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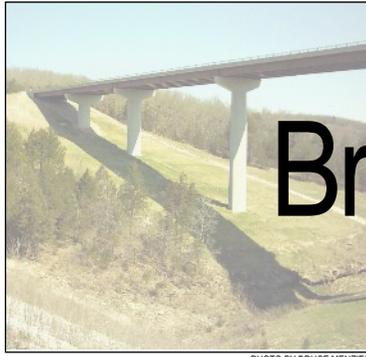


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# Branson Beat

Samson, “man of the sun” was the last of the judges of the ancient Israelites mentioned in the Book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible (chapters 13 to 16) and one of the last of the leaders who “judged” Israel before the institution of the monarchy.

The biblical account states that Samson was a Nazarite, and was given immense strength to aid him against his enemies and allowed him to perform superhuman feats, including slaying a lion and massacring an entire army of Philistines using only the jawbone of an ass. However, if Samson’s long hair was cut, then his Nazarite vow would be violated, and he would lose his strength.

According to the account in the Book of Judges, Samson lived during a time of repeated conflict between Israel and Philistia, when God was disciplining the Israelites by giving them “into the hand of the Philistines.” Manoah was an Israelite from Zorah, descended from the Danites, and his wife had been unable to conceive. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah’s wife and proclaimed that the couple would soon have a son who would begin to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. The Angel of the Lord stated that Manoah’s wife was to abstain from all alcoholic beverages, and her promised child was not to shave or cut his hair. He was to be a Nazarite from birth.

According to the biblical account, Samson was repeatedly seized by the “Spirit of the Lord,” who blessed him with immense strength. The first instance of this is seen when Samson was attacked by a lion. He simply grabbed it and ripped it apart, as the Spirit of God divinely empowered him.

Samson fell in love with Delilah in the valley of Sorek. The Philistines

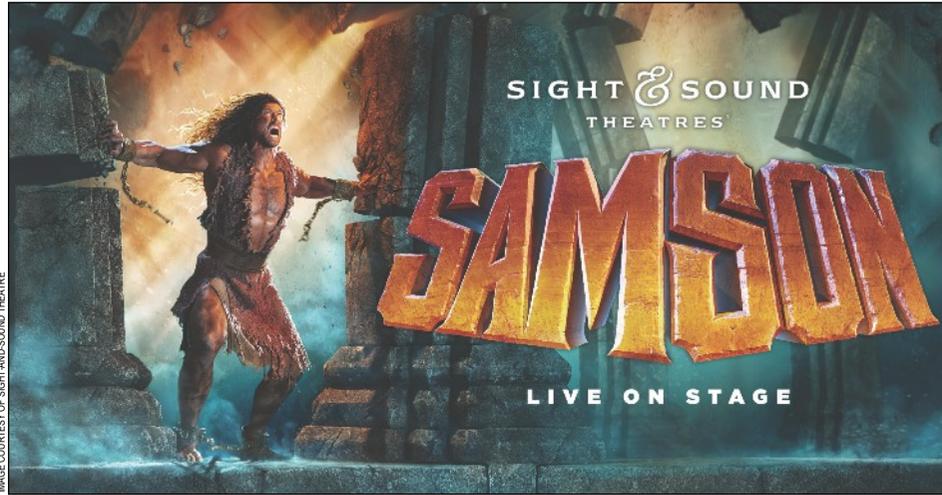


IMAGE COURTESY OF SIGHT-AND-SOUND THEATRE

## Sure to Bring Down the House

approached Delilah and induced her with 1,100 silver coins to find the secret of Samson’s strength so that they could capture their enemy, but Samson refused to reveal the secret and teased her.

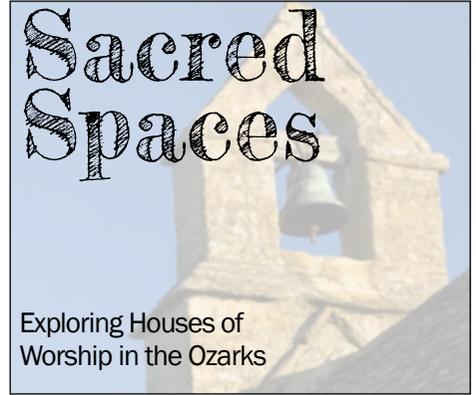
Delilah, however, persisted and Samson finally wore down and told Delilah that God supplied his power because of his consecration to God as a Nazarite, symbolized by the fact that a razor had never touched his head, and that if his hair was cut off he would lose his strength. Delilah then wooed him to sleep “in her lap” and called for a servant to shave his hair. Samson lost his strength and he was captured by the Philistines who blinded him by gouging out his eyes. They then took him to Gaza, imprisoned him, and put him to work turning a large millstone and grinding corn.

One day, the Philistine leaders assembled in a temple for a religious sacrifice to Dagon, one of their most important deities, for having delivered Samson into their hands. They sum-

moned Samson so that people can watch him perform for them. The temple was so crowded that people even climbed onto the roof to watch—and all the rulers of the entire government of Philistia gathered there too, some 3,000 people in all. Samson was led into the temple, and asked his captors to let him lean against the supporting pillars to rest. He prayed for strength and God gave him strength to break the pillars, causing the temple to collapse, killing him and the people inside.

According to the biblical narrative, Samson died when he grasped two pillars of the Temple of Dagon and “bowed himself with all his might” (Judges 16:30, KJV). ■ (Wikipedia)

**Publisher’s Note:** Sure to be one of the biggest productions in Branson this year, Samson will be performed at the Sight-and-Sound Theatre. As a way to know what the play is all about here’s a refresher on the story of Samson from the Book of Judges. Read this biblical account and you may enjoy the production even more. **BJM**



Exploring Houses of Worship in the Ozarks

## Old Stone Church, Branson



PHOTO BY WAMARKING.COM

The picturesque First Presbyterian Church (a.k.a. Old Stone Church) in Branson has ministered to the Branson community for over 110 years. The church was dedicated April 2, 1911.

Written historical accounts state that during World War I, representatives of the church met the trains that carried the flag-draped caskets of casualties from the battlefields of Europe. Church ladies wrapped bandages and knitted sweaters for the soldiers.

At the time of its construction, most other churches were built of wood. Old Stone Church was considered ahead of its time as it was Branson’s first stone structure. The parsonage burnt years ago, and many of the church records were lost. The church is located at the corner of 4th and Pacific in Branson. ■