

## SAMSON

### *Judges 14*

There is a very practical lesson in this lesson for every age, and the story of Samson himself illustrates the danger of carelessness and self-confidence, and our constant need of the Lord's guidance and protection. All the classes should be taught that Samson's strength was in his hair, and even the little ones can get some idea of the meaning of Samson's riddle. There is happiness in doing right.

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#### Doctrinal Points

*Samson represents the power of the Lord in our outward life.*

*The Word is in its power in the sense of the letter.*

*The Philistines represent knowing spiritual truth but not caring to live according to it. This is what is called "faith alone."*

*There is no real strength apart from love in the heart.*

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#### Notes for Parents

Almost everyone thinks of Samson as a synonym for strength and Delilah for treachery, but many have not read the whole story of Samson and so do not know that he had his strength only so long as he obeyed the Lord, and that if he had not yielded to his lower desires, he could not have been overcome by Delilah's wiles.

The last verse of the book of Judges gives us the key to the meaning of the whole book, as well as of the story of Samson: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." You may have heard people say, "If I do what I think is right, that is all that can be expected of me." That *sounds* reasonable, but it is really just an excuse for doing what we want to do without testing our desires and thoughts by the Lord's truth. We should have a king—the Lord Jesus Christ—by whose laws we intend to be governed. When each man is a law

unto himself, there is anarchy, and only trouble and conflict result.

Samson was a Nazarite, a man set apart for the service of God. The principal sign of a Nazarite was that he never cut his hair. As long as Samson kept this sign, the Lord could be with him and give him strength to overcome any enemy. So his strength was in his hair. The first victory given him—over a lion—means to us that the Lord can give us strength to resist any temptation, and the honey he afterward found in the carcass represents the happiness which comes from overcoming temptation. Anyone who steadily tries to learn truth from the Word and to obey the commandments has had this experience and knows the answer to Samson’s riddle. Our strength is in keeping the letter of the law of the Lord, which is the outmost form of the Lord’s truth, as the hair is the outmost manifestation of the body’s life.

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### Primary

Teach the children the general background of the book of Judges and the difference between a Judge and a national leader or king. They should also learn what a Nazarite was—the word means “separated”—and why Samson’s strength left him when his hair was cut. Tell the whole story of Samson briefly.

Who gave the Israelites power over their enemies?

After Joshua died, the people forgot this.

They thought they were strong and wise enough to get along without the Lord.

So their enemies became strong again and one by one attacked them.

When real trouble came, the Israelites always called on the Lord for help.

Each time He raised up someone to lead them against the attacking enemy.

These leaders were called Judges.

At the time of our lesson the Philistines had gained control of Israel.

The Judge the Lord raised up was Samson.

The Philistines, who lived in the Holy Land along the seacoast, had become so strong that the Israelites were having to do just what the Philistines told them to do. Before Samson was born the Lord had told his mother and father that he was to be a Nazarite, which meant a man singled out to serve the Lord in a special way. The principal sign of a Nazarite was that he allowed his hair and beard to grow, and never cut or trimmed them.

The Lord could give Samson great strength as long as he kept this rule. So his strength was in his hair.

Why did he go into the Philistine country?

What feat of strength did he perform on the way?

What did he find the next time he went down?

What riddle did he ask the Philistines?

Samson's wife coaxed the answer from him and then told her people the answer.

Samson kept his promise, but he was very angry.

From that time on he did many great deeds against the Philistines.

Finally, however, Delilah found out where his great strength lay, and she cut off his hair while he slept.

The Philistines took him prisoner and put out his eyes. But after a while his hair grew again and his strength came back. He did not tell the Philistines that he was strong again. Then one day when a great crowd of Philistines were gathered in one of their temples, and they brought Samson in so that they could enjoy making fun of him, he pushed down the pillars of the temple and the roof fell in and killed them all. Samson knew he would be killed with them, and he was. But he was doing his people a final great service.

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### Junior

Remind the Juniors that they heard of the Philistines in our lesson about Isaac and Abimelech, and show them the Philistine country on a map. Then point out the territory of Dan from which Samson came. They will be interested in Samson's feats of strength. The teacher should list them beforehand and tell them to the class. They are all found in chapters 14, 15, and 16.

All through the conquest of the Holy Land, the Lord had performed miracles to help the Israelites. You remember how He had told Joshua to study and obey the Law continually if he wished to succeed. Joshua obeyed this charge, but after he died the people forgot it. Read Judges 2:6-13. The Lord could not be with them when they ceased to obey Him, and so the enemies in the land began to gain strength again. The Israelites were so settled in their new homes and busy with their private affairs that they imagined they were wise and strong enough to get along without paying any

attention to the law of the Lord. The last verse of the book of Judges shows what their fault was: “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The Lord should be our king, and we should direct our lives according to His commandments.

Scattered in their homes throughout the country, the Israelites were really weak instead of strong, and after a while here and there an enemy would begin to annoy them, then to oppress them, and finally to rule them completely. When this happened, the Israelites always at last called on the Lord for help. And the Lord always helped them, just as He always helps us when we are ready to acknowledge our own weakness and turn to Him. In the part of the country where the enemy was attacking, the Lord would raise up some strong person to lead the people of that region against that particular enemy. These leaders were called Judges, and the book of Judges tells about them.

At the time of this lesson the Israelites in the southwestern part of the land had fallen under the dominion of the Philistines, who lived along the coast of the Mediterranean. Look at a map and see where they lived and also where the tribe of Dan was settled. Your teacher can show you the town of Zorah near the border of Judah, and southwest of it the town of Timnath. Zorah belonged to Dan, and Timnath was a town of the Philistines. Chapter 13 tells us how an angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, a man of Zorah, and promised her a son, who should begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. The woman called her husband and they made a sacrifice to the Lord and saw the angel ascend in the flame from their altar; so they knew the message was from the Lord. The angel had told them that the child must be brought up as a Nazarite; that is, a man especially dedicated to the service of the Lord. The signs of a Nazarite were that he should not touch wine or strong drink, and that he should never cut his hair. In due time the child was born and named Samson.

When he grew up, what did he want to do which displeased his parents?

What threatened Samson as they went down to Timnath?

How did Samson kill the lion?

What did he find when he came down the second time?

What riddle did he ask the Philistines?

How did they finally get the answer?

How did Samson keep his bargain?

Chapter 15 tells further exploits of Samson. If you read it, you will see what good reason the Philistines had to fear and hate him. They knew he had more than human strength, and they tried to trap him through the woman he loved, as they had done the first time. The woman who betrayed Samson this second time was a Philistine named Delilah. She coaxed Samson to tell her why he was so strong, and he finally was persuaded to tell her. As long as Samson was faithful to his Nazariteship and did not cut his hair, the Lord could give him strength. One night while Samson was asleep, Delilah cut his hair. To learn what happened when he awoke and the rest of his story, read Judges 16:20-31.

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### Intermediate

The correspondence of the tribe of Dan, of the Philistines, and of Samson and his hair are basic for this class. They will be interested also in the meaning of Samson's riddle, which can be illustrated from their own experience.

After Joshua there was no one ruler over all Israel and therefore no general organization of their forces. But whenever any enemy in any part of the land became so oppressive that the Israelites turned again to the Lord for help, the Lord would raise up someone strong from one of the tribes in that region to lead them in their resistance. These local leaders were called Judges, and they picture particular truths called to our minds by the Lord to strengthen us against particular temptations.

If we rely on the Lord and obey Him, He will always give us strength to conquer in temptation. Our troubles come from the weakness of our faith in the Lord and not from the strength of the evils in us. When the Israelites obeyed the Lord, His power was with them and their enemies became weak. The story of Samson teaches this lesson. So long as he obeyed the Lord he was given

strength to meet many enemies and overcame each of them single-handed, as he overcame the lion in our chapter. When he let his lower desires beguile him, he lost his strength. Read chapter 13 to learn of his birth and the conditions he was told to observe. He came from the tribe of Dan, which represents among other things the acknowledgment of the truth of revelation.

Samson represents simple obedience to the letter of the Word. He was to have nothing to do with wine and strong drink—which symbolize an intellectual grasp of the truth—and he was to let his hair grow. The hair, which has the least life of any part of the body, pictures what is most external: in this case, the letter of the Word. We learn from Samson that if we obey even the literal commands of the Word from a motive of obedience to the Lord, we shall have strength to meet and overcome every enemy which threatens us.

Swedenborg tells us that the Philistines—the only enemy never fully conquered by Israel at one time or another—picture an affection for learning the truth without any desire to live according to it. This is one of our persistent enemies—the temptation to be satisfied with knowing what is right. We go to Sunday school, for example, and are interested in the lesson. What do we do with it when we go home? How far do we really apply it in our own life?

Samson wanted a Philistine wife. He was tempted by this desire for knowledge for its own sake. It was of the Lord's providence, as we see in verse 4 of our chapter, that he was allowed to make this attempt. The young lion in the Philistine vineyard pictures the powerful temptation which is hidden in this superficial intellectual approach to life. Samson overcame the lion, and afterward found honey in its carcass. Honey, a wholesome and natural sweet, is a symbol of the delight which comes from doing what is right. The riddle which the Philistines could not solve without Samson's help asks, spiritually: "Is it possible to draw good out of trial, happiness out of struggle?" Only those who use the strength the Lord gives them to overcome their temptations really know the answer.

In spite of Samson's experience of the treachery of the Philis-

tines, he still desired a Philistine wife. The story of Samson and Delilah, found in chapter 16, is so powerful that Delilah has come to be recognized as the symbol of anything which beguiles in order to betray. The thing which betrays us more than any other is the love of learning without doing. So long as Samson's hair was uncut, no Philistine bonds could hold him. So long as we keep the commandments, we are safe. But once we reject the commandments, evil captures us, blinds us to the right, and eventually destroys us. Read chapter 16.

*Basic Correspondences*

- the Judges = particular truths called to our minds by the Lord to strengthen us against particular temptations
- Samson = judgment, and in a good sense acknowledgment of the truth of revelation
- the Philistines = the affection for knowing the truth without any desire to live according to it
- the hair = the outmost form of life; the letter of the Word
- a lion = power
- honey = sweetness, or the delight which comes in doing right

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**Senior**

The story of Samson should be used to put the Seniors on their guard against two things: the folly of overconfidence in one's own goodness and spiritual strength, and the ever-present danger of being beguiled by the allurements of the world about us and the reasonings in favor of them. Stress also the importance of the letter of the Word.

We are told in Judges 2:7 that the Israelites served the Lord all the days of Joshua and of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen the wonderful works of the Lord in the wilderness journey and in the conquest. Then they began to mingle with the evil people in the land whom, you remember, they had not wholly

conquered, and finally even to worship their gods. When we are just beginning the regenerate life, we are eager and enthusiastic in serving the Lord; but after we think we are established in the new pattern, we are liable to become self-satisfied and careless, to give way a little here and there to the pressure of worldly thinking and selfish feeling. Our inner spiritual enemies gain strength and threaten to resume control of our character.

The Judges, who were raised up from time to time by the Lord in one or another part of the land, represent particular truths which the Lord recalls to our minds in time of need to strengthen and lead us in our resistance to particular temptations. The period of the Judges pictures a time of vacillation in our lives before we have learned through experience the extent of our own weakness and our need of continual direction by the Lord.

The enemy now threatening Israel in the southwestern part of the country was the Philistines, and Samson—the Judge in this story—was of the tribe of Dan. Dan in a good sense represents the affirmation and acknowledgment that we should believe in God and live a good life. Samson was also a Nazarite, a man “separated” or set apart for special service of the Lord. The signs of Nazarite-ship were to abstain from wine and strong drink and not to cut the hair. As long as these signs were observed, the Lord could be with the man. A fuller explanation of this will be found in the quotation at the end of this lesson. The Philistines represent the affection for knowing the truth without any desire to live according to it. So we can easily see why Samson of the tribe of Dan was the chosen Judge.

The story of Samson is a very simple and striking one. Samson’s strength was in his hair: that is, in obedience to the law which had been laid down for his life. His was a simple character. Temptation came to him in the form of two women—both Philistines. Women represent the will side of our lives. In both cases Samson’s integrity was worn down by repeated appeals to his affections.

The lion which attacked him when Samson first went down into the Philistine country pictures the strength of the temptation to

which he was subjecting himself. His victory over the lion was given to show him that it was possible for him with the Lord's help to withstand temptation, and his finding the honey in the carcass of the lion the second time he came down was a reminder that overcoming temptation always brings satisfaction. Honey is a symbol of delight in doing right. Heaven is a state in which we both know the truth and delight in living according to it. So the Holy Land is described as a land "flowing with milk and honey." Samson should have learned his lesson from this experience and from the events which follow in the rest of our chapter.

But we remember that later he yielded again, with far more serious results. We all know the story of Samson and Delilah, which is told in chapter 16. Delilah beguiled him into disclosing to her the secret of his strength and cut off his hair while he slept. Then the Philistines captured him and put out his eyes. When we allow ourselves to be betrayed into giving up obedience to the commandments in their letter, we fall captive to false reasonings of every kind and lose our power to see what is truly right and wrong. There is much of this confusion in the world today simply because some people are being taught that the Bible is the product of men and that the commandments were written for an earlier time and are not binding upon "modern" men and women. A whole structure of philosophy and psychology has been built up, like the temple of Dagon the fish-god in Philistia, in honor of the human intellect and its achievements. Those who accept this philosophy make sport of the "simple-minded" people who still believe in the Word of God, just as the Philistines made sport of the blind Samson.

But Samson's hair began to grow again. The moment we see our folly and return to the acceptance of the commandments as our rule of life and exert ourselves to keep them again, the very central pillars of the house of Dagon are knocked out, and the whole structure comes tumbling down.

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### Adult

Good discussion topics are the meaning of the period of the Judges, Samson's

riddle, Samson's strength and weakness, and the Philistine temptation. Swedenborg's teaching that the letter of the Word is the "basis, containant, and support" of all our spiritual knowledge and power is one which we particularly need.

The Israelites, before they moved out to take possession of their allotted homes in the Holy Land, had been charged by Joshua to continue in their own territories the fight against the enemies who remained there, and to root them out. The first chapter of the book of Judges tells us how far short all the tribes fell of fulfilling this charge. Only one individual—Caleb—seems to have made a complete conquest of his inheritance. In AE 768<sup>21</sup> we learn that Caleb represents "those who are to be introduced into the church." (In AC 2909 we find a brief and very interesting summary of the history of Hebron and its meaning.) The rest of the people were too much interested in making themselves comfortable in their new homes to worry about enemies who appeared to be no longer threatening. The book of Judges teaches us that even after we have begun to regenerate, we cannot assume that we have reached a state in which we can settle down confident of our own spiritual security. Read Matthew 24:43. Self-confidence always betrays us. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) Our inner foes gain strength, and we suddenly find ourselves in the throes of temptation again. It may take us some time to learn this lesson. The period of the Judges lasted about two hundred years. We recall that the Judges were not rulers of the whole people but local leaders raised up by the Lord to meet the various enemies in one part of the country or another. They represent particular truths called to our attention by the Lord to help us fight particular temptations. We have already studied Deborah, Gideon, and Jephthah.

Our lesson today is about Samson, one of the Judges, and his exploits against the Philistines. The Philistines, as we recall from our lesson on Isaac and Abimelech, were a people who lived along the western border of the Holy Land. Authorities differ as to their origin. One suggests that they were pirates of ancient Aryan stock,

who forced themselves upon the Canaanites and settled permanently in the land. Genesis 10:14 makes them descendants of Ham, and they were a settled people in the time of Abraham. Abraham and Isaac both spent some time in the Philistine country and made treaties with them. At the time of the Exodus the Israelites were not allowed to go by the “way of the Philistines” (Exodus 13:17). From time to time throughout the history of Israel, the Philistines caused trouble. The Israelites often chastised them and even captured some of their strong cities, but never wholly overcame them. The story suggests an ever-present enemy to our spiritual peace, one with whom we are often tempted to compromise and against whom we must always be on our guard.

Swedenborg leaves us in no doubt as to what this enemy is. The Philistines, he says, represent those who are in the “knowledge of the knowledges of faith and charity,” those in faith separated from charity, with whom “the knowledge of the knowledges of faith is the principal thing, but not a life according to it; consequently those who teach and believe that faith alone saves” (AC 8093). The doctrine of faith alone was a widely accepted doctrine of the Protestant Reformation. Even Luther felt forced to adopt it in order to have a basis for separation from the Roman system, and in the course of time apparently argued himself into a belief in it. It has wrought tremendous havoc in the Christian world, and Swedenborg has much to say of its effects both in this world and in the spiritual world. Practically, it means that it makes no difference what we do so long as we acknowledge Christ and look to Him for salvation. We sometimes hear it said that this doctrine is no longer held today, but this is not true. Many still hold it even in its bald general form. But further than this, there are many less obvious manifestations of it, and none of us is wholly free from some form of it. For instance, whenever we go to church and come away critical of others and not equally dissatisfied with ourselves, we may know that the Philistines are upon us. Self-righteousness and the pride of self-intelligence are the earmarks of faith alone. For the more we know of the Lord and His ways, the more conscious we

should be of our own shortcomings; if we are not, it is a sign that we are not genuinely trying to live the truth we learn, that we are satisfied to know without doing. This is the Philistine temptation.

It is significant that Samson, the Judge raised up against the Philistines, was from the tribe of Dan, for Dan represents the “affirmation and acknowledgment” that we should believe in God and live a good life, which “is the first general principle with the man who is being regenerated.” Samson won notable victories over the Philistines. In SS 49<sup>2</sup> Swedenborg says: “The Lord’s power from the ultimate things of truth was represented by the Nazirites in the Jewish Church; and by Samson, of whom it is said that he was a Nazirite from his mother’s womb, and that his power lay in his hair.” AE 619<sup>18</sup> and AE 1086<sup>2</sup> elaborate this idea, with particular reference to Samson, and specify the sense of the letter of the Word as the ultimate in which the power of divine truth resides. Samson was tempted to ally himself with the Philistines, and was more than once overcome by them. In the same way, our affection for knowledge often leads us astray. We learn a great many things without due thought as to the use this knowledge should perform. This temptation is like the young lion which threatened Samson, and if we overcome it, we are given the joy pictured by the honey which Samson found in the carcass of the lion. This is a joy which comes only from carrying out in life the truth we learn. The Philistines could never have guessed Samson’s riddle. No one who is not trying to do right can believe that he would find pleasure in it. Samson fell as a result of his desire for a wife from among the Philistines. We may think he was easily beguiled, but how often we ourselves feel the attraction of “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” and take the easy way instead of the right way!

All the details of the story of Samson are interesting in their correspondence and useful in adding point to the lesson. But the principal truth with which we should be impressed is the fact that Samson’s power was in his hair. The hair corresponds to the “ultimates of the Divine truth,” and thus to the sense of the letter of the Word in which the Lord’s power is in its fullness. It was on

account of this correspondence that the Israelites were led to think of baldness as a disgrace; that the children who called Elisha “thou baldhead” were torn by bears; that the prophets, including John the Baptist, wore hairy garments; and that the Lord’s hair is described so beautifully in the vision of John in Revelation 1:14. The letter of the Word is our only means of conjunction with the Lord and of receiving power from Him. It is through the knowledge of the letter of the Word which we store in our minds that the Lord can speak to us; it is through our reading of the Word that His presence and power can come into our daily lives. The Lord in His Second Coming has opened the Word and made it possible for us by prayerful study and constant application in our lives to understand more and more of the spiritual and celestial things which lie within it. But it is still the letter of the Word which is “the basis, containant, and support” of all we learn. We cannot substitute the spiritual sense for the letter, as Swedenborg himself tells us more than once. Samson’s strength went from him when his hair was shaved. So his story contains a special warning for us of the New Church. We should not allow our delight in the new knowledge which is given us to beguile us into becoming separated from the source of all our spiritual strength.

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#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Doctrine of the Holy Scripture*, n. 49: “The power of Divine truth is directed especially against falsities and evils, thus against the hells. The fight against these must be waged by means of truths from the sense of the letter of the Word. Moreover it is by means of the truths in a man that the Lord has the power to save him; for man is reformed and regenerated and is at the same time taken out of hell and introduced into heaven, by means of truths from the sense of the letter of the Word . . . The Lord’s power from the ultimate things of truth was represented by the Nazirites in the Jewish Church; and by Samson, of whom it is said that he was a Nazirite from his mother’s womb, and that his power lay in his hair . . . No one can know why the Naziriteship (by which is meant the hair) was instituted, or whence it came that Samson’s strength was from the hair, unless he knows what is signified in the Word by the ‘head.’ The ‘head’ signifies the heavenly wisdom which angels and men

have from the Lord by means of Divine truth; consequently the ‘hair of the head’ signifies heavenly wisdom in ultimate things, and also Divine truth in ultimate things . . . In short, the reason why the power of Divine truth or of the Word is in the sense of the letter, is that there the Word is in its fullness; and it is also because in that sense are, at the same time and together [*simul*], the angels of both the Lord’s kingdoms and men on earth.”

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### Suggestion Questions on the Lesson

- J. What mistake did the Israelites make after Joshua’s death? *forgot God*
- J. What was the result? *enemies rose up*
- P. How did the Lord help them when they turned to Him? *Judges*
- J. What tribe did Samson belong to? *Dan*
- P. What were his parents told he should be? *Nazarite*
- P. What was the special sign of a Nazarite? *uncut hair*
- J. What enemy was threatening Israel in Samson’s part of the country?  
*Philistines*
- P. What was the secret of Samson’s strength? *his hair*
- J. What was his weakness? *women, pride*
- P. What feat of strength did he perform when he first went into Philistia?  
*killed lion*
- P. What did he find the second time he went down? *honey*
- J. What riddle did he ask the Philistines? *“Out of the eater . . .”*
- J. What can you tell about Samson’s later life and his death? *hair cut, blinded . . .*
- I. What do the Philistines represent? *desire to know truth but not live according to it*
- I. What is meant by Samson’s strength being in his hair? *power in ultimates*
- S. What does Samson’s riddle teach us? *happiness can come from struggle*