

SAMSON'S RIDDLE

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out of the strong, something sweet”
(Judges 14:14).*



<http://childrensministry.com/articles/bible-activity-samson-samson/>

Samson's story began with what was becoming a common introduction. **“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord...”** (Judges 13:1). The Israelites, those covenant people—again did not live according to the ways of their God, their loving heavenly Father and Creator. Teaching these stiff-necked and stubborn people requires thought-provoking strategies and paradoxical events that triggers questioning, agitates logic and pricks the intellect. Such is the story of Samson.

The Angel of the Lord came to Manoah's wife who was barren and said that she would conceive by God's grace and give birth to a son who **“would be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death”** (Judges 13:5, 7b).

Filled with excitement, Manoah's wife told her husband. He prayed to God, begging Him to send the Angel of the Lord again so that they can be taught how to bring up the child according to his special calling. The Angel of the Lord returned and said, **“Your wife must do all that I have told her. She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her”** (Judges 13:13-14).

The Nazirite vow was an oath of separation allowing a man or a woman outside of the tribe of Levi to dedicate their service to God. All that the angel of the Lord said harmonized with Numbers 6:1-8. The rules:

1. Abstain from drinking wine and fermented liquor, including vinegar derived from either wine or any fermented liquor, and will abstain from eating grapes fresh or dried or eat anything that comes from the vine (Numbers 6:3-4).
2. Let his/her hair grow uncut for the length of the vow (Numbers 6:5).
3. For the entire period of the vow, he/she must not come in contact with a corpse. He/she is to remain ritually clean and cannot defile his/her ritual cleanliness even in the event a parent or sibling dies (Numbers 6:7).

“The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol” (Judges 13:24-25). At the close of the chapter, everything in this story so far sings of hope for the Israelites, as this promised boy matured and is blessed. The “Highway of Holiness” (Isaiah 35:8) is in sight and his walk on the straight and narrow is an anticipated vision.

Into the next chapter, a sudden blow takes place, when Samson asks his parents for the hand of marriage of a Philistine woman in Timnah—where the grapes are grown and produce abundantly. Samson’s parents reply with the common sense of God-fearing, God-serving and truly caring parents, “Isn’t there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the **uncircumcised** Philistines to get a wife?” (Judges 14:3)

Knowledgeable Bible scholars know that such a marriage does not make sense for a person bound to a Nazirite vow. Intervention at all costs should take place, for even a simple-minded person understands the consequences of breaking a vow with God. The reader expects God’s intervention in the next verse.

“But Samson said to his father, ‘Get her for me. She’s the right one for me.’ **(His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel)**” (Judges 14:3b-4).

It is not logical for the God of Israel—the Great God and Creator of all things to move Samson to marry into an uncircumcised [wicked] people who are enemies of the people of Israel and God. It defies the purpose of a covenant people called to be separate from the world to discard the rules of any vow. Victory against any enemy is impossible when God’s people are violating His way.

This paradox is baffling. Tearing off the surface story, begins the journey into the deep thoughts of God. He is dealing with a rebellious and stubborn people who He is trying to awaken to their sins, idolatry and waywardness.

The embodiment of Samson started to take its true form; the image of the covenant-breaking Israelites. They are the children of promise born through a miraculous conception. They entered into a covenant with God and broke it more often than not. They perpetually flirted and entered into relationships with the idolatrous nations around them. **Again, they did evil in the eyes of God.** Yet, **despite their ruthless disobedience, God continued to work with them,** providing an example for them in their time and again, in the latter days (Genesis 49:16).

“As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat... Sometime later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass” (Judges 14:5b, 8a).

Samson appeared to be completely oblivious to Numbers 6:6-7 **“All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body.** Not even for his father or for his mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall he make himself unclean, because his separation to God is on his head.”

This blatant ignoring of the Nazarite vow now, clearly reflected the bigger story: Samson was Israel and Israel was Samson; God was holding up the mirror as He prophesied the beginning of the downfall of the Philistines.

On Samson’s way to marry the Philistine woman, he investigated the carcass of the mighty lion that he had killed earlier and saw a strange sight, a honey filled hive of bees. Samson took a full scoop and ate it. The eating from the carcass did not prick his conscience for the Spirit of God was ensuring that the behaviour of Israel was being truthfully portrayed in Samson. The prophecy God was telling went as planned and the unusual sight gave Samson the riddle to befuddle the Philistines at the customary bridegroom feast, he hosted.

The Philistines were wary of this Israelite and when he arrived, thirty security guards appeared. Samson was not intimidated. In the spirit of the celebration, he offered the Philistines a prize of thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes to those who could solve the riddle.

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THE ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE: This riddle has teased scholars for generations. Samson had killed a lion and it decomposed into a lifeless, empty carcass where a community of bees appeared producing sweet eternal honey. Samson knew the future of Israel and may have to some degree understood God’s salvation plan for all of mankind. He composed a riddle that prophesied the death of Christ and sweet gift of grace allowing all of mankind the opportunity again for eternal life. Jesus was born from the tribe of Judah. They were given the sceptre of the kingdom of Israel by Jacob. The tribe of Judah is represented as a lion



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Pointing to Jesus as their king—the Lion of Judah. The lion killed by Samson imaged Jesus' death needed to pay for sin and killed by Samson from the tribe of Dan. This tribe is the only tribe not listed among the 144,000 of Revelation because of their long history of idolatry. They image God's people and their history of worshipping the gods of the nations and rejecting the God of Israel, the only true God Creator. It was the riddle revealing the freedom of Israel from the rule of wickedness throughout all ages, not just the Philistines who served the rogue, fallen gods, who were and remain in rebellion against Almighty God to this day. Samson would initiate the overthrow in his time in a small way through his renewed strength given to him by God. He sacrificed his life to kill three thousand Philistines when he brought down the pillars upon them and the end of his calling.

After taken into captivity for the Philistines and humbled, he chose to sacrifice his life to take down 3,000 Philistines. This is a declaration of his humble loyalty and allegiance to God Almighty to overthrow Wickedness at the highest price. His life, orchestrated by God, was a record of all of God's people throughout time, who linger, play and bind with the ways of Wickedness. Samson came to see his calling. It ignited a burning flame to destroy Wickedness for all time, symbolic in the number 3,000—a numerical seal of God in number three and one thousand for all eternity.

“He will **begin the deliverance of Israel** from the hands of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5b). For three days the Philistines could not solve the riddle so they threatened Samson's wife, “Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death.” (Judges 14:15).

Samson offered the Philistines linen clothing to those who could resolve the riddle. Linen is made from flax through a lengthy process. It is a mirror of the length and varying amounts of time due to different conditions, as well, the different processes used by God to mature people spiritually.

The Philistine wife sobbed and begged Samson for the answer to the riddle and on the seventh day of the festival, he told her and she told her people. “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle” (Judges 14:19).

Samson gave them their reward by the same wrongful way that the Philistines obtained the answer to the riddle.

Samson returned to his father’s home angry, so his father gave his wife away, which when he learned of this, led to a series of ruthless attacks on the Philistines and the death of his wife and her father.

The Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson again when the people of Judah handed him over to the Philistines. “As **he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting**. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. **Finding a fresh jawbone** of a donkey, he grabbed it and **struck down a thousand men**” (Judges 15:14-15). The instrument of death was a “fresh jawbone.” Again, a reminder of the violation of the Nazirite vow—Samson’s/Israel’s flawed character.

“When he finished speaking, **he threw away the jawbone**, and the place was called Ramath Lehi. Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, ‘**You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?**’ Then **God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived**” (Judges 15:17-19).

After Samson killed the Philistines attempting to capture him, he threw aside **the jawbone—the unclean weapon** and he acknowledged the great victory was through God’s power and His Holy Spirit mirrored in the water that quenched Samson’s thirst.

THE ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE: God is able. He is able to cause bees to settle, live and produce honey in a place unnatural for them. It reflects God’s ability to preserve truth within a community of believers in a deceitful and corrupt world of wicked people who are DEAD spiritually. He is able to bring forth life-giving water in an unclean, dry place. He is able to revive a dying people and bring them back spiritually through His Holy Spirit in a place that denies the existence of God. Samson ate the honey and drank the water. Eventually, all of Israel will eat the pure word of God and drink His Holy Spirit.

The infamous love story told far and wide of Samson and Delilah is a repeat chapter of his life. The Philistines offered Delilah a financial reward for the formula of Samson’s great strength. Tired of her pleading, eventually Samson told her. When they shaved his head, his strength left for God was not with him. This is a warning for all of God’s people. When you are cut off from the source of your spiritual strength through disbelief or disobedience, God is not with you. You

will fall before your enemies like Samson. He was captured, his eyes gouged out, and put to grinding in prison (Judges 16:22).

“Now the Philistine leaders gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They rejoiced and said: Our god has handed over our enemy Samson to us. When the people saw him, they praised their god and said: **Our god has handed over to us our enemy who destroyed our land and who multiplied our dead**” (Judges 16:23-24).

The battles throughout our six-thousand-year period are truly not the Almighty God against the nations of the world, but the **Almighty God against Satan and the rogue sons of God ruling over the nations** who have **set the nations against their Creator**.

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

While Samson was in prison, he had lots of time to think. The Philistines had gouged out his eyes, but he had come to see God’s hand moving him constantly to violate the Nazirite vow. Blind, he worked like a caged animal on display before his enemy who delighted in their victory. They took every opportunity to mock him, belittle him and elevate their god over the God of Israel. His flirting and mingling with the enemy cost him his sight and blurred his judgment. But now in captivity, in his distress, his memories of his recklessness became clear.

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (II Corinthians 6:14)

Now that Samson could see, he humbly returned to God with one final request.

“And when their hearts were merry, they said, ‘Call Samson, that he may entertain us.’ So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, ‘Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.’ Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained” (Judges 16:25-27).

“Then Samson called to the Lord and said, ‘**O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once**, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.’ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines.’ Then he pushed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life” (Judges 16:28-30).



Samson **began the over-throw of the Philistines** just as God planned, but it would be the righteous King David who would complete the prophecy written in the riddle. David said, “**Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God**” (I Samuel 17:36). In the latter days, again, it will likely be the vow-breaking, yet God-given strong Samsonites swinging military weapons against the enemy who will **begin** the over-throw of the final world beast power, but the repentant, righteous people of God will be the ones who will fight with superhuman strength to **complete** the over-throw of the wicked beast power; the latter story will be remembered for generations.

It all began with a riddle.

*“Out of the eater, something to eat;
Wickedness will die, eternal truth will live
out of the strong, something sweet”
Christ will rule, through Him mankind will live.
(Judges 14:14).*

God’s instructional strategy is designed to stir believers into investigating beyond the surface—to probe into the deep mind of God and discover His fascinating complexity of omniscience that baffles and confounds the simple mind.

God has a grand plan. His moves go unhindered despite the appearance of victory on the side of His enemies. Don’t be deceived, every event is a direct result of the move God makes, working to correct His people, while bringing about the complete restoration of His kingdom on earth and in heaven.

God opened the womb of Samson’s mother and he was conceived, born of the tribe of Dan. This tribe was the most reckless among Israel at that time. They continued after the death of Samson in their careless regard for God, **adopting idol worship and favoring mysticism for many years to come.** Immediately following the story of Samson in the book of Judges, is the account of Micah’s idols taken by the Danites and their invasion of the Laish people. Amos, the prophet makes reference to the idolatry in Dan, “They who swear by the shame of Samaria, or say, ‘**As surely as your god lives, O Dan,**’ or, ‘As surely as the god of Beersheba lives’—they will fall, never to rise again” (Amos 8:14). They are not included in the 144,000 in Revelation 7:5-7. **Their reckless worship of God will delay their deliverance.** Dan’s father, Jacob, prophesied their humbled response, “**I wait for your salvation, O LORD**” (Genesis 49:18). Be not dismayed, all of the nations of Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26).

The shoes God gave Samson to wear killed him, but those same shoes gave him eternal life. Samson’s story is as Jacob prophesied in Genesis 49:16, “Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel.” The people who image the tribe of Dan, those flirting and mingling with this evil world will learn, like Samson, that it will overpower them and take them captive. They will be defeated and suffer humiliation at the hands of their enemy. The nations of 21st century Israel have not learned Samson’s lesson. They will fall and enter into a second captivity. Those who repent, as Samson did, will be rescued; they will wait for their deliverance and receive justice but at a heavy price. If only, they had taken the time to solve the riddle.

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