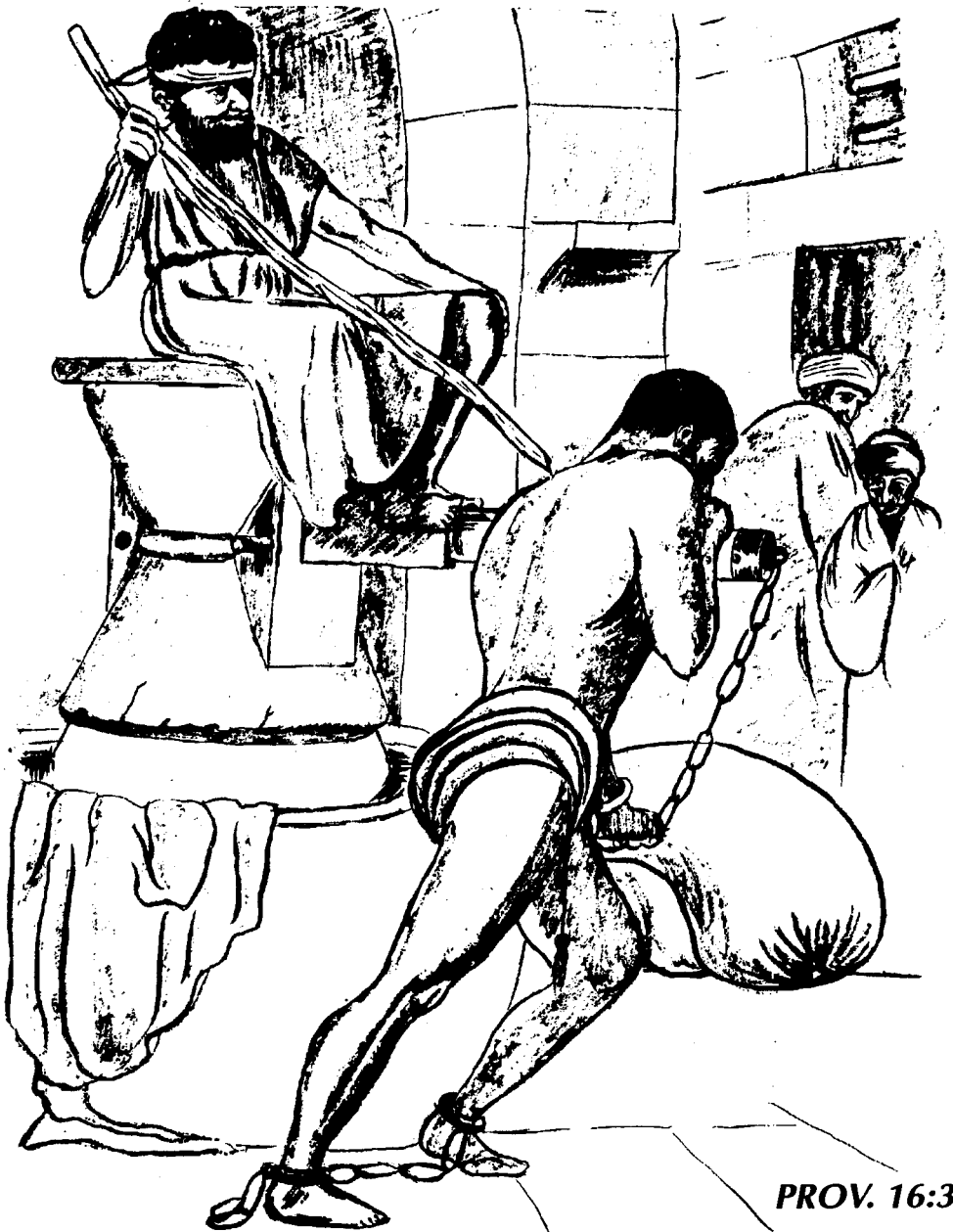


*'Better is He Who  
Rules His Spirit*



PROV. 16:32

*'Than He Who Takes A City'*

# Preface

The character of Samson has forever impressed itself upon all readers of the Holy Scriptures. The story of his life is not only one of the most popular in the Sunday School curriculum (especially for classes of young boys!) but also retains its magnetic interest for believers of all ages. How could a man so gloriously exalt the honour and power of Israel's God and yet descend to such abysmal depths of weakness? Why did God continue to use him even after repeated examples of instability? Why did Yahweh see fit to visit the unnamed wife of Manoah, living so obscurely on the fringes of Israel and of the infamous tribe of Dan?

Samson is the last of the judges as portrayed in "The Book of Judges". As such, he so very remarkably epitomises the whole of the nation throughout this period of Israel's history. Within this thought are the answers to the above questions. There is a cyclic pattern in the book of Judges and this is summarised in chapter 2 verses 10-14. Sin (verses 11-13) brought suffering (verses 14-15) and then seeking God brought salvation (verse 16). Throughout the book this cycle is repeated many times but in Samson's life we witness the pattern accelerated and we see strength follow weakness, salvation follow suffering several times within his own life. And just like Yahweh, as a pitying Father, returned again and again to restore His nation so He came back to His servant Samson despite his repeated instability; "the spirit of Yahweh began to move him *at times . . .*" (13:25; 14:6; 15:14). Throughout the times of the Judges one is impressed with the Divine principle, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Surely the life of Samson classically illustrates this principle. Born of an unnamed woman, formerly barren, of the despicable, faithless tribe of Dan, living among a remnant of his tribe right alongside the Philistines, yet upon Samson the Spirit of Yahweh came! And if the times of the Judges were those when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25) then in Samson we surely have the most dramatic example of the sad end of a man led by the lust of his eyes!

We thank those brethren and sisters who helped in the production of these notes on the life of Samson. On behalf of the late brother Ron Abel we would also like to thank brother John Martin whose vivid portrayal of the life of Samson has enriched the appreciation of so many of us.

May it please God to bless the use of these notes by our brethren and sisters in many places.



## ***“BETTER IS HE WHO RULES HIS SPIRIT THAN HE WHO TAKES A CITY”***

### **Foreword**

These notes attempt to set out a commentary on the life of Samson as recorded in Judges 13-16. His life affords a powerful example of the truth of the above proverb. Separated unto his God by a Nazarite vow and equipped for his work of delivering Israel from Philistine oppression by his super-human strength, Samson fell victim to the lustful passions of his own nature. He could tear a lion apart, and disdainfully carry away the city gates of Gaza, but he could not resist Philistine women.

Samson is not the only example of the proverb. Consider the following examples:

**1. King Asa** could muster over half a million men for his army, and he destroyed an Ethiopian army with twice as many men, but when reproved by the prophet Hanani for a foolish alliance with Ben-hadad, King of Syria, in a rage he threw the prophet into stocks in the prison and inflicted cruelties on the people (2 Chron. 16). He died diseased in his feet. Asa could take cities in the field of battle, but he could not rule his spirit.

**2. Uzziah** put to rout the Philistines, Arabs and Meunites until he became very strong. “But when he was strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.” (2 Chron. 26:16, RSV). As he retorted angrily when withstood by Azariah the priest, “leprosy broke out on his forehead, in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD”. His sad end is preserved: “And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper dwelt in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD” (2 Chron. 26:21, RSV). Surely the truth of this proverb would be engraven in his memory as he lived excluded from his people outside the camp of Israel.

**3. Joab** provides a powerful example of a man mighty and courageous in the taking of a city. In the conquest of the city of David, he “went first up, and was chief” (1 Chron. 11:6). For this act of valour he was rewarded with the office of “chief and captain” of David’s army.

On the field of battle he distinguished himself as a mighty man of war and a clever strategist, but he was unable to control his vindictive and vengeful spirit. Under the pretence of a private disclosure, he murdered Abner, (the former captain of Saul’s army). Upon Joab were invoked the most dreadful curses: “Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father’s house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a

leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread", (2 Sam. 3:29). It would have been better for Joab to have lived as an humble Israelite and to have mastered his spirit than to have taken cities.

Samson fits a recurrent human pattern—having great blessing—but beset by great weakness. For sheer tragedy, Samson is almost unparalleled—toiling in a Philistine grist mill with eyes bored out, he did the work of women and slaves—grinding grain to feed Philistine mouths. In the very city where he debased the Truth and shamed himself through a wicked woman, he returned to the clank of fetters of bronze, not as the strong man of Israel, but "weak as any other man".

There are many examples of contemporary blessings and weakness—like the young sister whose beauty of countenance and winsome personality catches the attention of aliens as well as Israelites indeed. The teenage brother, "tall, dark, and handsome" who finds that his natural attractiveness can net him Philistine dates as well as Christadelphian. Such persons ought to think reflectively on the utter tragedy of Samson's early life. "He did that which was right in his own eyes", ignoring the wise counsel of his parents, disregarding the instruction of his God through the prophets, until his brinkmanship brought him to utter disaster. The effects of sin do not always follow immediately—but follow they do—leaving in their wake shame, suffering, and death. It is indeed better that one should rule his spirit rather than take a city, for "a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov. 25:28, RSV).

Note preparation can be a difficult undertaking when the content relates primarily to a Biblical character, since many of these characters are only "skeletons" in the amount of direct description recorded. It remains for the imaginative student to clothe these with flesh and sinews. Such an undertaking if not carefully done can reveal more of the weakness of the student than the "flesh and sinew" of the character.

These notes are intended to serve as an aid to additional Bible study and marking. Although the research has been carefully annotated in the notes, and care taken in working from facts to inferences and conclusions, it is not intended that these notes be slavishly followed. In many instances their usefulness will be served by drawing your attention to a more exact consideration as to what a given passage teaches.

May the mighty lessons of Samson's life teach us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

Ron Abel.

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## **SAMSON: THE STRUCTURE OF JUDGES 13-16**

### **CHAPTER 13**

13: 1-25 - The birth of Samson

### **CHAPTER 14 - THE WOMAN OF TIMNATH**

14: 1-4 - Wedding Plans  
5-10 - Lion killed - a national parable  
          - a personal exhortation  
11- 20 - Riddle of lion and honey

### **CHAPTER 15 - THE SLAUGHTER OF THE PHILISTINES**

15: 1-2 - Wife given to best man  
3-5 - 300 foxes burn grainfields  
6-8 - Reprisal slaughter  
9-13 - Judah betrays Samson  
14-16 - 1,000 Philistines die by the jaw-bone of an ass  
17-20 - Deliverance from death by thirst

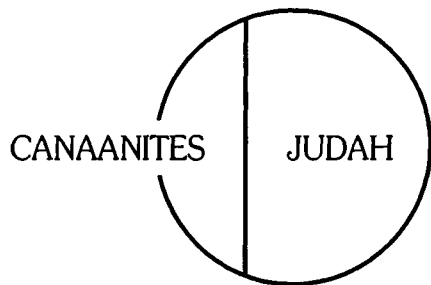
### **CHAPTER 16**

16: 1-3 - Prostitute of Gaza  
4-21 - Delilah the paramour  
      Attempts to find source of strength:  
        a) 7 green cords (6-9)  
        b) new ropes (10-12)  
        c) hair woven on loom (13-15)  
        d) hair shaven (16-20)  
22-31 - Samson kills 3,000+ Philistines in Temple of Dagon.

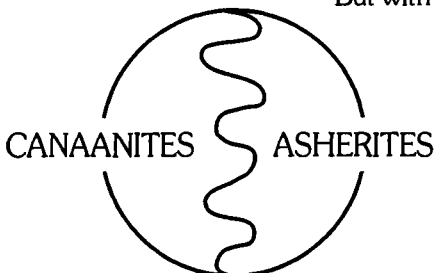
## THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES: “FAILURE THROUGH COMPROMISE”

Human nature, being weak and prone to sin, has a well-documented tendency to modify divine instruction. Israel had been commanded to utterly destroy the inhabitants of Canaan. Initially this was done under Joshua and his contemporaries, until the nation had taken the principal cities of the Philistines, “Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof” (Judges 1:18). But with the passing of time, there “arose another generation ... which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). Peaceful co-existence became the order of the day (when this was possible) and “they did not destroy the nations concerning whom the LORD commanded them: But were mingled among the heathen and learned their works” (Psa. 106:34, 35). No doubt the divine instruction had been challenged by plausible alternatives: Why couldn’t the inhabitants of the land be put to forced labour rather than exterminated? This would be appealing to the fleshly Israelite who saw in this move an opportunity for his own advantage—less work! It took but little time for the effects of such a compromise to become manifest. Note the following sequence:

**1. Canaanites allowed to co-exist as slaves** - “When Israel was strong, ... they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out” (Judges 1:28). This might be represented by a diagram to illustrate the respective positions of Judah as the dominant power and the Canaanites as the weaker power:

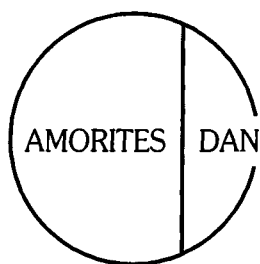


But with the passing of time,



**2. Israel dwells among the Canaanites** - The Gentile powers gained the ascendancy. “But the Asherites dwelt *among* the Canaanites ... for they did not drive them out” (Judges 1:32).

**3. Israel dominated by the Gentile powers** - "And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Judges 1:34).



The tragic history of the Judges may be summarized as follows: "And he (God) gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand ... (They) werē brought low ('impoverished or weakened', mg.) for their iniquity" (Psa. 106:41, 42). "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them" (Judges 2:16). There was evident justice in the punishment and mercy in the hardship. Note the following summary:

### THE 12 JUDGES AND THEIR VICTORIES

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <b>Othniel</b> of Judah (3:9):<br>victory against Cushan-rishathaim.                               | 6. <b>Tola</b> of Issachar (10:1).                                       |
| 2. <b>Ehud</b> of Benjamin (3:15):<br>victory against Eglon of Moab.                                  | 7. <b>Jair</b> of Gilead (10:3).   |
| 3. <b>Shamgar</b> (3:31):<br>victory against the Philistines.   | 8. <b>Jephthah</b> of Gilead (11:11):<br>victory over the Ammonites.     |
| 4. <b>Deborah</b> (Ephraim) and <b>Barak</b><br>(Naphtali) (4:4-6): victory over<br>Jabin and Sisera. | 9. <b>Ibzan</b> of Bethlehem (12:8).                                     |
| 5. <b>Gideon</b> of Manasseh (6:11):<br>victory over the Midianites and<br>Amalekites.                | 10. <b>Elon</b> of Zebulun (12:11).                                      |
|   | 11. <b>Abdon</b> of Ephraim (12:13).                                     |
|   | 12. <b>Samson of Dan</b> (15:20):<br>victory against the<br>Philistines. |



## SIN - SUFFERING

SIN	SUFFERING	SUPPLICATION	DELIVERANCE
1. Israel did evil... they served Baalim (3: 7). <sup>1</sup>	The anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. He sold them into the hand of Chushan-risha-thaim (3:8).	And when Israel cried unto the LORD (3:9).	The LORD raised up a deliverer even OTHNIEL (3:9).
2. Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD (3:12).	The LORD strengthened Eglon, King of Moab (3:12).	But when the children of Israel cried to LORD (3:15).	The LORD raised up a deliverer even EHUD (3:15). <sup>2</sup>
3. Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD when Ehud was dead ... (4:1).	And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin, King of Canaan (4: 2).	But when Israel cried unto the LORD (4:3).	DEBORAH a prophetess, judged Israel at that time .. He called also Barak (4:4).
4. And the children of Israel did evil (6:1).	And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years (6:1).	And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites (6:6).	And there came an angel unto GIDEON (6:11).
5. And the children of Israel did evil and forsook the LORD (10:6).	And His anger was hot and He sold them into the hand of the Ammonites (10:7).	And the children of Israel cried saying, "We have sinned against thee" (10:10).	Then the spirit of the LORD came upon JEPHTHAH (11:29).
6. And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD (13:1).	And He sold them into the hand of the Philistines forty years (13:1).	Possibly included in (10:15): "And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, we have sinned .."	And the angel of the LORD said, "he (SAMSON) shall begin to deliver Israel" (13: 5).

Samson *begun* to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression. The work was continued by Samuel but not finally completed until the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:8). The judgeship of Samson (which was probably contemporary with Samuel for a short time) was at the close of an era. The period of the Kings was about to commence when all the tribes would gain a cohesiveness under a central administration which had not existed during the whole period of the Judges.

<sup>1</sup> All references are to the book of Judges.

<sup>2</sup> "And after him was SHAMGAR, the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel" (Judges 3:31).

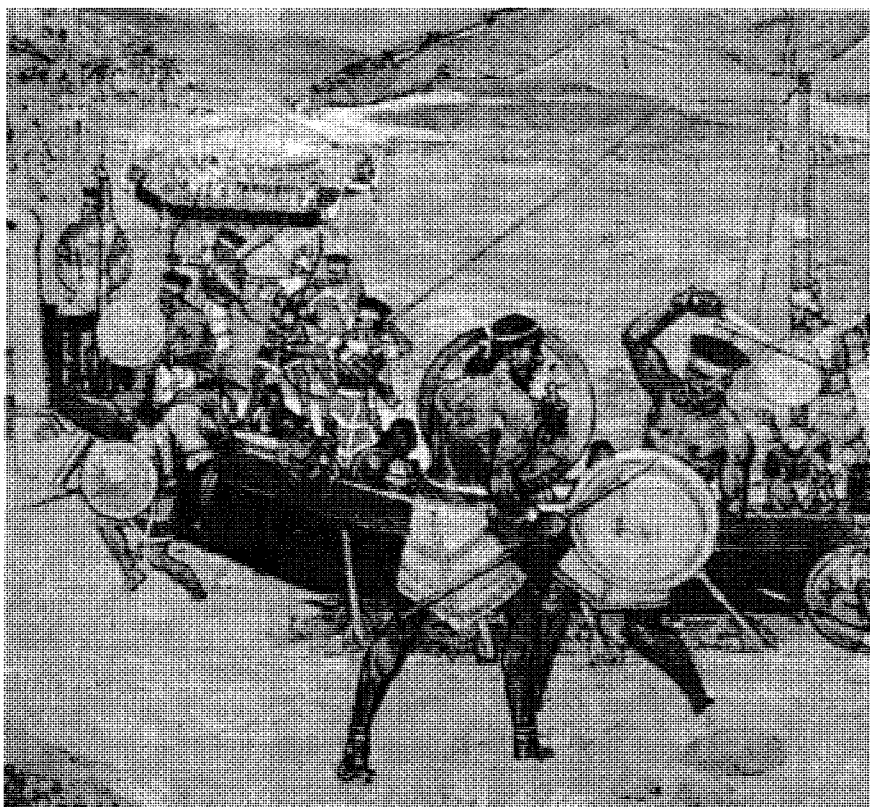
In order to understand the background to the work of Samson the following information is provided on the two principal inhabitants of the land which affected his work:

## THE PHILISTINES

1. Originally they came from Caphtor (Amos 9:7) which is almost certainly the ancient name for Crete. They were in the land at the time of Abraham (Gen. 21: 32) .
2. The Philistines inhabited the Maritime plain of Palestine (Judges 14:4) where they migrated from Egypt. At the time of the Exodus the Philistines were secure in the land. They had five lords over five principal cities:  
**Gaza** - the strong place (Yg); This was the chief city of the five.  
**Ashkelon** - holm, oak (Yg); weighing place (Stg).  
**Ashdod** - fortress, castle (Yg); ravager (Stg).  
**Ekron** - naturalisation (Yg); eradication (Stg).  
**Gath** - wine press, fortune (Yg); treading out (Stg).
3. Although the five lords co-operated in time of war, organised Philistine resistance in the land had been smashed by Judah shortly after Joshua's death (Judges 1:1, 18). The mopping-up operation later failed under the generation "which knew not the God of their fathers" (Judges 2:10).
4. The Philistines knew the art of iron smelting (1 Sam. 13:19-22) and therefore dominated the Shephelah with their chariots of iron.<sup>3</sup>
5. Foraging raids were continually made into territory occupied by the Israelites, one of the purposes being to capture slaves which were then traded to the Greeks and Edomites (Joel 3:4-6; Amos 1:6).
6. Samson destroyed many of the leading Philistines in the collapse of their temple of Dagon. They were later defeated by David but they were not completely overthrown until the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:8).

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<sup>3</sup> This situation continued through the reign of Saul: "Now there was no smith to be found through out all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, 'Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears'; but everyone of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plow-share, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle". (1 Sam. 13:19, 20, RSV). For this service the Israelites paid dearly: "and the charge was a pim for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads" (1 Sam. 13:21, RSV).



*Philistines land on Canaan*

7. The Philistines were known distinctively as *uncircumcised* a term of utter contempt by godly men as indicative of their vile and abominable worship. Philistine gods were as follows:

**Dagon** - This was their chief god. Its meaning relates to a fish-man (Judges 16:23; 1 Sam. 5:4, cf. mg.). Later commentaries identify it with agriculture.

**Ashteroth** - worship associated with immorality.

**Baalzebub** - "lord of the fly" (Yg). (See 2 Kings 1:2, 6).

One of the greatest indictments a prophet of Israel could make on his nation was to compare their conduct to that of the Philistines.

## THE AMORITES

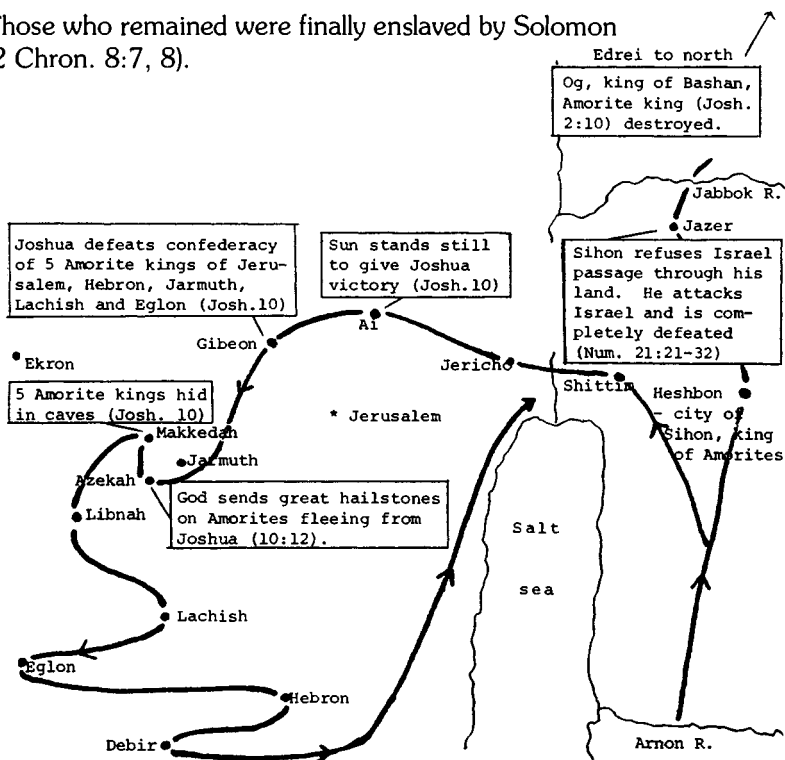
1. The name means "Mountaineer" (Yg)<sup>4</sup>. They inhabited the east bank of the Jordan River where their territory extended from the valley of the Arnon to Mt. Hermon (Deut. 3:8-9) and extended west to the mountains of Judah. Here they occupied not only the mountains, but the Arabah, the hill country and the lowland (Deut. 1: 7).
2. Their wicked culture can be inferred from the words of God regarding Abraham's descendants: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). God punished the Amorites whose wickedness was full under the hand of Moses (Num. 21).
3. At the time of the entry into the Land of Promise, Israel accomplished a signal victory over Sihon (Num. 21). The strength of the power is indicated in the following passage of Amos 2:9: "Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was as strong as the oaks: yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath".

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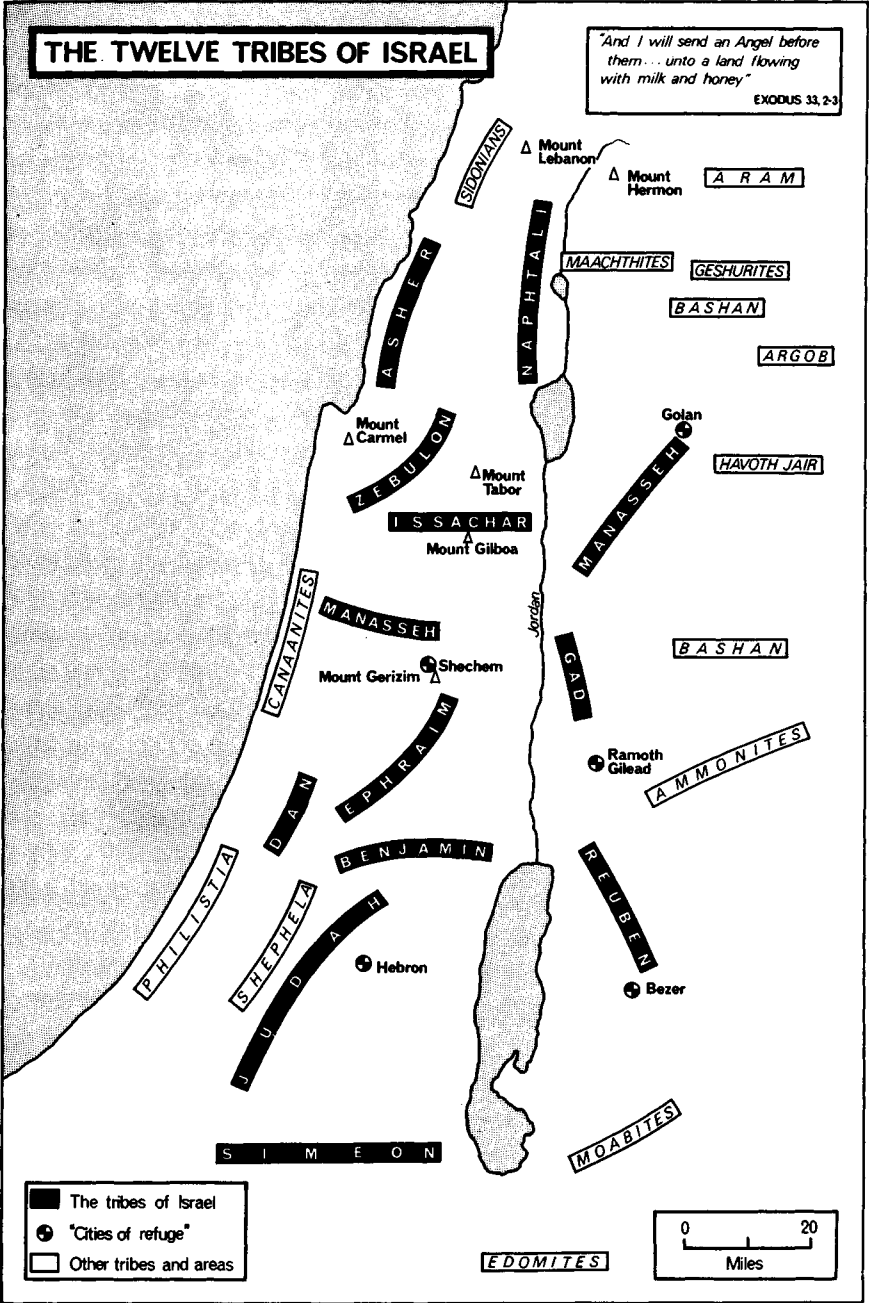
<sup>4</sup> This definition is supported by the fact that they are said to dwell in the mountains of Judah (Num. 13:29), and their territory was called the "mount of the Amorites" (Deut. 1:7).

## CONQUEST OF THE LAND UNDER JOSHUA: THE AMORITE KINGDOM

1. Amorites were descendants of Ham (Gen. 10:16, 6).
2. They inhabited the land<sup>5</sup> at the time of Abraham. (They were confederate with him, Gen. 14:3, cf. v.7).
3. They were subdued by Jacob (Gen. 48:22).
4. They were one of the principal inhabitants of the land at the time of the conquest. (Their name appears in all the listings of the inhabitants to be driven out by Israel, cf. Exod. 3:8, 17; 33:2; Josh. 11:3; Neh.9:8).
5. Their land was given to Gad, Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh (Num. 32:33).
6. They oppressed the tribe of Dan, but were routed by Joseph (Judges. 1:34, 35).
7. Those who remained were finally enslaved by Solomon (2 Chron. 8:7, 8).



<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem, Hebron, Eglon, Lachish and Jarmuth all lay in Amorite territory (Joshua 10).



## **SAMSON — A MAN OF PARALLELS**

It is a common feature of the divine revelation in Scripture that many of the Old Testament worthies had resemblances of character to Jesus. They never completely provided a mirror-image since the weakness of the flesh always in some way marred the comparison. A Messianic title is "my servant, David" (Ezek. 24:34), indicating the extent to which King David, a man after God's own heart, provided a type of the Son of God. David's sin with Bathsheba and the numbering of Israel, are, however, examples of imperfection not found in "the Lamb of God" without spot and blemish.

Similarly, Samson was only a shadowy type. As the following analysis points out, there were, nevertheless, some important points of comparison. It should not be forgotten that it is a matter of inspiration that Samson is catalogued along with the other worthies of old in Hebrews 11. He was a deliverer of his people—sent by God to be such.

### **SAMSON**

### **JESUS**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Birth announced by an angel (Judges 13:3).  | Birth likewise announced by an angel (Matt. 1:20).   |
| 2. Made strong by divine power - "The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him" (Judges 14:6).                | Made strong by divine power "The son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself" (Psa. 80:17).   |
| 3. A deliverer of his people - "He shall begin to deliver Israel" (Judges 13:5).                               | A deliverer of his people - "He shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21) "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15).  |
| 4. Delivered into the hands of Gentile overlords for the price of peace by the men of Judah (Judges 15:13-15). | Delivered into the hands of Gentile overlords for the price of peace by the men of Judah - "Caiaphas said ... 'Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not'" (Jn. 11:50). |
| 5. Betrayed for 1,100 pieces of silver (Judges 16:5).  | Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 27:3-5).   |

**SAMSON****JESUS**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 6. Held up to ridicule and mocking before his death (16:25).       | So was Christ (Matt. 26:67, 68; 27:29).   |
| 7. Burst the Philistine bonds of death to vanquish the foe (16:5). | He burst the bonds of death to vanquish the "prince of this world"—sin (Jn. 12:31). |

There are similarly impressive parallels between Samson and "Israel after the flesh":

**SAMSON****NATURAL ISRAEL**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Nazarite from birth separated for divine service (Judges 13:5).                 | Separated for divine service (Lev. 20:24, 26). The nation was a firstborn son (Exod. 4:22).  |
| 2. God was the source of his amazing strength (e.g. Judges 15:14).                 | God was the source of Israel's strength (Exod. 15:2, 13).  |
| 3. Source of strength inexplicable by enemies (Judges 16:5).                       | "The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might" (Micah 7:16).   |
| 4. Unable to be overcome by enemies when faithful (e.g. Judges 16:9, 12, 14).      | "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isa. 54:17; Deut. 28:7).  |
| 5. Despite great blessing, constantly going astray (e.g. Judges 14: 1-5; 16:1, 4). | So was natural Israel (Judges 2:17, 18).   |
| 6. Broke his vow and lost his God-given strength (Judges 16:17-20).                | Broke their covenant with God and lost national strength (cf. Lev. 26:15-20). "They were brought low ('impoverished', 'weakened', mg.) for their iniquity" (Psa. 106:41, 42).                  |
| 7. Sin led to blindness and chains (Judges 16:21).                                 | Zedekiah the last king of Judah had his eyes bored out and was placed in fetters (2 Kgs. 25: 7). National blindness to things spiritual was to remain until the Kingdom Age (Rom. 11: 25, 26). |



**SAMSON****NATURAL ISRAEL**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 8. Punishment - captivity. Samson worked as a slave in the prison house at Gaza (Judges 16:21). | This was the national punishment (2 Chron. 36:15-20).  |
| 9. A glorious future awaits him (Heb. 11:32, 39).   | "Blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:25, 26). |

**SAMSON - WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH**

It is useful to consider Samson's life as divided into two categories as follows:

**WEAKNESS**

There were 3 Philistine women with whom Samson debased the Truth and shamed himself:

- a) Woman of Timnath (referred to as his wife) - (Judges 14).
- b) Prostitute of Gaza (16:1-3).
- c) Delilah the paramour (16:4-20).

**STRENGTH**

Samson was said by the Philistines to be "our enemy ... the ravager of our country, who has slain many of us", (Judges 16:24, RSV). He delivered Israel on the following recorded occasions:

- i. He killed 30 men of Ashkelon (probably wealthy Philistines) in order to pay the debt owed to the wedding guests as a result of a bet on a riddle (14:19).
- ii. Destruction of the Philistine grainfields, vineyards and olives by a conflagration caused by 300 foxes (jackals) with burning lamps between their tails.
- iii. Reprisal attack (for the Philistines burning his wife and father-in-law, 15:6, 7). Samson slaughtered the Philistines "hip and thigh" (15:8).
- iv. 1,000 were killed with the jaw-bone of an ass at Lehi (15:15).
- v. 3,000 died and probably many more when he pulled down the temple of Dagon. He destroyed more Philistines in his death than he had in all his life (16:27, 30).

## JUDGES 13

### THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

**13:1** *And the children of Israel did evil again* - The command to utterly destroy the inhabitants of Canaan had been compromised. This failure was soon followed by a progressive breakdown of the separation that God had intended between Israel and the Gentile nations. They “mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols; which were a snare unto them” (Psa. 106:35, 36). It appears to be a well-documented characteristic of human nature that continued exposure to an evil environment results in compromise and its ensuing effects.<sup>6</sup>

*in the sight of the LORD* - It is worth remembering that “neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and open (‘laid bare’, RSV) unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). The expression “in the sight of the LORD”, however, almost certainly refers to God manifested through His angels. Consider the following parallel expressions:

- a) “The eyes of the LORD” are said to “run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2 Chron. 16:9, RSV). This was the work of the angels (cf. Exod. 23:20-23).
- b) The “watchers” are identified as “holy ones” (i.e., an angel) in Dan. 4:13, 17, 23.
- c) “The eyes of the LORD which run to and fro through the whole earth” (Zech. 4:10). This is a synonymous expression for the work of the angels as “ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation” (Heb. 1:14, RSV).

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<sup>6</sup> See the previous outline, “Sin - Suffering”. On five prior occasions it is recorded that Israel “did evil” and in every occurrence suffering followed.



*And the woman bare a son and called his name Samson  
Judges 13:24*

### ***and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines***

As outlined in the previous chart of the judges of Israel a sequence can be observed: Sin - suffering - repentance - deliverance. God delivered Israel into the hands of the inhabitants of the land because it provided the ideal environment for trial and chastisement. The commentary of Ezra in his great prayer sets this out:

“Therefore thou didst give them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer; and in the time of their suffering they cried to thee and thou didst hear them from heaven; and according to thy great mercies thou didst give them saviours who saved them from the hand of their enemies” (Neh. 9:27, RSV).

There is a problem, however, that sooner or later arises in the reading of Scripture. The problem is apparent in the contrasts between two sets of statements which are termed here “the divine point-of-view” and “the human point-of-view”.

#### ***The Divine Point-of-View***

- a) “I (God) will not henceforth drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, that by them I may test Israel, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not” (Judges 2:21, 22, RSV).

- b) “But you have not obeyed my command (in utterly destroying the inhabitants). What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you” (Judges 2:2, 3, RSV).

#### ***The Human Point-of-View***

- a) “Judah .. could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron” (Judges 1:19, RSV).

- b) “Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants .. but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labour, but did not utterly drive them out” (Judges 1:27, 28, RSV).

The problem is this: Why is Israel punished for what God does? The Israelites suffered because they did not drive out the nations, and yet the narrative elsewhere makes it clear that it was God who left the nations in the land.

Two reasons can be inferred from the “human point-of-view” for the incomplete conquest of the land:

- a) The superior weapons of the inhabitants—chariots of iron.
- b) Their persistence and the apparent willingness of the Israelites in allowing them to exist for their own advantage—forced labour.

Divine foreknowledge of the choice Israel would make once they entered the land had previously been revealed to Moses (“for I know the purposes which they are already forming, before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give”, Deut. 31:21, RSV). Divine foreknowledge, however, does not necessarily involve pre-destination. From the “human point-of-view” the Israelites made a responsible choice for which they were accountable. God’s divine foreknowledge of their choice resulted in His leaving the nations in the land—that is He did not exercise His great power to remove the nations despite their faithlessness. By leaving the nations in the land God provided an ideal situation for *trial*. A trial in which success or failure would be readily apparent to all Israelites (see Josh. 23:8-13).

Perhaps the clearest exposition in Scripture setting out the two points of view—the human and the divine—is found in Isaiah 10. God employed the Assyrian power as the “rod of his anger” and the “staff of his fury”, but from the point of view of the Assyrian: “... against the people of my wrath I command him ... but *he does not so intend*, and his mind does not so think” (Isa. 10:6, 7, RSV). By keeping the two points of view separate, the apparent difficulty is resolved.

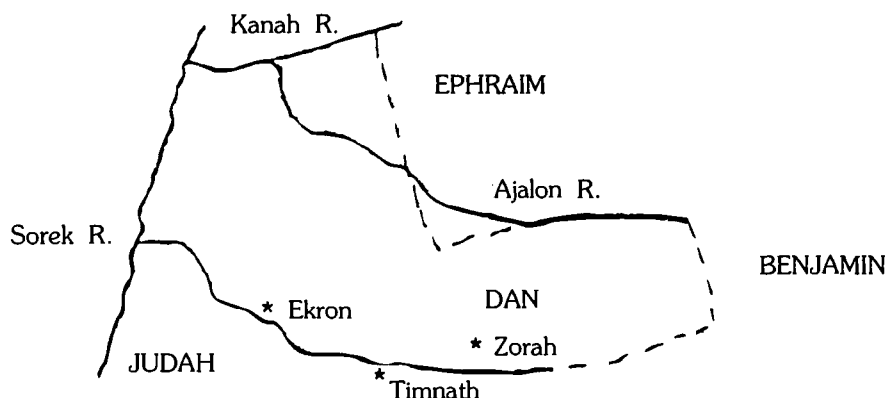
It appears that the tribe of Judah whose allotted territory bordered the Philistines had lost all spirit and completely capitulated to Philistine domination (Judges 15:11). Before Philistine oppression was alleviated the ark of God was captured and the sanctuary at Shiloh desolated (1 Sam. 4). Philistines were still a threat to Israel until the time of David.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There was a temporary respite during the time of Samuel when a decisive victory was achieved at Mizpeh: “So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel”. (1 Sam. 7:13).

**forty years** - Samson did not commence his judgeship at the end of the forty year period, but rather his twenty year judgeship (16:31) was during the period of the oppression. This conclusion is suggested by the fact that it was said that he would only *begin* to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines (13:5) - implying that the oppression would continue after his death.

**13:2 And there was a certain man of Zorah** - Zorah means “wasp, hornet”, (Stg). It was situated on the edge of the hill country, 1,500 feet above sea level<sup>8</sup> overlooking the valley of Sorek which was occupied by the Philistines. Zorah was originally given to Judah (Josh. 15:33-36), but was later given to Dan (Josh. 19:41).



**of the family of the Danites** - Was there only one family in the tribe of Dan? (cf. Num. 26:42, 43). Dan was the second largest tribe when it entered the land (64,400) but was unable to take even the relatively small territory allotted to it. Part of the tribe left the task of conquering the Amorites and the Philistines and journeyed to the far north of Palestine where they conquered the placid Sidonians. They soon lapsed into idolatry<sup>9</sup> (cf. Judges 18: 2, 7-10).

**Manoah** - His name means “rest” (Yg), or “settled spot”.

<sup>8</sup> J. J. Lias, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges: Judges*, (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1882), p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> Is this the reason why the tribe of Dan is deleted from the symbolic Israel in Rev. 7?

**13:3 And the angel appeared unto the woman** - The Psalmist penned the words: "... children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them ..." (Psa. 127:3-5). A childless marriage was a source of regret and often viewed as a divine blessing withheld. (See Gen. 16:2; 25:21; 1 Sam. 1:5.)

The significance of the occasion is indicated by the fact that this is only the third time that an angel is recorded to have appeared to anyone in the whole period of the Judges (cf. prior occasions, 2:1; 6:11).

**13:4 drink not wine** - There must be a complete abstinence from anything which would dull the sensibilities to spiritual matters. It was no doubt for this reason that the Levites were not permitted to drink wine when serving in the tabernacle (Lev. 10:8-11).

**strong drink** - Heb. "shecar" - "seems to have been distilled from corn, honey and dates",<sup>10</sup> "intoxicating liquor not made from grapes"<sup>11</sup>. Under the Nazarite law anything to do with the grape, the kernel or even the husk was forbidden to be eaten (Num. 6:3).

Why was Manoah's wife commanded to abstain from these things when they applied only to the Nazarite? Two reasons can be deduced:

- a) This would emphasise the extraordinary character of Samson's work in Israel. (Note the similar character of Hannah's preparation - 1 Sam. 1:15.)
- b) It has also been suggested that Samson's mother kept the Nazarite vow regarding strong drink and the eating of unclean foods. In support of this interpretation the following has been noted:

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<sup>10</sup> *The Companion Bible*, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Ellicott, *An Old Testament Commentary*, vol. II (London: Cassell and Co., 1897), p. 240. See the distinction in Luke 1:15 between "wine" and "strong drink", Gk: "sikera", the same word is used in LXX of Judges 13:4.

- i. The only specific prohibition regarding Samson was that “no razor shall come on his head”.<sup>12</sup> (Judges 13:5).
- ii. It is almost certain that he would have drunk wine at Timnath. The word used for “feast”, Heb. “mishteh”, (14:10) means “drinking” (Yg), (Stg).
- iii. It would also be difficult for Samson to avoid contact with a dead body (which was forbidden for Nazarites, Num. 6:6, 7) since on a number of occasions he slew many Philistines, and took honey from a dead lion. Samson was an unusual Nazarite since he was destined to be one from birth. Usually the Nazarite *voluntarily* undertook his vow for a period of time.

**and eat not any unclean (thing)** - The unclean things are listed in Lev. 11.

**For, lo thou shalt conceive and bear a son** - A source of reproach had been removed (cf. Elisabeth’s reaction: “Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men”, Lk. 1:25).

**13:5 and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb** - “The primary meaning of the Hebrew verb ‘nazar’ is to separate. Here the “nazir” is the ‘separated’, ‘consecrated’, ‘devoted’.<sup>13</sup>

In the 70’s it was not uncommon to see Bible School photos in which it appeared impossible to distinguish the males from the females on the basis of hair length, and to find brethren who were prominent in ecclesial and preaching work, with sons whose hair length was a source of embarrassment to fellow-labourers.

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<sup>12</sup> Against this point, note although Samuel is not specifically called a Nazarite, the fact that his hair was not to be cut makes it very likely that he was a Nazarite (1 Sam. 1:11). Like Samson, Samuel killed—Agag died at his hands—hewed in pieces (1 Sam. 15:33), yet there was no obligation for his mother to keep this part of the Nazarite vow for him.

<sup>13</sup> James Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), p. 691.



Justification for the long-hair on males innovation is sometimes sought in the hair length of Samson. Note the following:

1. Samson was *commanded* by God to leave his hair uncut (Judges 13:5). His long hair, therefore, had nothing to do with social custom. Samson was a Nazarite from birth (Judges 13:1-7). The Nazarite vow allowed Israelites not of the priestly tribe of Levi to assume, in effect, a priestly status in Israel."<sup>14</sup>
2. Separation and dedication are repeated descriptions of the Nazarite vow. God instructed that the visible token of his separation was that he "shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow" (Num. 6:5). When his hair was cut it indicated that his vow had either been violated or terminated (cf. Num. 6:18). It is tragically ironical that the token of the Nazarite's separation—his long hair—should be cited to justify *conformity* to this evil world, when the very intention of the vow was to teach separation from the world of man and dedication to the things of God.
3. Only those unaware of the special circumstances of the Nazarite vow would seek support in the example of Samson for the wearing of long hair.
4. It is noteworthy that even the priests of the Kingdom will be forbidden to wear long hair: "Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll ('trim', RSV) the hair of their heads" (Ezek. 44:20).
5. Long hair in Scripture is *always* associated with the female.  
Note the following:

- a) "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her, for hair is given her for a covering" (1 Cor. 11:15).
- b) "And they had hair as the hair of women ..." (Rev. 9:8). The intended contrasts here must relate to the appearance of the hair, i.e., its *length*.

The case of Absalom might be regarded as an exception to this: "And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it ...), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight" (2 Sam. 14:26, RSV).

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<sup>14</sup> The High Priest wore a turban on which was a gold plate inscribed: "Holiness to the LORD" (Exod. 39:30, cf. Exod. 28:36, 37; 29:6; Zech. 3:5). Instead of this the Nazarite wore a crown of hair, symbolic of his consecrated separateness.

The weight of his hair was about five pounds (2.2kg).<sup>15</sup> It was because his hair weighed so much that he cut it once a year. This exceptional growth of hair was, in fact, the very vehicle of his death. How else could a man remain suspended (*alive - caught*) by the head in the thick branches of an oak? (2 Sam. 18:9, 10.) Irregularities in worship and conduct were frequent among David's sons. Absalom is never set out in Scripture as a man to follow. Rather he was the epitome of vanity—a character who was base, immoral (2 Sam. 16:21-22), wicked, deceitful and treacherous. He is not an example to be emulated and only those hard-pressed for evidence could seek support in the hair length of Absalom to establish a rule of conduct.<sup>16</sup>

**he shall begin to deliver Israel** - Samson was a loner in his work and in his death. His deliverance was largely unaided by his brethren, who preferred peaceful co-existence with the enemy. Samson's deliverances were such an amazing demonstration of divine strength that news of his feats must have travelled through every hamlet in the Israelitish communities throughout the land. Can you imagine the sensation that would have been caused by Samson carrying the two leaves, the posts and the bar of the city gates of Gaza—the *chief* city of the Philistines—*uphill* toward Hebron? Think of the acclaim with which the Israelites would receive the news that Samson had slain 1,000 Philistines with the *jawbone* of an ass! What could be more designed to quicken the spirit of the Israelites after a long period of Philistine oppression?

**13:8 the man of God** - Angels were often mistaken for ordinary men in their appearances in Scripture (e.g. Gen. 18:2, 22, cf. 19:1, 5; Heb. 13:2). The "Jehovah's Witnesses" have devised the doctrine of materialisation of bodies to account for this phenomenon of angels appearing as men. The fact is that all existence is corporeal—bodily. The Scripture knows nothing of spirits which can materialise.<sup>17</sup>

**13:12 How shall we order the child, and (how) shall we do unto him?** - "what is to be the boy's manner of life, and what is he to do?" RSV.

<sup>15</sup> 2½ shekels are slightly heavier than 1 oz. See *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, (London: Collins, 1944), p. 522.

<sup>16</sup> For a further consideration of these points, see "*The Hair Length of Christadelphian Brethren: A Biblical Analysis*", published and obtainable from CSSS.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps nowhere else does this J.W. doctrine run into more difficulties than in the resurrection of Christ. See R. Abel, *Wrested Scriptures* Pasadena, California: The Christadelphians, 1971), p. 195, available from the Christadelphian Office.

**13:16 I will not eat of thy bread** - "Bread" is a term used in a wider sense than simply "bread". The Hebrew word "lechem" means "food, bread, sustenance" (Yg). As the context indicates, they had already brought the kid for this purpose (v.15). Note what Abraham's "morsel of bread" involved - cakes baked upon an hearth, a tender calf, butter and milk! (Gen. 18:5).

The angelic visitors shared a meal with Abraham (Gen. 18:1-8) why the refusal here? Perhaps because eating indicates a sharing, participation, i.e., *fellowship*. The purpose of the angel's visit was to announce deliverance through *separation*.

**and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering** - A kid of the goats was prescribed as a burnt offering by the Law (Lev. 1:3, 10).

It was evident in the Law of Moses that the Altar was first and foremost the Altar of Burnt Offering. Twice daily, morning and evening, a burnt offering on behalf of the nation commenced and finished the daily sacrifices (Exod. 29:38-42; Num. 28:1-8). The cereal offering therefore, could not be offered without it being associated with atonement and the requirement of blood-shedding for the forgiveness of sin.

The Burnt Offering was an offering in which the whole animal was burnt upon the altar—none of it being eaten. It was indicative of the offerer's intention to separate and dedicate himself completely to his God.

**thou must offer it unto the LORD** - The angel was the accredited representative of Yahweh, but the distinction of persons was still required. Deference belongs to God Himself. It is for this reason that clerical designations such as "Reverend", "Very Reverend" and "Most Reverend" have been rejected in acknowledgments to such authors in Christadelphian literature.

**13:17 What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?** - Notice the similarity to the question asked by Jacob of the angel who wrestled with him (Gen. 32:29) and Israel of the One who sent Moses (Exod. 3:13).

The "honour" probably meant a gift. See the way the Hebrew verb "kibbled" is used in Num. 22:17. The "very great honour" Balak was prepared to give Balaam involved gifts of money (cf. v.18). It appears to

have been customary to give gifts to prophets for their ministrations (see 1 Sam. 9:7; 1 Kings 14:3).

**13:18 My name ... is secret** - AV mg. "wonderful". It is the same word translated "Wonderful" (a description of Messiah in the Kingdom Age) in Isa. 9:6. The Hebrew word "peli"<sup>18</sup> probably means "ineffable, beyond comprehension". This is the contextual significance of the word in Psa. 139:6.

**13:19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering,<sup>19</sup> and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD** - The "meat offering", Heb. "minchah", "cereal offering", RSV. It was fine flour covered with oil and frankincense (Lev. 2:1, 2). Salt was also added.

The cereal offering was a voluntary offering—not commanded by the Law of Moses. It consisted of the following ingredients:

*flour*: The result of labour, tilling the soil, planting, cultivating, reaping, threshing and grinding, but nevertheless totally dependent upon God's blessings—the warmth of the sun, the rain and the nourishment of the soil.

*oil*: Pure olive oil (cf. Exod. 27:20) used in cooking. Oil was extracted by knocking the ripe olives from the trees into broad baskets. Then they were emptied into a vat and crushed by a large stone. The oil was filtered as it drained into pots.

*frankincense*: In its purest form it was a white gum resin. It was obtained by making a deep incision through the bark of a tree. The white juice which exuded from the tree hardened, and when crushed and burned gave off a sweet fragrance.

*salt*: is a preservative, with antiseptic properties and prevents fermentation.

<sup>18</sup> The word is not a proper name, it is an adjective. "Wondrously" v.19, is the same word (J.M.)

<sup>19</sup> Robert Roberts has an appropriate comment on the Meal Offering (Cereal Offering): "It was one of the many pleasing features of the system of divine service established by the Law of Moses that a man could give to God a portion of what he (the man) required for his own peculiar use: that is, if he felt moved to do so by a sense of gratitude to desire to do special honour to God. Some things were compulsory, but this was not: it was left to the spontaneous action of love, while yet enjoined as a thing expedient: 'Honour the LORD with thy substance, and the firstfruits of all thy increase.'" Robert Roberts, *The Law of Moses*, 4th edition, (Birmingham: The Christadelphian, 1939), p. 226.

## JUDGES 14

### 14:1-4 MARRIAGE WITH THE ALIEN

**14:1 And Samson went down to Timnath** - "Timnath" means "allotment", (Yg); "a portion assigned", (Stg). The reason why he went down to Timnath is not stated.<sup>20</sup>

**and saw a woman in Timnath** - Notice the way in which there is a repetition of *saw, seen* (v.2) and "is right in mine eyes" (14:3, mg.). It is tragic that the very eyes which lusted after Philistine women were bored out by Philistines (16:21).

**of the daughters of the Philistines** - To take a Philistine girl was a violation of the principle of separation and dedication (implicit in the Nazarite vow). Furthermore, it was against the specific command of God to Moses (Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:3, 4).

Note the emphatic warning of Joshua:

"For if you turn back, and join the remnant of these nations left here among you, and *make marriages with them*, so that you marry their women and they yours, know assuredly that the Lord your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a *snare and a trap for you*, a scourge on your sides, and *thorns in your eyes*, till you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God *has given you*" (Josh. 23:12-13, RSV).

It is evident in retrospect, that nearly every generation of believers has had those in their midst who would in some way challenge the wisdom of these words. Marriage with the alien was a chronic problem in the Israelitish ecclesia which in the time of Nehemiah eroded his work and led to gross apostasy (Neh. 6:17-19, cf. 10:30; 13:23-27). It has been the strength of Christadelphian teaching to maintain the counsel of God. Note the way it is put in the Toronto Christadelphian constitution:

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<sup>20</sup> J.M. suggests that the reason is clearly implied in the previous verse. He was fed up with living in the "camp of Dan" and wanted to take "the inheritance" from the Philistines (cf. Rom. 7:19).

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“Marriage with the alien is an offence against the law of Christ. That those who maintain the contrary are unfit for fellowship with those who ‘consent to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus’. That when offence takes place in the matter, the ecclesia shall signify their disapproval by announcing withdrawal from the offending brother or sister until he or she admit their offence and apply for re-fellowship.”<sup>21</sup>

Sound words are these!

Bryan Wilson, in a sociological survey of the Christadelphians made an interesting comment:

“There can be no doubt that the rule against exogamy (marriage with the alien) effectively promotes the individual’s allegiance to the faith, and that most Christadelphians are so brought up that the rule operates without them feeling very much constraint. For those who make outside affiliations, a real conflict of allegiance develops”.<sup>22</sup>

The real conflict of allegiance is called by the Apostle Paul “unequal yoking” (2 Cor. 6:14).

**14:2 now therefore get her for me to wife** - It has been well said that nothing drugs the senses like love and hate. Samson, feeling the strong pull of a desire for a wife, was unable to discipline himself. He was like a city broken into and left without walls (Prov. 25:28). Some of us have felt the strong pull towards a Philistine girl with whom we have “fallen” in love. At such times it takes strength of character to combine emotional intensity with Godly instruction. Many act rashly on these amazingly strong impulses only to find out later that what passed for “love” was infatuation. For some who marry the realisation comes too late and marriage is “stuck out” amidst bitterness and angularity. What was intended to bring man great happiness and help in the Truth, may as a direct consequence of such folly, bring a life of divided loyalties and misery.

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<sup>21</sup> The Constitution of the Toronto Christadelphian Ecclesia, Scarlett Road, (Toronto: 1963), p. 6, article 36. See also “The Christadelphian” magazine, 1886, XXIII, p. 368.

<sup>22</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, *Sects and Society: A Sociological Study of Three Religious Groups in Britain* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1961), pp. 292, 293.



*The daughters of Philistines*  
*Judges 14:2*

It is a very common weakness of the young man that the physical side easily gets out of proportion and becomes an end in itself. This "infatuation" is not the "caring" of New Testament "love" which can only be appreciated through a balanced perspective which God's Truth brings.

**14:3 *Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?*** - This was Godly counsel from Samson's dad and mum, but alas, it fell on deaf ears. Samson, strong-willed and insistent, was bent on a Philistine girl—the very people God had commanded to be exterminated (Deut. 7:1-3). Such a sinful course would inevitably bring suffering: "They shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:13, RSV).

***now therefore get her for me; for she pleaseth me well*** - See marginal note: Heb. "is right in mine eyes". Samson was prepared to lay aside the instruction of his God, the wise counsel of his dad and mum, for the superficial beauty of a Philistine woman. In this respect, Samson epitomised the whole period of the Judges in which "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

It is a sad commentary that human nature being what it is, has always it seems, rebelled against the marriage laws of God, and not always without a guise of plausibility. For example, the young lad who dates a Roman Catholic girl in which public displays of affection play a bigger and bigger part in the relationship until the "fact" that she is "as good as many Christadelphians" is considered justification for an engagement announcement. Later the intention to "become a Christadelphian" is sufficient reason for marriage. "Integrity" may even be pressed into service to rationalize the sin: "Isn't it better for her not to be baptised until she's sure, than to be baptised just to get married". Such a progression can probably be verified by a legion of Christadelphians. Wise shepherds of the sheep will see through such a façade and administer the word in season of admonishment and exhortation. Insistence on these standards is not the mark of a "square" or an "old-fashioned person with a marriage hang-up". It is the Godly counsel of a Shepherd providing the good pastures of His Word for a straying lamb.



**14:4 But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD** <sup>23</sup> -God did not *make* Samson take a Philistine wife from Timnath. Such a course of conduct was contrary to God's Law (Deut. 7:3, 4). Rather God used Samson's deliberate choice to exercise His punishment on the Philistines.

There was only one reason why Samson should go into Philistine territory and that was for the deliverance of Israel by judgment on the Philistines. To loiter in Philistine country was to invite sin. A notable precedent to this effect had been set by the sin of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. She "went out to visit the women of the land" (Gen. 34:1)—a harmless enough pastime one might think. But she became the subject of attention of a "Philistine", Shechem, an uncircumcised Hivite, who defiled her. This wicked action "wrought folly in Israel ... for such a thing ought not to be done" (Gen. 34:1, 2, 7, RSV). The appeal had been: "Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves" (Gen. 34:9, RSV). This plausible appeal was embroidered with the lure of economic gain: "You shall dwell with us; and the land shall be open to you; dwell and trade in it, and get property in it". The real intention however was: "Will not their cattle, their property and all their beasts be ours?" (Gen. 34:10, 23, RSV)

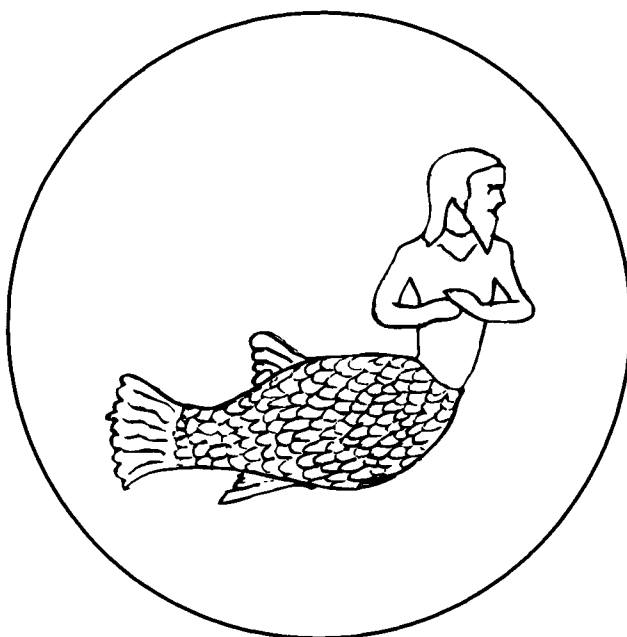
Parents may be Jacob-like and Manoah-like in their dedication to the things of God, but when the adolescent period is reached an increasing part of the decision-making becomes the responsibility of the son or daughter. It requires firm counsel that public dance halls, shows, the pool room and the football field are all Philistine country. An Israelite will walk carefully and circumspectly lest the lust of the flesh, the pride of life and the lust of the eye seduce him into sinful courses of conduct. Choice of environment is an important factor in living a Godly life. As the Apostle Paul put it: "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33, RSV).

**that he sought an occasion against the Philistines** - "Occasion", Heb. "toanah", "a meeting" (Yg); "an opportunity, purpose, occasion" (Stg).

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<sup>23</sup> See the similar use of this expression in 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Kings 6:33; 2 Chron. 25:20.

There is difficulty in deciding whether “the LORD” or “Samson” “sought an occasion against the Philistines”. Some have reasoned that “occasion” should be translated “quarrel”, “retribution” or “vengeance” on the basis of the LXX reading. In this view Samson undertook his marriage with the woman of Timnath in order to destroy the Philistines. Others have supported this interpretation *in order* to make Samson’s character appear more in keeping with his commendation in Hebrews 11. Neither of these reasons is satisfactory. If Samson is commended in Hebrews 11, then such requires no apology from us. The context of the statement in question is decidedly against rendering this passage by “quarrel”, so as to infer a righteous motive on the part of Samson. He went in to a prostitute at Gaza and betrayed his Nazarite vow to Delilah—was this done because he sought an occasion against the Philistines? There is not the slightest inference to this effect. It was the LORD who sought the occasion against the Philistines through Samson’s foolish decision. Samson, at this stage, was concerned in getting the woman of Timnath for his wife, not his divine mission.



*Dagon*

## **14:5-9 THE NATIONAL PARABLE - A PERSONAL EXHORTATION**

The following verses indicate the highly significant events which were about to intrude into Samson's life. The lion, the honey and Timnath were all to contribute to an allegory of divine instruction.

**14:5 *Samson went down ... to Timnath*** - Timnath means the "allotment", (Yg); "the assigned portion" (Stg). The city had been allocated to Judah (Josh. 15:57) but was not taken. The area of Timnath has been described by a visitor as follows:

"There were then vineyards belonging to Timnath, as there now are in all these hamlets along the base of the hills and upon the mountain sides. These vineyards are very often far out from the villages, climbing up rough wadies and wild cliffs."<sup>24</sup>

Samson left the high land between Zorah and Eshtaol (where the Spirit of God began to stir him) for the lowlands of Timnath, about 4 miles away. He went down in every sense of the word—and how he suffered for it! He never did consummate his marriage (although he had prepared for it with seven days of feasting) because his wife was given to his best man (14:20, RSV). The very girl whom he loved so much as to ignore the Godly counsel of his parents and the divine instruction of his God, was burned by the hated Philistines (15:6).

**and his father and mother** - It was the custom of the day for parents to arrange the wedding. (See Gen. 21:21; 34:8; 38:1; Exod. 21:9.) This accounts for Samson's insistence: "get her for me to wife" (14:2).

What a sad trip this must have been for Samson's parents. Marriage with the alien is a bitter experience for the parents of wayward sons and daughters. What profit is it to have sons if they disregard God's precepts? They are like the grass of the field which is here today and gone tomorrow. Children are only an heritage of the Lord ultimately—if they walk in divine ways.

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<sup>24</sup> See W. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, (London: Paternoster Row, 1903), p. 566.

Notice that Esau's choice of alien wives was a "grief of mind" (Heb. 'bitterness of spirit') to Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:35). The Christadelphian attitude is expressed by Rebekah in words which should be inscribed on the tablets of the heart of every disciple:

"And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these (which are) of the daughters of the land, *what good shall my life do me?*" (Gen. 27:46).

**a young lion** - Heb. "kephir" signifies a full-grown cub. Lions at one time abounded in the land of Palestine<sup>25</sup> and five different Hebrew words are used to describe the various stages of growth of the lion (several words are also used to describe the roar of the lion).<sup>26</sup>

**roared against him** ('in meeting him', mg. ) - This is the same Heb. word, "shaag", used for the Philistines when they shouted at Samson (15:14). It is the roar of the lion when seeking his prey.

**14:6 and he had nothing in his hand** - This is the whole point. Samson's own life was spared and the destroyer slain, not by sword or arrow, but by divine providence which overshadowed Samson's birth, growth, and was now working for Samson's benefit. Was it a mere chance meeting of a lion? Most unlikely'. Consider the following evidence:

- i. Samson was in Timnath, the *assigned portion* to Judah.
- ii. Timnath was a place of vineyards—the bounty of the land was evident in the famous Sorek grapes produced there.
- iii. Samson *unaided* tore a lion apart bare-handed.
- iv. There was an arresting character to the fall (ruin) of the lion—so much so, that when Samson passed by Timnath again, he stopped to look at the lion.

<sup>25</sup> See 1 Sam. 17:25; 2 Sam. 23:20.; 1 Kgs. 13:25; 2 Kgs. 17:25.

<sup>26</sup> These are as follows:

"Shaag" (Judges 14:5; Psalm 22:13; 104:21; Amos 3:4) - the roar of the lion while seeking his prey.

"Naham" - the sound which the lion makes when it seizes its victim (Isa. 5:29).

"Hagah" - the defiant growl with which it challenges other animals who attempt to snatch away a carcass (Isa. 31:4).

"Naar" - the cry of the lion cubs (Jer. 51:38).

- v. The lion carcase contained honey—an unusual place for bees to build a hive, since they usually avoided the putrefaction of decaying flesh.
- vi. The honey nourished the destroyer of the lion and his fellow Israelites.

When the evidence is set out in this fashion the divine parable becomes apparent. God was indeed teaching Samson a lesson. Note the symbolic character of the following:

*Lion* - the nations of the land to be exterminated—Philistines in particular. Nations hostile to Israel are depicted as lions. This interpretation is supported by two key passages:

- a) Lions are used prophetically as symbolic of powers, such as the Philistines, which ravaged Israel (Jer. 2:15).
- b) The Hebrew word “shaag” for the roar of the lion is the same Hebrew word used for the roar of the Philistines when they shouted against Samson (15:14).

*Samson* - the nation of Israel. God would provide Israel with the strength to conquer the land—one man would chase a thousand (Josh. 23:10). God, by His Spirit power, would drive out the nations. He did not require the strength of the horse, the legs of a man or chariots of iron.

*Lion carcase* - the total destruction of the inhabitants of the land—Philistines in particular.

*Honey* - If Israel destroyed the Philistine, Canaanite and Amorite “lions”, then God would bring forth the milk and honey of the land they possessed to nourish the destroyer and his people. Honey is used for a symbol of bounty: “sweet to the soul and health to the bones” (Prov. 16:24; Exod. 3:8).

**14:6 but he told not his father or his mother what he had done** - Why does this receive mention? It certainly suggests that Samson was not an arrogant boaster, but it might also suggest that the tearing a lion apart like a kid was a cause for private reflection.

**14:7 and she pleased Samson well** - Literally “was right in his own eyes”. Once Samson had met his girlfriend, even the powerful lesson that the lion must be killed was repressed. Samson saw only the beauty of the Philistine woman. The man who could rend a lion was about to become a piece of putty in the hands of a girl.

**14:8 after a time** - However long this was, it was sufficient for the lion to be stripped of its flesh. In Palestine carrion-eating birds like the vulture, and jackals and ants can clean a carcass in a matter of hours. The hot sun would soon dry out the bones to provide a suitable (but unusual) location in the head or chest cavity for the swarm of bees to build a hive.

**he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion** - “Carcass”, Heb. “mappeleth”, “fallen thing” (Yg). This is a different Hebrew word from “geviyah” which is the word for the body of the lion in verses 8 and 9.

**14:9 and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them and they did eat** - When the ravager was destroyed, nourishment was provided for the destroyer and his brethren. Samson did not work to produce the honey, God provided this—enough for all, even his brethren. “Destroy the Philistine Lion, Samson, and I will do the rest” was in effect what God was telling Samson.

**but he told not them** - secrecy is preserved. Why?

**14:10 and Samson made there a feast** - “Feast”, Heb. “mishteh”, “feast, drinking” (Yg). The Nazarite vow of Num. 6 forbade strong drink for the Nazarite. This was clearly not the kind of environment for one having long flowing locks of hair—the symbol of his consecrated separateness to the things of God. Sin, however, was supplying its anaesthetic, and one compromise was followed by another (and probably without a twinge of conscience!) The heart was becoming hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Only suffering could bring Samson to realities.

**for so used the young men to do** - This appears to refer to the custom of the Philistines rather than the Israelites. At the wedding of Jacob and Rachel it was Laban—the father of the bride—who “gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast” (Gen. 29: 22).

## 14:11-20 THE RIDDLE OF THE LION AND HONEY

**14:11 When they saw him** - "what sort of man he was" (Companion Bible). In appearance? Disposition? Or the fact that even at this time he had already performed unrecorded deliverances of Israel out of the hand of the Philistines so that they knew of his great strength?

**14:12 declare it me within the seven days of the feast** - It would seem that the drinking and feasting lasted seven days. At the end of this period of time, Samson was to take his bride.

**thirty sheets** - Heb. "sadin", "a wide flowing, under-garment of linen worn next to the body",<sup>27</sup> "shirts", AV mg.

**thirty change of garments** - "Garment", Heb. "begeg", "cloak, garment, covering" (Yg); denotes a festive garment as against working garb, often costly and presented as a mark of favour. (Cf. Gen. 45:22; 2 Kings 5:5, 22.) It may be inferred that they were expensive from the fact that the Philistines considered the debt would impoverish them (cf. 14:15, RSV).

It is interesting that the riddle related to the arresting circumstances of the lion and honey. Samson chose a riddle *for Philistines* in a venturesome gamble, the very thing through which God was instructing him (if the "national parable" interpretation is correct). It is, ironically, the riddle which proves his undoing. Their failure to find the answer leads to "ploughing with his heifer", his leaving the feast to pay the debt, and finally the death of the woman of Timnath.

**14:13 Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it** - Anxious to profit by the gamble, the Philistines accept the challenge.

**14:14 Out of the eater came forth meat** ('something to eat', RSV) i.e., out of the lion came forth honey.

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<sup>27</sup> J. J. Lias, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges: Judges*, (Cambridge: At the Uni. Press, 1882), p. 161.

**and out of the strong came forth sweetness** - an example of Hebrew parallelism. The same thought is expressed as in the previous clause, but in different words.

**They could not in three days expound the riddle** - Time was running out on the thirty Philistines and still they could not solve the riddle.

**14:15 On the seventh day** - Translations differ on the number. The RSV gives "four", with a footnote: "Gk. Syr.: Heb. 'seventh'" is probably correct. Consider the following:

- a) If they could not find the answer to the riddle in three days, the fourth day would be the reasonable time to begin to attempt new approaches. On the other hand, to wait until the seventh day is leaving it a little late. Besides, it is quite clear from the narrative that it required time for the woman of Timnath to weaken Samson's resistance. Could this likely be accomplished on the last day?
- b) Why would Samson's wife weep and lay sore upon him to know the riddles answer unless she had first received the ultimatum from the Philistines: "either tell the answer or we'll burn you and your father's house with fire". This conclusion is supported by reading 14:17 with the marginal alternative: "And she wept before him (the rest of) the seven days while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day that he told her".

The evidence therefore supports the RSV rendering of the "fourth day" rather than the "seventh".

**lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire** - With such a savage ultimatum the Philistine woman betrayed Samson, but it was to little profit since she was later burned by her own people (15:6).

**have ye called us to take that we have? (Is it) not (so)?** - This is a strong expression in the Hebrew. Literally it means "make us paupers"; "Have you invited us here to impoverish us?", RSV. They had entered into a bet which they stood to lose. The fact that the odds had been thirty to one seemed impressive and the chance to gain enticing. Evidently the "change of garments" must have been of great value.



**14:16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not** - Crocodile tears indeed were these tears, but Samson, obsessed with his Philistine girl which was "right" in his own eyes, was blind to her deceit. It was apparently impossible for him, having gone so far, to keep his head and his heart together. The words of the Proverb were as tinkling cymbals and sounding brass:

"My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee ... That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words ... He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks" (Prov. 7:1, 5, 22).

Samson had taken fire in his bosom and he was about to be burned.

**thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people** - "My people" was proof enough, (if such was lacking) of where her loyalties lay. There had been no conversion to the God of Israel. What a contrast to the disposition of Ruth: "for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; *thy people shall be my people*, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

**Behold, I have not told (it) my father nor my mother, and shall I tell (it) thee?** - Despite Samson's wholesale abandonment of divine instruction, it may be inferred that his parents were regarded as more intimate than his wife. This might suggest that Samson's "love" for the Philistine woman was primarily an infatuation with her seductive beauty. To have such a relationship is to have the pie-crust, but not the pie.

**14:17 And she wept before him the seven days** - She did not weep before him the whole of the seven days. The "seven days" is an idiomatic expression in Hebrew in which the remainder of a whole is regarded as the whole. The AV mg. renders this passage: "Or, the rest of the seven days".

**because she lay sore upon him** - "Because she pressed him hard", RSV. Like a continual dripping on a rainy day (which can wear away material as hard as rock) Samson's resistance was eroded. Relevant words indeed are those of the Proverbs: "Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea,



*Ruins of Ashkelon*

many *strong men ...*" (Prov. 7:25-27). The strong man of Israel was about to be wounded where it hurt most - through his girl-friend.

**14:19 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him** - This is not to suggest that the Spirit of the LORD departed from him prior to this. The Spirit only left Samson when he betrayed his Nazarite vow (16:20). Rather, when required, God's Spirit animated his whole being with a resolute and unquenchable force.

**and he went down to Ashkelon** - Samson left the wedding feast in a rage without consummating the marriage. The seven-day feast period was a prelude to the actual taking of the bride as wife. The journey from Timnath to Ashkelon was probably a two-day journey since Ashkelon was between Gaza and Ashdod on the Palestine coast. Certainly Ashdod was closer. Why did he go to Ashkelon? The reason might rest in the fact that thirty *lordly* Philistines were required to provide the thirty festal garments. These garments were of such a value as not to be the everyday wearing apparel of the Philistines.

**and took their spoil** - "Spoil", Heb. "chalitsah", "armour" (Yg); AV mg. "apparel".

**and his anger was kindled** - "In hot anger he went back to his father's house", RSV.

**But Samson's wife was (given) to his companion, whom he had used as his friend** - "who had been his best man", RSV. This was contemptuous treatment by his "father-in-law". It served to add insult to injury. Samson not only lost the bet because they had "ploughed with his heifer", but now his wife was to be given to his best man. No doubt his irrevocable action would have broken Samson's heart.

## JUDGES 15

### 15:1-2 WIFE GIVEN TO BEST MAN

**15:1 *But it came to pass within a while after*** - Samson's anger now abated, he decided he would consummate the marriage. He did not know that his wife had been given to his best man.

***the time of wheat harvest*** - about the month of May.

***Samson visited his wife with a kid*** - The kid was no doubt intended to be a conciliatory gift after his highly indignant departure from the wedding feast in a hot anger (cf. Gen. 38.-17).

***I will go in to my wife into the chamber*** - The very thing coveted by Samson at the expense of his God, his dad and mum and his nation, is now debarred from him.

**15:2 *I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her*** - The evident displeasure of Samson with his wife's deceit had been taken by the bride's father as certain evidence that he no longer wished to proceed with the marriage.

***is not her younger sister fairer than she?*** - The transition of affection is not so easy as this. Note that the appeal of the Philistine is not to the meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God a pearl of great price (1 Pet. 3:3, 4), but rather his appeal is that of unenlightened human nature - "fair to look at". This mistake has been made time without end. Young people have been married on the primary basis of a "terrific figure" or a "pretty face", only to find that as the years pass, the widening waist-line and the wrinkled face, have little to offer apart from integrity, faithfulness and love of the Truth. The proverbs need underlining:

"Favour (charm, NASB) is deceitful, and beauty is **vain**: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31.30).

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband" (Prov. 12:4).

***take her, I pray thee*** - This offer seems to suggest an admission of guilt on the part of the bride's father or a fear of consequences from Samson's great strength.

## **15:3-5 THREE HUNDRED FOXES BURN GRAINFIELDS**

### **15:3 *Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines*** -

Thirty men of Ashkelon died because of the bet which Samson had made. Since the dead were Philistines, this was blameless enough, but now with perfect personal justification he can be more blameless because of their vicious reprisal in regard to his wife.

***though I do them a displeasure*** - "Displeasure", Heb. "ra", "evil" (Yg).

**15:4 *three hundred foxes***<sup>28</sup> - Some have argued that Samson must have been a very fast and agile person to catch so many foxes.<sup>29</sup> However, the three hundred may have been trapped rather than caught bare-handed.<sup>30</sup>

Occasionally, "jackals" rather than "foxes" is given as an alternative translation. The Heb. word "shu'al" can mean either fox or jackal (Yg). The chief difference between the two is that the latter travel in packs, but the fox is usually solitary.

***and took firebrands*** - Heb. "lappid", "lamp" (Yg). These were often pieces of wood wrapped in absorbent material and soaked in oil. The same Hebrew word is used for the lamps of Gideon (Judges 7:16).

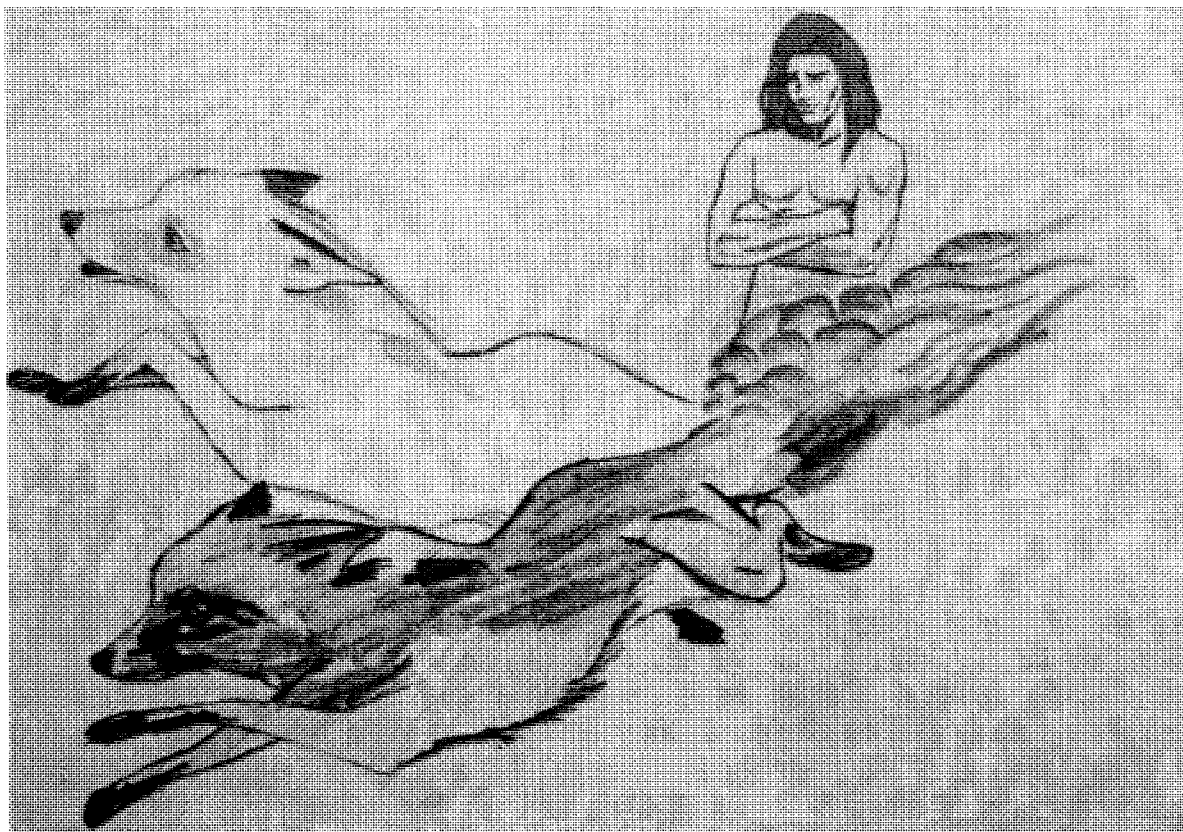
***turned tail to tail*** - The reasons for tying two tails together would be to support the torches and also to impede the speed of the foxes so that there would be sufficient time for the grain to catch fire. The random movement of the foxes would ensure that many fires would be lit. The Philistines would not be able to extinguish the fires because they could not tell where the fires would break out next. It can be presumed that the foxes would be released at night so that the plan would go undetected until executed.

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<sup>28</sup> Why 300 foxes? Was this a tenfold judgment on the Philistines - ten foxes for each of the Philistines who attended his wedding?

<sup>29</sup> Solomon "built the temple of the LORD", but clearly he did not do all the work himself. Similarly Samson "caught three hundred foxes" may mean that he engineered the enterprise but was helped by others.

<sup>30</sup> Snares, nets and pits are frequently referred to by Job and David etc. indicating their commonplace use.



*He let the foxes go into the standing corn - Judges 15: 4-5*

**15:5 standing corn of the Philistines** - "Standing corn", Heb. "qamach", "what stands up" (Yg). "Corn" is a general term which includes other grains as well. It was at the time of the wheat harvest (15:1); the barley would mature before the wheat.

**burnt up both the shocks,<sup>31</sup> and also the standing corn with the vineyards (and) olives** - This was no mere bonfire. The conflagration was such as to even consume the grapevines and the olive trees. Australians and West Indians who have seen a cane-fire will know the intensity of the heat and the speed with which fire can move when fed dry stubble and stooked grain. It requires little imagination to see Samson with powerful arms on hips, and feet astride, watching the holocaust from the safety of the high ground of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol, while panic-stricken Philistines run for their lives in the plain below.

## **15:6-8 REPRISAL SLAUGHTER**

**15:6 because he had taken his wife and given her to his companion** - Evidently Samson was well-known in the area and the association with the rough-shod treatment he had received at the hands of his father-in-law was readily made. This could only be the work of Samson the "ravager" of the Philistines.

**the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire** - The deceiver got what she deserved at the hands of her own people. It was only another illustration of the immutable law of God regarding Abraham and his seed: "I will bless him that blesseth thee, and curse him who curseth thee" (Gen. 12:3). Anyone who mistreats God's people will suffer for it.

**15:7 Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you** - "If this is what you do (i.e., in burning his wife and father-in-law), I swear I will be avenged upon you, and after that I will quit", RSV. Samson in great bitterness of spirit and with full justification—assured of the brutal character and utter worthlessness of the Philistines by personal experience—now seeks his revenge.

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<sup>31</sup> "Shocks" probably refers to heaps of cut grain loosely piled up.

It is a wise man that can learn life's lesson without always doing so experientially. God had commanded the utter extermination of the Philistines so Samson knew their worthlessness better than any man. Samson had no need to experience this, he had only to learn the lesson of divine revelation. It is only a fool who insists that he must always experience before he can know for sure.

***after that I will cease*** - Expressed colloquially, this probably is synonymous with "after that I will leave you alone".

***hip and thigh*** - This expression may imply that they were destroyed with such violence that they fell to the ground limb upon limb, hip upon thigh.

***hip and thigh*** - This expression may imply that they were destroyed with such violence that they fell to the ground limb upon limb, hip upon thigh.

***he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam*** - This was within the border of Judah (1 Chron. 4:32; 2 Chron. 11:6). It was for this reason that the Philistines pitched in Lehi—territory in Judah. The Philistines' reprisal put the men of Judah in an awkward position. Should they stand with Samson, the loner, or side with their overlords on the basis of expediency? Should peace be purchased even at the expense of selling Samson into the hand of the Philistines?

**15:11 *Then, three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam*** - Three thousand men looking for one man. Was he that hard to find? Or was there the fear that dead men of Judah might be added to the already dead Philistines? If Samson's great strength were known to the Philistines, it could hardly be hid from the men of Judah.

***Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us?*** - The men of Judah (whose ensign was the lion!) preferred comfortable compromise with one foot in Philistine country rather than have a showdown. By divine strength they could easily put to rout these adversaries. If Gideon could accomplish such a great slaughter with his three hundred, what could be done with three thousand?

***What is this that thou hast done unto us?*** - "Unto us" is expressive of their sentiment. There is no concern evident for the divine verdict on the matter—the fact that God had instructed them to utterly destroy the inhabitants of the land (Josh. 23:6-13). They had become reconciled to the dominion of sin since it did not appear to them to do



much harm. They could still grow their crops etc. It did not bind them like a slave in fetters which clanked. They were only concerned with their exposure to Philistine raids—otherwise in divine matters they were apathetic and indifferent.

**15:12 *We are come down to bind thee that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines*** - God had sent Samson to begin to deliver Israel and yet the tragic scene emerges as 3,000 men of Judah deliver the divinely appointed deliverer into the hands of the alien. History was to be repeated many years later when the same “men of Judah” delivered the Deliverer of God’s providing into the hands of wicked men to be crucified (Acts 2:22, 23).

***Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves*** - Samson would not shed the blood of his own people. He was like a lamb led to the slaughter. Imagine the emotions of Samson as he is betrayed by his own countrymen (it was bad enough to be deceived and betrayed by a Philistine wife). Bound with two new cords he is brought up from the rock Etam be given into the hands of the Philistines. It would be well-known to Samson and the men of Judah that his capture meant either death or servitude.

**15:14 *the Philistines shouted against him*** - “Shouted”, Heb. “shaag”. It is the same word used for the roar of the lion when Samson was in Timnath (14:5). Divine strength was made manifest in human weakness for the cords melted from off his hands as when flax is touched by the fire.

**15:15 *And he found a new jawbone of an ass*** - The jawbone of an ass is one of the seven “weak” things found in the book of Judges.<sup>32</sup> God did not require the legs of a man, the strength of a horse or chariots of iron to deliver His people and to vanquish the foes.

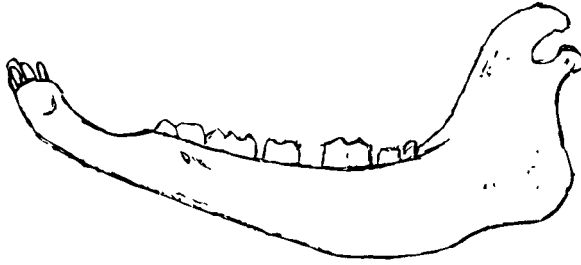
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<sup>32</sup> The other “weak” things are as follows: left-handed man (3:21); ox goad (3:31); a woman (4:4); a nail (4:21); a piece of millstone (9:53); pitcher and trumpet (7:20).



*Judges 15: 16*

"A new jawbone" suggests that the ass was one that had been recently killed (or had died). It would be heavier and less brittle than one from an ass which had been dead for some time.



*The Jawbone - a formidable weapon!*

**and slew a thousand men therewith** - This was an impressive illustration of the promise of Lev. 26:8 and the words of Joshua:

"But cleave unto the LORD your God ... no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you" (Josh. 23:8-10).

Could the men of Judah have missed the point?

Three thousand men of Judah equipped no doubt with some sort of weapons, but without divine fire in their bones were unable to accomplish what *one man* could do with divine strength. Can we miss the point? Of what use is it to have carpeted halls, airconditioned meeting rooms and comfortable pews if the ecclesia consists only of "men of Judah"?

One can only expect irregular and poor attendance at ecclesial Bible classes and lectures when television watching, summer cottages and extra-curricular demands of employment sap so much time and energy. God can do much with our little if the fire of His Word burns in the inner man and our feet are in Israelite territory. When the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches reduce one to servitude it is time to assess whether or not we have sought a parley with the Philistines.

**and called that place "Ramath-Lehi"** <sup>33</sup> - AV rag. "the lifting up of the jawbone, or, casting away of the jawbone".

**15:18 and he was sore athirst** - It was during the heat of harvest-time and Samson was exhausted from his great slaughter. In his exultation he had gloried: "with the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, have I slain a thousand men". The strong man of Israel was about to be reminded that he was totally dependent upon divine strength both for the victory and for his very survival. "Thou has given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant" was the appropriate attitude.

**and now shall I die for thirst** - It was incongruous that Samson having been delivered from death at the hand of the Philistines and having wrought such a great slaughter, should now perish from thirst. There is no doubt that this was part of Samson's spiritual education—like the national parable and personal exhortation from the lion and the honey. God often took time to instruct his prophets. (Cf. the miracles of the gourd, worm and sultry east wind performed for Jonah's spiritual development.)

Samson was doing the work of God, but this did not mean that the necessities of life would automatically be provided. God provides food, but saint and sinner alike must work to obtain it (cf. 2 Thess. 3:7-15). Brethren engaged in time-consuming preaching and ecclesial ministrations which take them from the home for many nights in the week cannot assume that the discipline of the children and preparation of their minds in spiritual matters can go unattended simply because the work of the Truth has absorbed them. It needs to be remembered that in the senior public school period (if not before), a powerful gospel is preached by school peers. It is a gospel of smut, profanity, pornography and delinquency. It is an age when the motion pictures, the TV, the radio and the novel frequently present the gunman, the outlaw, the illicit lover and the gangster as glorified or as perfectly normal.

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<sup>33</sup> It has been suggested that it was called "Lehi" "because of a chain of steep, craggy rocks which resembled a jawbone", Gesenius, quoted in D. Whedon (ed.), *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. III, (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1877), p. 262. It seems that place names were sometimes given because of the appearance of an area. "Shen" for example means "peak" or "tooth" (Yg) - cf. 1 Sam. 7:12.

It is not uncommon to find children who smoke, are regarded as “smart alecs” at school and who choose electives like social dancing unknown to their parents. One day dad may wake up to the fact that he does not “know” his son anymore, and cannot understand how with such a “good” home background such disinterest could be shown toward the Sunday School and ecclesial functions. Many examples of such “drop-outs” could be enumerated. If the compartmentalised conduct of the teenager goes undetected and uncontrolled—with his schizophrenic world, one at home and one at school (over which the parent has little direct control except through the home)—the formation of evil habits and patterns of behaviour may become fixed.

If the world of the Philistines and that of the Israel of God is not clearly demarcated by the parents, and if care is not taken for the necessary responsibilities of life, then we cannot require that God work a miracle on our behalf to compensate for our lack of maturity or neglect.<sup>34</sup>

**15:19 But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw** - It is not likely that the water came forth from the discarded jawbone of the ass, since the Hebrew word “Lehi” is also the name of the place. The RSV reads: “And God split open the hollow *place* that is at Lehi”.

**Wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore** - AV mg.: “That is, the well of him that called, or, cried”; “Fountain of the crier”, (Yg).

**and he judged in Israel** - The role of the judge was not a judge such as one might think of in the sense of a magistrate passing a guilty or innocent verdict.<sup>35</sup> Rather, they were Spirit-appointed leaders to deliver Israel from their oppressors.

**twenty years** - These twenty years were probably contemporary with the judgeship of Eli. By adding up the years of the individual judges it is apparent that some were overlapping.

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<sup>34</sup> *Family life in the Lord*, available from the publishers (CSSS) has some helpful advice on training children.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel is an exception in this regard since he had a regular circuit (1 Sam. 7:16).

## JUDGES 16

### 16:1-3 THE PROSTITUTE OF GAZA

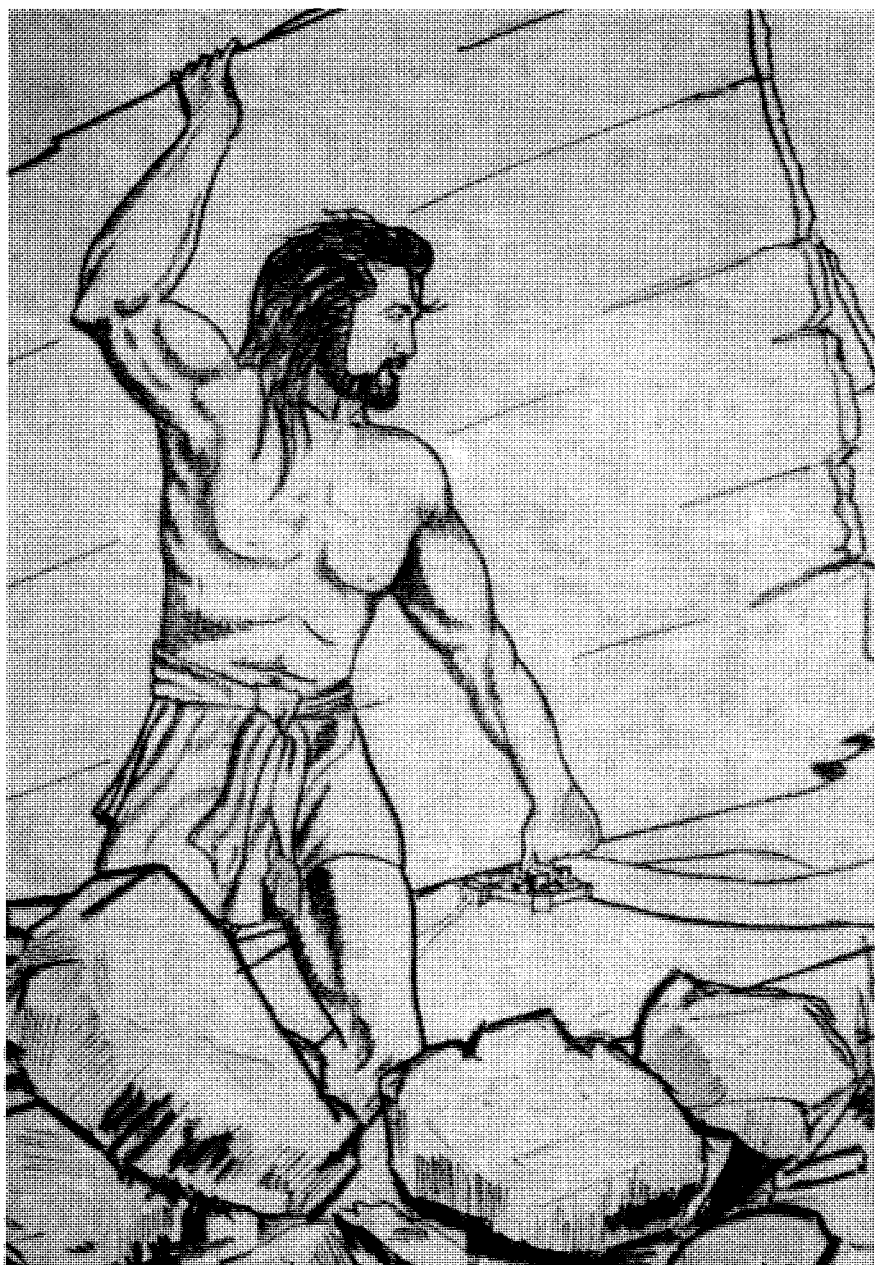
**16:1 *Then went Samson to Gaza*** - Gaza was the chief of the five principal cities of the Philistines. It was located about 35 miles south of Zorah in the heart of Philistine territory.

***and saw there an harlot*** - Samson could tear apart a lion, but could not control his own passions, he could burst asunder cords which bound him, but he could not resist what his lustful eyes saw.

**16:2 *In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him*** - Realising that the ravager of their people was within the city walls, they barred the gates awaiting the morning light before attempting to take him. An attempt at night would give all the advantages to the pursued in that he might disappear in the surrounding darkness and escape before detection in the light of the day. Perhaps they were afraid to try to take him at night. Had not 1,000 men perished at his hand earlier? They wanted Samson contained within the city where a waiting force might take him rather than a disarrayed army attempting a search operation within the city.

**16:3 *and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts and went away with them, bar and all*** - Unexpectedly, Samson did not wait until morning. Rather, he arose at midnight and to the astonishment of the Philistines, departed not only with the two leaves of the city gate, but pulled up the supporting posts on which these were supported and marched away with bar and all on his shoulders to the top of the hill on the way to Hebron.<sup>36</sup> To carry away the gate of one's enemies must have been regarded as a particularly galling insult. Imagine the early morning Philistine news: "Missing—the city gates!" Samson's exploit would no doubt be told and retold throughout the many villages in Israel. What more could breathe spirit into Israelites after so many years of Philistine oppression?

<sup>36</sup> "Before Hebron" can mean either *opposite* Hebron, or *towards* Hebron. Hebron is about 40 miles from Gaza, so the latter is probably the correct reading. Near Gaza there is a range of hills in the direction of Hebron, the highest of which commands a view of the hills around Hebron.



*Judges 16: 3*

## 16:4-21 DELILAH - THE PARAMOUR

Effects do not always immediately follow sin, but follow they do, even although the connection may be forgotten, ignored or repressed. With a bold show of strength in the heart of Philistine territory, Samson treated with impunity the defences of his enemy. But it was only a matter of time until he returned to the very city in which he debased himself, and disgraced the Truth with a Philistine harlot. Little did he know that his brinkmanship spelled disaster. He returned to Gaza, not as a triumphant hero, but to the clank of bronze chains to do the lowly work of women and slaves in a Philistine prison house.

These are powerful lessons—tragic and stark as they are. When the enlightened saints of the God of heaven flirt with the passions of human desires, surely shame and disgrace will follow. In an age of so much pornography and moral wickedness, illicit conduct may pass for the norm in society, but it does not escape the eye of Him before whom all things are “naked and open”. The godly young person will “flee youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22). He will not hanker after sources of seduction and sordid suggestion.

**16:4 And it came to pass afterward that he loved a woman -** Having disdainfully removed the city gates of Gaza and having experienced no immediate ill-effects of his night with the prostitute, it was but a short step to the next exploit—Delilah, a woman whom he loved.

**in the valley of Sorek** - This valley is located adjacent to Zorah and Eshtaol. It was a valley noted for its grapes. The Hebrew word “soreq” denotes “the choicest vine” (Yg).

**whose name (was) Delilah** - Her name comes from a root meaning “that which hangs down or droops”; “languishing” (Yg). Although she is not called a Philistine, her conduct makes it almost certain that she was a Philistine.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> J. Martin's opinion is that she was an Israelite for the following reasons:

- 1) We are not told she was a Philistine. She lived near the tribe of Dan and the Philistines came “up to her”.
- 2) She used the term “The Philistines be upon thee” rather than “the daughter of my people” as the woman of Timnath had.

This would explain the relationship she had with the five lords of the Philistines.



**16:5 And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her** - They apparently knew Samson's weakness.

**entice him** - After two involvements with Philistine women, one might have thought that Samson would have learned his lesson. Unrepentant sin, however, has a benumbing effect on spiritual sensitivities. Sin supplies its own anaesthetic. If one spends his time in Philistine country, then it can be expected that compromise of standards will follow.

Perhaps a more contemporary example might illustrate the valuable lesson here. Young brethren sometimes make an unwise choice in an exclusive preoccupation with university life at the expense of Bible classes, the Bible readings, youth groups and even the memorial services. This is dwelling in the valley of Sorek—Philistine country. Parents who encourage this kind of devotion to secular education on the grounds that "it is necessary today to get a good job" ought not to find it incredible when their son in three years looks like a Philistine in his dress, and attitudes. Nor should it appear unbelievable that (like Samson) he is intent on taking a Philistine for a wife. Such a retrogression has many precedents.

The wise man Solomon fell because he "loved strange women", not because he was ignorant of God's counsel. Samson, the strong man of Israel, found Philistine girls irresistible despite the instruction of his parents and the laws of his God. A good environment does not necessarily make a good Christadelphian, but a continued deliberate exposure to an evil environment is to invite failure through compromise.

No longer can brethren who value God's truth sit by when engagements with the alien are undertaken on the grounds that "she's from a good family" or "If I speak to him, I might cause him to be offended or to leave the Truth". Such rationalisations do not cloak the fact that sin has been committed and will erode the very principles of separateness which the Truth teaches. This is the lesson in the life of Samson. In America where divorce problems and moral issues are occurring with distressing frequency leaving havoc in their wake, there must be an insistence on Biblical standards.

**and see wherein his great strength (lieth)** - Evidently Samson was not like the sons of Anak - a giant of a man. His enormous strength could not be accounted for on the basis of his physique. The Philistines thought no doubt that his strength was due to some magical charm which might be

uncovered by Delilah. On the other hand, Samson was probably not a small person either, since he could carry the gates and posts of Gaza.

**that we may bind him to afflict him** - This was the Philistine ambition, and Samson knew that it was their intention. Previous experience with the woman of Timnath proved this.

**and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver**<sup>38</sup> - This was a very large sum of money and indicates the high price tag which they placed on Samson's capture.

**16:7 If they bind me with seven green withs ('fresh bowstrings', RSV) that were never dried, then shall I be weak and be as another man** - Samson was only toying with Delilah.

**Now (there were) men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber** - Samson may have loved her, but it was certainly not reciprocal.

**16:9 he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire** - "Tow" refers to the coarse flax or hemp used for spinning or twining. It is very inflammable. "Toucheth", Heb. "ruach", "to smell, refresh, touch" (Yg). The image is of flax snapping from the smell of the fire, i.e., the heat, before the flame touches it.

**16:11 If they bind me fast with new ropes that were never occupied** - Again Samson is only toying with her. These he broke like sewing thread. No doubt Delilah represented her desire to know as due only to her loving curiosity!

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<sup>38</sup> If a silver shekel is valued at 62¢ Canadian, then the five lords of the Philistines (from the five main cities) would have offered her a bribe worth \$34,100. See D. Whedon (ed.), Vol III, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua to 2 Samuel* (New York: Nelson, 1877), p. 265.

**16:13 *If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web*** - Samson's long hair was divided into seven locks and these were to be woven into a loom and fastened with a pin.<sup>39</sup> Did you notice how the incessant pressure of Delilah resulted in Samson coming closer and closer to betraying his vow? He has now referred to his hair, he has only to tell her the secret of the Nazarite vow regarding its cutting.

**16:15 *How canst thou say, I love thee*** - Having failed to entice Samson into declaring the source of his strength, on the three previous occasions, this final piece of allurements was eminently successful. It was tantamount to saying that his professions of love were worthless.

**16:16 *when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, (so) that his soul was vexed unto death***<sup>40</sup> - It may have been that she withheld the satisfaction of his lustful passion until the secret was disclosed - hence his "soul was vexed unto death". The Proverbs puts Samson's fall expressively:

"With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him ... For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" (Prov. 7:21; 6:26, 27).

**16:17 *he told her all his heart*** - The tragic end of flouting God's commandments. "Out of (the heart) are the issues of life", (cf. Prov. 4:23; Micah 7:5).

***If I be shaven, then my strength will go from me*** - This is information not contained in the Nazarite vow of Numbers 6, nor is this information recorded as having come from the angel in Judges 13.

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<sup>39</sup> "Fastened with a pin" may mean that the loom was fastened by a pin into the wall. The LXX adds "and fastened them with the pin into the wall". The loom probably consisted of two upright posts fixed in the ground, the one holding the yarn-beam and the other the cloth-beam. See F. Davidson (ed.), *The New Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1963), p. 254.

<sup>40</sup> Did you notice that this passage affords proof that by "soul" the Bible does not mean something immortal, immaterial - the real person. The fact that the soul could be vexed unto death proves its destructibility.

**16:18 the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hands** - Of such importance was the capture of Samson that the lords themselves came up to secure his capture. Delilah was careful, no doubt, to see that they arrived with the “money in their hand” exactly as promised.

**16:20 And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself** - The fool is now enmeshed in his own folly. After three previous attempts Delilah succeeds. Suffering and death were to follow.

**And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him** - Of what use were the great muscles of his body now? His real power had been of God. It was “not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the LORD” that Samson had enjoyed his special relationship.

“Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation” (Psa. 27:9) had been the plea of the Psalmist. God left Samson only when Samson left God. Well had the wise man contemplated Samson’s fall:

“I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands (‘fettters’, RSV): whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her” (Eccles. 7:26).

**16:21 the Philistines took him and put out his eyes** - The man who had never experienced defeat is taken as a forlorn captive. The very eyes through which he lusted after Philistine women were now only two blackened holes—“plucked out” in a horrible way.

“Put out”, Heb. “nagar”, “to pick out, pierce” (Yg); “gouged out”, RSV; “bored out”, AV mg.

**and brought him down to Gaza** - What a humiliation—blind and weak the strong man of Israel who had carted off the city gates and posts after polluting himself with a prostitute, returns as a slave.

**fetters of brass** - The Hebrew construction here means with double brass. This suggests that he was bound by both hands and feet. Brass is almost certainly a symbol of the flesh—the innate rebelliousness within human nature to divine law.<sup>41</sup>

Samson was led in fetters of brass as was customary for prisoners of note (cf. 2 Kgs. 25:7) bound by the innate rebelliousness of human nature.

**and he did grind in the prison house this** - There is tragic irony in this. Consider the following:

1. The man who began to deliver Israel by the destruction of Philistine grain crops (15:5), now grinds grain to feed Philistine mouths.
2. The man who had slain a thousand Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass (15:15), is now doing the work of an ass grinding as a beast of burden.
3. The man who could not leave strange women alone ends by doing the work of women.<sup>42</sup>

**16:22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again** - Weeks and weeks of agonising remorse must have filled Samson's thoughts. In the prison house there would be no sound of the sweet Hebrew of God's law read by fellow brethren—just the sound of Philistine chatter broken by the monotonous clatter of bronze chains. How his muscles would have ached as round and round for many hours he toiled pondering the folly of his way. The dust of the fine weed seeds and the grain chaff from the bags of wheat, barley and corn grains would settle on sweaty limbs only to smart and irritate.

**16:23 a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god** - This god had the trunk of a fish as the name "dag" signifies, but with human face, hands and feet (see 1 Sam. 5:4).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Hebrew word "nechosheth" translated "brass" is rendered "filthiness" in the AV of Ezek. 16:32 and is used for the serpent of brass in Num. 21:9.

<sup>42</sup> Notice Isa. 47:2 - "Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh"; Exod. 11:5 - "even unto the firstborn of the maid-servant that is behind the mill".

<sup>43</sup> Although there is some uncertainty as to the form of Dagon, Young gives the following comment: "The national god of the Philistines, whose most famous temples were at Gaza and Ashdod. Its form had the face and hands of a man, and the tail of a fish."

**16:24 for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy** - A fatal mistake was this! The conflict was now no longer between Samson and the Philistines but rather between Yahweh and Dagon.

**the destroyer ('ravager', RSV) of our country, which slew many of us** - This was a frank acknowledgment of Samson's work as "deliverer".

**16:25 their hearts were merry** - Having drunk their fill they looked for some amusement.

**and he made them sport** - It takes little imagination to picture the ribald mirth of the Philistines as they poked sticks in front of Samson and watched the blind man tumble from his feet, until in order to gain respite he groped for the two pillars.

**16:26 Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them** - These are expressive words. "Suffer" Heb. "nuach", "to give rest (peace) let alone" (Yg). These words have all the suggestion of a harassed and weary man begging a little reprieve.

"Feel", Heb. "mush", "to feel, touch, grope" (Yg).

"Lean", Heb. "shaan", "to be supported, lean on" (Yg). This word is supportive of the inference made above. It is the tragic depiction of the strong man of Israel exhausted from abuse, led by a young lad, groping for the pillars to rest himself.

**16:27 Now the house was full of men and women** - The important guests would be under cover and in addition to this there were 3,000 men and women upon the roof.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> This fact is conveyed in the Hebrew of the first occurrence of men and women ('anashim' and 'nashim', i.e., the lords in the house) and the second occurrence ('ish' and 'isha', i.e., the common people upon the roof).

**16:28 remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God** <sup>45</sup>—the prayer of a man of faith—able to “see” better now than he ever did with his eyes.<sup>46</sup>

**that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for two eyes -**

This is more accurately rendered in the RSV: “that I may be avenged upon the Philistines for *one of my two eyes*”. Perhaps Samson realised that the destruction he was able to bring upon the Philistines even in his death would not be sufficient to repay the abuse, indignity and suffering he had experienced at their hands. It remained for others to avenge Samson’s other eye—the work of King David and Solomon.

**16:29 took hold** - Heb. “laphat”, “turn, to clasp” (Yg); “to grasp with a twisting movement”. It would seem that he pulled the two pillars together when he bowed with all his might, rather than pushed them out as artists have depicted the scene.

**the two middle pillars upon which the house stood** - Recent excavations at Gaza have provided information as to the structure of these ancient buildings. In the ruins of one edifice, two smooth stone bases close together in the centre were discovered, on (not in) which two pillars stood. On these rested the main beams by which the whole house was sustained.<sup>47</sup> If the design of the Temple of Dagon were similar it can be seen how the two pillars supported the whole building.

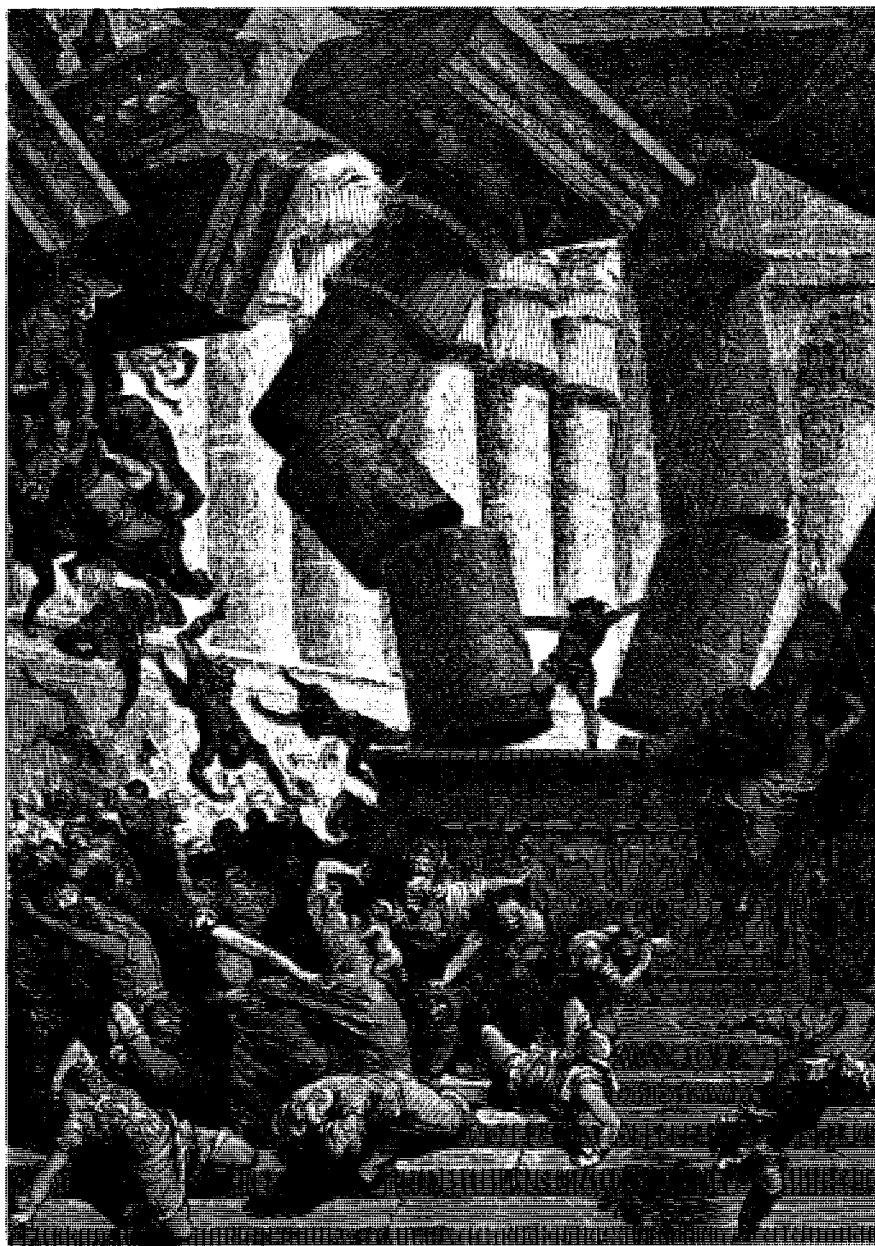
**16:30 Let me die with the Philistines** - “Me”, Heb. “nephesh”, the usual word for “soul”, proving once again that in the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures the word did not convey the idea of something immortal and immaterial. “Nephesh” here refers to Samson, not something said to be capable of existing apart from the body.

**16:31 his brethren and all the house of his father came down and brought him up** - Probably by this time his parents were dead so that it remained for his brethren to bury him between Zorah and Eshtaol where the Spirit of his God first began to stir him.

<sup>45</sup> Three different words are used in this verse in Samson’s appeal to God - Adonai (Lord), GOD (Yahweh), and God (Elohim).

<sup>46</sup> Notice the relevant words of Jesus: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matt. 5:29).

<sup>47</sup> J. J. Lias, *Cambridge Bible Commentary for Schools and Colleges: Judges* (Cambridge: At the Uni. Press, 1882), p. 155.



*Death of Samson: engraving by Gustave Dore (?1832-83)*



Samson's work was finished: he died a man of prayer and faith. He began to deliver his nation from Philistine oppression, having stopped the mouth of a lion, turned to flight the armies of the alien, waxed valiant in fight, and out of weakness was made strong. He obtained a good report through faith (Heb. 11).

May our God be gracious toward us that we too might "out of weakness" be "made strong" to join Samson and the multitudes of the faithful in the Kingdom Age.

*"To grind in brazen fetters under task,  
Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill with slaves!  
Oh, change beyond report, thought or belief!  
See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused!*

*Can this be he  
Who tore the lion as the lion tears the kid;  
Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,  
In scorn of their proud arms and warlike tools;  
Spurned them to death by troops? The bold Ascalonite  
Fled from his lion ramp; old warriors turned  
Their plated backs under his heel,  
Or, grovelling, soiled their crested helmets in the dust.  
Then, with what trivial weapon came to hand,  
The jaw of a dead ass his sword of bone,  
A thousand foreskins fell, the flower of Palestine,  
In Ramath-lechi, famous to this day.  
Then by main force pulled up, and on his shoulders bore,  
The gates of Gaza, post, and massy bar,  
Up to the hill by Hebron, seat of giants old."*