

Judges 13-16, Samson

Overview

As we observed earlier, Samson's activity along the Mediterranean coast is concurrent with Jephthah's fight in the east (Figure 1, chart). Judg 13:1 picks up 10:7,

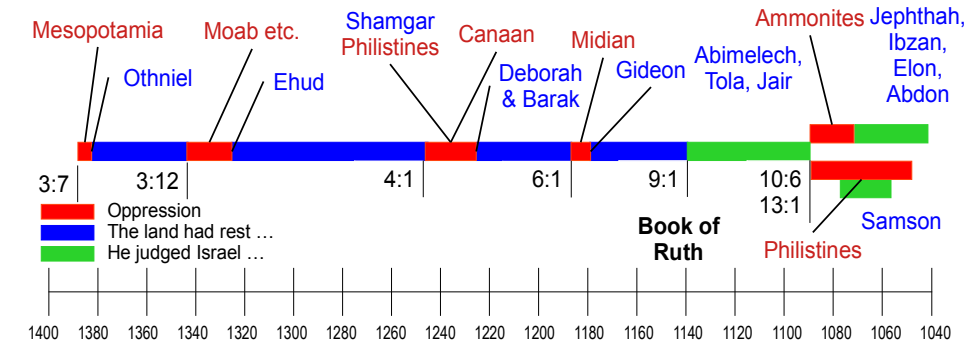


Figure 1: Chronology of Judges

Judg. 10:7 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the **Philistines**, and into the hands of the children of **Ammon**. 8 And that year **they** vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were **on the other side Jordan** in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. ... 13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the **Philistines** forty years.

With 13:1, Samson's story begins with Rebellion and Retribution, like the other major judges.

Israel confronts many adversaries in the book of Judges: Mesopotamia, Moab, Ammon, Hazor, the Midianites. In most cases, the judge achieves a notable victory that relieves the pressure. But one enemy is left hanging: the Philistines. Two judges—Shamgar (3:31) and Samson (ch. 13-16)—fight them, but with no conclusive victory. The Philistines go on to dominate the history until the time of David. We will study their background briefly, then consider an anomaly in Samson's story and how 1 Samuel resolves that anomaly.

Background on the Philistines

The Philistines first appear as descendants of Ham, after the flood (chart).

Gen 10:6 And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, ... 13 And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim, 14 And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (out of whom came **Philistim**;) and Caphtorim.

Amos mentions their origin as Caphtor, the island of Crete (Figure 2):



Figure 2: Origin of the Philistines in Crete (Caphtor)

Amos 9:7 Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and **the Philistines from Caphtor, ...?**

In Samson’s day, the Philistines dominate the coastal plain (Figure 3) from five cities:

1Sa 6:17 And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the LORD; for **Ashdod** one, for **Gaza** one, for **Askelon** one, for **Gath** one, for **Ekron** one;

Their presence in Canaan goes back at least to Abraham, who dealt with their king Abimelech at Beersheba (Genesis 21). The Philistines then were based at Gerar (Gen 26:1), inland from the coastal cities they later occupy, and probably came in an earlier migration. Their appearance in Canaan in the account of Shamgar (Judg 3:31) about 1240 BC reflects the beginning of depredations by island dwellers (the “sea people”) throughout the eastern Mediterranean about 1200 BC.¹



Figure 3: Geography of Samson and Samuel

Relation between Judges and 1 Samuel

Samson’s cycle is incomplete (Table 1, chart). Rebellion and Retribution are followed by Restoration (Samson), but there is no national Repentance, no Rebuke of their sin, and no clear victory. Judg 13:5 says that Samson “shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.” But who will finish the task?

Rebellion: <i>Did Evil</i> <i>Forsook/served</i>	2:11 :12,13 17,19	3:7 :7	3:12	4:1	6:1	10:6 :6	13:1
Retribution: <i>Lord angry</i>	:12, 14	:8				:7	
<i>Spoilers</i>	:14-15	:8 <i>Meso-</i> <i>potamia</i> 8	:12-14 <i>Moab</i> 18	:2 <i>Canaan</i>	:1-6 <i>Midian</i>	:7-9 <i>Philistines,</i> <i>Ammon</i> 18	:1 <i>Philistines</i>
<i>Years</i>				20	7		40
Repentance	:15,18	:9	:15	:3	:6	:10	
Rebuke	:1-3				:7-10	:11-16	
Restoration: <i>Judge</i> <i>Victory</i> <i>Land had rest</i> <i>Years</i> <i>He judged Israel</i> <i>Years</i>	:16,18	:9-11 <i>Othniel</i> :10 :11 40	:15-30 <i>Ehud</i> :30 :30 80	4:4-5:31 <i>Deborah, Barak</i> 4:23 5:31 40	6:11-8:28 <i>Gideon</i> 8:28 :28 40	10:17-12:7 <i>Jephthah</i> 11:33	13:2-16:31 Samson
Supplements:			:32 <i>Shamgar</i>		8:29-9:57 <i>Abimelech</i> , 3 10:1,2 <i>Tola</i> , 23 10:3-5 <i>Jair</i> , 22	12:8-10 <i>Ibzan</i> , 7 :11-12 <i>Elon</i> , 10 :13-15 <i>Abdon</i> , 8	15:20, 16:31 20

Table 1: The Cycles of Judges. Yellow shows significant omissions.

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_Peoples

Judges 13-16

The answer comes in 1 Samuel 7. By this time, the ark has been captured at the Battle of Aphek (1 Samuel 4). This chapter reads naturally as a continuation of Judg 13:1. 1 Samuel does not emphasize Israel's *Rebellion* leading to the Philistine oppression, but recapitulates the *Retribution* and its remaining duration, 20 years since the Battle of Aphek:

1 Sam 7:2a And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was **twenty years**:

The nation cries to the Lord, which often constitutes the *Repentance* in other cycles:

2b and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

Then Samuel *Rebukes* them:

3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

The earlier chapters of 1 Samuel do not mention this apostasy. 1 Sam 7:3 is a clear link back to Judg 10:6, which introduces the Philistine oppression.

Judg. 10:6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and **Ashtaroth**, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

The nation confirms their *Repentance* with a solemn gathering at Mizpeh.

1 Sam 7:4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only. ... 6 And they ... said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh. ... 8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines....

Then the Lord brings a miraculous *Restoration*:

10 ... the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar. 12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

As a result, the Philistines are no longer able to invade Israel with impunity, though they continue to harass the nation down to the time of David:

13 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.

“Subdued” כָּנַע N H3665 is the standard verb in Judges for the defeat of an adversary, like Moab (3:30), or Jabin (4:23), or Midian (8:28), or Ammon (11:33).

Figure 4 (chart) shows the overall chronology of this period, based on the numbered data:

1. The total length of the Philistine oppression is 40 years.
2. It ends with the Battle of Ebenezer in 1 Samuel 7, when the Philistines are finally “subdued.”

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3. This battle follows 20 years that the ark was in Kirjathjearim.

4. That period begins with the battle of Aphek, when the Philistines captured the ark, and Eli and his two sons died. That was the end of Eli's 40 years as judge (1 Sam 4:18), and the starting point for Samuel's judgeship.

5. Samson's 20 years judging Israel fit somewhere in this period, "in the days of the Philistines" (15:20), after his victory at Lehi (Judg 15:14-20).

6. At some earlier point he engages the Philistines, but as predicted to his mother (Judg 13:5), he only *begins* to deliver Israel, so this must be before the middle of the 40 year oppression.

This joint history is remarkable in two ways.

First, the author of Judges, having firmly established the elements of a judge's cycle, ends with a partial cycle. He clearly shows us what a judge needs to do, only to leave us in suspense with a judge who does not finish the work.

Second, a later book deliberately picks up the cycle and shows how Samson completes it.

This division of the cycle emphasizes that the work of delivering Israel, while accomplished through men, is really the work of the Lord. By dividing the final cycle in this way, we see that God is the one who brings the diverse pieces of the project together into a complete whole.

Paul articulates this principle when he writes to the Corinthians (chart),

1 Cor 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, **even as the Lord gave to every man?** 6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but **God gave the increase.** 7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but **God that giveth the increase.** 8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 9 For we are **labourers together with God:** ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and **another buildeth thereon.** ...

We should not be discouraged when we labor for the Lord without apparent results, nor puffed up when a great victory unfolds in our hands. The work is his, not ours. We are privileged to be simply "laborers together with God" in doing a work that ultimately is his work, not ours.

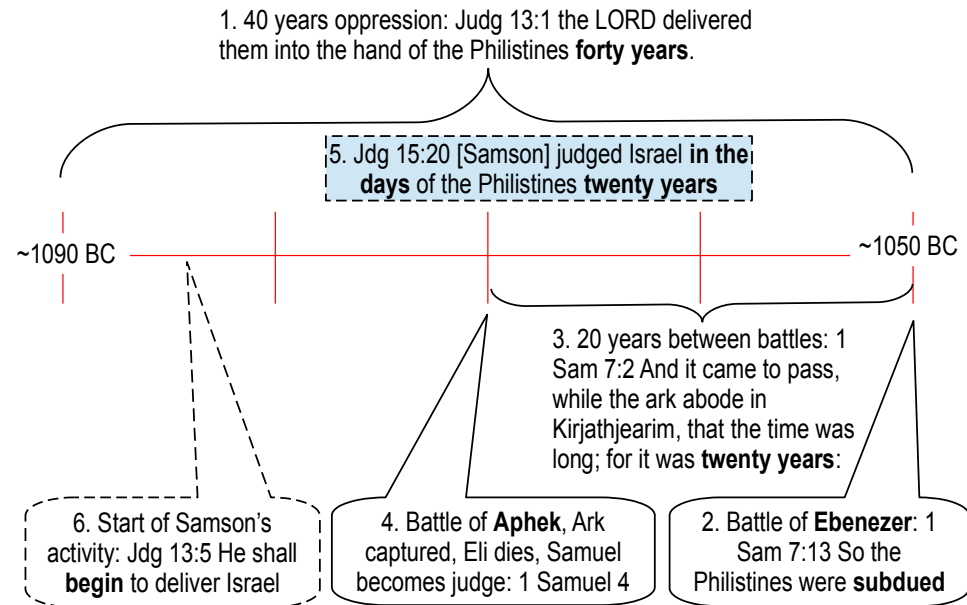


Figure 4: Chronology of the Philistine Oppression (dashed = uncertain dates)

Structure of the History of Samson

In this section, the writer marks the structure with internal inclusions (Figure 5, chart).²

- References to Samson’s father, Manoah, enclose the entire history, 13:1, 16:31.
- The birth narrative begins and ends with Manoah’s wife, first barren in 13:2, then bearing a child in 13:24.
- 13:25 and 16:31 frame the career of Samson with the place reference “between Zorah and Eshtaol.”
- 15:20 and 16:31 both tell us that his period of judging Israel after the victory of Lehi lasted 20 years. We will see that this notation presents the entire last chapter as a picture of Samson’s death.

In terms of the five R’s, Samson’s story is incomplete. This impressive use of inclusions, all culminating in 16:31, provides clear closure to the story, reassuring us that in fact Samson has done what he came to do.

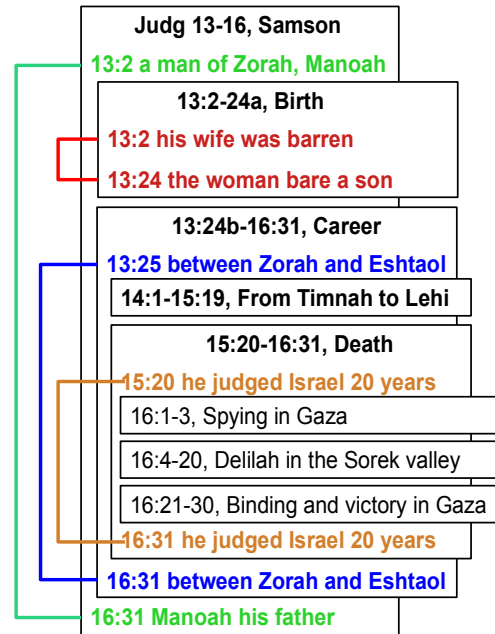


Figure 5: Structure of the History of Samson: successive inclusions terminating in 16:31

13:2-24a, Restoration: Birth

2 And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.—The account of Samson’s birth begins and ends with his mother, first barren, then giving birth to a son.

The miraculous birth of a child to a barren couple is a frequent occurrence in Scripture, going back to Abraham and Sarah. The birth of Samson is especially similar to two later such births, those of Samuel and of John the Baptist (Table 2, chart). We will see other parallels between these three births as we work through this narrative.

Samson	Samuel	John the Baptist
Judg 13:2 And there was a certain man ויהי איש ארוד of Zorah,	1Sa 1:1 Now there was a certain man ויהי איש ארוד of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim,	Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest
of the family of the Danites , whose name was Manoah ;	and his name was Elkanah , the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite :	named Zacharias , of the course of Abia :
and his wife was barren , and bare not.	2 And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children .	and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. ... 7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren , and they both were now well stricken in years.

Table 2: Births of the Forerunners

The similarities between Samson and Samuel remind us of how these two judges share the work of subduing the Philistine oppression. But the parallels with John the Baptist suggest another

² Suggested by Exum, JBL 99/1 (1980) 43-59 and Chisholm, JSOT Vol 34.2 (2009): 171-182

similarity, one that applies to all three men. All of them are forerunners—Samson of Samuel, Samuel of David, and John the Baptist of our Lord, the culmination of Israel’s judges and kings.³

The overall structure of the birth announcement consists of two cycles in which the angel of the Lord appears to the woman, she reports to her husband, and he speaks to the Lord on her behalf (Table 3, chart). These are followed by his offering to the Lord, in which the identity of the heavenly visitor is made clear. Both

Angel Appears to Woman	13:3-5 the child shall be a Nazarite	13:9b
She tells her husband	13:6-7 the child shall be a Nazarite	13:10
Manoah asks questions	13:8-9a Let the man of God ... come again ... what we shall do unto the child	13:11 Art thou the man? 13:12-14 How shall we order the child? → No wine or strong drink 13:15-16 Let us prepare a kid 13:17-18 What is thy name?

Table 3: Structure of the Announcement of Samson's Birth

cycles emphasize that the child will be a Nazarite—the first in the angel’s speech to the woman and her report to her husband, the second in the angel’s response to Manoah’s central question.

The structure of this section emphasizes that Manoah is not afraid to bring his questions and concerns directly to God. We will see that his son learns this attribute of his father, for Samson is the only one of the judges to cry out to the Lord for help, and he does it twice, after the battle of Lehi in 15:18 and again in the Philistine temple in 16:28. This conscious calling on the Lord may be why Heb 11:32 includes him among the heroes of faith.

13:3-9a, First Appearance-Report-Question Cycle

3-5, The Announcement

3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman,—This is the third time this individual appears in Judges.

- In 2:1-5, he comes from Gilgal to Bochim to rebuke the people for their compromise with the people of the land, whom they were supposed to cast out.
- In 6:11-21, he comes to call Gideon to his work as a judge.

This title appears in 54 verses of the OT, ranging from Genesis (ch. 16 and 22) to Zechariah (six times). It should always be translated “**the** angel of the Lord,” not “an angel of the Lord.”⁴ Frequently, the context identifies this individual as the Lord himself (see notes). For example, in Gideon’s history, the angel speaks in 6:12 (“the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him ...”), but then in v. 14, “and the Lord looked upon him, and said” It is reasonable to see here pre-incarnate appearances of the second person of the godhead, of whom Micah wrote,

Mic. 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; **whose goings forth have been from of old**, from everlasting.

3 Another possible long-haired forerunner is Elijah, forerunner of Elisha, who is described in 2 Ki 1:8 as בעל שער “a hairy man”

4 In Hebrew, if the governing noun in a genitive construction (the noun after the “of”) is definite, so is the governed noun (the one before the “of”). As a proper name, “Lord” יהוה is definite.

“From of old,” the one who would be born as Jesus of Nazareth has been going forth among his people. Now he appears to Samson’s mother.

and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.—Note the temporal sequence.

1. Right now, you have are childless.⁵
2. In the past tense, you have not borne a child.
3. But in the future, two things will happen:
 - (a) you shall conceive
 - (b) you shall bear a son.

4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:—Her son will be a lifelong Nazarite (v. 5). Even in the womb he must not be exposed to the fruit of the vine, or indeed any intoxicants.⁶

5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive art with child, and shalt bear a son;—Again, we should pay attention to the tenses, which this time are obscured in the translation:

1. You are (presently) with child.⁷
2. You shall (in the future) bear a son.

In v. 3, the conception was described as still in the future, but in v. 5, it is a present reality. Between v. 3 and v. 5, she has conceived.

Samson’s birth is miraculous, like the births of Isaac, and Jacob and Esau, and Samuel, and John the Baptist. All of these events connect God’s promise in Gen 3:15 to send the seed of the woman, and the ultimate fulfillment of that promise in the miraculous birth of our Lord Jesus (Figure 6, chart). Scripture has many instances of this pattern, called “manifold fulfillment”:⁸ an initial prophecy is repeated, sometimes in words and sometimes in events that foreshadow the promise, until the actual fulfillment arrives. Before we come to Matthew 1, none of the sons is solely the seed of the women. All the earlier mothers (including Samson’s mother) have husbands. But the portrayal of the miraculous nature of the coming birth is perhaps strongest here, when the angel reveals that the conception takes place during his conversation with her.

and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb:—This child is remarkable not only in his conception, but also in his Nazarite status.

and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.—Unlike the other major judges, he only *begins* to deliver Israel. The Philistines are subdued only under Samuel.

Excursus: The Nazarite Vow (Numbers 6)

Consider first the vow, then how it relates to our Lord and us.

The Nazarite Vow

A vow promises an offering to the Lord in return for a request. Compare Jephthah’s vow in 11:30-31. The offering could be a person’s total dedication to the Lord, marked in three ways:

5 אִתִּי־עֲקָרָה, a verbless clause, most naturally understood as present tense.

6 Milgrom (Commentary on Numbers, Excursus 11) compares the priests, Lev 10:9.

7 הִנֵּנִי הָרָה, another verbless clause, likely present in meaning.

8 The term is due to Willis Judson Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*. Thomas Y. Crowell, 1905. The definition is my own, based on his discussion.

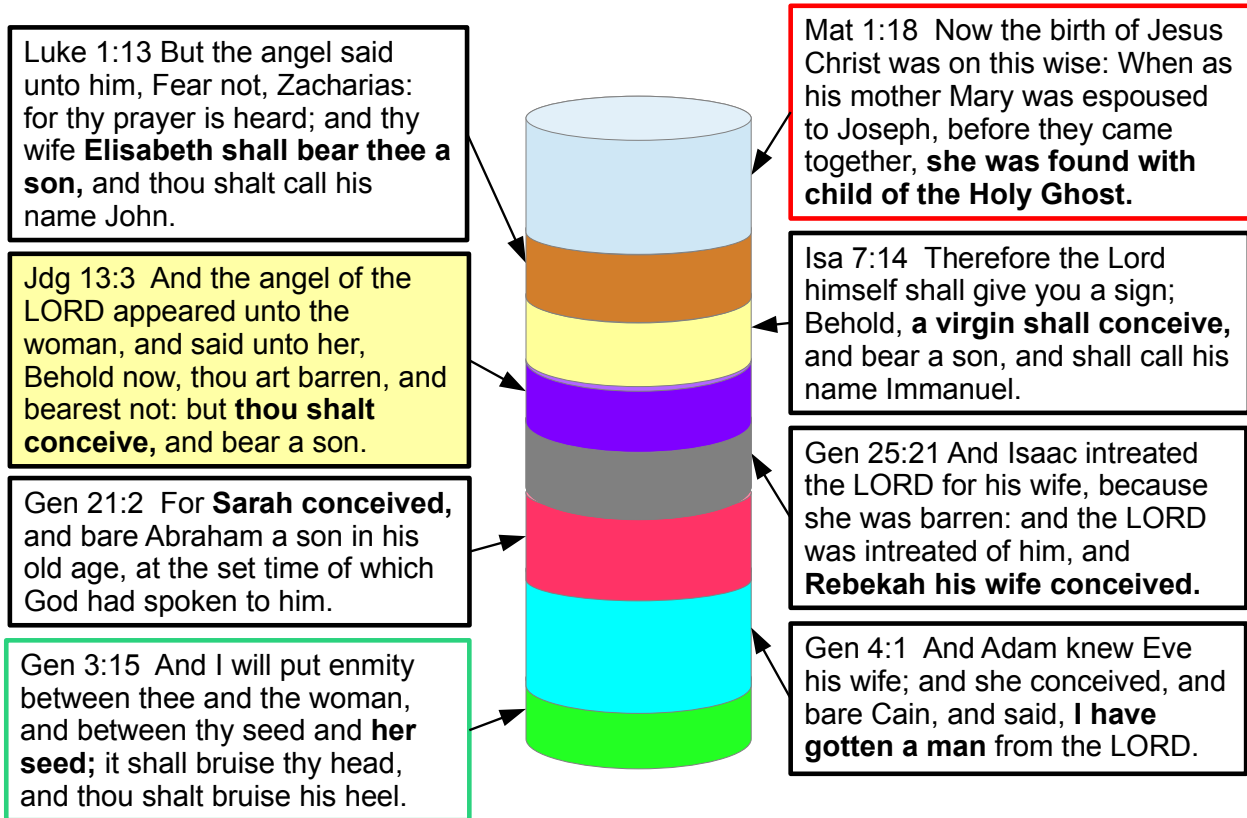


Figure 6: Manifold Fulfillment of the miraculous Seed of the Woman

1. No contact with the vine or any of its products
2. No contact with any dead body
3. The hair allowed to grow long, without cutting.

Ordinarily, such a vow was undertaken by the person who would be restricted, for a temporary period of time. At the end of the vow, the hair was shaved and presented in the temple in Jerusalem. It was practiced by early Jewish Christians, including Paul. At the end of his second missionary journey, as he leaves Cenchrea, a port serving the city of Corinth, we read (chart):

Act 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; **having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.**

He has apparently ended a Nazarite vow and cut his hair, taking it back to Jerusalem to offer in the temple. At the end of his third journey, he agrees to sponsor the required sacrifices for four Jewish Christians who had such vows, at the request of the elders in the Jerusalem church:

Act 21:23 We have four men which **have a vow** on them; 24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may **shave their heads**: ...

Samson differs in three ways.

1. He does not undertake it himself. His mother commits him to it, at the angel's instruction.
2. It is not temporary, but life-long.
3. It does not preclude his contact with dead bodies, for his whole mission is to kill Philistines (14:19; 15:15).

Was our Lord a Nazarite?

The Scriptures record two other life-long Nazarites—the same two miraculous sons we noted earlier (Table 2), Samuel and John the Baptist (Table 4).⁹ All three point to the Seed of the Woman (Figure 6). Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist are links in the chain of manifold fulfillment that culminates in our Lord, and they were all Nazarites from the womb. Sometimes it is suggested that our Lord, too, was a Nazarite, which is perhaps one source of the artistic tradition depicting the Lord with long hair.

Samson	Samuel	John the Baptist
Judg 13:3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.	1Sam. 1:17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.	Luke 1:13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son , and thou shalt call his name John.
5 ... no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb:	1Sam. 1:11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.	15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

Table 4: Divine Announcements and Lifelong Nazarites

The answer is that formally he did not follow the requirements of the vow, but his life is an example of the principles underlying the vow. Let's consider first a verse that is sometimes understood to teach that he was a Nazarite, then look at how he did not keep the vow, and finally explore the underlying principles.

One verse in the NT is sometimes cited to claim that he was a Nazarite. After Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt with the child Jesus, we read (chart),

Matt. 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, **He shall be called a Nazarene.**

No OT passage comes anywhere near these words, so some have sought to find the source in Numbers 6. But linguistically, "Nazarene" is not how a Greek would write "Nazarite."¹⁰ And Matthew is not referring to the words of one prophet, but to a theme in "the prophets" (plural).

In NT times, Galilee in general, and Nazareth in particular, is the object of disdain.

Joh 1:45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, **Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?** Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

Joh 7:52 They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for **out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.**

⁹ In each case, only one of the restrictions is mentioned explicitly—long hair for Samson and Samuel, and abstention from wine for John. Samuel, like Samson, does not avoid contact with the dead (1 Sam 15:33).

¹⁰ In the rare cases where the LXX transliterates the term (Judg 13:5; Alexandrinus of 13:7; 16:17), the second vowel is ι (echoing the Hebrew *hireq*), where Matthew has ω.

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Galilee is a backwater, at best unsophisticated, and at worst naïve and polluted with frequent contact with the Gentiles. To call someone a Nazarene is to belittle and despise them.

No prophet ever uses the *word* “Nazarene” to describe our Lord. But the prophets agree that the Messiah would be despised by his people.

Isa 49:7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man **despiseth**, to him whom the nation **abhorreth**, to a **servant** of rulers,

Isa 53:3 He is **despised** and **rejected** of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was **despised**, and we esteemed him not.

Mic 5:1 Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall **smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek**.

Zec 11:4 Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; ... 8 Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul lothed them, and **their soul also abhorred me**.

Truly, the prophets taught that “he shall be called a Nazarene,” a despised person.

The Lord does not keep the Nazarite restrictions (chart): long hair, abstention from the vine or grape products, and avoiding the dead. We do not know how he wore his hair, but we do know about the other two. On at least two occasions, he does not avoid proximity with the dead:¹¹

Luke 7:11 ... he went into a city called Nain; ... 12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: ... 14 And he came **and touched the bier**: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. 15 And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.

Luke 8:49 While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, **Thy daughter is dead**; trouble not the Master. ... 52 And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. 53 And they laughed him to scorn, **knowing that she was dead**. 54 And he put them all out, and **took her by the hand**, and called, saying, Maid, arise.

In addition, he does not avoid wine, and contrasts himself with John the Baptist on this point:

Luke 7:33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread **nor drinking wine**; and ye say, He hath a devil. 34 The Son of man is come eating **and drinking**; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a **winebibber**, a friend of publicans and sinners!¹²

So our Lord does not observe the outward signs of the Nazarite. But he does satisfy the spiritual meaning of the vow, stated in two words at the beginning of Numbers 6 (chart). And since we are “to be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Rom 8:29), these two words are a guide to us.

Num. 6:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall **separate** פלא C H6381 themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to **separate** נזר H5144 themselves unto the LORD:

11 He might not actually have touched a dead person, if the bier in 7:14 is more than a cloth covering, and if 8:52 is a physiological statement rather than a promise of her resuscitation. But Numbers 6 doesn't exclude simply touching a corpse. Even if someone dies suddenly near the Nazarite, the vow is broken. And since much of the point of the vow is making a person visibly distinct from others, if the Lord were a Nazarite, these two episodes would certainly compromise that appearance.

12 See also Cana of Galilee, John 2:1-11; the last supper; vinegar on the cross, Matt 27:48.

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The second of these words is the verb *nazar*, the root of “Nazarite.” It means “separated, set apart.” The first instance of this root in the OT is in Jacob’s blessing to Joseph:

Gen. 49:26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was **separate** from his brethren.

Joseph, like David, is a type of the Messiah, recognized by the Jews and reflected in the NT.¹³ Certainly our Savior was “separate from his brethren,” “despised and rejected of men” (Isa 53:3), as Joseph was by his brothers. In this sense, as a “Nazarene” (2:23), a despised person, he demonstrated one facet of the spiritual character of the Nazarite.

Our Savior told us that the world will hate us because “it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). As followers of the Messiah, we must not expect the world’s approval. Quite the contrary, if we are confronting people with their sin as we ought, we can expect tribulation. The Lord calls us to “come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor 6:17). Like Joseph and like our Lord, we will be “separate from our brethren” after the flesh.

The first instance of “separate” in Num 6:2 is a different Hebrew root, which means “to be wonderful, to be exceptional.” Literally, we might render, “when either man or woman shall act wonderfully, to vow a vow of separation, to separate unto the Lord.” The Nazarite vow was viewed as something exceptional. As we saw when we studied Jephthah, all vows were voluntary, never required by the law. But the Nazarite vow was particularly exceptional, because it marked the person as different and imposed extreme constraints on his behavior.

The word family used here usually describes the Lord and his works. It appears twice in Judges 13 in reference to the angel of the Lord. When Manoah asks his name, the angel replies using an adjective from this verb:

Judg 13:18 Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is **secret פלאי**?

And when Manoah offers the kid to the angel, the verb appears:

Judg. 13:19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel **did wondrously פלא C**; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

Our Savior’s devotion to his Father was exceptional and wonderful. Perhaps this is why Isaiah uses this word family specifically in reference to him:

Is. 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called **Wonderful פלא**, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

As our Savior was exceptional in his devotion to the Father, so should we. Being a disciple of the Lord Jesus is not a hobby. It is all-consuming. We are to love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, all our abundance (Deut 6:5).

So the Nazarite institution points to the Lord—in his separateness, rejected by his brethren, but also in the exceptional nature of the work that he did, the very work of God. And it also reminds us of what the Lord expects from us—willingness to suffer rejection for his sake, and wholehearted devotion to serving him.

13 D.C. Mitchell, *Messiah ben Joseph*. Scotland: Campbell Publications, 2016.

6-9a, The Report and Question

6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying,—The second element set apart by the structure of the passage (Table 3, chart) is that the woman involves her husband. As in the case of Deborah, Manoah’s wife has two remarkable characteristics.

First, she is more sensitive to the Lord’s leading than is her husband. The angel comes to her, not to her husband, though in other miraculous births (Isaac, John the Baptist) the divine messenger addresses the husband. Similarly, Barak overlooks the Lord’s command to him to muster the tribes until Deborah reminds him,

Jdg 4:6 Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

It is often the case that women are more sensitive to spiritual realities than men are. Certainly, churches that allow women in positions of leadership find that women soon dominate those positions. Men are often content to let the women do the job.

Second, she fully involves Manoah in the process, reporting the vision to him. Deborah also takes this approach. She doesn’t muster the troops herself, but urges on Barak to do his duty. In both cases, these spiritual women recognize the importance of the distinctive roles that God has given men and women, and exert their influence to encourage their men in doing what they should, rather than taking over from them.

A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God האלהים, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:—She does not fully understand the nature of the being who has appeared to them. She and Manoah call him simply “a man of God” (chart), comparing him to an angel of God, but not identifying him as such. They show less spiritual discernment than Abraham and Gideon when the Lord visited them. Abraham immediately recognizes one of his visitors in Gen 18:3 as God. “My Lord” is pointed as the plural form of the noun, the form that is used to address God,

Gen. 18:2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, 3 And said, **My Lord אדני**, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

The same mark shows that Gideon initially assumes his visitor is a man, but shifts his opinion:

Judg. 6:13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh **my Lord אדני [singular]**, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. 14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? 15 And he said unto him, Oh **my Lord אדני [plural]**, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.

But Manoah and his wife persist in viewing the visitor as just a man. They are an instance of those whom the writer of Hebrews recalls when he exhorts his readers,

Heb 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have **entertained angels unawares.**

7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive art with child, and shalt bear a son;— She exactly quotes the angel's message from v. 5, including the news that she has just conceived.

and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.—Here she combines the restrictions the angel has placed on her, and on the coming child.

8 Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.—Manoah, like his wife, calls the visitor a “man of God.”

He takes responsibility for carrying out the angelic charter. But he asks specific clarification about one detail: “What we shall do unto the child.” He is referring to the instruction that the child is to be a lifelong Nazarite. The Nazarite vow was normally undertaken for a specific period of time, by the person involved. Here, it is imposed on him from birth, and is a lifelong responsibility. Manoah knows Numbers 6 well enough to be surprised by this distinction, and wants confirmation.

9 And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah;—Each time Manoah asks a question, he receives a divine answer. God delights to respond to his children.

9b-18, Second Appearance-Report-Question Cycle

As shown in Table 3, the writer repeats the same sequence we saw in the first cycle. This time, the emphasis shifts from the angel's discussion with the woman to his discussion with Manoah.

and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field:—Perhaps she was watching the flocks. Alternatively, we learn in vv. 19-20 that the family had a private altar, and she may have been praying there for the angel to return.

but Manoah her husband was not with her.—Once again, she is alone when the angel comes.

10 And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.—For the third time, the visitor is described as a “man.” Both Manoah and his wife underestimate the nature of their visitor.

Again, she looks to her husband for guidance.

Now Manoah asks four questions instead of just one.

11 And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am.—First, he verifies the identity of the visitor. Two more times, he is described as a “man,” once even by the narrator. The Angel chooses for the moment to overlook this error, which he will shortly correct.

12 And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass.—Unlike Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, Manoah accepts the divine promise.

How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?—His second question focuses on raising the child. As the father of the family, he wants to be sure that he understands the instructions that the angel has given, so he can see that they are followed.

13 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. 14 She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine

or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe.—The angel repeats to him the instructions given to his wife in v. 4.

15 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.—Manoah’s third question is a request that the visitor remain for a meal. Here he is following the example of Abraham in Genesis 18, and of Gideon in Judges 6. Table 5 (charts) shows the correspondences among the three cases. The places where the current episode differs from the usual pattern merit our particular attention.

The first distinction is in the form of the invitation. Abraham and Gideon ask that the visitors would not leave, but Manoah is more insistent. “Let us detain thee,” literally, “restrain thee.” Everywhere else in the OT this verb has the sense of constraining someone contrary to their will.

Manoah’s enthusiasm is presumptuous, but understandable. The angel has just promised him and his wife a wonderful blessing. He cannot imagine letting such a guest depart without a meal. His boldness also reflects his opinion that the visitor, while impressive, is after all only a “man.”

Gideon, recognizing his visitor as divine (6:14), proposes to bring a “present” (6:18, מנחה H4503, “offering”). Manoah, recognizing only a “man of God,” offers a meal.

16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was ~~an~~ the angel of the LORD.—Now the angel begins to deal with Manoah’s misunderstanding concerning his identity, by making two points. 1) He does not need Manoah’s food, a refusal that suggests he is more than human. 2) The appropriate offer for Manoah to make is not of a meal to a human visitor, but of an offering to the Lord.

The Lord accepts Abraham’s offer of a meal because Abraham acknowledges his visitor’s divine status. Gideon likewise acknowledges the angel’s deity by the time he makes the offer, characterizing it as an offering. But Manoah is treating him just as a “man of God,” so the angel refuses the meal, suggesting that his hospitality must be directed toward God. He needs to realize that his visitor is more than just a “man of God.”

17 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?—The angel’s response leads Manoah to suspect that he may have underestimated his visitor. His question shows his confusion. He begins to ask “Who are you?” but then changes in mid-sentence: “Who ... is your name?” (chart)

18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?—The word “secret” סֵּפֶּת H6383 deserves special attention. We saw the verb form “to be wonderful, exceptional” as the second term translated “separate” in Num 6:2. The noun form of this word, which appears 13 times in the OT, is “always in connection with God, especially his acts of salvation and judgment in history, his laws, his final acts of apocalyptic judgment, and (in one case) his Messiah.”¹⁴ Here we have the adjective, which appears only in one other place in the OT. David, speaking of God’s surpassing knowledge of him, says (chart),

Psa. 139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

The angel’s answer is evasive. He does not tell Manoah his name, but only describes it. The issue is not that Manoah cannot know the name of God. God revealed it to Moses in Exodus 3:14.

14 Webb, citing Exod. 15:11; Pss. 77:11 (12), 14 (15); 78:12; 88:10 (11), 12 (13); 89:5 (6); 119:129; Isa. 25:1; 29:14; Lam. 1:9; Dan. 12:6; the messianic reference is in Isa. 9:6 (5).

Judges 13-16

	Abraham	Gideon	Manoah
Invitation	Gen 18:2 he ran to meet them from the tent door ... 3 And said, My Lord [plural], if now I have found favour in thy [singular] sight, pass not away , I pray thee, from thy servant: ... 5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant.	Judg 6:17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. 18 Depart not hence , I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present , and set it before thee.	Judg 13:15 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee , until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.
Response	And they said, So do, as thou hast said.	And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.	16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread:
Special Instructions			and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. ...
Delay			17-18 [asks name]
Preparation	6 And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal , ... 7 And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. 8 And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed,	19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid , and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak,	19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat (meal) offering,
Presentation	and set it before them;	and presented it. 20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.	and offered it upon a the rock unto the LORD:
Consumption	and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.	21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes.	and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. 20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar,
Departure	16 And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.	Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.	that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar.

Table 5: *Hosting a Divine Guest*

Rather, the issue is confronting Manoah with the identity between this angel, whom so far he has called only a “man,” and God himself, an understanding that becomes clear to him after his visitor ascends in the fire of the offering.

19-24, Confirmatory Signs

The angel’s message is confirmed by two signs: the offering of the kid, and the birth of Samson.

19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering,—The KJV expression “meat offering” always refers to a grain offering. Like Abraham and Gideon, he has prepared both flesh and bread (chart). It is described here as an offering because, following the angel’s instructions in v. 16, he now conceives of it not as a meal for his visitor but as a sacrifice to the Lord.¹⁵

and offered it upon a the rock unto the LORD:—The text speaks of “the rock,” a specific rock well known to Manoah and his wife. In v. 20, it is called “the altar,” suggesting that it is a family sanctuary.¹⁶

and the angel did wondrously;—Once again, we have a form of the word meaning “exceptional,” this time the verb (as in Num 6:2). The angel did something exceptional (chart).

and Manoah and his wife looked on. 20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar.—As the flame of the sacrifice ascended up to heaven, the angel rides it heavenward, as though say, “I am the one to whom you are offering this sacrifice, and I will take my place in the destination to which you are sending it.”

And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.—Finally, they realize the nature of the One who has visited them.

21 But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife.—In the Old Testament as in the New, God’s people walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). The Lord has told them of the miracle he is working, and of how the child should be raised. Now he leaves them to carry out their mission.

Then Manoah knew that he was an the angel of the LORD. 22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.—Manoah’s fear recalls Gideon’s reaction to the full realization of the nature of his visitor (chart):

Jdg 6:22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. 23 And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

In both cases, the men show their knowledge of the Pentateuch. Jacob expressed surprise that he could see God and still live:

Gen 32:30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

When Moses asked to see God’s face, the Lord warned him,

Exo 33:20 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

15 The term can sometimes include flesh, which is the case when Gideon describes his entire offering of meat and bread using this same word in 6:18. But “meat” in the KJV simply means “food.”

16 See note on the tension with the prohibition of local sacrifice in Deuteronomy 12, and also comments on 6:26.

Israel at Sinai feared that even the sound of the divine voice would be enough to slay them:

Deu 5:25 Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?

23 But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.—Manoah has swung from one pole to the other—from viewing the visitor as a mere man whom he might compel to stay for supper, to a paralyzing fear. His wife helps him think through what has happened and encourages him. Here is another good example for women in their ministry to their husbands: not only to support their leadership, but also to encourage them and comfort them.

24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson:—The name, *shimshon*, is derived from the Hebrew word for “sun,” *shemesh*, and perhaps embodies the parents’ hopes that the child would indeed deliver Israel from the night imposed by the Philistines. His name will become significant later in the story.

This birth announcement forms an *inclusio* with the description of the barren woman in v. 2, marking the end of the first section of Samson’s history (Figure 5). The next section, his career, is marked by the references to Zorah and Eshtaol in 13:25 and 16:31.

A final *inclusio*, describing his 20-year judgeship (15:20-16:31), distinguishes that section from 13:24b through 15:19. We will see that the later section is an expansion of the standard formula describing the death of a judge, “and he judged Israel X years, and he died” (3:10-11; 10:2; 12:9-10, 11-12, 14-15), where the entire description of the harlot of Gaza and Delilah traces his death.

13:24b-15:19, Restoration: The Woman of Timnah

and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times—The three clauses zoom in, each a refinement of the previous one.

1. The child grew older.
2. In particular, he received special blessing from the Lord.
3. And one particular blessing dominates: the Spirit of the Lord.

Recall our study of Luke 24, where the blessing that the Lord gives the disciples (24:50) is explained in Acts 1:8 as the gift of the Spirit.

The term “move” פָּעַח H6470 is uncommon as a verb in the OT, but where it appears elsewhere, it means “disturb,” and always describes an action of God to get someone’s attention. It describes the response of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar to dreams that God sent them:

Gen 41:7 And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream. 8 And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was **troubled**;

Dan. 2:1 ... Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was **troubled**, and his sleep brake from him. 2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, ... 3 And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was **troubled** to know the dream.

Asaph uses it to describe the disturbance that God gives him as he contemplates the apparent prosperity of the wicked:

Psa. 77:4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so **troubled** that I cannot speak.

It's not clear that either Pharaoh, Asaph, or Nebuchadnezzar would have described their disturbance as a blessing, but in each case it leads to a deeper understanding of the ways of God. So the Spirit moves in Samson. He does not necessarily recognize it, any more than Pharaoh, Asaph, or Nebuchadnezzar did, but it spurs him to action.

Compare how God begins to work with his contemporary Samuel. 1 Samuel 3 records how the Lord called to him, but Samuel doesn't recognize who it was, until Eli explains it to him. Samson does not have the benefit of such a counselor.

Samuel learned to respond to this disturbance by asking the Lord for clarification. We should also recognize uneasiness as the Lord's attempt to get our attention, and respond like Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam 3:9, 10). God often calls us through uneasiness to spend more time in prayer, meditation on Scripture, and consultation with God's people.

in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.—The location forms an inclusio with 16:3 (Figure 5), setting off his career. Figure 3 (chart) shows the area. 18:12 explains the name "camp of Dan" (Mahaneh-Dan) from the earlier mustering of the tribe there, not to take possession of their own territory, but to migrate to Laish.¹⁷ Samson, by himself, undertakes what the entire tribe should have done.

As noted, the final inclusion between 15:20 and 16:31 sets that section off from 14:1-15:19. Ch. 14-15 has no inclusio, but refers often to the intervention of God's Spirit,¹⁸ which is not mentioned in ch. 16 (Figure 7, chart). All of the references to God's Spirit in Samson's history are in this section.

So 15:20-16:31 is marked as a section by inclusio, leaving 14:1-15:19, which is marked by references to the Spirit. The recurrent theme throughout ch. 14-15 is that Samson slays Philistines.

There are three episodes. The first two have strikingly similar sequence of three scenes, each culminating in the slaughter. Once we have accounted for those two, we are left with a final episode, which also has the destruction of Philistines in the third scene. All three episodes end with an epilog showing Samson seeking refuge after the battle (Table 6, chart). The strong parallels between the first two episodes leads us to seek correspondences with the third.

This line of thought shows two applications of an important Bible study principle: units can be identified either by positive marking or by being left over after positively marked portions are set

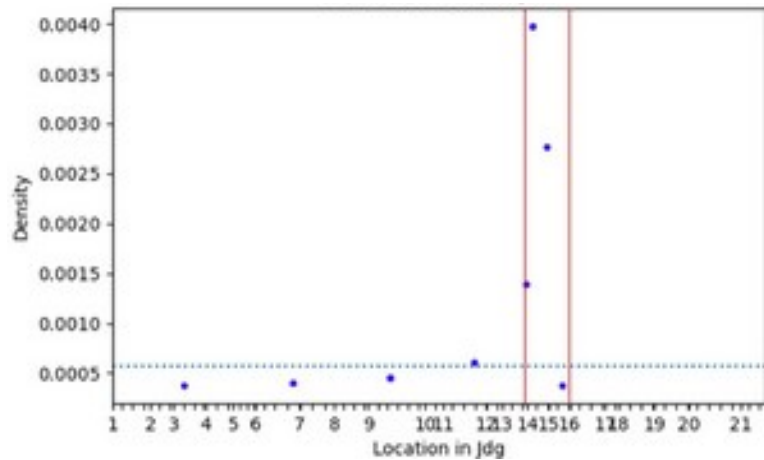


Figure 7: God's Spirit in Judges, Red lines mark 13:24b-15:19.

¹⁷ The events of the epilog occur early in the history of the Judges: see notes on ch. 17-21.

¹⁸ The reference in 9:23 is to "an evil spirit" from God; the others are to רוח יהוה.

	14:1-20, Slaughter in Ashkelon	15:1-8, Revenge for Timnah	15:9-19 Battle of Lehi
Compromise	1-4, Samson's Philistine bride	1-2, Samson's Philistine bride	9-10, Judah's Philistine partners
Power	5-9, Power over the Lion	3-6, Power over the Foxes	11-13, Power over himself
Slaughter	10-19a, Thirty in Ashkelon	7-8a, A great slaughter	14-17, A thousand
Refuge	19b-20, Goes up to Judah	8b, Goes down to Etam	18-19, Calls on the Lord

Table 6: Structure of 14:1-15:19

aside. The first application of this principle is in recognizing 14:1-15:19 as a section, once we see the inclusio around 15:20-16:31. The second is recognizing 15:9-19 as a section after seeing the close parallel between 14:1-20 and 15:1-8. In both cases, having found the negatively marked portion, we will be rewarded by a closer look at it.

14:1-20, The Slaughter in Ashkelon

This section has three scenes, each marked by renaming Samson, going down, and the intervention of the Lord (two times through his Spirit).

1-4, Samson Falls in Love

The first scene describes Samson's romantic involvement with a woman of Timnah.

14:1 And Samson went down ירד שמשון to Timnah,—The town was part of Dan's territory:

Josh. 19:40 And the seventh lot came out for the tribe of the children of Dan . . . 41 And the coast of their inheritance was Zorah, . . . 43 . . . and **Thimnathah**,¹⁹ and Ekron, . . .

Like the other tribes, they could not hold their allotment. Ekron became one of the five Philistines capitals, and this episode shows that Timnath also has a strong Philistine presence.

When Samson enters Philistine territory, he “goes down” (ירד H3381 3ms *waw* consecutive). Like references to God's Spirit, this verb is concentrated in Judges 14-15 (Figure 8, chart). When Samson returns home he “goes up” (עלה H5927), 14:2, 19. Geographically, Philistine territory is downhill from Zorah and Eshtaol, but the concentration of the verbs may have a spiritual connotation as well.²⁰

and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.—The Philistines were accepted in Timnath, if not in control there.

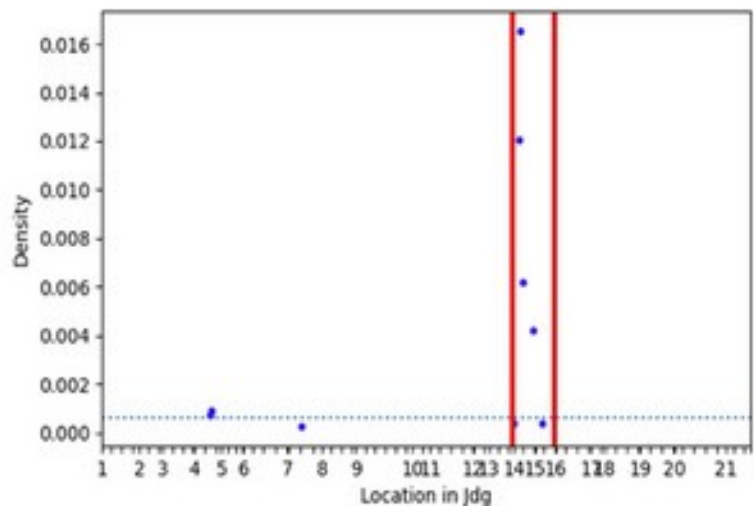


Figure 8: ירד "and he went down" in Judges, Red lines mark 13:24b-15:19.

19 In spite of the difference in English spelling, the Hebrew spelling is the same in Judges 14 as here.

20 Compare the book of Jonah, where Jonah repeatedly “goes down” in fleeing from the Lord (Jon 1:3, 5; 2:6).

2 And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.—

Samson's request is a curious mixture of formal respect for his parents and a selfish stubbornness. He recognizes the responsibility of parents to approve marriages for their children, but he expects them to rubber-stamp his choice. For their part, they are disappointingly compliant. Perhaps they found it difficult to discipline a child with such supernatural strength.

3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, 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?—Manoah is familiar with the law of Moses, for he is surprised at the deviations of Samson's Nazarite condition from the norm. His protest here also reflects his knowledge of the law, in particular Moses' prohibition of intermarriage with the gentiles (chart).

Deut. 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, **the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites**, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; 2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: 3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. 4 **For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods:** so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.

Strictly speaking, Samson's choice does not violate this law, for Deut 7:1 does not name the Philistines. But the parents are right to be concerned. The Philistines, like the Canaanites, worship idols (Dagon, 1 Sam 5:2-4, whose idol falls before the ark of God). A Philistine mother would be as likely to compromise the children of such a marriage as would a Canaanite woman.

And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.—Samson, for his part, doesn't appear to care whether the marriage is in keeping with the law or not. He appears as willful and insistent. "Pleaseth me well" is literally "she is right in my eyes," which anticipates the refrain of the book in the final section,

Judg. 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did **that which was right in his own eyes.**

Judg. 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did **that which was right in his own eyes.**

Samson's involvement with the woman is deliberate. He repeatedly goes down to see her: here, when he initially meets her; again in 14:5 with his parents to negotiate the wedding; later in 14:8 to prepare for the celebration; followed by his father in 14:10; and even after the debacle where she betrays his confidence, in 15:1. He cannot plead that he was overcome with momentary passion. He is deliberately following his own lusts.

So far, the Lord seems to have made a mistake. He has promised that Samson would be a deliverer, but as the boy matures, he proves to be willful, selfish, uninterested in biblical constraints, and only minimally respectful to his parents. But the narrator offers a deeper insight.

4 But his father and his mother knew not that it²¹ was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.— Recall how the Spirit of the Lord “moved” or “disturbed” Samson in 13:25. Samson may be driven by entirely fleshly motives. But God is using Samson’s lusts to achieve his own purposes, as he does so often throughout Scripture.²² As Asaph summarizes the principle,

Psa 76:10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain [הגר H2296, gird on].

God uses even our sinful deeds to accomplish his purposes, and if they are insufficient, he girds himself with wrath and finishes the job. This is exactly what happens with the Philistines: God starts working with Samson’s ungodly wrath, then finishes the job through Samuel and David.

5-9, Samson Kills a Lion

5 Then went Samson down וירד שמשון, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and [they] came to the vineyards of Timnath:—The reference to Samson in a vineyard is troubling in view of his Nazarite status. It may be that the road led by vineyards on the way to the town, but the attack of the lion and the ignorance of his parents suggest he has left the path.

and, behold, a young lion roared against him. 6 And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand:— Samson dispatches the lion as readily as a lion might tear apart a kid,²³ with his bare hands.

but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.—They are ignorant of the fight, though they are traveling with him (v. 5). We can understand how this could happen if we visualize a typical Palestinian vineyard (Figure 9, chart). Notice three features:

1. The vines are trained close to the ground to capture the morning dew during the dry season. So the lion isn’t hiding among tall plants.
2. There is a wall around the vineyard, often with an additional protective barrier of brambles on top. Note the road running horizontally across the upper quarter of the picture, with a wall along either side.
3. There is a structure inside the vineyard, a watchtower occupied by the owner during harvest time to guard against thieves.



Figure 9: Palestinian vineyard. Van and Anita Parunak, 1975

The story makes sense if Samson has left the road momentarily and entered the vineyard, and perhaps the watchtower, where he encounters the lion. Then his parents would not see what has happened. Whatever his motives for entering the vineyard, he is likely to come into contact with vines, leaves, or grapes, compromising his Nazarite status.

21 The feminine היא is well suited to the neutral meaning “it,” GKC §122q, Waltke-O’Connell 16.3.5.c.11, Joüon-Muraoka 152b, but it is tempting to translate it literally “she,” that is, the woman.

22 Hervey (Pulpit) cites Exod. 7:3,4; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20

23 As suggested by Milton in *Samson Agonistes* I.128.

7 And he went down ויירד, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well [was right in Samson's eyes].—Once again, Samson exhibits the nation's weakness, doing what is right in his eyes rather than seeking the will of the Lord, 17:6; 21:25.

8 And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm עֲדָה of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion.—It has often been noted²⁴ that the moist environment of a rotting cadaver is more suited to maggots than to bees. In addition, Block notes the unusual use of עֲדָה H5712 (usually “congregation”) to describe the swarm. The hive is an image of Israel living in the midst of corruption.

9 And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.—Again, his parents are ignorant of what has happened. Only Samson knows the source of the honey, a detail that enables the next scene.

It is debated whether contact with dead animals (in contrast with people) would defile a Nazarite.²⁵ If it would, contact with the lion joins his visit to the vineyard as an occasion when he is compromised. Yet he retains his strength, perhaps leading him to devalue his vow.

10-19a, Samson Kills Thirty Philistines

10 So his father went down ויירד unto the woman:—Perhaps to contract the marriage and pay the bride-price. Compare the gifts that Abraham sent to procure Rebecca for Isaac.

and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.—Samson is expected to sponsor a bachelor party. The word for “feast” (as throughout the Bible for secular feasts²⁶) is מִשְׁתֶּה H4960, literally “drinking,” which would further compromise the traditional Nazarite.

11 And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.—Samson didn't bring a large wedding party from home, so his in-laws assembled some local young men to make a respectable gathering. Or are these a guard, assembled out of fear when people see how powerful Samson is?²⁷ The two functions are not mutually exclusive.

12 And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you:—A riddle is a challenge offered to another person: “I know something that you don't know, and even though I will tell it to you, you still won't know it.” See Note for discussion. One way that it is used is to test someone, as the queen of Sheba did to Solomon (chart):

1Kings 10:1 And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with **hard questions**.

Samson's mission is to oppose the Philistines, and here he begins that contest with a riddle.

if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments: 13 But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments.—The “sheet” is a linen garment, probably worn next to the body. He is offering each of them a complete outfit.

24 Emmrich has references

25 Stipp *Vetus Testamentum* XL V (1995), 356; Milgrom *Numbers*; Chisholm *Bib Sac* 2009.

26 Twice (Eccl 10:19; Dan 5:1) KJV “[secular] feast” = לַחֵם. Sacred feasts are almost always חַג, three times (2 Chr 30:22; Lam 2:7; Hos 12:9) מוֹעֵד.

27 Thus Emmrich, Block, Boling, Burney, and others, following LXX pointing of כְּרֹאוֹתָם as from יָרָא rather than רָאָה, and recognizing the military associations of “young men” בְּחֹרִים.

We are accustomed to inexpensive clothing from Walmart or Meijers, but in biblical times clothing was much more precious. Note the gift that the king of Syria sends with Naaman to support his request that the king of Israel would heal him of his leprosy:

2Kings 5:5 And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten **changes of raiment**.

In the ancient world, gold was worth between two (Egypt) and twelve times (Rome) silver by weight.²⁸ If we set the ratio at 5, which has been claimed for Syria, the first two items are of about equal value (\$300k at today's value of silver). The clothing is listed on a par with the gold and silver, valuing a change of raiment at about a talent of silver, or \$30k. Compare also Achan's treasure from Jericho:

Jos 7:21 When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish **garment**, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

Again, a garment is listed as an extremely valuable item, comparable to the silver and gold.

Samson's challenge is a serious wager. He expects that they will be unable either to answer the riddle or to make good their payment, and resort to violence against him, giving him occasion to destroy them (v. 4).

And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.—They accept his challenge, in spite of its costliness. If they refuse it, they would lose face.

14 And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.—The eater is the lion, and the sweetness is the honeycomb.

And they could not in three days expound the riddle.—As we have noted, a carcass is an unlikely place to find a bee hive, and since Samson hadn't even told his parents, his "companions" had no way of figuring out the answer.

15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? is it not so?—We have already noted that they are not really Samson's friends. Now we see that they are not really sympathetic to his wife's family either.

16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?—Moved with fear for herself and her family, she implores Samson for the answer.

17 And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him:—Finally, he yields.

and she told the riddle to the children of her people.—She in turn betrays him.

28 <https://www.worldhistory.org/Silver/#:~:text=A%20Phoenician%20talent%20of%20silver,four%20times%20more%20than%20silver.>, which has bibliography. See also <https://coinweek.com/ancient-coins/worth-purchasing-power-ancient-coins/>.

We noted earlier the exemplary conduct of Manoah's wife within God's family order. Samson's wife is an excellent counterexample. Instead of turning to her husband for guidance and protection and urging him to take the lead, she subverts his authority in favor of her own security.

18 And the men of the city—Now his “companions” have become “the men of the city.” Superficially, they are his groomsmen, but their real loyalty is to the city.

said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?—With his wife's help, they are able to answer his riddle.

And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.—He immediately recognizes what his wife has done, and must make good on his bet.

19 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down **וַיֵּרָד** **to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle.**—“Go down” is again geographically accurate, for Ashkelon is by the seacoast (Figure 3). But the term may also reflect a spiritual judgment. To pay his debt, Samson resorts to using his strength for banditry.

Whether or not the dead lion violates the conditions of the traditional Nazarite vow, the dead bodies of the men of Ashkelon certainly would be defiling. Yet both of these are expressly enabled by “the Spirit of the Lord.” Samson may be getting the impression that the conditions of Numbers 6 don't really apply to him. But the only one of the three conditions that the angel imposed on him personally was the long hair.

19b-20, Epilog: Samson goes up to Judah

And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.—Frustrated with the whole incident, he “goes up” to territory controlled by Israel, before consummating the marriage.

Though Samson has not followed the counsel of his parents, after his disappointment, he returns to their home, and apparently is welcomed. The next episode will show a more mature Samson than the impetuous, selfish youth of ch. 14. He will have been disillusioned with his Philistine “friends,” and we can imagine that the influence of his patient, godly parents during this visit home is responsible, under the hand of God, for this change. After this, he is never angry again.

20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.—For the Hebrews, the betrothal established the marriage. But the Philistines, following Greek custom, consider the contract broken because the marriage was not consummated.²⁹ “Companion” in v. 11 describes the bridal party (or guards) that his in-laws engaged. The “best man” takes the bride.

15:1-8, Revenge for Timnah

The passage of time (“within a while after,” מִיָּמִים “after some days”) marks a shift in episode (and may contain some events that are related later in the history). Again, there are three scenes, marked by renaming Samson, and an epilog. Again, the first scene focuses on his romantic life, the second shows his power over wild beasts, and the third leads to the slaughter of Philistines.

29 Greek custom, which the Philistines would follow, puts the consummation at the end of the feast: Yadin, VT 52:3 (2002) 407-426. In the eyes of the Philistines, Samson has voided the marriage by leaving early.

1-2, The Frustrated Bridegroom

15:1 But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest,—April to May.

that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber.—He had stormed off before consummating the marriage, but presumes (following Hebrew custom) that the girl would still be his, and returns with a gift to apologize for his abrupt departure. His action suggests a more responsible side of Samson than we are accustomed to consider.³⁰ He shows commitment to the woman and a desire to persevere in the marriage, and tries to make amends for his rash behavior in rushing off from the wedding.

But her father would not suffer him to go in. 2 And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her.—The attitude of the father-in-law, that one daughter should be as good as another, reminds us of Laban’s treachery against Jacob (who, like Samson, has a lot of learning to do through his experiences).

3-5, The Foxes

3 And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.—He recognizes that one might question the legitimacy of his attack on Ashkelon, but now feels that the broken contract is a just cause for complaint.

4 And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes [or jackals?], and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.—As with the lion, we see Samson’s power over wild beasts.

5 And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.—These crops were the staples of the economy. Burning a field threatens the community with famine, and the law demands restitution, even in the case of an accident:

Ex. 22:6 If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

He attacks, not just his father-in-law, but the entire community. They have not respected his marriage, and have supported giving his wife to the best man, so he holds them all accountable.

6-8a, Samson’s Great Slaughter

6 Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this?—They ask the same question that the people of Ophrah asked in 6:29 when Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal.

And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.—In ch. 6, the citizens of Ophrah sought to take out their anger on Gideon, who was protected by his father’s argument that Baal ought to be able to defend himself. The Philistines, perhaps cowed by Samson’s strength, focus their rage instead on his in-laws.

Samson’s wife betrayed him to her countrymen to avoid burning (14:15), but finally suffers that very fate. Hervey compares the failed strategy of the Jews against our Lord.

³⁰ Gunn, “Samson of Sorrows,” in Fewell, *Reading Between Texts*, Westminster: Louisville, KY, 1995.

John 11:47 Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. 48 If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.

In the end the Romans did “come and take away both our place and our nation” in AD 70. If we violate God’s law to avoid some threat, it is likely to come upon us from another direction. The Lord can protect his people from any threat, however powerful, and no precaution can protect against his judgment when he unleashes it.

7 And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.—In spite of the wrong that in-laws did to him, Samson feels an obligation to defend their honor. As in his return to see his wife, bringing a kid, we see a serious side of Samson. He fulfills his duty as a kinsman-redeemer, according to Moses (chart):

Nu 35:18 the murderer shall surely be put to death. 19 The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.

Again, some time may have elapsed between the burning of the fields and the murder of Samson’s in-laws, and then before Samson returns to take vengeance.

8 And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter:—He slays more Philistines. We don’t know how many were slain, but since the whole affair appears to be local to Timnah, he has probably decimated the men of that village, perhaps a hundred.

8b, Epilog: Samson goes down to Etam

and he went down 7771 and dwelt in the top cleft of the rock Etam.—We don’t know the location of Etam.³¹ The word translated “top” is rare (elsewhere only v. 11; Isa 2:21; 57:5), but probably refers to a cave or fissure. Like the foxes (cf. Matt 8:20), he is now in his hole.

Samson shows clear spiritual progress in 15:1-8 over what we saw in ch. 14. There, he was selfish, impetuous, and deceitful. But after his time with his parents, now he shows a commitment to his marriage covenant. He tries to repair the damage done when he abruptly left the wedding, and when the Philistines kill his wife and her family, he assumes the responsibility of the kinsman redeemer. In the third episode of his campaign against the Philistines, he advances even further, justifying his selection in Hebrews 11:32 as a hero of faith.

15:9-19, The Battle of Lehi

This episode again falls into four parts. The recurrent themes of the first two episodes lead us to look for the same themes here. One parallel is obvious: the slaughter of Philistines. At first, the other scenes seem dissimilar, but the structural parallel encourages us to look deeper (Table 6).

In place of the direct parallels of the previous two sections, this section is marked by an inclusion in the place name “Lehi.”³² The word actually means “jawbone,” and is derived from the weapon that Samson uses to dispatch the Philistines. The location itself, like that of Etam, is lost to us.

31 It might be the Etam in Simeon (1 Chr 4:32), somewhere in the NW Negev or Shephelah. It is less likely to be the Etam in Judah (2 Chr 11:6), near Bethlehem, which lies uphill from Timnah, because Samson “went down.”

32 Webb, who also sets this episode as parallel to the previous two.

9-10, the Philistines and the Men of Judah

9 Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up,—Judah should have rallied to Samson to fight against the Philistines. Instead, they are willing to betray their own countryman. This scene corresponds structurally to Samson's romantic involvement with the woman of Timnah (Table 6), which thus becomes a picture of Israel's overall compromise with pagan peoples throughout the book.

to do to him as he hath done to us.—Their standard is the opposite of the golden rule (chart),

Matt. 7:12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

11-13, The Men of Judah and Samson

11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the cleft of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us?—The children of Israel wanted Gideon to rule over them (8:22; cf. 9:2), and he had refused:

Judg. 8:23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: **the LORD shall rule over you.**

But Judah is content to remain subject to the Philistines.

And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.—Samson's ethic is no better than that of the Philistines (v. 10).

12 And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines.—Contrast David's experience, when he (a man of Judah) is pursued by Saul (a Benjamite), and also takes refuge in a cave in the wilderness:

1Sa 22:1 David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. 2 And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.

Both Samson and David take refuge in caves. Some of David's countrymen rally here under his leadership. One might have hoped that the men of Israel would similarly rally to Samson and rise up against the Philistines. But the spirit of indifference that Deborah and Barak encountered has grown worse since then. The Israelites come to Samson, not to join him, but to betray him to his enemies. Judah should join forces with Samson against the Philistines. Instead, they are willing to betray the one God has sent to deliver them.

Though David drew some followers, he also experienced betrayal by his country men, in a way that again recalls Samson. David delivered the town of Keilah from the Philistines (1 Sam 23:1-5), but they then tried to deliver him to his enemy Saul (1 Sam 23:12). Both betrayals anticipate a later generation of the men of Judah, who will betray their Messiah to the Romans.

We will shortly see other parallels between Samson and our Lord.

And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. 13 And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.—The correspondence with the first two episodes suggests that we should see here evidence of Samson’s power over the forces of nature (Table 6). What he shows is in fact power over himself. He could as easily have destroyed the three thousand men of Judah as he does the Philistines, but he agrees to submit to them.³³

14-17, Samson Kills a Thousand Philistines

This scene offers the most direct alignment with the previous two campaigns, describing the slaughter of Philistines (Table 6). As Samson’s betrayal by Judah to his enemies and his submission anticipate our Savior’s betrayal by the Jews to Rome, the victory of Lehi reminds us of our Lord’s great victory over Satan and his power.

14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. 15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass,—That is, he found a *lehi*, after which the place is named.

and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.—This third slaughter of Philistines, corresponding to the 30 men of Ashkelon (14:19) and the “great slaughter” (15:8), on the order of the population of a village, perhaps 100.

16 And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.—Note the repetitive, poetic structure. Like Moses in Exodus 15 and Deborah in Judges 5, he celebrates his victory with a song. The alliteration is strong: the word for “ass” *xamor* is spelled and pronounced the same as the word for “heap,” so the line runs, בלחי החמור חמור חמורתים *bilxi haxamor xamor xamortayim*.

Webb notes that the expression “heaps upon heaps” echoes the description of the dead frogs when Moses and Aaron withdrew the second plague from Pharaoh (Exod 8:14, MT 10), חמור חמורם. Perhaps Samson is recalling this event, and comparing the dead Philistines to piles of frogs. This would be further evidence that Samson, like his parents, knows the books of Moses.

17 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramathlehi.—That is, “Jawbone Hill.” It is interesting that the place where our Lord defeated Satan, Golgotha (Aramaic, in Matthew, Mark, and John) or Calvary (Greek, in Luke), was also named after a bone, the skull.³⁴

18-19, Epilog: Samson calls on the Lord

In each of the other two campaigns, Samson withdraws after the slaughter (Table 6). In those cases, his withdrawal was physical, to a place of refuge (his father’s house in 14:19; a cave in the rock Etam in 15:8). This time, he finds relief in a spiritual refuge, calling on the Lord.

18 And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD,—Samson is the only judge to call on the Lord for help (twice, here, and in 16:28). Perhaps this is why he is described as a man of faith in

33 Compare Webb’s comment on the lion: “It represents the wild, out-of-control aspect of Samson’s nature that threatens to destroy him if it is not mastered.” Here that nature is considerably subdued.

34 The NT never calls Golgotha a “hill,” though the name might be due to a skull-like topographic feature.

Heb 11:32. For all his weaknesses and failings, he knows that Israel's God will hear him. In this he reflects the attitude shown by his father Manoah in ch. 13.

There is an interesting complementarity between Samson's behavior in this cycle and that of Israel in the other cycles (Table 1, chart).³⁵ In every earlier cycle, Israel as a nation cries out to the Lord when the oppression of their enemies finally breaks down their stubborn self-confidence. We labeled these instances as "Repentance" to help remember the entire sequence. Sometimes there is no evidence of regret, but each one is marked by the verb זעק H2199 (or its homophone צעק H6817, 4:3; 10:12), "to cry out for help." Only in Samson's cycle does the nation never cry out to God. Israel has fallen so far from the Lord that it does not recognize the depth of its humiliation to the Philistines or the Lord as their only hope. Not until 1 Sam 4:13, when the town of Shiloh learns that the ark of God has been captured, do the people "cry out" (זעק), reinforcing our interpretation of 1 Samuel 1-7 as the completion of Samson's cycle.

But if the nation will not cry out to God, Samson at least finally recognizes that in spite of his great physical strength, he is impotent without the Lord, and he cries out. The verb is a much more common one (קרא H7121) meaning simply "to cry aloud," without the specialized sense of summoning help appropriate to זעק (see Note), but in both cases where Samson cries out, he is asking for the Lord's help, and the Lord answers him.

Samson, a single individual, pictures the experience of the nation elsewhere in Judges (Table 7, chart). His personal life reflects every phase of their experience. In this light, his crying to the Lord represents the point to which God seeks to bring each of his children. Perhaps his status as an exemplar of the sinful, chastised, but repentant believer is what merits him a place among the heroes of faith in Heb 11:32.

Each element of his plea reflects an awareness of his sacred mission.³⁶

and said, Thou hast given—First, he recognizes God as the source of his strength.

this great deliverance—Second, he finally recognizes his role and responsibility as a judge. "Deliverance" תשועה H8668 appears only here in Judges, but it is cognate to one of the main verbs in Judges, ישע H3467 "to save," which regularly describes the work of a judge. In particular, it is what the angel told Manoah's wife that Samson would begin to do, in 13:5. And in another anticipation of the Lord Jesus, it is the heart of his mission to "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21) and the core element of his name, "Jehovah saves."

into the hand of thy servant:—Third, Samson identifies himself as God's servant. He finally recognizes that he is answerable to the Lord for what he does.

	Israel	Samson
Rebellion	Going after other gods	Taking a Philistine wife
Retribution	Servitude	15:13, bound by Judah; thirst 16:21, grinding in Gaza
Repentance	Cry זעק to the Lord	15:18; 16:28, Cry קרא to the Lord
Rebuke	2:1-3, Angel 6:7-10, Prophet 10:11-16, the Lord	13:3, Parents
Restoration	God sends a deliverer	God answers prayer

Table 7: Samson as a Picture of Israel

35 Dave Nelson called this feature to my attention. Later I found that Webb also notes it.

36 I follow Webb's emphasis here.

and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?—Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with Israel. For the first time, Samson recognizes the covenant distinction between Israel and the Philistines that was of such concern to his parents:³⁷

Jdg 14:3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, 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?

At first, this request seems selfish, but in view of the previous three clauses, we can understand it more positively. Having come to recognize his divinely-appointed role in delivering Israel, he realizes what an encouragement it would be to the Philistines to exhibit his dead body, and how it would work against the destabilization that he has achieved by his victories.

19 But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw Lehi, and there came water thereout;—Recall that the place took its name, Lehi, from Hebrew word for “jaw.” Probably the word “Lehi” here refers to the place, not the jawbone, for the resulting spring was known to subsequent generations, long after a jawbone would have rotted away.

and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived:—The Lord not only provides the resource that Samson requests, but also the strength that he needs.

wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore [the spring of the one who called], which is in Lehi unto this day.—He commemorates the Lord’s answer to his prayer by naming the spring (Table 8, chart). This act is a further sign of faith, placing him in the company of other Bible characters who want to glorify the Lord by memorializing his deliverance. It also exemplifies a principle later captured by the Psalmist,

Speaker	Ref	Name	Meaning
Samson	Jdg 15:19	En-hakkore	The spring of the one who called
Hagar	Gen 16:14	Beer-lahairoi	The well of the One who lives and sees
Abraham	Gen 22:14	Jehovah-jireh	The Lord will provide
Jacob	Gen 28:19	Beth-el	The house of God
Samuel	1 Sam 7:12	Eben-ezer	Stone of Help

Table 8: Commemorative place names

Psa. 107:2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;

It is boasting if we proclaim our own works to others. But when the Lord delivers us, we owe him praise. As the Lord told the Gadarene demoniac,

Luke 8:39 Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee.

The second episode of Samson’s campaigns shows his progression from selfish, impetuous youth to a man who takes seriously his responsibility toward his family. In this third episode, he finally progresses to being a man of faith, in control of his own passions and recognizing his calling to serve the Lord.

Excursus: Samson, the Representative Servant of the Lord

Samson’s prayer in v. 18 is the pinnacle of his spiritual progress. One feature of the prayer is particularly striking. In all of Judges, only two people are called the servant of the Lord: Samson, and Joshua in 2:8. No other judge receives this title, and no other judge represents Israel as

³⁷ These are the only two instances of עָרַל H6189 “uncircumcised” in Judges, as A. Parunak points out.

Samson does (Table 7). In addition, while some Israelites oppose other judges (Gideon in 8:1-4; Jephthah in 12:1), none is so universally abandoned as is Samson.

These three features of Samson—1) a servant of the Lord 2) who represents the nation 3) even while they betray him—may be in Isaiah’s mind four hundred years later, when the Lord shows him a coming Servant of the Lord who represents in himself the entire nation of Israel, and suffers to deliver them. In Isaiah 44-66, the “servant of the Lord” refers initially to Israel, but then increasingly to the Messiah, and then finally to his redeemed people, like an hourglass that focuses on a single individual (Figure 10, chart).

		41:8-13	42:1-7	42:19	43:10	43:22-44:5	44:21-23	44:26	48:20	49:1-13	50:4-9	50:10	52:13-53:12	54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8-9; 13-15; 66:14
Israel	x		x		x	x	x	x	x					
Messiah	x	x		x						x	x	x	x	
Church		x								x	x		x	x

Servant Mostly Israel
Servant Mostly Messiah

• Servant → Servants
 • Messiah is Deity

Table 9: The Servant(s) of the Lord in Isaiah 40-66

Table 8 gives more detail.³⁸ The Servant in Isaiah 41-48 refers mostly to the nation Israel, while hinting at the coming of a single person who will represent the nation, and the redeemed people that will come later. For example (chart),

Is. 41:8 But thou, Israel, art **my servant**, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. 9 Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art **my servant**; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

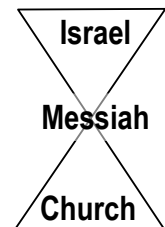


Figure 10: The Servant in Isaiah 44-66

Four more poems in Isaiah 49-53 focus attention on the single messianic Servant of the Lord, culminating in his suffering in chapter 53, rejected by his own people.

Is. 52:13 Behold, **my servant** shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. 14 As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: 15 So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: ... 53:3 He is **despised and rejected** of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and **we esteemed him not**.

The single “Servant of the Lord” disappears after chapter 53, and instead we read of “my servants,” focusing entirely on the redeemed and their mission:

Is. 54:17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of **the servants of the LORD**, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

These same later chapters no longer describe the Messiah as God’s servant, but increasingly identify him with God himself. The one who is to come is no longer just “a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch ... out of his roots” (Isa 11:1), but the Lord himself:

Isa 59:15 Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. 16 And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. 17 For he put on righteousness as a

38 See notes on Isaiah 53 (<https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/isaiah/notes/Isaiah53.pdf>) for further discussion.

breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.

Samson, a “servant of the Lord” who represents the nation even as they reject him, anticipates Isaiah’s prophecy,³⁹ and in turn points to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate servant of the Lord.

The idea that one person can represent a group is central to understanding our Lord’s work, as Paul makes clear in Rom 5:12-21 (chart). The spiritual history of our race is dominated by two individuals, each of whom represents a larger group: **Adam** (whose sin condemned all mankind) and **our Lord Jesus** (whose righteous acts have saved all his people) (chart).

Rom. 5:17 For if by **one man**’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by **one, Jesus Christ**.
18 Therefore as by the offence of **one** judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of **one** the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by **one man**’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of **one** shall many be made righteous.

Paul summarizes the idea in the great resurrection chapter:

1Cor. 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

The writer of Judges, in setting forth Samson as a representative of the nation, may be the earliest Bible writer to grasp this critical principle of representation. But there is one critical difference. Samson *illustrates* Isaiah’s servant as one who represents the nation and yet is rejected by it. But unlike our Lord, he is not a *substitute* for the nation.

15:20-16:31, The Death of Samson

Now we encounter a familiar formula that we have often seen before in Judges:

20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.—This is a standard summary at the end of the later judges (from Jephthah on). (After Othniel, Ehud, Barak, and Gideon, we do not read “he judged Israel,” but “the land had rest,” again with a duration.) This notice of time is routinely followed with a description of the death of the judge (chart).⁴⁰

3:11 And **the land had rest** forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz **died**.

8:28 And **the country was in quietness** forty years in the days of Gideon. ... 32 And Gideon the son of Joash **died** in a good old age,

10:2 And [Tola] **judged Israel** twenty and three years, and **died**, and was buried in Shamir.

10:3 And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and **judged Israel** twenty and two years. ... 5 And Jair **died**, and was buried in Camon.

12:7 And Jephthah **judged Israel** six years. Then **died** Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

12:9 And [Ibzan] **judged Israel** seven years. 10 Then **died** Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

39 This pattern further supports Gunn’s thesis in “Samson of Sorrows.”

40 The only judge whose death is not recorded is Barak.

12:11 And after him Elon ... **he judged** Israel ten years. 12 And Elon the Zebulonite **died**, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

12:14 ... and [Abdon] **judged** Israel eight years. 15 And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite **died**, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim,

So we expect 15:20 to continue, “and he died.” Samson does die, but not until 16:30, and even there, the writer avoids the standard formula, “and he died.” Then in 16:31 he repeats the notice in slightly different form, “And he had judged Israel twenty years.”

Only with Samson does the time notice appear twice. Why the repetition? Critical scholars (e.g., Boling) find here evidence of combination of sources or a later redactor, but this does not explain the omission of the death notice, and the events between the two notices (a harlot, and Delilah) have nothing to do with judging Israel. More likely,⁴¹ the writer wants us to understand ch. 16 as an extended discussion of Samson’s death. We might paraphrase, “So Samson judged Israel 20 years. Then, like other judges, he died, but let me tell you the details: ... So, as I said, he had judged Israel 20 years.”

So far, Samson shows clear growth, from an impetuous youth through growing family responsibility and finally recognition of his role as the Lord’s servant and deliverer of Israel. The conventional reading of ch. 16 challenges this progression, suggesting instead a regression, from a wife (ch. 14-15) to a harlot, and finally to a mistress.⁴² How can we account for this change?

Perhaps some of the events of ch. 16 happen earlier than the battle of Lehi, in the interval noted in 15:1 “after some days,” or after Samson’s revenge in Timnah and before the battle of Lehi. “Then” at the start of 16:1 is not a temporal particle, but simply the conjunction, as at the start of 15:20. We might read, “And he judged Israel ... and he went to Gaza ...” But we do know that his dalliance with Delilah followed his engagement with the harlot of Gaza (16:4 “afterward”), and his final revelation of his long hair to Delilah marked the end of his public activity.

A second possibility is that Samson is experiencing the kind of spiritual lapse we often see after a great triumph, like that of Elijah’s deep depression after his victory on Mount Carmel, or David’s sin with Bathsheba after God’s promise of an everlasting covenant and great military victories (see notes on 12:3). Once we understand the theme of ch. 16 as Samson’s death, we would not be surprised to find him in the house of a harlot, of which Solomon warns,

Pro 7:27 Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.

We will explore a third possibility: that Samson’s relations with these women are not as reckless as the popular literature suggests.

16:1-3, Spying in Gaza

16:1 Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot,—Most commentators assume that Samson is visiting the harlot out of lust. This is unlikely, for three reasons.⁴³

1. Even as an impetuous youth, he was willing to pursue a legitimate marriage rather than seek fornication. Why would this change now that he is older and more mature?

41 Chisholm, *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Kregel)

42 Alter, Robert. “Samson without Folklore.” In *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, edited by Susan Niditch, pp. 47–56. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990, p. 48.

43 I follow the analysis of Cassel.

2. If he did seek out a harlot, why go to Gaza, 45 miles from his home territory, at the southern edge of the Philistine region?
3. The wording of 13:1 makes the harlot secondary to his visit to Gaza. He went to Gaza, and saw there a harlot. But that doesn't explain why he went to Gaza in the first place.

The episode with the harlot is extremely terse, leaving many details unanswered.⁴⁴ This episode is not here for the story that it contains, but to introduce us to Gaza, where Samson finally destroys many Philistines in his death, and to point us to another biblical story.

Gaza is the southernmost of the five Philistine cities, which also include Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Ashkelon (Figure 3, chart). Its name probably means “the strong city” (גַּזָּא, from גַּז “strong,” following Cassel). Along with Askelon and Ekron, two other cities later occupied by the Philistines (1 Sam 6:17), it was conquered by Judah in the period immediately after Joshua:

Jdg 1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.

Gaza was part of Judah's territory (Josh 15:47). But like Jerusalem (1:8, cf. 1:21), the nation failed to drive out the native inhabitants or defend it against the later Philistine invasions.

After the victory at Lehi, and Samson's recognition of his role and responsibility as a judge, it would be natural for him to think more strategically. What if he could somehow strike the most remote of the Philistine cities, the one whose very name suggests the enemy's strength? This would be a huge undertaking. How should he prepare for it?

We have seen repeatedly that Samson, his parents, and other characters in Judges know the books of Moses. We would also expect them to know the story of the conquest under Joshua, how God enabled a nation of ex-slaves to conquer the powerful walled cities of Canaan. How did Joshua prepare for his conquest, and in particular, for his attack on the strong city of Jericho?

Joshua 2 recounts how Joshua sent spies into the city. The account of Samson's visit to Gaza follows closely the story of the spies (Table 10, chart). The purpose of the terse account of his initial visit to Gaza is to recall the Jericho episode, and the harlot is there, not to satisfy Samson's carnal lust, but to direct our minds back to Rahab in Joshua 2. In both cases, the attack begins with the house of a harlot, and ends with the fall נפל H5307 of an enemy stronghold.

and went in unto her.—This expression is widely understood to indicate sexual activity. But that is not the usual meaning of the Hebrew phrase. I count 14/102 instances where the combination בוא אל + personal pronoun *might* refer to intimate relations; everywhere else it refers simply to approaching someone or coming into their quarters or home, and could very well mean that in the 14 cases as well. For example (chart),

Gen. 40:6 And Joseph **came in unto them** in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad.

Gen. 42:21 And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress **come upon us**.

Gen. 46:31 And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father's house, I will go up, and shew Pharaoh, and say unto him, My brethren, and my father's house, which were in the land of Canaan, are **come unto me**;

⁴⁴ Block enumerates nine unanswered questions, leading to his question, “What is the purpose of this text?”

	Jericho, Joshua 2	Gaza, Judges 16
Entry into hostile city	1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went ,	1 Then went Samson to Gaza,
Lodging with a harlot	and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there. ... 3 ... the men that are come to thee ... 4 ... there came men unto me ...	and saw there an harlot , and went in unto her .
Anonymous report of the presence of the spy/spies	2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.	2 And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither.
Precautions taken with the city gate	7 And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate .	And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city , and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.
Nighttime departure with gate closed	5 about the time of shutting of the gate , when it was dark ... 15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window : for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.	3 And Samson lay till midnight , and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders,
Visit to nearby mountain	22 And they went, and came unto the mountain הר H2022 , and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned:	and carried them up to the top of an hill הר H2022 that is before Hebron.
Final Victory	6:20 the wall fell down flat	30 the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein.

Table 10: Parallels between Joshua's spies and Samson in Gaza

The expression simply means that Samson enters her house, as the spies entered the house of Rahab (using the same expression, Josh 2:3, 4). Why are they there? An ancient Jewish tradition (the Targum; Josephus) considers her an innkeeper.⁴⁵ In the clannish culture of the Bible, an outsider had few places to lodge, particularly someone who came on hostile business and wished to remain unknown. She probably offered a range of services, including simple lodging.

2 And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither.—Samson is trying to remain incognito, but as with the spies in Jericho, someone identifies him and discloses his presence.

And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.—As in Joshua, the people of the city try to catch him. They don't know where he is, but watch the gates and encompass the city so that he cannot leave.

3 And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders,—In both stories, the spy leaves the city at night in spite of the closed gates.

45 The Targum renders זונה in Joshua and Judges, even Judg 11:1, with פונדקיתה from Greek πανδόκεια “female innkeeper” (Cassel). Elsewhere, it uses נפקת־ברא “one who is brought out.”

and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.—Both stories end as the heroes move to a nearby hill (הר H2022 “mountain” in both cases).

The terseness of 16:1-3 and its alignment with Joshua 2 suggest that the point of this paragraph is not Samson’s lustful behavior, but his deliberate imitation of Joshua in attacking the Philistines’ “strong city.” He finally is acting deliberately as a judge, seeking to deliver Israel. And in fact he succeeds, though not as he planned. Ultimately, the temple of Dagon, like the walls of Jericho, will fall down.

16:4-20, Delilah

The episode has an introduction and four scenes.

4-5, Introduction

4 And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman—Even as an impetuous youth, he sought to follow the course of marriage, not fornication. His sin then was not lust, but his choice of a Philistine girl. The next verse suggests that Delilah is not a Philistine, but one of the “daughters of thy brethren” that his parents recommended (14:3), and she may well have been his wife. His sin is not sexual indiscretion, but faithlessness to his obligation as a Nazirite.

Nevertheless, this episode reflects a clear lapse on Samson’s part. In this he recalls Gideon’s cruelty to the people of Gad and his lapse into idolatry in Judges 8, or Jephthah’s war with Ephraim in Judges 12. Samson’s prayer at Lehi is his high point, and the visit to Gaza is part of an attempt to fulfill his role as judge in a deliberate and purposeful way, but here he stumbles.

in the valley of Sorek,—The valley extends from the highlands of Judah down to the Mediterranean through the north of Philistia (Figure 3). “Sorek” שֹרֵק H8321 is the name of a particularly prized kind of vine, used in Isa 5:2 and Jer 2:21 to describe Israel’s choice by the Lord for his vineyard, and reflects the vineyards that are common in the area. As in his visits to Timnah in ch. 14, Samson can hardly avoid contact with products of the vine.

whose name was Delilah.—The woman’s name is very close to a Semitic phrase meaning “of the night,” *de-laylah*, and together with Samson’s name, “little sun,” suggests that their encounter reflects the conflict of light and darkness that pervades the Bible.⁴⁶

5 And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her,—Throughout the story, Samson “goes down” to the land of the Philistines (Figure 8), and “goes up” to return to his parents’ home. The fact that the Philistines “come up” to Delilah suggests that she lives in Israelite territory.

and said unto her, Entice him,—This word (פתה H6601) appears elsewhere in Judges only in 14:15, where the Philistines similarly deal with Samson’s bride to learn his riddle (chart):

Judg. 14:15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson’s wife, **Entice** thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father’s house with fire:

Samson foolishly falls twice for the same trap, betrayal by an unfaithful wife.

The Philistines seek answers to two questions.

⁴⁶ Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, p. 119.

and see wherein his great strength lieth,—First: what is the source of his strength? The word “strength” (כֹּחַ H3581) occurs 8x in Judges. Seven of these are in this episode. The other is in 6:14 (Gideon), and tells him (and us) where a judge gets his real strength:

Judg. 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto [Gideon], and said unto him, **The LORD is with thee**, thou mighty man of valour. 13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. 14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, **Go in this thy might** בְּכֹחֲךָ, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? 15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith בְּמָה shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house. 16 And the LORD said unto him, **Surely I will be with thee**, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

The Lord greets Gideon with the assurance “the Lord is with thee,” and at the end reassures him, “I will be with thee.” This is Gideon’s strength. The story of Samson and Delilah is preoccupied with his strength (Judg. 16:5–6, 9, 15, 17, 19, 30). But in fact what really matters is his relation to the Lord. When he abandons the one mark of the Nazarite that the angel required, his long hair, his strength departs from him (vv. 17, 19) because the Lord has departed from him (16:20).

and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him:—The second question is: how can we bind him? They are frank about their motivation. They want to humble him. The final verb describes oppressing and humiliating someone, and is commonly used for rape (as in its only other occurrence in Judges, the story of the Levite’s concubine in 19:24; 20:25). Samson’s exploits have put them badly off balance, and they want revenge.

and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.—Compare the motivation that the Philistines gave Samson’s wife in Timnah. There, they threatened to kill her. Here, they offer a huge bribe. If there are five lords (one for each city), the aggregate is 5500 shekels of silver, or over 55 kg, more than 110 pounds. Why did they not just threaten her with harm? Probably because she lives in Israelite territory.

The whole interaction between Samson and Delilah is her effort, motivated by the bribe, to learn his secret, while he in turn toys with her.

The episode unfolds in four parallel scenes (Table 11, chart). In such alternations, we learn much by comparing each account with its parallels. The first three scenes grow progressively shorter, as the reader becomes accustomed to the basic pattern: Delilah’s question, Samson’s answer, her attempt to implement it, and his persistent strength.⁴⁷

6-9, Scene 1: Raw Tendons

6 And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.—She echoes both questions of the Philistine lords—perhaps because their soldiers are hiding in the room to seize Samson (v. 9),

⁴⁷ To achieve this reduction in size, the third scene abbreviates Samson’s answer to her question and her attempt to bind him. The LXX fills in these details: “then shall I be weak as another man. 14 And it came to pass when he was asleep, that Dalida took the seven locks of his head, and wove them with the web,” But in doing so, it destroys the dramatic effect of shrinking episode lengths (in Brenton’s translation of the LXX, the lengths of the four panels are 128, 94, 120, and 240 words). The Hebrew text is to be preferred.

and she wants them to know that she is asking for the very information they require. She does not even try to hide the fact that the information might lead to his humiliation.

7 And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried,—He focuses on the binding, not the source of his strength. “With” is the tendon of an animal, used for bowstrings (as in Ps 11:2). “Green” means fresh, not dried. As the tendons dry, they contract, and would bind him even more closely.

As in his contact with the dead lion and the jawbone of an ass, not to mention dead Philistines, he does not conceive that the rule excluding Nazarites from dead bodies applies to him.

then shall I be weak, and be as another man.—This expression is a refrain, recurring in v. 11 and (in slightly modified form) in v. 19.⁴⁸ In ch. 13, the angel twice (vv. 5, 7) declares to Samson’s parents that he will be a Nazarite, “separated, distinct.” He claims that these measures will remove his distinct condition. His willingness to contemplate such a loss is his great fault.

	:6-9 (122 words in KJV)	:10-12 (92 words)	:13-14 (75 words)	:15-20 (245 words)
Question	6 And Delilah said to Samson, • Tell me, I pray thee , wherein thy great strength lieth, • and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.	10 And Delilah said unto Samson, • Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: • now tell me, I pray thee , wherewith thou mightest be bound .	13 And Delilah said unto Samson, • Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: • tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound .	15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? • thou hast mocked me these three times, • and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth. 16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;
Answer	7 And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man .	11 And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man .	And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.	17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother’s womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me סר ממני , and I shall become weak, and be like any other man .
Summons to Philistines				18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart.
Coming of the Philistines	8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried,			Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

⁴⁸ The LXX reconstructs it at the end of v. 13 as well.

Judges 13-16

	:6-9 (122 words in KJV)	:10-12 (92 words)	:13-14 (75 words)	:15-20 (245 words)
Delilah's action	and she bound him with them.	12a Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith,	14 And she fastened it with the pin,	19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head;
Ambush	9 Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber.	12c And there were liars in wait abiding in the chamber.		
Testing				and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him וסר כחו מעליו.
The Alarm	And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.	12b and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.	and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.	20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.
Awaking			And he awaked out of his sleep,	And he awoke out of his sleep,
Attempt to Escape	And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire.	12d And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.	and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.	and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself.
Ignorance	So his strength was not known וידע H3045.			And he wist וידע H3045 not that the LORD was departed from him וסר מעליו.

Table 11: Samson and Delilah

8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried,—Samson never used conventional weapons in his warfare, so he would not have undried bowstrings around the house. Delilah gets them from the Philistines.

and she bound him with them. 9 Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber.—In the last two scenes, she acts while he is asleep, then he awakens, vv. 14, 20. But in the first two, he is awake, playing along with her. “Let’s play Samson and the Philistines,” she is saying. “You are big strong Samson. I’ll be a weak Philistine. Show me how strong you are.”

And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.—After each action to restrain his strength, she invites him to show his strength with this cry.

And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire.—In 15:14, the ropes used by the men of Judah became like scorched flax. Tow is a coarse, broken fibre separated from flax during processing, and would be even weaker, with no tensile strength at all.

So his strength was not known.—Recall the theme of strength that runs through this scene. At the end of the scene, his strength is not known. This element has no correspondent until we get to the final scene. There, once again something is “not known” (same Hebrew verb, וידע H3045).

But at the end, like a punch line, we see that what is critical is not his strength, but the presence of the Lord, as Gideon's experience has led us to expect.

10-12, Scene 2: New Ropes

10 And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked [deceived] me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.—In her second and third attempts, she leaves aside the question of his strength, and focuses on how to bind him.

11 And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.—This effort is doomed from the start. The men of Judah already tried “new ropes” עֲבָתִים הַדְּשִׁים H5688 H2319 before the battle of Lehi, to no avail.

12 Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers in wait abiding in the chamber.—Again the Philistines have sent a delegation to arrest him.

And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.—But the ropes don't work any better here than they did at Lehi.

13-14, Scene 3: Weaving his Hair

13 And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound.—Delilah continues to focus on binding, ignoring his strength. She ended her first two requests with “I pray thee,” roughly equivalent to “please.” Now she is insistent: “tell me,” with no “please.”

And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.—The “web” is either the warp of the loom (Figure 11, chart) or the overall fabric. His hair forms the weft, the horizontal threads. Weaving was part of daily life, so it is not surprising that Delilah has a loom.

We aren't told the rest of his answer, or the details of his binding. The LXX translators felt the need to flesh out these details in line with the previous two scenes, but that spoils the dramatic effect of the shrinking scenes. The increasingly stereotyped scenes show the futility of Delilah's focus on the “binding” part of the Philistine's question.

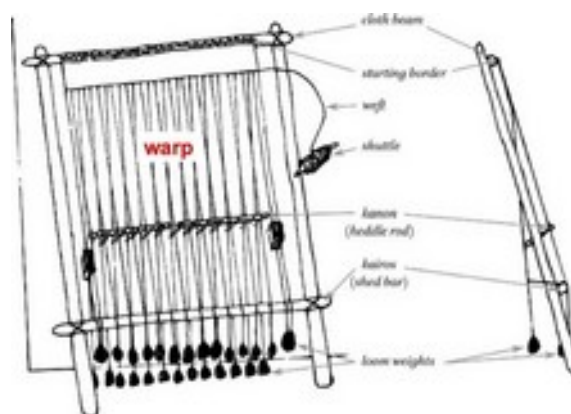


Figure 11: An Ancient Loom. The “web” may be the warp (the vertical threads)

But Samson is letting down his guard. While he still focuses on binding rather than strength, he now introduces his hair into the discussion.

14 And she fastened it with the pin,—It's not clear which part of the apparatus the pin is, or what she is fastening (lit. drive, thrust, strike). More significant is the previous use of these two words, “fasten” תַּקַּע H8628 and “pin” יָתַד H3429, in the history of Deborah and Barak:

Judg. 4:21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and **smote תַּקַּע the nail יָתַד** into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

To the attentive reader, it is clear that Samson is in very dangerous territory. He has begun to direct her attention to his hair, and like Sisera, he is now subject to a woman who drives a pin.

and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.—In this scene there are no Philistines present. After two false alarms, they don't bother to send a contingent to arrest him.

And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

—He is so sure of himself that he has fallen asleep while she manipulates his hair. When she arouses him, he walks off with no difficulty, taking a significant part of the loom with him.

15-20, Scene 4: Cutting his Hair

After the short third scene, the action slows. The fourth scene is twice as long as the first.

Delilah is now getting nervous. A lot of money is at stake, and her sponsors are losing confidence that she can deliver.

15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?

—Note the shift in the tone of her request. She has moved from polite questions (scenes 1 and 2) to a direct demand (scene 3), omitting the “please,” and now accuses him of lack of love.

thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength

lieth.—The subject of her demand has also shifted. The first three cycles focused on binding Samson. Now she leaves that aside, and turns to the other element of the Philistine's question, concerning the source of his strength.

16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;—She made his life miserable.

17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God נָזִיר אֱלֹהִים from my mother's womb:—So far, so good. The expression is that used by the angel in announcing his birth (13:5, 7). It means “separated unto God.”

if I be shaven,—Numbers 6 calls a Nazarite's hair “the consecration of God” (chart):

Num. 6:7 He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because **the consecration of his God is upon his head.**

In Hebrew, this word נָזִיר H5145, translated “consecration” or “separation” 13 times in Numbers 6, is translated 11 times in other books as “crown,” whether of the high priest (Ex 29:6) or of the king (1 Ki 11:2). A crown is the symbol that a person is dedicated to a particular office, and if the crown is lost, the office is forfeited. The Amalekite who reported the death of Saul to David brought Saul's crown (נָזִיר) to show that Saul was no longer king:

2Sa 1:10 So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the **crown** that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.

In Numbers 6, a Nazarite who is defiled must terminate his vow by shaving his head and starting over, and at the end of the vow, he shaves his head again to show that he is no longer set apart. Samson realizes that if he surrenders his hair, he is giving up his special relation to God. He knows from the past three episodes that Delilah will act on the information he gives her. Like Adam accepting the fruit from Eve, he chooses to please her rather than be faithful to the Lord.

then my strength will go from me סָר מִמֶּנִּי, —We know from Judges 6 that his strength consists of his special relation to the Lord. He might have said, “The Lord will go from me.”

and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. —The expression changes subtly from vv. 7 and 11. There, he said that he would become כְּאֶחָד הָאָדָם, like one man. Here, he will become כְּכָל הָאָדָם, like every man.

Does Samson really believe this? On the one hand, the narrator tells us that he is telling her “all his heart,” his truest and deepest feelings. In that case, he really is abandoning the Lord. But on the other hand, he has repeatedly violated the usual Nazarite restrictions about contact with dead bodies and with vine products, with no consequences, and when he wakes up in v. 20, he clearly does not think he has lost his strength. Perhaps he thinks that this long hair is only “symbolic,” and not really essential to his strength.

Again, we hear echoes of Eden. God said to Adam, “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17) but Adam had no experience of death. The serpent persuaded Eve (and through her, Adam) that God didn’t mean what he said (Gen 3:1). They fell when they questioned God’s word. The angel told Samson’s parents that he must never cut his hair in order to be Israel’s savior, but Samson has no experience of weakness. Perhaps he doubts God’s word.

The great failing of modern christendom is being too clever in our reasoning about God’s word, looking for loopholes, trying to retain our title as Christians while living to please ourselves. God is a jealous God (Exod 20:5 and six other times⁴⁹). He demands our complete love and dedication (Deut 6:5), and expects our uncompromising submission to his word. Our symbols of devotion to him, our faithfulness at the meetings or remembering to have our devotions each morning, are nothing compared with the state of our heart:

Is. 66:1 Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? 2 For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and **trembleth at my word.**

2Cor. 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness **in the fear of God.**

18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.—Delilah realizes that he has now surrendered to her.

19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man,—Probably to be ready to bind him. The next clause shows that he was not the barber.

and she caused him to shaved off the seven locks of his head;—The Hebrew is quite clear that it was Delilah herself who cut off his hair.⁵⁰

and she began to afflict him,—This is what the Philistines said was their purpose (16:5). As Samson has forsaken his God, Delilah has forsaken her husband.

and his strength went from him.—The consequences are as he told her (16:17).

49 Ex. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Josh. 24:19; Nah. 1:2

50 The AV follows the Geneva Bible, which explains the feminine subject of the verb in a causative sense. The Bishop’s Bible follow the LXX literally, making the man (whom the LXX calls a barber) the subject of the verb.

20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself.—Is he unaware that she has shaved him? Or does he think that maybe the Nazarite vow doesn't really matter?

And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him סר מעליו.—What really mattered was not his hair, but the presence of the Lord. Note two parallels with earlier verses (chart).

First, “wist” is the verb “to know” ידע H3045, used at the end of the first scene (16:8), “so his strength was not known.” There, the Philistines and Delilah were ignorant of the true source of his strength. Here, even he does not know the real meaning of his hair, his separation unto God.

Second, the phrase “departed from” that describes the Lord also describes the departure of his strength in 16:17, 19. As Gideon learned in chapter 6, strength consists in the presence of the Lord, and Samson's strength has gone from him because the Lord has gone from him.

16:21-31, Binding and Victory in Gaza

21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass;—We return to the location of vv. 1-3, which is 40 miles from the Sorek valley. Why not take him to a closer Philistine city? Perhaps because he dishonored Gaza so greatly by walking off with its gates. Or it may be the most prominent of their cities.⁵¹

and he did grind in the prison house.—Grinding grain was the task of the lowest of the servants. Moses uses it to describe the extent of the curse on the firstborn in Egypt, from the highest to the lowest levels of society:

Ex 11:5 And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of **the maidservant that is behind the mill;**
 ... 12:29 And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of **the captive that was in the dungeon;** ...

They seek to humiliate him.

22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.—This note opens the possibility that he will recover his strength. But by itself, it is not sufficient. It makes him eligible to “reenlist” (Boling), which he does in v. 28.

23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them[selves] together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. 24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.—The Philistines see Samson's humiliation as a sign of the power of their god Dagon. Of course, we realize that what it really shows is the withdrawal of the Lord's power, because of Samson's decision to resign his Nazarite position. But their claim makes the final outcome a matter of the Lord's honor.

We will meet Dagon, the god of the Philistines, again in 1 Samuel 5 after the Battle of Aphek, when the ark is taken to his temple in Ashdod. He had another temple in Bethshan, where the Philistines took Saul after his death (compare 1 Sam 31:10 with 1 Chr 10:10).

⁵¹ It is mentioned 22x in the OT, more than Gath 7x, Ashdod 17x, or Ashkelon 12x. Ekron is also mentioned 22x, but its proximity to Judah may have made it a security risk for such a high profile captive.



Figure 13: Philistine Temple at Tell es-Safi (Gath). <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/1,7340,L-3927273,00.html>

Dagon is known throughout the Middle East. His name דָּגָן H1712 is related to the Hebrew word for grain, דָּגָן H1715, and he was probably a grain god.⁵² The Philistine lords may find Samson's capture particularly significant in light of his destruction of the grain fields of Timnah in ch. 15.

25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.—Recent excavations have clarified the architecture of two Philistine temples: one in Gath (Figure 13, chart),⁵³ the other at Tell Qasile, at the mouth of the Yarkon River (Figure 14, in modern Tel Aviv).⁵⁴ These are both a century later than Samson, and too small to accommodate 3000 people on the roof, but clearly show the prominence of two central pillars inside the temple. Solomon's temple, like most Canaanite temples, had columns at the door, but not inside (Figure 12).

26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.—In spite of his blindness, Samson is aware of the structural importance of the pillars, perhaps from his reconnaissance trip at the start of the chapter.

27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.—Clearly, this structure was larger than the examples at Tell Qasile



Figure 14: Philistine temple at Tell Qasile (modern Tel Aviv). <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/judges-united-monarchy/3800-between-the-pillars-revisiting-samson-and-the-house-of-dagon>



Figure 12: Solomon's temple: pillars at the door, but not inside. <https://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/isc-buildings/>

52 Not, as speculated earlier, a fish deity; see Kitchen in NBD.

53 Maeir, A. M. 2012. Tell es-Safi/Gath I: Report on the 1996–2005 Seasons. *Ägypten und Altes Testament* 69. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. Dated Iron IIA (10th - 9th century BC), 6.5m square (Fig 1.16, p. 30).

54 A. Mazar, Qedem, 1980, Vol. 12, Excavations at Tell Qasile. Part One: The Philistine Sanctuary: Architecture and Cult Objects. Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Temple 131, Stratum X, dated 1050-980, thus later than Samson. Two earlier temples on the site do not show pillars. "The outer dimensions of the temple are 8.00 x 14.50 m and thus it covers an area of 116 sq. m." See pp. 35-36

and Gath, and we do not understand how the overflow crowd on the roof could have seen what happened inside, “between the pillars” (v. 25), but there were a lot of people.⁵⁵

28 And Samson called unto the LORD,—We saw in 15:18 that Samson is the only judge to call on the Lord for help. Here he does it again. For all his failings, he knew to cry out to the Lord.

and said, O Lord GOD,—Advancing beyond 15:18, he calls on God by his covenant name.

remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.—He does not trust in his hair, though that has grown, but in God who has given him his hair.

Both of Samson’s prayers focus on his personal needs—his thirst in 15:18, and revenge for his eyes in v. 28. But the point is that he recognizes the Lord as the source of his strength, and that is progress beyond his original condition.

29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.—Again we are reminded of the structural importance of these pillars, which Samson understands.

30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might [strength, כֹּחַ H3581]; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.—After 30 at Ashkelon, perhaps 100 in Timnah, and 1000 at Lehi, now he vanquishes more than 3000. Gaza is his greatest victory, though not perhaps in the way he envisioned. Samson stumbled badly in marrying Deborah and yielding to her desires, but in spite of that, the Lord fulfilled Samson’s resolve to attack Gaza, as Joshua had once attacked Jericho.

31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father.—His father has apparently passed away.

And he judged Israel twenty years.—This expression closes off the inclusio from 15:20, with a slight syntactic change, “he had judged Israel,”⁵⁶ emphasizing the backward look to 15:20. slightly different syntax: instead of וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל, we have וְהָיָא שֹׁפֵט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל, perhaps to be understood in a pluperfect sense, “and he had judged Israel”

Review of the Heroes of Faith

We have finished the central section of Judges, with its repeated cycles of Rebellion, Retribution, Repentance, Rebuke, and Restoration (Table 1, chart). Let’s return to the verse in Hebrews that launched us on our study of Judges (chart).

Heb. 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae;

We have detailed histories of six judges: the four named by Hebrews, and also Othniel and Ehud. In addition, Deborah is central to Barak’s success, but Hebrews names only Barak and does not mention Deborah. He’s not a misogynist—he gives special attention to Sarah along with

55 Kitchen, Reliability of the OT, ch. 5 suggests an explanation based on Greek temples at Kition in Cyprus.

56 The perfect וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל instead of the imperfect וְהָיָא שֹׁפֵט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל

Abraham (Heb 11:11), and to Rahab (11:31). Why select just these four? What sets them apart from Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah?

One possible answer is that each of the four judges selected by Hebrews overcomes some personal weakness or spiritual failing in the course of his history. The author of Judges has nothing negative to say about Othniel, Ehud, or Deborah, the first ones named. But each of the later judges bears some weakness, reflecting the growing apostasy of the nation.

We first meet **Gideon** cowering at his winepress, covertly threshing and hiding wheat from the Midianites. The angel's greeting seems almost a mockery:

Judg. 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

When the angel announces that he is to deliver Israel from the Midianites, Gideon tries to reject the assignment:

Judg. 6:15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

But his reception of the angel shows his great knowledge of Scripture. After the encouragement of the angel, some warm-up exercises at his father's sanctuary of Baal, and empowerment by the Spirit of the Lord (6:34), he obediently leads Israel to a great victory.

Barak also shows signs of cowardice. He ignores the Lord's call until the Lord instructs Deborah to arouse him.

Judg. 4:4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. 5 And she dwelt ... between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: ... 6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, **Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded**, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

Deborah's home is 60 miles as the crow flies from Kedeshnaphthali, and probably twice that by roads. She is three tribes away from Barak. She has to remind him of the Lord's call, then coach him through the entire campaign. He ends up leading a great victory over Jabin's chariot forces, but only under her encouragement.

Jephthah begins life with the deck stacked against him.

Jdg 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. 2 And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

He leads a band of "vain men," probably surviving by banditry, until the elders of Gilead, cowed by the Ammonites, invite him back to lead the fight. But his history shows that he knows the law of God, and he brings a glorious victory.

We have traced **Samson's** spiritual progress, due largely to his parents' patient guidance, again with clear knowledge of God's prior works. From rebellious teenager, through responsible husband, to the recognition that he is the one sent by the Lord to deliver Israel, and on to his grand scheme to humble Gaza, he shows clear spiritual growth.

Judges 13-16

The writer to Hebrews appears to have in mind this dynamic evidence of faith. He goes on to characterize his heroes,

Heb. 11:33 Who through faith ... 34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, **out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight**, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

All of God's people start off as incompetent sinners. The faith that God gives us shows itself, not by spotless lives, but by growth through time as the Spirit of God uncovers the sin that afflicts all of us and roots it out. This is what attracted the attention of the writer to the Hebrews, and this is the dynamic that we should covet in our lives.

Notes

Chronology of Samson and Samuel

Wood puts Aphek at 1075.

Edersheim ch. 18:

- End of the Philistine's oppression (40 years) is battle of Ebenezer, 1 Sam 7
- Eli dies at Battle of Aphek, aged 98, having judged Israel 40 years: 1 Sam 4:11, 15, 18, when the ark was taken.
- Time from capture of ark to 1 Sam 7 is 20 years 7 months (1 Sam 6:1; 7:2)

Wood puts both Samson and Samuel between Aphek and Ebenezer, the same 20 year period, but in different regions of the country.

The Angel of the Lord

Here are the places in the OT where the phrase appears of a superhuman being, organized by the function that the Angel carries out. In two places, the expression refers to a human messenger—the prophet Haggai (1:13) and the priest (Mal 2:7), as individuals carrying a message from God.

Founder of Jews and Gentiles

Only instances in Genesis. As God's Word to humanity, declares God's mercy to both Gentiles (first!) and Jews.

Gen 16:7-11 Reassures Hagar in the wilderness, promises to multiply her seed. First instance, caring for a Gentile.

Gen 22:11-15 Interrupts sacrifice of Isaac, promises to multiply Abraham's seed

Messenger

Most natural application of the title.

By sending someone

2 Ki 1:3, 15 sends Elijah to meet messengers of Ahaziah to Baalzebub

Carries the Message himself

Num 22:22-35 stops Balaam's ass and warns Balaam

Judg 2:1-4 claims to have brought Israel out of Egypt; warns them of their disobedience (cf. Ex 23:20, 23; 33:2; God promises an angel to lead them to the Canaan)

Judg 5:23 declares a curse on Meroz (somewhere around Jezreel valley) for not joining in the war against Sisera and Jabin

1 Ki 19:7 encourages Elijah on his journey to Horeb (v. 5 "an angel")

Delivers Israel

By sending a deliverer

Ex 3:2ff Appears to Moses in the burning bush, sends him to deliver Israel

Judg 6:11 summons Gideon to fight the Midianites

Judg 13:3ff announces birth of Samson

Himself

2 Ki 19:35 = Isa 37:37 smites 185k Assyrians outside Jerusalem to deliver Hezekiah

Zech 1:11, 12 prays for Lord's mercy on Jerusalem

Zech 3:1, 5, 6, defending Joshua from Satan

Zech 12:8, House of David compared to AoL in defending Jerusalem

Psa 34:7 encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

Ps 35:5, 6 prays for AoL to chase adversaries

By judging sin

Many cases under deliverance include this facet.

2 Sam 24:16 = 1 Chr 21:15 the destroying angel in David's plague. Clearly identified in 1 Chr 21:12. 1 Chr 21:18, tells David to set up altar. also v. 30

Local Sacrifice and Deuteronomy 12

At the command of the angel, Manoah offers a sacrifice to the Lord on "the rock" near his home. Gideon also offered sacrifices locally with divine approval (6:24-28), and Samuel frequently makes offerings at places other than the tabernacle, where he was raised. He builds an altar to the Lord at Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17), and offers sacrifice at Mizpeh (1 Sam 7:9), Gilgal (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8ff.), and an unnamed town somewhere south-west of Bethlehem (1 Sam 9, cf. 10:2) when he anoints Saul. When he goes to Bethlehem to anoint David, the Lord instructs him,

1Sam. 16:2 Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to **sacrifice** to the LORD.

Yet Deuteronomy 12 condemns the local worship of the Cananites "upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree" (12:2) and commands Israel to bring their sacrifices to the central sanctuary:

Deu 12:4 Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. 5 But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: 6 And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: 7 And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.

There are three possible ways to reconcile these passages.

1. In our discussion of 6:26, we noted that Deut 12:10 assumes that the nation has rest נוח in the land, a condition that is not achieved until David and Solomon. Solomon offered sacrifice at the tabernacle in Gibeon (1 Ki 3:4), but after the temple is built, God does not approve of any further decentralized sacrifices. This appears to be the best solution.
2. Some suggest that the tabernacle at Shiloh was destroyed in connection with the battle of Aphek, and certainly, without the presence of the ark (missing from the tabernacle between Aphek and David), the legitimacy of the tabernacle is questionable. But this does not explain the legitimacy of Gideon's altar.
3. Another possibility is the emphasis of Deuteronomy on communal meals. Perhaps local sacrifices that are not the center of a communal celebration are permitted. But this is contradicted by the sacrificial feast that Samuel sponsored at Ramah, when he anointed Saul (1 Sam 9:13).

Significance of Riddles חידות H2420 in the Bible

The purpose of language is to convey thoughts from one person to another. Ordinarily, if my words do not convey to you what I am thinking, I have failed. But a riddle deliberately holds back part of the meaning. It draws attention to the mental gulf between the speaker and the hearer: "I know something that you don't know, and even though I will tell it to you, you still won't know it."

The word first appears when the Lord challenges Aaron and Miriam for opposing Moses.

Num. 12:6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. 7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. 8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in **dark speeches חידות H2420**; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

He contrasts his direct speech to Moses with the dreams he sends to others, which he compares with riddles. Think of the dreams he sends to Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. They know that God is speaking to them, and yet they cannot understand his message without an interpreter.

A riddle is thus a challenge, emphasizing the limitations of the one to whom it is addressed. The queen of Sheba uses such questions to test Solomon, to see whether he is as wise as his reputation makes him out to be:

1Kings 10:1 And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with **hard questions**. = 2 Chr 9:1.

Dan 8:23 mentions another king whose intelligence is seen in his ability to understand riddles:

Dan. 8:23 And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding **dark sentences**, shall stand up.

In the context, this is Antiochus Epiphanes, who prefigures the coming antichrist.

Throughout the wisdom literature, the riddle is paired with the parable משל H4912, which also says something indirectly. In poetry, the word "parable," as the more common word (39x), always comes first, followed by "riddle" (a total of 17 occurrences):

Hab. 2:6 Shall not all these take up a **parable** against him, and a taunting **proverb** [riddle] against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

Psa. 49:4 I will incline mine ear to a **parable**: I will open my **dark saying** [riddle] upon the harp.

Psa. 78:2 I will open my mouth in a **parable**: I will utter **dark sayings** [riddle] of old:

Prov. 1:6 To understand a **proverb**, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their **dark sayings** [riddle].

The parable is especially common in Ezekiel, where once (17:2) it is also called a “riddle.” Our Lord made extensive use of parables, and his disciples asked him why.

Mat 13:10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? 11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

The purpose of a parable, as of a riddle, is to conceal the truth. The Lord only spoke in parables (Matthew 13) after the people had rejected his simple teaching (ch. 5-7). The same dynamic occurs in John 6, where the Lord at first speaks plainly about believing on him (vv. 35-40), and only after the people murmur against him, recasts the promise in figurative language (vv. 53-58).

The term characterizes two Psalms, 49 and 78.

In Psalm 49, the riddle is summarized in the last lines of the first and last stanzas (vv. 12, 20): Why is man no better than the beasts? The answer, in the second stanza (vv. 13-15), makes clear that there are two kinds of men, the godless and the righteous. The pessimistic characterization of vv. 12 and 20 applies to the godless, but the righteous are far superior to the beasts.

In Psalm 78, which follows the pattern of the cycles in Judges, the riddle is why Israel should be so resistant to the Lord who has repeatedly delivered them from the consequences of their own sin? Here the riddle is left unanswered, but left as a rebuke to the wicked.

The same use of a parable/riddle as a rebuke is seen in Hab 2:6, against the unjust in Israel (and in fact in our Lord’s confrontations with the Jewish leaders during passion week).

The story in 1 Esdras 4 illustrates the use of riddles to test the wisdom of royal advisors.

קרא/צעק and קרא in the LXX

	קרא/צעק	קרא	Totals
καλέω	1	363	467
ἔπνομάζω	0	30	36
(ἀνα, κατα)βοάω	64	45	182
κράζω	46	26	104
Totals	130	736	