

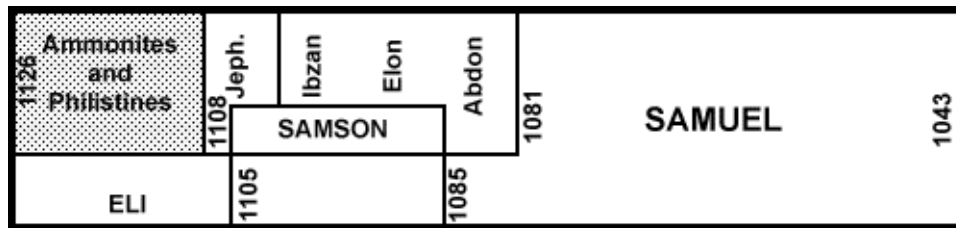
## Lesson 10

# Samson in Timnah

## *Judges 13-15*

### Introduction

Beginning around 1126 BC, the Israelites suffered under the dual oppression of the Ammonites and Philistines. Jephthah liberated the Transjordan area from the Ammonites in 1108 BC, but the Philistine oppression in the west persisted for forty years until 1085 BC., marking the longest subjugation recorded in the Book of Judges. Although Samson, who judged Israel for twenty years, managed to challenge the Philistines with his formidable strength, he did not achieve complete liberation. Ultimately, it was Samuel who successfully freed the Israelites from Philistine control.



THE LATER JUDGES  
1126-1043 BC

Samson was a unique figure but not particularly devout or closely connected with his fellow Israelites. He often associated with the Philistines and showed a strong attraction to Philistine women. Driven by impulse and governed by his sensual desires, Samson's actions were frequently motivated by a desire for revenge, a theme that even influenced his prayers..

### Judges 13 – Samuel’s Early Life

Unlike other Judges called during crises, Samson was designated for his role before birth. Samson's birth is unique in the text as it is the only one described, emphasizing the extraordinary measures God took to appoint a deliverer. Here we are reminded that true deliverance could only be achieved through divine intervention, illustrating that the Israelites' salvation was a gift of grace from God, given their own helplessness.

#### *13:2-7 – The Angel of the Lord Appears*

Samson's life begins with a familiar theme of Israel's apostasy and subsequent judgment but notably lacks any mention of the Israelites crying out to Yahweh in repentance or distress. This absence demonstrates the debilitating effect of sin, which can leave people too crushed to seek change. Yet, the story of Samson highlights a simple truth found throughout Scripture: God initiates deliverance even without a plea for help, demonstrating his grace.

Approximately a century after appearing to Gideon, the Angel of the Lord visited the home of Manoah, a Danite, and his barren wife around 1125 BC. Barrenness was viewed as a disgrace then, and the text does not even name Manoah's wife. Despite these circumstances, she is portrayed with great faith and assurance, exemplifying how God often works through the anonymous and powerless to fulfill his purposes.

The Angel informed this faithful woman of her impending pregnancy and instructed her to avoid strong drink and unclean food, as her son was to be a Nazirite from birth. This son, later known as Samson, was destined to begin Israel's deliverance from the Philistines. After the visitation, Manoah's wife described the visitor to her husband as a "man of God" with an awe-inspiring appearance, akin to an angel. She relayed the angel's prophecy and instructions without seeking further details about his identity, emphasizing the mysterious and divine nature of the encounter..

### ***13:8-23 – Second Appearance of the Angel***

Despite believing his wife's encounter with the Angel of the Lord, Manoah sought further guidance on raising their promised son. He prayed for another visitation, which was granted. The Angel reiterated the earlier instructions about the child's upbringing directly to Manoah, emphasizing the importance of following divine directions.

Initially mistaking the Angel for a prophet, Manoah offered hospitality as a meal. However, the Angel declined, suggesting instead that Manoah offer a burnt sacrifice to Yahweh. This response led Manoah to realize the true divine nature of his visitor.

When Manoah inquired about the Angel's name, he was told it was "wonderful," indicating that it was beyond human understanding, which underscored God's mysterious and incomprehensible nature. The encounter culminated with Manoah and his wife offering a sacrifice on a rock altar, during which the Angel ascended to heaven in the flames, deepening their awe and reverence.

Fearing death from having seen God, Manoah panicked, but his wife reassured him, logically arguing that if their demise had been intended, their sacrifice would not have been accepted, nor would they have witnessed such wonders and received prophecies of good tidings. Her calm and wise reaction highlights her faith and understanding, contrasting with the often less perceptive men in the narrative.

### ***13:24-25 – Samson is Born***

As foretold, Manoah's wife gave birth to a son named Samson, meaning "sunshine," symbolizing a new beginning for their family and Israel. Samson's childhood is not detailed in the texts, only noting that he grew up blessed by Yahweh. As he matured, the Spirit of the Lord began to stir within him at Mahanehdan, a location in Judah. This spiritual stirring marked the beginning of many instances where the divine Spirit empowered Samson to perform extraordinary feats of strength.

## **Judges 14 – Samson & the Philistines**

### ***14:1-4 – Samson Finds a Wife***

Samson visited the nearby town of Timnah, where he became enamored with a Philistine woman. Despite his parents' attempts to persuade him to choose an Israelite bride, Samson, driven by physical attraction, insisted they arrange a marriage with the Philistine woman, saying, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me!" This choice, motivated by lust, is portrayed as a shaky foundation for marriage.

Unbeknownst to Samson and his parents, God's providence was at play. Judges 14 reveals that God intended to use Samson's personal conflict as a means to deliver judgment upon the Philistines, who were oppressing Israel. Samson's marriage to the Philistine woman was designed to provoke him into actions against the oppressors, thereby initiating God's plan of retribution. While the characters in the story are unaware of this divine strategy, the reader is made privy to it.

### ***14:5-7 – The Marriage Arrangement***

Samson's second journey to Timnah was to finalize his marriage arrangements, accompanied by his parents who were involved in the traditional negotiation process. During this visit, while venturing into some vineyards, Samson was attacked by a young lion. This encounter marked the first time the Spirit of Yahweh empowered him, enabling him to tear the lion apart with his bare hands, similar to how one might tear apart a young goat. Samson kept this event a secret, likely due to concerns about violating his Nazirite vow by touching a dead body. This incident was Samson's first opportunity to realize the extent of his own strength.

The marriage negotiations and interactions with the Philistine woman proceeded successfully, and Samson remained attracted to her following their discussions..

### ***14:8-18 – The Marriage Celebration***

Samson, returning to marry, detoured to check the lion he had previously slain and found bees making honey in its carcass. He ate some honey and shared it with his parents without revealing its source, thus keeping another secret.

At his marriage feast, which was a week-long drinking celebration known as a *mishteh*, Samson, having likely already breached Nazirite rules by touching the dead lion and perhaps drinking wine, introduced a riddle to the thirty Philistine companions attending the event. He wagered thirty sets of garments against them solving the riddle, which was: "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet."

By the fourth day of the feast, the Philistines hadn't solved the riddle and threatened Samson's bride to extract the answer or face her father's home being burnt. Under pressure, she persuaded Samson to reveal the riddle's solution, which she promptly relayed to the Philistines. Before the seventh day ended, the guests presented the answer, infuriating Samson, who realized his wife had betrayed his confidence. He accused the guests metaphorically, saying, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle," before storming out, indicating his deep frustration and sense of betrayal.

### ***14:19-20 – Vengeance***

The Spirit of God empowered Samson for a second time, setting him on the path to fulfill his destiny. In a display of divine strength, Samson went to Ashkelon and killed thirty Philistines, taking their garments to Timnah as proof to those who had outwitted him with his riddle. This act marked the beginning of the Israelites' deliverance from Philistine domination, revealing that deliverance often involves tumultuous and violent methods.

Still enraged by the Philistines' deceit, Samson returned to his father's house to calm himself. Meanwhile, further provocations in Timnah set the stage for continued conflict. In Samson's absence, his wife was given to another man, specifically his best man, who was also a Philistine, setting up another confrontation with the oppressors.

## **Judges 15 – Samson and His Adventures**

Judges 15 details three instances over his twenty-year career when Samson delivered significant blows against the Philistines in response to their provocations. Each encounter showcases Samson's ability to exact swift and devastating retribution. The chapter culminates with Samson, nearing death, calling God for rescue.

### ***15:1-6a – At the Wheat Harvest***

After his anger subsided, Samson sought reconciliation with his wife during the wheat harvest by bringing her a young goat. However, upon arriving at her father's house in Timnah, he learned she had been given to his best man because her father believed Samson had abandoned her. The father, attempting to mitigate Samson's wrath, offered his younger and supposedly more beautiful daughter instead. Unappeased and angered, Samson declared he was justified in seeking revenge against the Philistines.

In retaliation, Samson captured three hundred foxes, pairing them by their tails with a burning torch attached to each pair. He then released them into the Philistine fields during the harvest. The terrified animals, dragging the torches, set the fields and vineyards ablaze, causing extensive crop damage.

### ***15.6b-8 – More Revenge***

The Philistines quickly discovered that Samson was responsible for destroying their fields and the reason behind his actions. Unable to capture Samson immediately, a group of vengeful Philistines retaliated by killing his wife and her father in Timnah. This act of violence provoked Samson to exact further revenge against the Philistines. The specifics of this retaliation are not detailed in the text, which only notes that Samson struck them "ruthlessly with a great slaughter." Afterward, Samson retreated to a cave at the rock of Etam, possibly mourning his wife's death or weary from the ongoing conflict.

### ***15:9-17 – The Philistines Attack***

In response to Samson's actions, the Philistines launched a large-scale attack on Israel, aiming primarily to capture and kill Samson. The men of Judah, fearing conflict with the Philistines, learned that the invasion was to apprehend Samson and, in their fear, agreed to betray him.

Three thousand men from Judah confronted Samson in his cave, questioning his actions and the wisdom behind them. They asked if he was unaware that their actions would provoke the Philistines, who ruled over Israel. Samson justified his actions with a simple philosophy of retaliation, indicating a personal vendetta rather than a strategic move as Israel's deliverer. He made no attempt to unite the Israelites against their oppressors, likely recognizing the futility given their demoralized state.

Samson consented to be bound and handed over to the Philistines on the condition that the men of Judah would not kill him themselves. They bound him with new ropes and delivered him to the Philistine camp at Lehi. Upon arrival, the Philistines celebrated prematurely as the Spirit of Yahweh empowered Samson for the third time. He broke free from the ropes, found a fresh donkey's jawbone, and, using it as a weapon, killed a thousand Philistines. This display of strength may have inspired some of the Judahites, leading to the Philistines' retreat.

After his victory, Samson commemorated the event with a poetic verse and named Ramath-lehi, meaning "the high place of the jawbone." This incident underscored Samson's formidable power and the divine intervention that often enabled his triumphs.

### ***15:18-20 – A Personal Crisis***

After a grueling day of battle, Samson was physically exhausted and extremely thirsty, yet there was no water nearby. As mentioned This prompted him to pray to God for the first time. In his prayer, Samson acknowledged God's role in granting him victory over the Philistines but expressed his fear of dying from thirst and having his body desecrated by the enemy.

God responded to Samson's prayer by miraculously providing water from a split hollow place in Lehi. This revitalized Samson, and he named the spot "En-hakkore," which means "spring of the caller." The spring continued to flow and was still active when the Book of Judges was composed, signifying its enduring significance.

## **What's In This for Us?**

**Recognize the Source of Strength:** Samson's life demonstrates that true strength and deliverance come from God. This reminds us to seek divine intervention and strength in our challenges, recognizing that our abilities are often insufficient.

**Consequences of Personal Choices:** Samson's decisions, driven by personal desires rather than divine guidance, often led to complicated and painful outcomes. This highlights the importance of making choices that align with spiritual wisdom and guidance rather than being led by immediate personal gratification or emotional impulses.

**God's Grace in Human Weakness:** Despite Samson's flaws and the Israelites' repeated failures, God still chose to work through them, illustrating His grace and mercy. This teaches us that God can use anyone to fulfill His purposes, regardless of their past or weaknesses.

**Learning from Others' Faith:** Manoah's wife's faith and actions, in contrast to the often dubious decisions of the men around her, provide a strong example of steadfast faith in uncertain circumstances. Her ability to trust God's plan without needing all the answers is a powerful model for approaching our faith.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the story of Samson is not just about extraordinary feats and dramatic battles; it serves as an important spiritual lesson on the consequences of personal choices, the importance of divine guidance, and the boundless grace of God. Samson's life reminds us that God's purposes can still be fulfilled even in moments of great personal failure and weakness. His story encourages us to lean not on our understanding but to recognize and rely on the strength that comes from God. It also highlights the significance of responding to God's call with faith and obedience, exemplified by characters like Manoah's wife, who demonstrate unwavering trust in God amidst uncertainty. By studying Samson's life, we learn the value of seeking God's will in our decisions, acknowledging our dependence on His strength, and embracing His grace in our imperfections. We need to reflect on our actions, pursue righteousness, and to trust in God's plan.

## For Discussion

1. How does Samson's reliance on personal strength instead of divine guidance impact his effectiveness as a leader and deliverer?
2. What lessons can we learn from Samson's impulsive nature about the consequences of acting on emotion rather than seeking spiritual wisdom?
3. In what ways does the story of Samson demonstrate the concept of grace, particularly in how God uses flawed individuals to achieve His purposes?
4. How does the reaction of Manoah's wife to divine messages contrast with other characters' responses in the story, and what can we learn from her faith and demeanor?
5. What does the story of Samson teach us about the dangers of compromising with the world, as seen in his relationships with the Philistines?
6. Discuss how Samson's physical strength and spiritual weaknesses provide insights into the true source of power in a believer's life.
7. How might Samson's story have been different if he had cultivated a closer relationship with God from the beginning?
8. What does this story suggest about the importance of community and accountability in spiritual life, considering Samson often acted alone?
9. How does the concept of vengeance in Samson's story align or conflict with New Testament teachings on forgiveness and love for enemies?
10. What can Samson's final act and prayer teach us about redemption and repentance, and how can these themes be applied in our lives today?.