

Samson and the Lion

By Greg Balagian

Samson was the last and most famous of the Judges of Israel, legendary for his enormous strength. The account of the life of Samson and his exploits is contained in chapters XIII - XVI of the Book of Judges.

The Bible says that after being freed by Jephthe, the Israelites again abandon their God and are delivered over to the Philistines for forty years.

An angel in the form of a man appears to the infertile wife of Manoah of the tribe of Dan, and promises her that she will bear a son who will free Israel from Philistine oppression.

True to the word of the angel, the child is born and receives the name Samson.*

The angel prescribes abstinence on the part of both mother and son from all things intoxicating or unclean, and that no razor should touch the child's head, invoking a vow of the strict Nazarite sect.

The narrative informs us that the "spirit of the Lord" was with him from his youth, but despite his parents' opposition, Samson chooses a wife from among the Philistines. On a visit to Timnah, the town of his intended bride, Samson gives the first evidence of his superhuman strength by slaying a lion with his bare hands.

Returning later he discovers a swarm of bees have taken up their abode in the carcass of the lion. He eats the honey and the incident becomes the source of the famous riddle proposed by him to the thirty Philistine guests at the wedding festivities: "Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judges 14:14).

Unable to answer the riddle, the wedding guests persuade Samson's new wife to coax him into revealing it. No sooner has she succeeded than she repeats it to her countrymen: "What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?"

In payment for guessing the riddle, Samson travels to Ashkelon and slays thirty Philistines whose garments he gives his guests as their prize.

Samson's father-in-law, thinking that Samson hates his daughter for her betrayal, betroths her to Samson's friend. In the ensuing violence brought on by Samson's temper, both his wife and father-in-law are burned and killed by the Philistines.

Samson becomes a judge in Israel for 20 years, eventually falling in love with Delilah, also a Philistine. Delilah deceives him into revealing that the nature of his strength was his hair and she has seven locks cut while he is sleeping.

The Philistines pay off Delilah with silver and capture Samson. Blinded and dragged into the Temple of Dagon, Samson requests to stand near the pillars. Grabbing hold, he pulls them, destroying the temple and killing everyone including himself.

In 1961, Israel issued the first stamp commemorating Samson with the lion on the tab. Samson is breaking the lion's jaw on a second stamp issued in November 2010 [on the cover].

Sweden issued a stamp in 1971 showing a bas-relief of Samson and the lion from the 12th century Hogran Church.

Great artists such as Rubens, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Cranach, Durer, and Michelangelo created paintings and sculptures portraying Samson and the lion. Guyana's 1989 miniature sheet has the drawing "Samson Discovering a Swarm of Bees in a Carcass of a Lion" by Peter Paul Rubens for the title page of *Poemata* (1620) by Maffeo Barberini (Pope Urban VIII).

The theme of Samson slaying a lion was utilized in four famous European fountains. The most illustrious is the fountain at the Royal Palace in Peterhof, commissioned by Peter the Great in the 18th century. "Samson Rending Open the Jaws of the Lion" was originally cast in lead by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli in 1735. The deteriorating fountain was recast in bronze by Mikhail Kozlovsky in 1801. Following damage during World War II, sculptors Vasily Simonov and N.V. Mikhailov recreated the fountain based on archival data from Kozlovsky.

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Israel 208 (1961)



Left and above: Kozlovsky's fountain sculpture "Samson Rending Open the Jaws of the Lion" is on stamps and postal stationery from Russia. The fountain is at the Royal Palace in Peterhof, Russia. The stamp (Russia 7099) and prepaid envelope were issued in 2008.

Right: Guyana's 1989 miniature sheet (Scott 2236) depicts a drawing by Peter Paul Rubens, "Samson Discovering a Swarm of Bees in a Carcass of a Lion."



Kozlovsky's fountain is shown on four stamps and the cachet of a prepaid envelope from Russia, as well as in the margin of a 2003 miniature sheet from St. Thomas and Prince Island.

A Samson and lion fountain sculpted by Josef Dietrich is located on Central Square of Ceske Budejovice in the Czech Republic. The 18th century fountain is on stamps from Bohemia and Moravia (1940), Czechoslovakia (1954), and Czech Republic (1993).

Italian master builder Domenico Edigio Rossi's fountain, located in the 18th century Rastatt Castle, is depicted on six stamps from Baden (German Occupation) issued in 1947-1949.

Gera, Germany is the site of a fountain with the Samson and the lion theme pictured on a stamp issued in 1995.

Naturally a number of manufacturers adopted Samson's name to emphasize the strength of their products. I have two interesting advertising covers in my collection that show Samson rending the lion's jaw on the cachet. The Samson Cordage Company was founded by J.P. Tolman in 1878 in Massachusetts. Today the company operates under the name Samson Rope Technologies. My cover is postmarked 1894 from Boston, Massachusetts.

The Eugene Doherty Rubber Works Inc. was established in 1865 in Greenpoint, New York, producing rubber for dentures under the trademark Samson Rubber. The cover was canceled in 1934 in Brooklyn, New York.

I compiled a checklist [in column two] for those interested in collecting 'Samson and the Lion' on stamps. ♣

*Samson, Shimshon in Hebrew: "of the sun" *shemesh*, and the root, "to serve God." -*Courtesy of Nahum Shereshevsky*

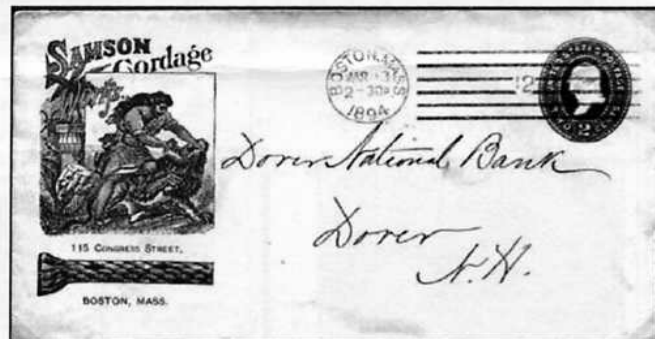
Samson & the Lion Preliminary Checklist By Greg Balagian

Country	Year(s)	Scott	Notes
Baden	1947-49	5N6, 5N8*, 5N20, 5N22, 5N29, 5N38	Rossi's fountain
Bohemia & Moravia	1940	45*	Dietrich's fountain
Czechoslovakia	1954	675	" "
Czech Rep.	1993	2888*	" "
Germany	1995	1881	fountain in Gera
Guyana	1989	2236*	m/s, bees in lion
Israel	1961	208*	lion on tab
	2010	??**	part of motif on tab
Russia	1998	5735	Kozlovsky's fountain
	2000	6606k	" "
	2003	6804	" "
	2008	7099*	" "
St. Thomas & Prince	2003	1468	in margin of m/s
Sweden	1971	894	bas-relief

*shown on page 42 or 43; **on the cover



Left: Rossi sculpted this fountain of Samson and the lion for the Rastatt Castle in Baden, depicted on six stamps; Scott 5N8 (1947) is shown below.



These two advertising covers reinforce the strength of their products by picturing Samson breaking the lion's jaw on the cachet. The top cover is from the Samson Cordage Company (rope), postmarked March 13, 1894 from Boston, Massachusetts. Below, the cover is from Samson Rubber, postmarked on February 23, 1934.

Below: Dietrich's Samson and the lion sculpture is on a fountain in what is now the Czech Republic. It appears on stamps from Bohemia and Moravia (Scott 45, left) and Czech Republic (Scott 2888, right).

