

# A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 14:1-20

Topic

Samson breaks his Nazirite vow when he scoops honey from the carcass of the lion he previously killed

Title

*“Honey Boo-Boo”*

In a memorable *Got Milk?* commercial, a criminal is being interrogated by two detectives. On the table are oh-so-gooey-chewy chocolate Hostess cupcakes. One of the cops says, “Go ahead; take a bite.”

The hungry suspect grabs one and begins to devour the entire cupcake. As he’s clearly struggling to swallow, the cop says, “We can do this the easy way,” while taking a carton of milk out of a paper sack. But then he puts the milk just out of reach and says, smirking, *“Or we can do it the hard way.”*

There are a lot of variations on the “easy way/hard way” decision. There’s a version in *The Lord of the Rings* when Saruman says to Gandalf, “I gave you the chance of aiding me willingly, but you have elected the way of pain!”

For the most part, the Old Testament hero Samson did it the hard way, and it definitely was a way of pain - especially in the end, when he had his eyes gouged-out and was put to work as a beast of burden.

What did he “do” the hard way? He judged Israel against the Philistines, wreaking havoc upon them. We’ll see him kill thirty Philistines, then one thousand, then anywhere from three thousand to seven thousand more.

But because he did it the hard way, along the way his own life was wrecked.

**Samson illustrates the carnal Christian.** Writing to the believers in Corinth, the apostle Paul said, “I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual... but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ... for you are still carnal” (First Corinthians 3:1&3).

Carnal Christians are saved, and can be used by God - **but you don’t want to be one.**

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Be Horrified When Your Carnal Rules Over You, and #2 Be Humbled When God Overrules Your Carnal.

#1 Be Horrified When  
Your Carnal Rules Over You

(v1-3)

The word “carnal” can mean *flesh, fleshly, or pertaining to the body*. In the Bible there is also the connotation that “carnal” involves preferring things that are temporal rather than eternal.

The verse we quoted in First Corinthians goes on to say of the carnal Christian, “you are worldly and living by human standards.”

Another translation says, “you are acting like the people of this world,” indicating their behavior was essentially that of an unsaved person.

Are there really carnal Christians? Paul certainly used the word of believers in the church at Corinth, calling them “brethren.”

But some commentators point out that they were baby Christians who needed to grow, and once they did, they would no longer be called “carnal.”

I can see what they’re saying, but I don’t think it’s unbiblical to identify a mature believer as “carnal” if he or she is, in fact, dominated by their flesh rather than by the indwelling Holy Spirit:

- In some cases, the mature believer is carnal because they have yielded their members to sin - either for a short time, or for a longer time.
- Billy Graham identifies a carnal Christian as having left their first love for Jesus. You’re not committing any particular sin, but you no longer have a passion for the things of God.
- In other cases, more subtle and more prevalent, the mature believer is not sinning, and outwardly seems passionate, but has chosen to walk in the energy of their flesh rather than continuing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you think it’s more accurate, you can call them Christians who are carnal rather than carnal Christians.

Samson was certainly saved. But I think it could be said of him, at the very end of his life, “you are still carnal.”

It all started with a trip down to Timnah.

Jdg 14:1 Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines.

The Philistine oppression of Israel had a different twist than that of the other pagan nations. After subduing Israel, the Philistines lived alongside them, and tried to assimilate them by intermarrying with them.

Samson was a young man at this point - maybe still in his late teens, but more likely early twenty's. We can suppose that Samson had done nothing spectacular up to this point. He traveled openly and unhindered to Timnah and back. The Philistines were not concerned about him.

They hadn't established a threat-level for him yet.

While in Timnah, he “saw a woman,” and wanted her. That was a problem, because God had forbidden intermarriage with the surrounding nations - unless they first converted to Judaism. Samson certainly knew this, but he was thinking temporal thoughts rather than eternal - a sure sign he was carnal.

Today we try hard to restrict believers from marrying nonbelievers. We're told in the Bible to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (Second Corinthians 6:14).

Being unequally yoked, a believer with a nonbeliever, is the hard way. Too bad so many believers rush headlong into those marriages, only to feel the pain later.

Jdg 14:2 So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

Every parent's nightmare. Your son, or your daughter, wants to marry the wrong person.

Mr. And Mrs. Manoah would have the additional crushing disappointment of realizing that the son who had been a Nazirite from the womb, set apart as a hero to deliver Israel from the Philistines, was instead demanding to marry one of them.

Jdg 14:3 Then his father and mother said to him, "*Is there* no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."

They were speaking of the spiritual importance of ritual circumcision - that it kept Israel separate from other nations.

It didn't phase Samson. It was all about what pleased him, not what would please and bring glory to God. It was based on natural attraction, not supernatural leading.

I don't need to point out that Samson was being disrespectful to his parents. He was carnal, through-and-through.

God's boundaries, His restrictions, regarding marriage and human sexuality are for our good, and for His glory. Within monogamous, heterosexual marriage we experience both pleasure *and* joy. There is a spiritual element to marriage that simply cannot be reproduced if we disregard and disobey the Lord.

By giving himself over to his flesh, Samson would never know the joy of a deep and abiding love. He would never have a companion to share his life with.

Samson was called from the womb to deliver Israel from the Philistines. In his first recorded foray into their territory, he didn't challenge them, or throw down their gods, or desecrate their temple.

No, instead he was immediately overcome by the sight of a beautiful Philistine woman.

It's interesting that the emphasis was on what Samson "saw." I'm sure he "saw" a lot of beautiful women in his life, and indulged in their pleasures. How ironic that he would end his life with his eyes gouged out.

Do you think it was worth it, in the end?

## #2 Be Humbled When God Overrules Your Carnal

(v4-20)

Now is as good a time as any to correct a common misconception about Samson. **He wasn't muscle-bound.** His strength didn't come from being a gym-rat. It was supernatural.

Otherwise, why were the Philistines always trying to figure out its source?

He was an ordinary looking Jewish man who was empowered by God to do extraordinary feats of strength.

Before we see one of them, the writer has an insight for us to consider.

Jdg 14:4 But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD - that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

There's a lot of theology packed into that comment. We can see God's sovereignty at work alongside of man's free will, with God's providence thrown in.

It's also very simple. God stirred-up Samson to move against the Philistines; but when Samson got to Timnah, his flesh took over, and deliverance from the Philistines would have to happen the hard way.

I'm saying God had a plan to move against the Philistines, but it certainly did not involve Samson marrying one of them. In His sovereignty, God provided for His plan another way, without violating Samson's free will.

Jdg 14:5 So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah...

With the mention of "vineyards," maybe we should refresh ourselves concerning the lifestyle of a Nazirite.

Num 6:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD,

Num 6:3 he shall separate himself from wine and *similar* drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from *similar* drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins.

Num 6:4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.

Num 6:5 'All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. *Then* he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

Num 6:6 All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body.

Samson should not have been anywhere near “the vineyards of Timnah.” It almost reads like he went there for wine tasting (if they did that kind of thing).

Jdg 14:5 So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now *to his* surprise, a young lion *came* roaring against him.

Jdg 14:6 And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though *he had* nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

“Young” means a lion in the prime of its life. These were what we today identify as Asiatic lions. There aren't any in the Promised Land currently, but they were plentiful in Bible times.



Samson was surprised, but he easily prevailed as the Spirit empowered him.

Might this have been a warning to Samson? A roaring lion seeking to devour him... He would not have been in that situation had he honored his vows.

He was empowered to defeat the lion... If the Spirit could strengthen Samson physically against so fierce a foe, could He not also give him victory over his flesh?

Sadly, Samson missed the lesson:

Jdg 14:6 ... But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

He couldn't tell them without admitting he had been near or in a vineyard. His amazing exploit must be kept secret.

Jdg 14:7 Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

This means they made the customary arrangements for a wedding.

Jdg 14:8 After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey *were* in the carcass of the lion.

Strike two. A Nazirite was to avoid dead bodies, even those of animals. Maybe if he could just see it, and not touch it...

Ah, but there within the carcass was irresistible honey.

If we build on the New Testament symbolism of Satan being the roaring lion seeking to devour, we see that even when we think he's been beaten, he remains dangerous. There are some places you just should not go; some situations you just should not be in.

Jdg 14:9 He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave *some* to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

Samson must have thought that what his parents didn't know wouldn't hurt them. Secrets and lies, sneaking around, are works of the flesh.

Jdg 14:10 So his father went down to the woman. And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so.

Jdg 14:11 And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

This was all very typical - a week long feast that preceded the wedding.

Samson had brought no friends of the bridegroom. His side of the aisle was empty, so thirty Philistines were invited.

I think it's sad Samson had no friends. No one wanted to be around him.

Jdg 14:12 Then Samson said to them, "Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing.

Jdg 14:13 But if you cannot explain *it* to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing." And they said to him, "Pose your riddle, that we may hear it."

Riddles were more of a thing in ancient cultures than they are today. J.R.R. Tolkien treats the riddle game between Bilbo and Gollum as if it were something almost sacred.

Let's call Samson's riddle, *The Lion, the Wife, and the Wardrobe*.

Jdg 14:14 So he said to them: "Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet." Now for three days they could not explain the riddle.

It reminds you of Bilbo asking Gollum, "What is in my pocket." It wasn't a riddle in the truest sense because it couldn't be guessed.

Jdg 14:15 But it came to pass on the seventh day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? *Is that not so?*"

In chapter fifteen we'll see the Philistines act on this threat, burning her and her father with fire.

Jdg 14:16 Then Samson's wife wept on him, and said, "You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained *it* to me." And he said to her, "Look, I have not explained *it* to my father or my mother; so should I explain *it* to you?"

Jdg 14:17 Now she had wept on him the seven days while their feast lasted. And it happened on the seventh day that he told her, because she pressed him so much. Then she explained the riddle to the sons of her people.

The flesh is simultaneously weak and strong:

- It was strong enough so that Samson easily denied his Nazirite vow for wine and honey.
- It was weak enough that a man who could kill a lion with his bare hands could not withstand a nagging woman.

Jdg 14:18 So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down: "What *is* sweeter than honey? And what *is* stronger than a lion?" And he said to them: "If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have solved my riddle!"

Samson wasn't exactly romantic. "Heifer" doesn't rank high as a term of endearment.

"Plowed with my heifer" was a common idiom to describe misusing something or someone, since you normally plowed with oxen.

Jdg 14:19 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes *of clothing* to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father's house.

Apparently Old Navy was closed, so Samson traveled to another town and killed thirty Philistines for their wardrobe.

His “anger was aroused.” This was not a righteous anger against their domination of Israel. It was Samson’s own personal anger - a sure symptom of the flesh dominating him.

I think it was another subtle nudge from God. Samson ought to have been representing God and His wrath against the oppressors. Instead Samson was overcome by petty emotions unworthy of a servant of God.

Jdg 14:20 And Samson's wife was *given* to his companion, who had been his best man.

As I said earlier, Samson had no real companion to act as his “best man.” We have to therefore assume this “companion” was one of the Philistines who had attended the feast.

God was “seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines,” in order to “begin to deliver” Israel from their domination.

The Spirit stirred Samson to go down into Philistine territory. What was God’s plan? How was He going to utilize Samson?

We’ll never know, because Samson got sidetracked by his flesh when he “saw” a beautiful Philistine woman and wanted to marry her - a thing forbidden in God’s Law.

Things began to cascade as Samson went into a vineyard, then touched a carcass - breaking two of the three lifestyle vows of a Nazirite.

(We aren’t told Samson drank wine at the feast, but I think we all know that he did).

The Nazirite vow was meant to be an outward show of inward devotion. While we no longer take the vow, it does have New Testament counterparts.

The Nazirite was to avoid everything concerning grapes, which in that culture included wine and (later) strong drink. The Christian is to remain sober. That doesn't just mean you don't get drunk. It means we have a sober, realistic, eternal mindset and lifestyle.

The apostle Peter said, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (First Peter 5:8).

The Nazirite was to never cut his or her hair. This speaks to us of being submitted to God, because in the Bible hair and head covering was a symbol of submission to authority. We are to look like, and live like, we are submitted to the authority of God.

James wrote, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (4:7).

The Nazirite was to avoid death. I think the spiritual counterpart here is our call to remain separate from the world. We are, to use the well-worn phrase, to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Samson was to be a life-long Nazirite. We are to be living sacrifices, offering ourselves to God for His constant use.

Quoting the Old Testament, the apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE, SAYS THE LORD. DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN, AND I WILL RECEIVE YOU" (Second Corinthians 6:17)

God was merciful to warn Samson about his sin, and to show him he could overcome it. If Samson could defeat the roaring lion, he could defeat the beast within - his flesh.

But Samson chose the temporal over the eternal. He remained carnal.

Here's the amazing grace of it all: **God used Samson despite all that.**

It's not something to brag about; it is, in fact, humbling. It was a kindness on God's part that ought to have led Samson to repentance.

Samson sinned, but God's grace abounded. The apostle Paul once asked, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" His answer:

Rom 6:2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Earlier I mentioned that a Christian is not to be unequally yoked with a nonbeliever. I said that too many believers ignore that, to their own pain.

But guess what: Sometimes the nonbeliever gets saved. Hallelujah. Does that mean it was God's will all along?

No; that would be an example of continuing in sin so that grace might abound. The fact God is gracious doesn't excuse sin.

If you have sinned... Or if you are in sin right now... Or if you've left your first love... Or if you having begun in the Spirit are trying to live the Christian life in the energy of your flesh... God's grace abounds to you.

The question for each of us today, who are Christians, is this: "Have I chosen the easy way, or the hard way?"

Sin is the hard way. Trying to walk in the energy of the flesh is the hard way. If God still uses me while I'm choosing the hard way, I should not confuse that for His approval. It's just His mercy and grace seeking to lead me to repentance. I should be humbled.

If I am sober, and submitted, and separated, then the roaring lion who seeks to devour me - Satan - must flee. He'll keep coming back, but I already have everything I need in Christ to defeat him.