishing their personal provisions nearly to the point of starvation. Anyone who attempts to fight back is promptly put in his, or her, place.

Samson meets and falls for a Philistine woman named Taren. Determined to make her his wife, Samson decides to go against his parents' emphatic wishes to marry a Hebrew woman. Persuaded by his implicit mistress, Delilah, Rallah chooses to give Samson his blessing to marry Taren so that he may have control over his Hebrew nemesis. During the wedding feast, Samson and Rallah enter into a duel of riddles, which ultimately stirs Rallah to threaten Samson's new bride. Samson is led to kill 30 Philistines in an effort to protect his wife, but Rallah reacts by killing Taren and thus breaks Samson's heart.

The hostility between Samson and his Philistine foe only escalates from there. Rallah murders Samson's father, Monoah, just before attempting to behead Samson. Filled with rage, the resilient Hebrew breaks free and kills 1 000 Philistine soldiers with the jawbone of a donkey as his weapon. The story only gets more intense when Delilah later seduces Samson to reveal the secret to his otherworldly strength.

We all know how the real life story ends, but the movie's interpretation is pretty incredible and unlike any you would have seen before.

After having the privilege of previewing this impressive film, one cannot help but go back to Judges 13-16 to reread the story of Samson. As one might have come to expect in the portrayal of a biblical epic, creative liberties were taken in the writing of this story.

Most notably, the Samson depicted in this film is far more likeable than the one depicted in the Bible. The Samson in the Bible appears generally unrepentant and arrogant, spending much of his life ignoring God's clear call and, instead, chooses to live recklessly. He would visit brothels, shamelessly spending the night with women he didn't know. One of the only prayers recorded in the story of Samson involves him asking God to give him strength that he might have vengeance for a wrong done to himself – not to God.

The man in this film, by contrast, has moments of sincere humility where he goes to God in prayer, pleading Him for strength that he may give God the glory. He is tricked into going into a brothel but is incensed when he realises the nature of the inn he's been led to. He doesn't spend the night with prostitutes. He is also ultimately repentant and realises that he's only ever seen things through his own eyes, rather than through God's. It seems the film made their version of Samson into more of the hero we wish he could have been. This may be justified by how Samson is included in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:32-34.

On the note of character development, Delilah is not represented as the conniving, heartless woman we read in the book of Judges. Instead, she's seen as a woman of character and conviction. You find yourself almost liking her and believing she truly loves and cares for Samson.

A key protagonist in this film is Prince Rallah, the Philistine Commander. While his character is fictitious, he serves a very important role in personifying the oppression of the Philistines over the Hebrew people.

The Bible makes it clear that Samson's mother was barren and unable to have children, which made the prophecy and birth of Samson an absolute miracle. It seems a bit of a stretch to include a brother in the story, and yet Caleb does serve as a moral compass for Samson throughout the film. As there are very few details surrounding the story of Samson, one cannot blame the writers for wanting to fill in the gaps.

If you're debating whether or not to see the new Samson movie, let me help you make your decision. This is a film you do not want to miss. *Samson* was produced locally with a cast that includes more than 30 South African actors. Despite a few faux beards, the cast played their roles brilliantly and made us believe they were exactly who they portrayed. You'll be transported back into biblical times and feel as if you're actually there. *Samson* offers a strong Christian worldview that clearly presents the God of Israel as the "Living God." One note of warning would be toward the violence in the movie. They definitely dial it back for the big screen, but caution is advised for younger members of the family.

Samson is in cinemas country-wide from today, June 8. For more information, visit – www.samsonmovie.co.za