

• *Two stories about Sampson*

There are really only two stories about Samson:
 (i) the story of his marriage to a Philistine woman and the various events that resulted from it ^{□1}. It ends by noting how Samson came to lead Israel for twenty years ^{□2}. Then
 (ii) there is the story of the events that led up to Samson's great victory at the time of his death ^{□3}. The repetition of Judges 15:20 in Judges 16:31 highlights the division of the stories into two sections.

^{□1} 14:1-15:20
^{□2} 15:20
^{□3} 16:1-31

• *Born in fulfilment of a promise*

As the angel promised, the child was born. He was named 'Samson' ('Sunny'). He came to faith in the God of Israel. On one occasion when he was at a place called 'Mahaneh Dan', the Spirit of God began arousing him and empowering him for his particular ministry ^{□1}.

^{□1} 13:24-25

Sampson chooses a Philistine wife

• *Self-willed, arrogant and overbearing personality*

The story comes swiftly to the opening event in Samson's conflict with the Philistines. He falls in love with a Philistine woman in Timnah. Although the Israelites and Philistines were hostile towards each other they occupied the same territory. Samson had great strength of body and great strength of personality. He was naturally overbearing, domineering, masterful. He was self-willed, arrogant, and always was strongly drawn to a good-looking woman. When he sees a fascinating, good-looking woman, the woman of Timnah, he decides he must have her as his wife ^{□1}, and that she will be his way of getting into the society of the Philistines. The protest of his parents could not change his mind ^{□2}. There was no law against marrying a Philistine, although most Israelite parents would not have thought it a good idea.

^{□1} 14:1-2
^{□2} 14:3

• *He (Sampson) sought an opportunity against the Philistines*

Judges 14:4 says 'His father and mother did not know that this was from Yahweh, for *'he sought an opportunity against the Philistines.'* But who is this 'he'? Does it refer to God? Or does it refer to Samson? A study of Judges shows, I believe, that it refers to Samson. It comes clear that Samson was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. He was mixing business and pleasure in befriending the woman of Timnah!

• *Despite his failings Sampson was a man of faith and used by God*

God was determined to use Samson. The birth-story of Judges 13 makes it clear that God had made Samson the way that he was! Even his weaknesses of character would be used by God. Like left-handed Ehud, God would use His servant Samson just as he was – and indeed God had made him the way that he was. Whatever failings Samson may have had, he was a man of faith with a determination to put down the power of the Philistines.

• *Samson is a classic case of God's working through a person's own personality and desires*

Samson is a classic case of God's working through a person's own personality and desires. Samson 'was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines'. One might ask, did God need Samson to 'seek an occasion' to deal with the Philistines. Why did He not just pour out fire and sulphur upon them from heaven as He did upon Sodom and Gomorrah? Why did He not just send Samson and give him a miraculous victory, in the way that He sent Gideon and gave him a miraculous victory?

God works in different ways at different times

God works in different ways at different times.
 (i) Sometimes He works by sheer miracle, without human agency. No human being was involved in pouring out fire and sulphur upon Sodom.
 (ii) Sometimes He works through miracles which make use of human obedience. Gideon's defeat of Midian was miraculous but it involved Gideon's obedience.

• *Miracles – with or without human obedience*

• *Through human character empowered by the Holy Spirit*

• *Samson kills a lion*

• *Honey from the lion's carcass*

Sampson's riddle contest

• *Impossible for the companions to work it out*

• *The companions intimidate Samson's bride into betraying his confidence*

• *Samson's revenge – God's plan and Samson's character worked together*

(iii) Sometimes God works through human character, empowered by the Holy Spirit. This third option was the way God worked through Samson. He used Samson himself. God gave Samson himself unusual power and strength that came through the anointings of the Spirit. Samson was not a very religious man, but God was using him anyway! Samson had his own wishes and desires, and God was working through them. Samson was a man of faith, but his style of living had a certain shape to it that depended on the kind of person that Samson was.

Samson and his parents go down to Timnah to prepare for a marriage. On the way Samson wanders off alone into the vineyards of Timnah and kills a lion with his bare hands, but his parents did not know about that incident ¹. They meet the woman ² and the marriage is arranged.

Later they go down again for the wedding. By this time, some bees have made a nest in the carcass of the lion and Samson gets some honey for himself and his parents. Still the parents do not know about the killing of the lion ¹.

The wedding feast would be seven days long. The father sees the woman to arrange the marriage ¹. The bride's family provide thirty men to be friends and companions to Samson ². Then Samson arranges a kind of contest with his thirty companions. They are asked to decipher a riddle, as a form of entertainment during the wedding. There was a lot of money involved, because thirty suits of clothing would be valuable ³. The thirty men accept the challenge ⁴, but actually Samson's riddle is exceptionally difficult. Samson has played a trick on them. There is no way they will be able to guess what it means. 'Out of the eater something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet' ⁵. What can it mean?

For three days they puzzle over it. On the fourth day they use Samson's intended wife to get the secret, threatening her with death if she does not co-operate ¹. For the rest of the seven days (which is what verse 17 means) she uses her tears and nagging to get the secret out of him and then tells the thirty Philistine companions of Samson ². They answer the riddle ³ but Samson knows how they got the answer ⁴. Then comes a dramatic turn. Samson is furious, but the Spirit of God comes down upon him. There is a mixture of human anger and divine enablement. He goes down to Ashkelon, more than twenty miles away, robs thirty Philistines of their clothes and pays his debt to the thirty companions ⁵. God's plan and Samson's own character have worked together to strike the first blow in the harassing of the Philistines.

¹ 14:5-6

² 14:7

¹ 14:8-9

¹ 14:10

² 14:11

³ 14:12-13a

⁴ 14:13b

⁵ 14:14

¹ 14:15

² 14:16-17

³ 14:18a

⁴ 14:18b

⁵ 14:19a



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