

Samson is the most gifted judge in the whole book.

He is called from the womb,

and empowered with extraordinary gifts by the LORD,

but he accomplishes less than any other judge in the book.

He has a few magnificent individual victories,

but he never finishes the job.

He “begins” to defeat the Philistines, but never leads Israel to triumph.

Judges 14-15 tells one story (concluded in 15:20)

The key to the whole story is 14:4

“His father and mother did not know that was from the LORD,

for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.”

This is rooted in verse 25 of chapter 13—

the Spirit of the LORD is stirring in Samson—even though it takes a rather odd form.

The theme in verses 1-20 is “going down”

(since Samson lives in the hill country – and the Philistines live on the coastal plain –

so you would literally *go down* from the hill country to Timnah).

### 1. “Go Down” Samson (14:1-20)

#### a. Going Down to Timnah – the Secret of the LORD’s Purpose (v1-4)

*Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.”*

For one in whom the Spirit of the LORD is stirring,

Samson does not appear to be a very good role model.

He sees this Philistine gal, and tells his parents, “get her for me as my wife.”

Manoah and his wife could not have been too pleased.

Their response in verse 3 makes it clear that they don’t think much of his choice.

<sup>3</sup> *But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.”*

Especially for a Nazirite—this is not going to be very conducive to his keeping his vows.

But his response is blunt: “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.”

(Only two chapters from now we will begin to hear the refrain,

“In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his own eyes”

Samson is setting the tone)

This makes us think that Samson is totally unaware of the Spirit’s moving.

His interactions with the Philistines (at least at the beginning)

appear to be entirely selfish.

<sup>4</sup> *His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.*

But God's purposes are different.

Israel is living at ease under Philistine oppression—  
the seed of the woman is willing to yield authority to the seed of the serpent,  
and refuses to live as the Son of God.

And so God will use this comfortable status quo in order to upset the status quo.

Samson, this selfish young man—intent on his own pleasures—  
will unwittingly become the agent of God's judgment

### **b. Going Down to Timnah Again – the Secret of the Lion (v5-6)**

<sup>5</sup> *Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring.* <sup>6</sup> *Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.*

So Samson and his parents go down to Timnah to meet the woman.

This phrase “go down” is used five times in this chapter,  
four times to refer to Samson or his father “going down” to Timnah,  
and once to refer to Samson “going down” to Ashkelon.

Apparently Samson and his parents were not walking together,  
because he is alone when a lion came roaring towards him.

Where was he?

The vineyards of Timnah—and Samson was a Nazirite who was forbidden  
to eat any product of the grape.

But it is here that the Spirit of the LORD *rushed* upon him—  
not just “came” but “rushed”!

The Spirit of God infuses Samson with superhuman strength,  
and he tore the lion in pieces as one might tear a young goat.

Then he continues his journey and doesn't tell his parents –  
perhaps thinking, “no one would believe me!”

After all, this was the first time anything like this had happened!

He just tore a *lion* in pieces with his bare hands!

Who does that?!

### **c. Going Down to Talk with the Woman – the Secret of the Honey (v7-9)**

<sup>7</sup> *Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.*

<sup>8</sup> After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. <sup>9</sup> He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.

And he spoke to the young woman, “and she was right in Samson’s eyes.”

So the wedding is arranged.

Some days later, he returns to marry her, and finds a honeycomb in the carcass of the lion.

Bees do not ordinarily inhabit cadavers (flies and maggots normally do).

So this is plainly another divine sign.

But Samson fails the test.

Not only does he touch the cadaver—something forbidden to a Nazirite,  
but he also eats something unclean

(contact with a dead animal renders anything unclean)

and offers unclean food to his parents.

They had consecrated him; now he defiles them.

#### **d. Father Goes Down – the Secret of the Riddle (v10-18)**

<sup>10</sup> His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. <sup>11</sup> As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. <sup>12</sup> And Samson said to them, “Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, <sup>13</sup> but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes.” And they said to him, “Put your riddle, that we may hear it.” <sup>14</sup> And he said to them, “Out of the eater came something to eat.  
Out of the strong came something sweet.”  
And in three days they could not solve the riddle.

So Samson prepares a feast— the word for feast here refers to a drinking party—  
(as was customary for bridegrooms).

What’s the problem?

If it’s a drinking feast, then it would appear that Samson is involved in partaking of wine—  
a product of the grape.

Once again our hero is set on violating all the requirements of his Nazirite vow!

The whole scene appears to be fraught with ethnic tensions.

Samson prepares a drinking feast –  
which seems like a good opening.

And the Philistines then bring him thirty companions...  
which seems like a neighborly response!

After all, it does not seem as though the groom has any friends beside his parents.

But then things start to fall apart.

Samson seems intent on humiliating his companions.

The terms that he sets for answering his riddle are not well-designed to make friends—  
clothing wasn't cheap—

and he sets them a riddle that they have no hope of solving:

“Out of the eater came something to eat.

Out of the strong came something sweet.”

[all three riddles in this chapter are two-lines of three words each]

After three days of frustration they come to his wife and blackmail her:

if you don't get the answer, we'll burn you and your father's house with fire.

They even insinuate that she is in on the plot—“have you (pl) invited us here to impoverish us?”

(Literally, to “dispossess us”—this hints at God's intention in the matter:

his purpose is indeed to dispossess the Philistines and establish his people in the land)

*<sup>15</sup> On the fourth<sup>[a]</sup> day they said to Samson's wife, “Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?” <sup>16</sup> And Samson's wife wept over him and said, “You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is.” And he said to her, “Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?” <sup>17</sup> She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. <sup>18</sup> And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, “What is sweeter than honey?  
What is stronger than a lion?”  
And he said to them,  
“If you had not plowed with my heifer,  
you would not have found out my riddle.”*

So she begins to coax and wheedle Samson.

He puts her off, suggesting that he hasn't even told his parents the answer.

But if you loved me you would tell me the answer!

“You hate me; you do not love me!”

How many men could resist that for four days?!

So he finally gives in.

And so by sundown of the seventh day, Samson's riddle comes back at to haunt him:

“What is sweeter than honey?

What is stronger than a lion?”

While in its most straightforward sense, this is the answer to Samson's riddle,

in the light of the context, there is a double meaning:

What is sweeter than honey? —the love of a woman

What is stronger than a lion? —remember who killed the lion with his bare hands!

And yet, even Samson is but putty in the hands of a woman!

Furious, Samson responds with another two-liner of 3 words each,  
if you had not plowed with my heifer,  
you would not have solved my riddle!  
(And no, calling your wife a heifer in Hebrew doesn't sound any better than it does in English!)  
(It's the word "eglah"—remember Eglon! The fat greasy slob?!)

**e. Samson Goes Down to Ashkelon – the Power of the LORD's Spirit (v19-20)**

*<sup>19</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. <sup>20</sup> And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.*

Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him,  
clothing him with divine power,  
and he stormed 20 miles to Ashkelon,  
slaughtered 30 Philistines, gave their garments to the “companions,”  
and returned in anger to his father's house.

In one sense, this may seem to be a strange “mighty deed”!  
It sounds like petty vengeance!  
Thirty dead Philistines?  
You could wonder about the brutality –  
or if that doesn't bother you – then you might be puzzled at how small it is!

But think about the promise: “he will *begin* to save his people from the Philistines.”  
When God begins to work salvation – he often begins *small*.  
Think about your own life!  
When you have been in the middle of misery and trouble –  
God rarely brings radical, immediate deliverance –  
but he very often brings one small moment of promise.

In Samson's case, however, things only seem to get worse:  
Since Samson did not seem to be interested in the girl,  
her father gave her to one of the “companions” instead.

The whole picture makes more sense if you see Samson as the representative Israelite:  
Samson (Israel) is trying to arrange a mixed marriage with pagans;  
Israel is trying to live at peace with the uncircumcised.  
But the pagan woman has betrayed her husband,  
the husband is calling his wife names,  
and the father-in-law has given his daughter to another man.  
God will not allow his son to become like the nations.  
He will instead use the occasion to provoke a war between the seed of the woman

and the seed of the serpent.

Think about that – when you are faced with those times of misery and trouble!

God may well be provoking a war between *you* and *sin*!

## 2. “Do Unto Others...” (15:1-20)

### a. Samson’s Vengeance (15:1-8)

*After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. And he said, “I will go in to my wife in the chamber.” But her father would not allow him to go in. <sup>2</sup> And her father said, “I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead.” <sup>3</sup> And Samson said to them, “This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.” <sup>4</sup> So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. <sup>5</sup> And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards. <sup>6</sup> Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?” And they said, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.” And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.*

But Samson doesn’t realize yet what is to come.

He thinks that after cooling down he can come back to his wife.

He brings a young goat along as a present to soften her mood (no doubt she’ll be quite upset!)

But he discovers instead that her father has given her to one of his “companions.”

Hoping to placate Samson, he offers him her younger sister as “more beautiful than she!”

But no one tells Samson how to find a wife!

Enraged, he declared,

“This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.”

First, he catches 300 foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs, and set a torch between every pair of tails.

\*these are probably actually jackals\*

Why he would choose this method is something of a mystery,

but it is fitting with the guerilla tactics he uses throughout his life.

The result is massive destruction to the Philistines grain and olive groves.

Predictably, the Philistines were furious,

but rather than go after Samson,

they take it out on the Timnite and Samson’s wife.

Recognizing that Samson was merely acting in response to his father-in-law,

they burn the Timnite and his daughter with fire–

thus bringing upon her the very fate that she thought she had avoided

by telling the answer to Samson’s riddle to the thirty companions.

But this is a story of ironies upon ironies.

Because the death of his wife does not make Samson happy!

Far from it!

Enraged even more, he declares (verse 7)

<sup>7</sup> *And Samson said to them, “If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.”* <sup>8</sup> *And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.*

This is the pattern of the Samson narrative.

The Philistines keep trying to solve the “problem” of Samson –

but every time they think they have solved it – they wind up making it worse!

(The only solution that is permanent is *repentance*.)

And in the days of David – there will be many Philistines who take that route!

But in the days of Samson – not so much!

After great slaughter, he flees to the cleft of the rock of Etam in Judah.

#### **b. Judah Hides from the Philistines (15:9-13)**

<sup>9</sup> *Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi.* <sup>10</sup> *And the men of Judah said, “Why have you come up against us?” They said, “We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us.”* <sup>11</sup> *Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?”* *And he said to them, “As they did to me, so have I done to them.”* <sup>12</sup> *And they said to him, “We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.”* *And Samson said to them, “Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves.”* <sup>13</sup> *They said to him, “No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you.”* *So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.*

But even as Samson hides from the Philistines,

the Israelites—and especially here the Judahites—

are also hiding from the Philistines.

They don’t want any conflict.

A greater warrior has arisen than any in their history—

but they will not follow him.

All they want is to live in peace and avoid conflict with the Philistines.

So when the Philistines come looking for Samson,

the Judahites quickly fold and promise to go find him.

They become the messengers and servants of the Philistines.

The Philistines have come “to do to him as he did to us”--

he has wreaked havoc on them, they now wish to bring similar evil upon him.

And they send 3,000 men to get him.

Either way, it is a lot of men to capture one man—  
they recognized that Samson will be a hard man to bring down.  
Rather than send 3,000 men against the Philistines  
(remember the 300 that defeated Midian?!)  
they go to find the great Samson and hand him over to those who wish to kill him.  
They will sacrifice the divinely appointed leader in order to preserve the status quo.  
(Think of the priests handing over Jesus—better for one man to die, than the nation!)

They ask Samson “what have you done to us?”  
(Why have you provoked the Philistines?)  
His answer is, “I merely did to them what they did to me.”

How ironic!  
The Philistines have come to “do unto Samson as he did unto them”  
but Samson merely “did unto the Philistines” what they had done to him!  
Where will the cycle of revenge end?

So Samson yields to the Judahites—but only on the promise that they will not kill him.  
So they bind him with new ropes (the point is that these were not flimsy old ropes),  
and hand him over to the Philistines.

### c. The “Great Salvation” of Samson (15:14-20)

*<sup>14</sup> When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. <sup>15</sup> And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men.*

When the Philistines see him, they come shouting,  
but the Spirit of the LORD rushes upon him again.  
The ropes became as flax that has caught fire,  
and his bonds melted off his hands.  
And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey  
(The adjective “fresh” suggesting that he was once again breaking his Nazirite vow  
by touching a corpse)  
and with it slaughtered 1,000 men.  
(Remember Shamgar who killed 600 Philistines with an oxgoad in 3:31)

*<sup>16</sup> And Samson said,  
“With the jawbone of a donkey,  
heaps upon heaps,  
with the jawbone of a donkey  
have I struck down a thousand men.”*

*<sup>17</sup> As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi.<sup>[b]</sup>*



Samson's song is clever (since donkey and heap are spelled the same in Hebrew:  
"hamor"),  
but he does not seem to acknowledge God in his song of triumph.  
Then he threw away the jawbone—and the place was called Ramath-lehi (Hill of the Jawbone).  
What is Jawbone Hill?  
A hill where the battle took place?  
Or the heap of Philistine bodies!

Dale Ralph Davis appreciates the humor of our story-teller!  
The Philistines "triumphantly answer Samson's riddle...  
they win the bet and lose thirty fellow citizens...  
Does everything seem peaceful in Timnah?  
Samson's foxy antic will insure that the Philistine Cooperative Association's elevators  
will be near empty.  
No, it's not funny for the foxes..., but, looking at the episode in general,  
I'm sure an Israelite would find it at least mildly humorous.  
Or the Philistines are cocksure they have their foe at their mercy –  
until Samson is suddenly beating sense into their heads  
with an ass's dentures." (177)

<sup>18</sup> *And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said, "You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"* <sup>19</sup> *And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore;<sup>[c]</sup> it is at Lehi to this day.*

Now Samson was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said,  
"You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant,  
and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"  
God will not allow Samson to remain so cocky.  
By driving him to thirst, he forces Samson to acknowledge that God is the author of  
"this great salvation."  
Samson is replaying the part of Israel in the wilderness,  
after the great redemption at the Red Sea Israel grumbles about not having water.  
Jonah will be put in a similar situation—parched by the sun—  
as well as Elijah in the wilderness.  
But Samson plays his part perfectly,  
he is focused on himself and does not appreciate the truly marvelous thing  
that God has done.  
Like Israel before him—and like Jonah after him—  
he grumbles and murmurs,  
fearing that he will fall into the hands of the uncircumcised.  
Of course, if all had gone according to his plans,

he would be married to a Philistine woman right now!

But God heard his voice and split open the hollow place at Lehi, and water came out from it,  
and he drank and his spirit returned and he revived.

Therefore he called it “En-Hakkore” The spring of him who called.

When Hagar—the Egyptian—experienced a similar blessing, she called the spring,  
“the well of the living one who sees me”

but Samson calls this well after himself—the one who called!

**Conclusion: “He Judged Israel in the Days of the Philistines”**

<sup>20</sup> *And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.*

And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

The earlier judges delivered their people from their enemies,  
and then judged Israel in peace.

But Samson never finishes the job,  
and he judges Israel “in the days of the Philistines.”

Samson does not get off to a very good start as a deliverer.

Rather than fight the Philistines, he tries to marry one!

But God uses that as the occasion to set Samson off on his course.

Samson does not set us a very good example.

He tries to “fit in” to the culture of the dominant power of the age.

Of course the Judahites of his day are no better.

They have found their own way of making peace.

They are more pious than he—but they want to live at peace with the Philistines as well.

They don’t want to have anything to do with their Philistine overlords,  
so they will hand over Samson to them, rather than fight.

Under King Saul Israel will begin to fight,

but only King David will finish the job.

He will cast down the cities of the Philistines and reassert the reign of God over his people.

But unwittingly, Samson points us forward to Christ.

Samson is a great hero who embodies the history of Israel.

In all sorts of flawed ways, he points forward to one who would flawlessly embody Israel.

Psalm 45 and the true wedding of the Son of God

We need a king.

But not just any old king.

We need a king who will not seek what is right in his own eyes,  
but one who will seek what is right in God’s eyes—

and not a king who merely does what is right alone, by himself,  
but one who will lead *us* to do what is right in God's eyes!

Samson is a bad example of how to live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

The best example is Jesus!

Jesus—the one who was what Israel was supposed to be!

A kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

We are now that royal priesthood in Christ.

And that means that we are to mediate the blessings of Christ to those around us.

But it also means that we are to be messengers of death.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession,  
and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God

among those who are being saved

and among those who are perishing,

to one a fragrance from death to death,

to the other a fragrance from life to life.”

To some you will smell like life.

To others you will smell like death.

You cannot please everyone—so don't bother trying!