

## Samson

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### Judges 13

#### Samson's Life, and Conflicts with the Philistines.—Ch. 13–16.

While Jephthah, in the power of God, was delivering the tribes on the east of the Jordan from the oppression of the Ammonites, the oppression on the part of the Philistines continued uninterruptedly for forty years in the land to the west of the Jordan (Judges 13:1), and probably increased more and more after the disastrous war during the closing years of the high-priesthood of Eli, in which the Israelites suffered a sad defeat, and even lost the ark of the covenant, which was taken by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4). But even during this period, Jehovah the God of Israel did not leave himself without witness, either in the case of His enemies the Philistines, or in that of His people Israel. The triumphant delight of the Philistines at the capture of the ark was soon changed into great and mortal terror, when Dagon their idol had fallen down from its place before the ark of God and was lying upon the threshold of its temple with broken head and arms; and the inhabitants of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, to which the ark was taken, were so severely smitten with boils by the hand of Jehovah, that the princes of the Philistines felt constrained to send the ark, which brought nothing but harm to their people, back into the land of the Israelites, and with it a trespass-offering (1 Sam. 5–6). At this time the Lord had also raised up a hero for His people in the person of *Samson*, whose deeds were to prove to the Israelites and Philistines that the God of Israel still possessed the power to help His people and smite His foes.

The life and acts of *Samson*, who was to begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, and who judged Israel for twenty years under the rule of the Philistines (Judges 13:5 and 15:20), are described in Judges 13–16 with an elaborate fulness which seems quite out of proportion to the help and deliverance which

he brought to his people. His birth was foretold to his parents by an appearance of the angel of the Lord, and the boy was set apart as a Nazarite from his mother's womb. When he had grown up, the Spirit of Jehovah began to drive him to seek occasions for showing the Philistines his marvellous strength, and to inflict severe blows upon them in a series of wonderful feats, until at length he was seduced by the bewitching Delilah to make known to her the secret of his supernatural strength, and was betrayed by her into the power of the Philistines, who deprived him of the sight of his eyes, and compelled him to perform the hardest and most degraded kinds of slave-labour. From this he was only able to escape by bringing about his own death, which he did in such a manner that his enemies were unable to triumph over him, since he killed more of them at his death than he had killed during the whole of his life before. And whilst the small results that followed from the acts of this hero of God do not answer the expectations that might naturally be formed from the miraculous announcement of his birth, the nature of the acts which he performed appears still less to be such as we should expect from a hero impelled by the Spirit of God. His actions not only bear the stamp of adventure, foolhardiness, and wilfulness, when looked at outwardly, but they are almost all associated with love affairs; so that it looks as if Samson had dishonoured and fooled away the gift entrusted to him, by making it subservient to his sensual lusts, and thus had prepared the way for his own ruin, without bringing any essential help to his people. "The man who carried the gates of Gaza up to the top of the mountain was the slave of a woman, to whom he frivolously betrayed the strength of his Nazarite locks. These locks grew once more, and his strength returned, but only to bring death at the same time to himself and his foes" (*Ziegler*). Are we to discern in such a character as this a warrior of the Lord? Can Samson, the promised son of a barren woman, a Nazarite from his birth, be the head and flower of the Judges? We do not pretend to answer these questions in the affirmative; and to justify

this view we start from the fact, which *Ewald* and *Diestel* both admit to be historical, that the deep earnest background of Samson's nature is to be sought for in his Nazarite condition, or rather that it is in this that the distinctive significance of his character and of his life and deeds as judge all culminates. The Nazarite was not indeed what *Bertheau* supposes him to have been, "a man separated from human pursuits and turmoil;" but the significance of the Nazarite condition was to be found in a consecration of the life to God, which had its roots in living faith, and its outward manifestations negatively, in abstinence from everything unclean, from drinking wine, and even from fruit of the vine of every description, and positively, in wearing the hair uncut. In the case of Samson this consecration of the life to God was not an act of his own free will, or a vow voluntarily taken; but it was imposed upon him by divine command from his conception and birth. As a Nazarite, i.e., as a person vowed to the Lord, he was to begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines; and the bodily sign of his Nazarite condition—namely, the hair of his head that had never been touched by the scissors—was the vehicle of his supernatural strength with which he smote the Philistines. In Samson the Nazarite, however, not only did the Lord design to set before His people a man towering above the fallen generation in heroic strength, through his firm faith in and confident reliance upon the gift of God committed to him, opening up before it the prospect of a renewal of its own strength, that by this type he might arouse such strength and ability as were still slumbering in the nation; but Samson was to exhibit to his age generally a picture on the one hand of the strength which the people of God might acquire to overcome their strongest foes through faithful submission to the Lord their God, and on the other hand of the weakness into which they had sunk through unfaithfulness to the covenant and intercourse with the heathen. And it is in this typical character of Samson and his deeds that we find the head and flower of the institution of judge in Israel.

The judges whom Jehovah raised up in the interval between Joshua and Samuel were neither military commanders nor governors of the nation; nor were they authorities instituted by God and invested with the government of the state. They were not even chosen from the heads of the nation, but were called by the Lord out of the midst of their brethren to be the deliverers of the nation, either through His Spirit which came upon them, or through prophets and extraordinary manifestations of God; and the influence which they exerted, after the conquest and humiliation of the foe and up to the time of their death, upon the government of the nation and its affairs in general, was not the result of any official rank, but simply the fruit and consequence of their personal ability, and therefore extended for the most part only to those tribes to whom they had brought deliverance from the oppression of their foes. The tribes of Israel did not want any common secular ruler to fulfil the task that devolved upon the nation at that time (see pp. 172f.). God therefore raised up even the judges only in times of distress and trouble. For their appearance and work were simply intended to manifest the power which the Lord could confer upon His people through His spirit, and were designed, on the one hand, to encourage Israel to turn seriously to its God, and by holding fast to His covenant to obtain the power to conquer all its foes; and, on the other hand, to alarm their enemies, that they might not attribute to their idols the power which they possessed to subjugate the Israelites, but might learn to fear the omnipotence of the true God. This divine power which was displayed by the judges culminated in Samson. When the Spirit of God came upon him, he performed such mighty deeds as made the haughty Philistines feel the omnipotence of Jehovah. And this power he possessed by virtue of his condition as a Nazarite, because he had been vowed or dedicated to the Lord from his mother's womb, so long as he remained faithful to the vow that had been imposed upon him. But just as his strength depended upon the faithful observance of his vow, so his weakness

became apparent in his natural character, particularly in his intrigues with the daughters of the Philistines; and in this weakness there was reflected the natural character of the nation generally, and of its constant disposition to fraternize with the heathen. Love to a Philistine woman in Timnath not only supplied Samson with the first occasion to exhibit his heroic strength to the Philistines, but involved him in a series of conflicts in which he inflicted severe blows upon the uncircumcised. This impulse to fight against the Philistines came from Jehovah (Judges 14:4), and in these conflicts Jehovah assisted him with the power of His Spirit, and even opened up a fountain of water for him at Lehi in the midst of his severe fight, for the purpose of reviving his exhausted strength (Judges 15:19). On the other hand, in his intercourse with the harlot at Gaza, and his love affair with Delilah, he trod ways of the flesh which led to his ruin. In his destruction, which was brought about by his forfeiture of the pledge of the divine gift entrusted to him, the insufficiency of the judgeship in itself to procure for the people of God supremacy over their foes became fully manifest; so that the weakness of the judgeship culminated in Samson as well as its strength. The power of the Spirit of God, bestowed upon the judges for the deliverance of their people, was overpowered by the might of the flesh lusting against the spirit.

This special call received from God will explain the peculiarities observable in the acts which he performed,—not only the smallness of the outward results of his heroic acts, but the character of adventurous boldness by which they were distinguished. Although he had been set apart as a Nazarite from his mother's womb, he was not to complete the deliverance of his people from the hands of the Philistines, but simply to commence, it, i.e., to show to the people, by the manifestation of supernatural heroic power, the possibility of deliverance, or to exhibit the strength with which a man could slay a thousand foes. To answer this purpose, it was necessary that the acts of Samson should differ from those of the judges who fought at

the head of military forces, and should exhibit the stamp of confidence and boldness in the full consciousness of possession divine and invincible power.

But whilst the spirit which prevailed in Israel during the time of the judges culminated in the nature and deeds of Samson both in its weakness and strength, the miraculous character of his deeds, regarded simply in themselves, affords no ground for pronouncing the account a mere legend which has transformed historical acts into miracles, except from a naturalistic point of view, which rejects all miracles, and therefore denies *a priori* the supernatural working of the living God in the midst of His people. The formal character of the whole of the history of Samson, which the opponents of the biblical revelation adduce for the further support of this view, does not yield any tenable evidence of its correctness. The external rounding off of the account proves nothing more than that Samson's life and acts formed in themselves a compact and well-rounded whole. But the assertion, that "well-rounded circumstances form a suitable framework for the separate accounts, and that precisely twelve acts are related of Samson, which are united into beautiful pictures and narrated in artistic order" (*Bertheau*), is at variance with the actual character of the biblical account. In order to get exactly twelve heroic acts, *Bertheau* has to fix the stamp of a heroic act performed by Samson himself upon the miraculous help which he received from God through the opening up of a spring of water (Judges 15:18, 19), and also to split up a closely connected event, such as his breaking the bonds three times, into three different actions.<sup>24</sup> If we simply confine ourselves to the biblical account, the acts of Samson may be divided into two parts. The *first* (Judges 14 and 15) contains those in which Samson smote the Philistines with gradually increasing severity; the *second* (Judges 16) those by which he brought about his own fall and ruin. These are separated from one another by the account of the time that his judgeship lasted (Judges 15:20), and this account is briefly

repeated at the close of the whole account (Judges 16:31). The *first* part includes six distinct acts which are grouped together in twos: viz., (1 and 2) the killing of the lion on the way to Timnath, and the slaughter of the thirty Philistines for the purpose of paying for the solution of his riddle with the clothes that he took off them (Judges 14); (3 and 4) his revenge upon the Philistines by burning their crops, because his wife had been given to a Philistine, and also by the great slaughter with which he punished them for having burned his father-in-law and wife (Judges 15:1–8); (5 and 6) the bursting of the cords with which his countrymen had bound him for the purpose of delivering him up to the Philistines, and the slaying of 1000 Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass (Judges 15:9–19). The *second* part of his life comprises only three acts: viz., (1) taking off the town gates of Gaza, and carrying them away (Judges 16:1–3); (2) breaking the bonds with which Delilah bound him three separate times (Judges 16:4–14); and (3) his heroic death through pulling down the temple of Dagon, after he had been delivered into the power of the Philistines through the treachery of Delilah, and had been blinded by them (Judges 16:15–31). In this arrangement there is no such artistic shaping or rounding off of the historical materials apparent, as could indicate any mythological decoration. And lastly, the popular language of Samson in proverbs, rhymes, and a play upon words, does not warrant us in maintaining that the popular legend invented this mode of expressing his thoughts, and put the words into his mouth. All this leads to the conclusion, that there is no good ground for calling in question the historical character of the whole account of Samson's life and deeds.<sup>25</sup>

**Judges 13.** Birth of Samson.—V. 1. The oppression of the Israelites by the Philistines, which is briefly hinted at in Judges 10:7, is noticed again here with the standing formula, “*And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord,*” etc. (cf. Judges 10:6; 4:1; 3:12), as an introduction to the account of the life and acts of *Samson*, who began to deliver Israel from the hands of these enemies. Not

only the birth of Samson, but the prediction of his birth, also fell, according to v. 5, within the period of the rule of the Philistines over Israel. Now, as their oppression lasted forty years, and Samson judged Israel for twenty years during that oppression (Judges 15:20; 16:31), he must have commenced his judgeship at an early age, probably before the completion of his twentieth year; and with this the statement in Judges 14, that his marriage with a Philistine woman furnished the occasion for his conflicts with these enemies of his people, fully agrees. The end of the forty years of the supremacy of the Philistines is not given in this book, which closes with the death of Samson. It did not terminate till the great victory which the Israelites gained over their enemies under the command of Samuel (1 Sam. 7). Twenty years before this victory the Philistines had sent back the ark which they had taken from the Israelites, after keeping it for seven months in their own land (1 Sam. 7:2, and 6:1). It was within these twenty years that most of the acts of Samson occurred. His first affair with the Philistines, however, namely on the occasion of his marriage, took place a year or two before this defeat of the Israelites, in which the sons of Eli were slain, the ark fell into the hands of the Philistines, and the high priest Eli fell from his seat and broke his neck on receiving the terrible news (1 Sam. 4:18). Consequently Eli died a short time after the first appearance of Samson (see p. 206).

**Judges 13:2–7.** Whilst the Israelites were given into the hands of the Philistines on account of their sins, and were also severely oppressed in Gilead on the part of the Ammonites, the angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, a Danite from *Zorea*, i.e., *Sur'a*, on the western slope of the mountains of Judah (see at Josh. 15:33). *Mishpachath Dani* (the family of the Danites) is used interchangeably with *shebet Dani* (the tribe of the Danites: see Judges 18:2, 11, and 18:1, 30), which may be explained on this ground, that according to Num. 26:42, 43, all the Danites formed but one family, viz., the family of the Shuhamites. The angel of the Lord announced to this woman, who was barren,

*“Thou wilt conceive and bear a son. And now beware, drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean: for, behold, thou wilt conceive and bear a son, and no razor shall come upon his head; for a vowed man of God (Nazir) will the boy be from his mother’s womb,”* i.e., his whole life long, *“to the day of his death,”* as the angel expressly affirmed, according to v. 7. The three prohibitions which the angel of the Lord imposed upon the woman were the three things which distinguished the condition of a Nazarite (see at Num. 6:1–8, and the explanation given there of the Nazarite vow). The only other thing mentioned in the Mosaic law is the warning against defilement from contact with the dead, which does not seem to have been enforced in the case of Samson. When the angel added still further, *“And he (the Nazarite) will begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines,”* he no doubt intended to show that his power to effect this deliverance would be closely connected with his condition as a Nazarite. The promised son was to be a Nazarite all his life long, because he was to begin to deliver Israel out of the power of his foes. And in order that he might be so, his mother was to share in the renunciations of the Nazarite vow during the time of her pregnancy. Whilst the appearance of the angel of the Lord contained the practical pledge that the Lord still acknowledged His people, though He had given them into the hands of their enemies; the message of the angel contained this lesson and warning for Israel, that it could only obtain deliverance from its foes by seeking after a life of consecration to the Lord, such as the Nazarites pursued, so as to realize the idea of the priestly character to which Israel had been called as the people of Jehovah, by abstinence from the *deliciae carnis*, and everything that was unclean, as being emanations of sin, and also by a complete self-surrender to the Lord (see Pentateuch, p. 674).

**Judges 13:6, 7.** The woman told her husband of this appearance: *“A man of God,”* she said (lit., *the man of God*, viz., the one just referred to), *“came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very terrible;*

*and I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name,”* etc. *“Man of God”* was the expression used to denote a prophet, or a man who stood in immediate intercourse with God, such as Moses and others (see at Deut. 33:1). *“Angel of God”* is equivalent to *“angel of the Lord”* (Judges 2:1; 6:11), the angel in whom the invisible God reveals himself to men. The woman therefore imagined the person who appeared to her to have been a prophet, whose majestic appearance, however, had produced the impression that he was a superior being; consequently she had not ventured to ask him either his name or where he came from.

**Judges 13:8–20.** Being firmly convinced of the truth of this announcement, and at the same time reflecting upon the obligation which it imposed upon the parents, Manoah prayed to the Lord that He would let the man of God whom He had sent come to them again, to teach them what they were to do to the boy that should be born, i.e., how they should treat him.

הַיְיֹלֵד, according to the *Keri* הַיְיֹלֵד, is a

participle *Pual* with the ם dropped (see *Ewald*, § 169, b.). This prayer was heard. The angel of God appeared once more to the woman when she was sitting alone in the field without her husband.

**Judges 13:10, 11.** Then she hastened to fetch her husband, who first of all inquired of the person who had appeared, *“Art thou the man who said to the woman”* (sc., what has been related in vv. 3–5)? And when this was answered in the affirmative, he said still further (v. 12), *“Should thy word then come to pass, what will be the manner of the boy, and his*

*doing?”* The plural דְּבַרְיָךְ is construed *ad sensum* with the singular verb, because the words form one promise, so that the expression is not to be taken distributively, as *Rosenmüller* supposes. This also applies to v. 17, *Mishpat*, the right belonging to a boy, i.e., the proper treatment of him.

**Judges 13:13, 14.** The angel of the Lord then repeated the instructions which he had already given to the woman in v. 4, simply adding to the prohibition of wine and strong drink the caution not to eat of anything that came from the vine, in accordance with Num. 6:3.

**Judges 13:15.** As Manoah had not yet recognised in the man the angel of the Lord, as is observed by way of explanation in v. 16, he wished, like Gideon (Judges 6:18), to give a hospitable entertainment to the man who had brought him such joyful tidings, and therefore said to him, “*Let us detain thee, and prepare a kid for thee.*” The construction נַעֲשֶׂה לְפָנֶיךָ is a pregnant one: “prepare and set before thee.” On the fact itself, see Judges 6:19.

**Judges 13:16.** The angel of the Lord replied, “*If thou wilt detain me (sc., that I may eat), I will not eat of thy food (אֲכַל with בָּ, to eat thereat, i.e., thereof, as in Ex. 12:43, Lev. 22:11); but if thou wilt prepare a burnt-offering for Jehovah, then offer it.*”

**Judges 13:17.** Manoah then asked his name: מִי שְׁמֶךָ, lit., “*Who is thy name?*” מִי inquires after the person; מָה, the nature of quality (see Ewald, § 325, a.). “*For if thy word come to pass, we will do thee honour.*” This was the reason why he asked after his name. כְּבִד, to honour by presents, so as to show one’s self grateful (see Num. 22:17, 37; 24:11).

**Judges 13:18.** The angel replied, “*Why askest thou then after my name? truly it is wonderful.*” The *Kethibh* פִּלְאִי is the adjectival form פִּלְאִי from פִּלְאָ, for which the *Keri* has פִּלְי, the pausal form of פִּלְי (from the radical פִּלָּה = פִּלְאָ). The word therefore is not the proper name of the angel of the Lord, but expresses the character of his name; and as the name simply

denotes the nature, it expresses the peculiarity of his nature also. It is to be understood in an absolute sense—“absolutely and supremely wonderful” (*Seb. Schmidt*)—as a predicate belonging to God alone (compare the term “Wonderful” in Isa. 9:6), and not to be toned down as it is by *Bertheau*, who explains it as signifying “neither easy to utter nor easy to comprehend.”

**Judges 13:19, 20.** Manoah then took the kid and the *minchah*, i.e., according to Num. 15:4ff., the meat-offering belonging to the burnt-offering, and offered it upon the rock, which is called an altar in v. 20, because the angel of the Lord, who is of one nature with God, had sanctified it as an altar through the miraculous acceptance of the sacrifice. מִפְּלֵא לַעֲשׂוֹת, “*and wonderfully (miraculously) did he act*”

(הִפְלִיא followed by the infinitive with לְ as in 2 Chron. 26:15). These words form a circumstantial clause, which is not to be attached, however, to the subject of the

principal clause, but to לַיהוָה: “Manoah offered the sacrifice to the Lord, whereupon He acted to do wonderfully, i.e., He performed a wonder or miracle, and Manoah and his wife saw it” (see Ewald, *Lehrb.* § 341, b., p. 724, note). In what the miracle consisted is explained in v. 20, in the words, “*when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar;*” that is to say, in the fact that a flame issued from the rock, as in the case of Gideon’s sacrifice (Judges 6:21), and consumed the sacrifice. And the angel of the Lord ascended in this flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell upon their faces to the earth (sc., in worship), because they discovered from the miracle that it was the angel of the Lord who had appeared to them.

**Judges 13:21–25.** From that time forward the Lord did not appear to them again. But Manoah was afraid that he and his wife should die, because they had seen God (on this belief, see the remarks on Gen. 16:13 and Ex. 33:20). His wife quieted his fears, however, and said,

“Jehovah cannot intend to kill us, as He has accepted our sacrifice, and has shown us all this” (the twofold miracle). “And at this time He has not let us see such things as these.” כְּעֵת, at the time in which we live, even if such things may possibly have taken place in the hoary antiquity.

**Judges 13:24.** The promise of God was fulfilled. the boy whom the woman bare received the name of *Samson*. שִׁמְשׁוֹן (LXX, Σαμψών) does

not mean sun-like, hero of the sun, from שֶׁשׁ (the sun), but, as *Josephus* explains it (Ant. v. 8, 4), ἰσχυρός, the strong or daring one, from

שִׁמְשׁוֹם, from the intensive from שִׁמַּשׁ,

from שִׁמַּח, in its original sense to be strong or

daring, not “to devastate.” שִׁדַּח is an analogous word: *lit.* to be powerful, then to act powerfully, to devastate. The boy grew under the blessing of God (see 1 Sam. 2:21).

**Judges 13:25.** When he had grown up, the Spirit of Jehovah began to thrust him in the

camp of Dan. פָּעַם, to thrust, denoting the operation of the Spirit of God within him, which took possession of him suddenly, and impelled him to put forth supernatural powers.

*Mahaneh-Dan*, the camp of Dan, was the name given to the district in which the Danites who emigrated, according to Judges 18:12, from the inheritance of their tribe, had pitched their encampment *behind*, i.e., to the west of, *Kirjath-jearim*, or according to this verse, between Zorea and Eshtaol. The situation cannot be determined precisely, as the situation of Eshtaol itself has not been discovered yet (see at Josh. 15:33). It was there that Samson lived with his parents, judging from Judges 16:31. The meaning of this verse, which forms the introduction to the following account of the acts of Samson, is simply that Samson was there seized by the Spirit of Jehovah, and impelled to commence the conflict with the Philistines.

## Judges 14

**Judges 14.** Samson’s First Transactions with the Philistines.—Vv. 1–9. At Tibnath, the present *Tibne*, an hour’s journey to the south-west of Sur’a (see at Josh. 15:10), to which Samson had gone down from Zorea or Mahaneh-Dan, he saw a daughter of the Philistines who pleased him; and on his return he asked his parents to take her for him as a wife (לָקַח, to take, as in Ex. 21:9).

**Judges 14:3, 4.** His parents expressed their astonishment at the choice, and asked him whether there was not a woman among the daughters of his brethren (i.e., the members of his own tribe), or among all his people, that he should want to fetch one from the Philistines, the uncircumcised. But Samson repeated his request, because the daughter of the Philistines pleased him. The aversion of his parents to the marriage was well founded, as such a marriage was not in accordance with the law. It is true that the only marriages expressly prohibited in Ex. 34:16 and Deut. 7:3, 4, are marriages with Canaanitish women; but the reason assigned for this prohibition was equally applicable to marriages with daughters of the Philistines. In fact, the Philistines are reckoned among the Canaanites in Josh. 13:3 upon the very same ground. But Samson was acting under a higher impulse, whereas his parents did not know that it was from Jehovah, i.e., that Jehovah had so planned it; “for Samson was seeking an opportunity on account of the Philistines,” i.e., an occasion to quarrel with them, because, as is afterwards added in the form of an explanatory circumstantial clause, the Philistines had

dominion over Israel at that time. הָיָה לָאֲנָהּ, ἄπ.

λεγ., an opportunity (cf. הָיָה לָאֲנָהּ, 2 Kings 5:7).

**Judges 14:5, 6.** When Samson went down with his parents to Timnath, a young lion came roaring towards him at the vineyards of that town. Then the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, so that he tore the lion in pieces as a kid is torn (*lit.* “like the tearing in pieces of the kid”),

although he had nothing, i.e., no weapon, in his hand. David, when a shepherd, and the hero Benaiah, also slew lions (1 Sam. 17:34, 35; 2 Sam. 23:20); and even at the present day Arabs sometimes kill lions with a staff (see *Winer*, *Bibl. R. W. Art. Löwe*). Samson's supernatural strength, the effect of the Spirit of Jehovah, which came upon him, was simply manifested in the fact that he tore the lion in pieces without any weapon whatever in his hand. But he said nothing about it to his parents, who were not eyewitnesses of the deed. This remark is introduced in connection with what follows.

**Judges 14:7.** When he came to Timnath he talked with the girl, and she pleased him. He had only *seen* her before (v. 1); but now that his parents had asked for her, he talked with her, and found the first impression that he had received of her fully confirmed.

**Judges 14:8.** When some time had elapsed after the betrothal, he came again to fetch her (take her home, marry her), accompanied, as we learn from v. 9, by his parents. On the way "*he turned aside (from the road) to see the carcass of the lion; and behold a swarm of bees was in the body of the lion, also honey.*" The

word מַפְלֵת, which only occurs here, is

derived from נִפְל, like πτώμα from πίπτω, and

is synonymous with נִבְלָה, *cadaver*, and signifies not the mere skeleton, as bees would not form their hive in such a place, but the carcass of the lion, which had been thoroughly dried up by the heat of the sun, without passing into a state of putrefaction. "In the desert of Arabia the heat of a sultry season will often dry up all the moisture of men or camels that have fallen dead, within twenty-four hours of their decease, without their passing into a state of decomposition and putrefaction, so that they remain for a long time like mummies, without change and without stench" (*Rosenmüller*, *Bibl. Althk.* iv. 2, p. 424). In a carcass dried up in this way, a swarm of bees might form their hive, just as well as in the hollow trunks of trees, or clefts in the rock, or where wild bees are accustomed

to form them, notwithstanding the fact that bees avoid both dead bodies and carrion (see *Bochart, Hieroz.* ed. Ros. iii. p. 355).

**Judges 14:9.** Samson took it (the honey) in his hands, ate some of it as he went, and also gave some to his father and mother to eat, but did not tell them that he had got the honey out of the dead body of the lion; for in that case they would not only have refused to eat it as being unclean, but would have been aware of the fact, which Samson afterwards took as the subject of the riddle that he proposed to the Philistines.

רָדָה, to tread, to tread down; hence to get

forcible possession of, not to break or to take out, neither of which meanings can be

established. The combination of רָדָה and

אֶל-כַּפָּיו is a pregnant construction, signifying to obtain possession of and take into the hands.

**Judges 14:10–20.** *Samson's Wedding and Riddle.*—V. 10. When his father had come down to the girl (sc., to keep the wedding, not merely to make the necessary preparations for his marriage), Samson prepared for a feast there (in Timnath), according to the usual custom (for so used the young men to do).

**Judges 14:11.** "*And when they saw him, they fetched thirty friends, and they were with him.*" The parents or relations of the bride are the subject of the first clause. They invited thirty of their friends in Timnath to the marriage feast, as "children of the bride-chamber" (Matt. 9:15), since Samson had not brought any with him.

The reading כְּרֵאוֹתָם from רָאָה needs no alteration, though *Bertheau* would read

כְּרֵאוֹתָם from יָרָא, in accordance with the rendering of the LXX (*Cod. Al.*) and *Josephus*, ἐν τῷ φοβεῖσθαι αὐτούς. Fear of Samson would neither be in harmony with the facts

themselves, nor with the words וַיִּהְיוּ אִתּוֹ,

"*they were with him,*" which it is felt to be necessary to paraphrase in the most arbitrary manner "they watched him."



**Judges 14:12.** At the wedding feast Samson said to the guests, *“I will give you a riddle. If you show it to me during the seven days of the meal (the wedding festival), and guess it, I will give you thirty *sedinim* (σινδόνες, tunicae, i.e., clothes worn next to the skin) and thirty changes of garments (costly dresses, that were frequently changed: see at Gen. 45:22); but if ye cannot show it to me, ye shall give me the same number of garments.”* The custom of proposing riddles at banquets by way of entertainment is also to be met with among the ancient Grecians. (For proofs from *Athenaeus, Pollux, Gellius*, see *Bochart*, Hieroz. P. ii. l. ii. c. 12; and *K. O. Müller*, Dorier, ii. p. 392). As the guests consented to this proposal, Samson gave them the following riddle (v. 14): *“Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.”* This riddle they could not show, i.e., solve, for three days. That is to say, they occupied themselves for three days in trying to find the solution; after that they let the matter rest until the appointed term was drawing near.

**Judges 14:15.** On the seventh day they said to Samson’s wife, *“Persuade thy husband to show us the riddle,”* sc., through thee, without his noticing it, *“lest we burn thee and thy father’s house with fire. Have ye invited us to make us poor; is it not so?”* In this threat the barbarism and covetousness of the Philistines came openly to light. הַלִּירְשָׁנוּ without *Metheg* in the יִ is the *inf. Kal* of יָרַשׁ, to make poor,—a meaning derived from inheriting, not the *Piel* of יָרַשׁ = רוּשׁ, to be poor. הֲלֵא, *nonne*, strengthens the interrogative clause, and has not the signification “here” = הֲלֵא. Samson’s wife, however, wept over him, i.e., urged him with tears in her eyes, and said, *“Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not; thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people (my countrymen), and hast not shown it to me.”*

חָדַתָּהּ is from חָדַד. Samson replied, that he

had not even shown it to his father and mother, *“and shall I show it to thee?”*

**Judges 14:17.** *“Thus his wife wept before him the seven days of the banquet.”* This statement is not at variance with that in v. 15, to the effect that it was only on the seventh day that the Philistine young men urged her with threats to entice Samson to tell the riddle, but may be explained very simply in the following manner. The woman had already come to Samson every day with her entreaties from simple curiosity; but Samson resisted them until the seventh day, when she became more urgent than ever, in consequence of this threat on the part of the Philistines. And *“Samson showed it to her, because she lay sore upon him;”* whereupon she immediately betrayed it to her countrymen.

**Judges 14:18.** Thus on the seventh day, before the sun went down (חָרַסְתָּהּ = חָרַסְתָּהּ, Judges 8:13; Job 9:7, with a toneless *ah*, a softening down of the feminine termination: see *Ewald*, § 173, *h.*), the men of the city (i.e., the thirty young men who had been invited) said to Samson, *“What is sweeter than honey, and what stronger than a lion?”* But Samson saw through the whole thing, and replied, *“If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, ye had not hit upon (guessed) my riddle,”*—a proverbial saying, the meaning of which is perfectly clear.

**Judges 14:19.** Nevertheless he was obliged to keep his promise (v. 12). Then the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him. He went down to Ashkelon, slew thirty men of them, i.e., of the Ashkelonites, took their clothes (חֲלִיצוֹת, *exuviae*: see 2 Sam. 2:21), and gave the changes of garments to those who had shown the riddle. This act is described as the operation of the Spirit of Jehovah which came upon Samson, because it showed to the Philistines the superior power of the servants of Jehovah. It was not carnal revenge that had impelled Samson to the deed. It was not till the deed itself was done that his anger was kindled; and even then it was not against the Philistines, to whom he had been obliged to pay or give the

thirty garments, but against his wife, who had betrayed his secret to her countrymen, so that he returned to his father's house, viz., without his wife.

**Judges 14:20.** *“And Samson's wife was given to his friend, whom he had chosen as a friend.”*

מִרְעֵ is not doubt to be understood here in the sense of “the friend of the bridegroom” (John 3:29), ὁ νυμφαγωγός (LXX), the conductor of the bride,—namely, one of the thirty companions (v. 10), whom Samson had entrusted with this office at the marriage festival. The faithlessness of the Philistines towards the Israelites was no doubt apparent here; for even if Samson went home enraged at the treacherous behaviour of his wife, without taking her with him, he did not intend to break the marriage tie, as Judges 15:1, 2 clearly shows. So that instead of looking at the wrong by which Samson felt himself aggrieved, and trying to mitigate his wrath, the parents of the woman made the breach irreparable by giving their daughter as a wife to his companion.

### Judges 15

**Judges 15.** Further Acts of Samson.—V. 1–8. *His Revenge upon the Philistines.*—V. 1. Some time after, Samson visited his wife in the time of the wheat harvest with a kid,—a customary present at that time (Gen. 38:17),—and wished to go into the chamber (the women's apartment) to her; but her father would not allow him, and said, *“I thought thou hatedst her, and therefore gave her to thy friend (Judges 14:20): behold her younger sister is fairer than she; let her be thine in her stead.”*

**Judges 15:3.** Enraged at this answer, Samson said to them (i.e., to her father and those around him), *“Now am I blameless before the Philistines, if I do evil to them.”* מִן נִקְוָה with מִן, to be innocent away from a person, i.e., before him (see Num. 32:22). Samson regarded the treatment which he had received from his father-in-law as but one effect of the disposition of the Philistines generally towards the Israelites, and therefore resolved to avenge the

wrong which he had received from one member of the Philistines upon the whole nation, or at all events upon the whole of the city of Timnath.

**Judges 15:4, 5.** He therefore went and caught three hundred *shualim*, i.e., jackals, animals which resemble foxes and are therefore frequently classed among the foxes even by the common Arabs of the present day (see *Niebuhr*, *Beschr. v. Arab.* p. 166). Their European name is derived from the Persian *schaghal*. These animals, which are still found in great quantities at Joppa, Gaza, and in Galilee, herd together, and may easily be caught (see *Rosenmüller*, *Bibl. Althk.* iv. 2, pp. 155ff.). He then took torches, turned tail to tail, i.e., coupled the jackals together by their tails, putting a torch between the two tails, set the torches on fire, and made the animals run into the fields of standing corn belonging to the Philistines. Then he burned *“from the shocks of wheat to the standing grain and to the olive gardens,”* i.e., the shocks of wheat as well as the standing corn and the olive plantations. כָּרְם

וְיָת are joined together in the construct state.

**Judges 15:6.** The Philistines found out at once, that Samson had done them this injury because his father-in-law, the Timnite, had taken away his wife and given her to his companion. They therefore avenged themselves by burning her and her father,—probably by burning his house down to the ground, with its occupants within it,—an act of barbarity and cruelty which fully justified Samson's war upon them.

**Judges 15:7.** Samson therefore declared to them, *“If ye do such things, truly (כִּי) when I have avenged myself upon you, then will I cease,”* i.e., I will not cease till I have taken vengeance upon you.

**Judges 15:8.** *“Then he smote them hip and thigh (lit. ‘thigh upon hip;’ עַל as in Gen. 32:12), a great slaughter.”* שׁוֹק, thigh, strengthened by

עַל-יָרֵךְ, is a second accusative governed by the verb, and added to define the word אֹתָם more minutely, in the sense of “on hip and thigh;” whilst the expression which follows, מִכָּה גְדוֹלָה, is added as an adverbial

accusative to strengthen the verb יָדָה. Smiting hip and thigh is a proverbial expression for a cruel, unsparing slaughter, like the German “cutting arm and leg in two,” or the Arabic “war in thigh fashion” (see *Bertheau in loc.*). After smiting the Philistines, Samson went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock *Etam*. There is a town of *Etam* mentioned in 2 Chron. 11:6, between Bethlehem and Tekoah, which was fortified by Rehoboam, and stood in all probability to the south of Jerusalem, upon the mountains of Judah. But this *Etam*, which *Robinson* (Pal. ii. 168) supposes to be the village of *Urtas*, a place still inhabited, though lying in ruins, is not to be thought of here, as the Philistines did not go up to the mountains of Judah (v. 9), as *Bertheau* imagines, but simply came forward and encamped in Judah. The *Etam* of this verse is mentioned in 1 Chron. 4:32, along with *Ain Rimmon* and other Simeonitish towns, and is to be sought for on the border of the Negeb and of the mountains of Judah, in the neighbourhood of *Khuweilifeh* (see *V. de Velde*, Mem. p. 311). The expression “he went down” suits this place very well, but not the *Etam* on the mountains of Judah, to which he would have had to go up, and not down, from *Timnath*.

**Judges 15:9–17.** *Samson is delivered up to the Philistines, and smites them with the jaw-bone of an Ass.*

**Judges 15:9.** The Philistines came (“went up,” denoting the advance of an army: see at Josh. 8:1) to avenge themselves for the defeat they had sustained from Samson; and having encamped in Judah, spread themselves out in

*Lechi* (*Lehi*). *Lechi* (לְחִי, in pause לְחִי, i.e., a jaw), which is probably mentioned again in 2

Sam. 23:11, and, according to v. 17, received the name of *Ramath-lechi* from Samson himself, cannot be traced with any certainty, as the early church tradition respecting the place is utterly worthless. *Van de Velde* imagines that it is to be found in the flattened rocky hill *el Lechieh*, or *Lekieh*, upon which an ancient fortification has been discovered, in the middle of the road from *Tell Khewelfeh* to *Beersheba*, at the south-western approach of the mountains of Judah.

**Judges 15:10ff.** When the Judaeans learned what was the object of this invasion on the part of the Philistines, three thousand of them went down to the cleft in the rock *Etam*, to bind Samson and deliver him up to the Philistines. Instead of recognising in Samson a deliverer whom the Lord had raised up for them, and crowding round him that they might smite their oppressors with his help and drive them out of the land, the men of Judah were so degraded, that they cast this reproach at Samson: “Knowest thou not that the Philistines rule over us? Wherefore hast thou done this (the deed described in v. 8)? We have come down to bind thee, and deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines.” Samson replied, “Swear to me that

ye will not fall upon me yourselves.” פָּגַעַ with בָּ, to thrust at a person, fall upon him, including in this case, according to v. 13, the intention of killing.

**Judges 15:13.** When they promised him this, he let them bind him with two new cords and lead him up (into the camp of the Philistines) out of the rock (i.e., the cleft of the rock).

**Judges 15:14.** But when he came to *Lechi*, and the Philistines shouted with joy as they came to meet him, the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, “and the cords on his arms became like two that had been burnt with fire, and his fetters melted from his hands.” The description rises up to a poetical parallelism, to depict the triumph which Samson celebrated over the Philistines in the power of the Spirit of Jehovah.

**Judges 15:15.** As soon as he was relieved of his bands, he seized upon a fresh jaw-bone of an ass, which he found there, and smote therewith

a thousand men. He himself commemorated this victory in a short poetical strain (v. 16): “With the ass’s jaw-bone a heap, two heaps; with the ass’s jaw-bone I smote a thousand men.” The

form of the word חֲמֹר = חֶמֶר is chosen on account of the resemblance to חֲמֹר, and is found again at 1 Sam. 16:20. How Samson achieved this victory is not minutely described. But the words “a heap, two heaps,” point to the conclusion that it did not take place in one encounter, but in several. The supernatural strength with which Samson rent asunder the fetters bound upon him, when the Philistines thought they had him safely in their power, filled them with fear and awe as before a superior being, so that they fled, and he pursued them, smiting one heap after another, as he overtook them, with an ass’s jaw-bone which he found in the way. The number given, viz., a thousand, is of course a round number signifying a very great multitude, and has been adopted from the song into the historical account.

**Judges 15:17.** When he had given utterance to his saying, he threw the jaw-bone away, and called the place *Ramath-lechi*, i.e., the jaw-bone height. This seems to indicate that the name *Lechi* in v. 9 is used proleptically, and that the place first received its name from this deed of Samson.

**Judges 15:18–20.** The pursuit of the Philistines, however, and the conflict with them, had exhausted Samson, so that he was very thirsty, and feared that he might die from exhaustion; for it was about the time of the wheat-harvest (v. 1), and therefore hot summer weather. Then he called to the Lord, “Thou hast through (בְּיָד) “Thy servant given this great deliverance; and now I shall die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised!” From this prayer we may see that Samson was fully conscious that he was fighting for the cause of the Lord. And the Lord helped him out of this trouble. God split the hollow place at Lechi, so that water came out of it, as at Horeb and

Kadesh (Ex. 17:6, and Num. 20:8, 11). The word

מִכְתֵּשׁ, which is used in Prov. 27:22 to signify a mortar, is explained by rabbinical expositors as denoting the socket of the teeth, or the hollow place in which the teeth are fixed, like the Greek ὀλίμίσκος, *mortariolum*, according to *Pollux*, Onom. ii. c. 4, § 21. Accordingly many have understood the statement made here, as meaning that God caused a fountain to flow miraculously out of the socket of a tooth in the jaw-bone which Samson had thrown away, and thus provided for his thirst. This view is the one upon which Luther’s rendering, “God split a tooth in the jaw, so that water came out,” is founded, and is has been voluminously defended by *Bochart* (*Hieroz.* i. ii. c. 15). But the

expression אֲשֶׁר בְּלַחֵי, “the *maktesh* which is at *Lechi*,” is opposed to this view, since the tooth-socket in the jaw-bone of the ass would be simply called מִכְתֵּשׁ הַלַּחֵי or מִכְתֵּשׁ

בְּלַחֵי; and so is also the remark that this

fountain was still in existence in the historian’s own time. And the article proves nothing to the contrary, as many proper names are written with it (see *Ewald*, § 277, c.). Consequently we must follow *Josephus* (*Ant.* v. 8), who takes

הַמִּכְתֵּשׁ as the name given to the opening of the rock, which was cleft by God to let water flow out. “If a rocky precipice bore the name of jaw-bone (*lechi*) on account of its shape, it was a natural consequence of this figurative epithet, that the name *tooth-hollow* should be given to a hole or gap in the rock” (*Studer*). Moreover, the same name, *Maktesh*, occurs again in Zeph. 1:11, where it is applied to a locality in or near Jerusalem. The hollow place was split by *Elohim*, although it was to *Jehovah* that Samson had prayed, to indicate that the miracle was wrought by God as the Creator and Lord of nature. Samson drank, and his spirit returned, so that he revived again. Hence the fountain received the name of *En-hakkore*, “the crier’s well which is at Lechi,” unto this day. According

to the accents, the last clause does not belong to **בְּלֶחִי** (in Lechi), but to **קָרָא וּגו'** (he called, etc.). It received the name given to it unto this day. This *implies*, of course, that the spring itself was in existence when our book was composed.—In v. 20 the account of the judicial labours of Samson are brought to a close, with the remark that Samson judged Israel in the days of the Philistines, i.e., during their rule, for twenty years. What more is recorded of him in Judges 16 relates to his fall and ruin; and although even in this he avenged himself upon the Philistines, he procured no further deliverance for Israel. It is impossible to draw any critical conclusions from the position in which this remark occurs, as to a plurality of sources for the history of Samson.

**Judges 16.** Samson's Fall and Death.—Samson's judicial labours reached their highest point when he achieved his great victory over the Philistines at Lechi. Just as his love to the daughter of a Philistine had furnished him with the occasion designed by God for the manifestation of his superiority to the uncircumcised enemies of Israel, so the degradation of that love into sensual lust supplied the occasion for his fall which is related in this chapter. "Samson, when strong and brave, strangled a lion; but he could not strangle his own love. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned up the crops of others, and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman." (*Ambros. Apol. ii., David. c. iii.*)

### Judges 16

**Judges 16:1-3.** *His Heroic Deed at Gaza.*—Samson went to Gaza in the full consciousness of his superiority in strength to the Philistines, and there went in unto a harlot whom he saw.

For Gaza, see Josh. 13:3. **בּוֹא אֶל** is used in the same sense as in Gen. 6:4 and 38:16. It is not stated in this instance, as in Judges 14:4, that it was of the Lord.

**Judges 16:2.** When this was told to the Gazites, they surrounded him (the object to the verb is to be supplied from the following word **לוֹ**) and laid wait for him all night at the city gate, but they kept themselves quiet during the night, saying, "Till the dawning (**אֹר**, *infin.*) of the morning," sc., we can wait, "then will we kill him." For this construction, see 1 Sam. 1:22. The verb **וַיִּגֵּד**, "it was told" (according to the LXX and *Chald.*: cf. Gen. 22:20), or **וַיֹּאמְרוּ**, "they said," is wanting before **לְעִזָּתִים**, and must have fallen out through a copyist's error. The verb **הִתְחַרְשׁוּ** has evidently the subordinate idea of giving themselves up to careless repose; for if the watchmen who were posted at the city gate had but watched in a regular manner, Samson could not have lifted out the closed gates and carried them away. But as they supposed that he would not leave the harlot before daybreak, they relied upon the fact that the gate was shut, and probably feel asleep.

**Judges 16:3.** But at midnight Samson got up, and "laying hold of the folding wings of the city, gate, as well as the two posts, tore them out of the ground with his herculean strength, together with the bar that fastened them, and carried them up to the top of the mountain

which stands opposite to Hebron." **עַל-פְּנֵי** merely means in the direction towards, as in Gen. 18:16, and does not signify that the mountain was in the front of Hebron or in the immediate neighbourhood (see Deut. 32:49, where Mount Nebo, which was on the other side of the Jordan, and at least four geographical miles from Jericho, is said to have been over against it, and the same expression is employed). The distance from Gaza to Hebron was about nine geographical miles. To the east of Gaza there is a range of hills which runs from north to south. The highest of them all is one which stands somewhat isolated,

about half an hour to the south-east of the town, and is called *el Montar* from a wely which is found upon the top of it. From this hill there is a splendid prospect over the whole of the surrounding country. Hebron itself is not visible from this hill, but the mountains of Hebron are. According to an ancient tradition, it was to the summit of this hill that Samson carried the city gates; and both *Robinson* (Pal. ii. 377) and *V. de Velde* regard this tradition as by no means improbable, although the people of Gaza are not acquainted with it. "The city gate of the Gaza of that time was probably not less than three-quarters of an hour from the hill *el Montar*; and to climb this peak with the heavy gates and their posts and bar upon his shoulders through the deep sand upon the road, was a feat which only a Samson could perform" (*V. de Velde*).

**Judges 16:4–21.** *Samson and Delilah.*—V. 4. After this successful act, Samson gave himself up once more to his sensual lusts. He fell in love with a woman in the valley of *Sorek*, named *Delilah* (i.e., the weak or pining one), to whose snares he eventually succumbed. With reference to the valley of *Sorek*, *Eusebius* affirms in the *Onom.* (s. v. Σωρήχ), that there was a village called Βαρήχ (*l. Καφάρ σωρήχ* according to *Jerome*) near *Zorea*, and ἐν ὀρίοις (*l. βορείοις* according to *Jerome*, who has *ad septentrionalem plagam*); and also (s. v. Σωρήκ) that this place was near to *Eshtaol*. Consequently the *Sorek* valley would have to be sought for somewhere in the neighbourhood of Samson's birthplace (Judges 13:1), and the dwelling-place of his family (v. 31).

**Judges 16:5.** The princes of the Philistines offered *Delilah* a considerable sum (they would give her one thousand and one hundred shekels of silver each, i.e., a thousand shekels or more: cf. Judges 17:2) if she would persuade Samson, and bring out from him "whereby his strength was great," and whereby they could overpower and bind him, לְעַנּוֹתוֹ, to bend him, i.e., to oppress him. The Philistine princes thought that Samson's supernatural strength arose from

something external, which he wore or carried about with him as an amulet. There was a certain truth at the foundation of this heathen superstition, inasmuch as this gift of divine grace was really bound up with the possession of a corporeal pledge, the loss of which was followed by the immediate loss of the gift of God (see at v. 17).

**Judges 16:6.** Allured by the reward in prospect, *Delilah* now sought to get from him the secret of his strength. But he deceived her three times by false statements. He first of all said to her (v. 7), "If they bound me with strings that have not been dried, I should be weak and like one of the

men" (i.e., like any other man). יִתָּר signifies a sinew or string, e.g., a bow-string, Ps. 11:2, and in the different dialects either a bow-string or the string of a harp or guitar. As a distinction is made here between the יִתָּרִים and the עֲבֹתִים in v. 11, the strings intended here are those of catgut or animal sinew. The number *seven* is that of a divine act, answering to the divine power which Samson possessed.

**Judges 16:8, 9.** When *Delilah* told this to the princes of the Philistines, they brought the seven strings required, and *Delilah* bound Samson with them. "And the spy sat in the room (לְהִ, dat. com., lit. 'to her,' i.e.) to help her."

namely, without Samson knowing it, as *Delilah* had certainly not told him that she should betray the secret of his strength to the Philistines. He was there, no doubt, that he might be at hand and overpower the fettered giant as soon as it became apparent that his strength was gone. She then cried out to him, "Philistines upon thee, Samson!" And he snapped the strings as one would snap a cord in two "when it smells fire," i.e., is held to the fire.

**Judges 16:10–12.** The second deception: Samson had himself bound with new cords, which had not yet been used for any purpose, and these also he burst from his arms like a thread.

**Judges 16:13, 14.** The third deception: “If thou weavest together the seven locks of my hair with the warp. And she drove it in with the plug.”

These words are difficult to explain, partly because several technical terms are used which have more than one meaning, and partly because the account itself is contracted, both Samson’s advice and her fulfilment of it being only given in a partial form, so that the one has to be completed from the other. In v. 19, the

only other passage in which **מַחְלָפוֹת** occurs, it no doubt means the plaits into which Samson’s long flowing hair was plaited.

**הַמְסַכָּת** only occurs here (vv. 13 and 14), and probably means the woven cloth, or rather what was still upon the loom, the warp of the cloth, **δίασμα** (LXX). Accordingly the meaning of the verse would be this: If thou weavest the seven plaits of my hair along with the warp upon the loom. The commentators are all agreed that, according to these words, there must be something wanting in the account, though they are not of one opinion as to whether the binding of Samson is fully given here, and all that has to be supplied is the clause “Then shall I be weak,” etc. (as in vv. 7 and

11), or whether the words **וּתְתַקַּע בַּיָּתֶד** add another fact which was necessary to the completeness of the binding, and if so, how these words are to be understood. In *Bertheau’s* opinion, the words “and she thrust with the plug” probably mean nothing more than that she made a noise to wake the sleeping Samson, because it is neither stated here that she forced the plug into the wall or into the earth to fasten the plaits with (LXX, *Jerome*), nor that her thrusting with the plug contributed in any way to the further fastening of the hair. These arguments are sound no doubt, but they do not prove what is intended. When it is stated in v. 14*b*, that “he tore out the weaver’s plug and the cloth,” it is certainly evident that the plug served to fasten the hair to the cloth or to the loom. Moreover, not only would any knocking with the plug to waken Samson with the noise

have been altogether superfluous, as the loud cry, “Philistines upon thee, Samson,” would be amply sufficient for this; but it is extremely improbable that a fact with so little bearing upon the main facts would be introduced here at all. We come therefore to the same conclusion as the majority of commentators, viz., that the words in question are to be understood as referring to something that was done to fasten Samson still more securely.

**הַיָּתֶד = הָאָרְגַּג** (v. 14) does not mean the roller or weaver’s beam, to which the threads of the warp were fastened, and round which the cloth was rolled when finished, as

*Bertheau* supposes, for this is called **מְנוֹר**

**אֲרָגִים** in 1 Sam. 17:7; nor the **σπάθη** of the Greeks, a flat piece of wood like a knife, which was used in the upright loom for the same purpose as our comb or press, viz., to press the weft together, and so increase the substance of the cloth (*Braun, de vestitu Sacerd.* p. 253); but the comb or press itself which was fastened to the loom, so that it could only be torn out by force. To complete the account, therefore, we must supply between vv. 13 and 14, “And if thou fastenest it (the woven cloth) with the plug (the weaver’s comb), I shall be weak like one of the other men; and she wove the seven plaits of his hair into the warp of the loom.” Then follows in v. 14, “and fastened the cloth with the weaver’s comb.” There is no need, however, to assume that what has to be supplied fell out in copying. We have simply an ellipsis, such as we often meet with. When Samson as wakened out of his sleep by the cry of “Philistines upon thee,” he tore out the weaver’s comb and the warp (sc.) from the loom, with his plaits of hair that had been woven in. The reference to his sleeping warrants the assumption that Delilah had also performed the other acts of binding while he was asleep. We must not understand the account, however, as implying that the three acts of binding followed close upon one another on the very same day. Several days may very

probably have elapsed between them. In this third deception Samson had already gone so far in his presumptuous trifling with the divine gift entrusted to him, as to suffer the hair of his head to be meddled with, though it was sanctified to the Lord. "It would seem as though this act of sin ought to have brought him to reflection. But as that was not the case, there remained but one short step more to bring him to thorough treachery towards the Lord" (*O. v. Gerlach*).

**Judges 16:15.** This last step was very speedily to follow.—V. 15. After this triple deception, Delilah said to him, "*How canst thou say, I love thee, as thine heart is not with me*" (i.e., not devoted to me)?

**Judges 16:16.** With such words as these she plagued him every day, so that his soul became impatient even to death (see Judges 10; 16).

The ἀπ. λεγ. פָּלַח signifies in Aramaean, to press or plague. The form is *Piel*, though without the reduplication of the לָ and *Chateph-patach* under (see *Ewald*, § 90, b.).

**Judges 16:17.** "*And he showed her all his heart,*" i.e., he opened his mind thoroughly to her, and told her that no razor had come upon his head, because he was a Nazarite from his mother's womb (cf. Judges 13:5, 7). "*If I should be shave, my strength would depart from me, and I should be weak like all other men.*"

**Judges 16:18.** When Delilah saw (i.e., perceived, namely from his words and his whole behaviour while making this communication) that he had betrayed the secret of his strength, she had the princes of the Philistines called: "*Come up this time, ... for he had revealed to her all his heart.*" This last clause is not to be understood as having been spoken by Delilah to the princes themselves, as it is by the Masorites and most of the commentators, in which case הָלַח would have to be altered into לָחַ; but it contains a remark of the writer, introduced as an explanation of the

circumstance that Delilah sent for the princes of the Philistines now that she was sure of her purpose. This view is confirmed by the word

וַיֵּצֵא (came up) which follows, since the use of the perfect instead of the imperfect with *vav consec.* can only be explained on the supposition that the previous clause is a parenthetical one, which interrupts the course of the narrative, and to which the account of the further progress of the affair could not be

attached by the historical tense (וַיֵּצֵא).<sup>26</sup> The princes of the Philistines came up to Delilah on the receipt of this communication, bringing the money, the promised reward of her treachery (v. 5), in their hands.

**Judges 16:19.** "*Then she made him sleep upon her knees, and called to the man,*" possibly the man lying in wait (vv. 9 and 12), that she might not be alone with Samson when cutting off his hair; and she cut off the seven plaits of his hair, and began to afflict him, as his strength departed from him now.

**Judges 16:20.** She then cried out, "*Philistines upon thee, Samson!*" And he awaked out of his sleep, and thought ("said," i.e., to himself), "*I will go away as time upon time (this as at other times), and shake myself loose,*" sc., from the fetters or from the hands of the Philistines; "*but he knew not that Jehovah had departed from him.*" These last words are very important to observe in order to form a correct idea of the affair. Samson had said to Delilah, "If my hair were cut off, *my strength* would depart from me" (v. 17). The historian observes, on the other hand, that "*Jehovah had departed from him.*" The superhuman strength of Samson did not reside in his hair as hair, but in the fact that Jehovah was with or near him. But Jehovah was with him so long as he maintained his condition as a Nazarite. As soon as he broke away from this by sacrificing the hair which he wore in honour of the Lord, Jehovah departed from him, and with Jehovah went his strength.<sup>27</sup>

**Judges 16:21.** The Philistines then seized him, put out his eyes, and led him to Gaza fettered



with double brass chains. The chains are probably called *nechushtaim* (double brass) because both hands of both feet were fettered with them. King Zedekiah, when taken prisoner by the Chaldeans, was treated in the same manner (2 Kings 25:7). There Samson was obliged to turn the mill in the prison, and grind corn (the participle **טָחַן** expresses the continuance of the action). Grinding a handmill was the hardest and lowest kind of slave labour (compare Ex. 11:5 with 12:29); and both Greeks and Romans sentenced their slaves to this as a punishment (see *Od.* xx. 105ff., vii. 103–4; *Terent.* Phorm. ii. 1, 19, Andr. i. 2. 29), and it is still performed by female slaves in the East (see *Chardin* in *Harmar's* Beob. üb. d. Orient. iii. 64).

**Judges 16:22–31.** *Samson's Misery, and His Triumph in Death.*—V. 22. The hair of his head began to grow, as he was shaven. In the word

**בְּאִשֶּׁר**, *as* (from the time when he was shaven), there is an indication that Samson only remained in his ignominious captivity till his hair began to grow again, i.e., visibly to grow. What follows agrees with this.

**Judges 16:23, 24.** The captivity of this dreaded hero was regarded by the Philistines as a great victory, which their princes resolved to celebrate with a great and joyous sacrificial festival in honour of their god *Dagon*, to whom they ascribed this victory. “A great sacrifice,” consisting in the offering up of a large number of slain sacrifices. “And for joy,” viz., to give expression to their joy, i.e., for a joyous festival. *Dagon*, one of the principal deities of the Philistines, was worshipped at Gaza and Ashdod (2 Sam. 5:2ff., and 1 Macc. 10:83), and, according to Jerome on Isa. 46:1, in the rest of the Philistine towns as well. It was a fish-deity

(**דָּגוֹן**, from **דָּג**, a fish), and in shape resembled the body of a fish with the head and hands of a man (1 Sam. 5:4). It was a male deity, the corresponding female deity being *Atargatis* (2 Macc. 12:26) or *Derceto*, and was a symbol of water, and of all the vivifying forces of nature which produce their effects through the

medium of water, like the Babylonian **Ὠδάκων**, one of the four *Oannes*, and the Indian *Vishnu* (see *Movers*, Phöniz. i. pp. 143ff., 590ff., and *J. G. Müller* in *Herzog's Cycl.*).

**Judges 16:24.** All the people took part in this festival, and sang songs of praise to the god who had given the enemy, who had laid waste their fields and slain many of their countrymen, into their hands.

**Judges 16:25ff.** When their hearts were merry

(**יָטְבוּ**, *inf.* of **יָטַב**), they had Samson fetched out of the prison, that he might make sport before them, and “put him between the pillars” of the house or temple in which the triumphal feast was held. Then he said to the attendant who held his hand, “Let me loose, and let me touch the pillars upon which the house is built, that I may lean upon it.” **הִימְיִשְׁנִי** is the

imperative *Hiphil* of the radical verb **יָמַשׁ**, which only occurs here; and the *Keri* substitutes the ordinary form **הִמְיִשׁ** from **מוֹשׁ**. “But the house,” adds the historian by way of preparation for what follows, “was filled with men and women: all the princes of the Philistines also were there; and upon the roof were about three thousand men and women, who feasted their eyes with Samson's sports” (**רָאָה** with **בָּ**, used to denote the gratification of looking).

**Judges 16:28.** Then Samson prayed to Jehovah, “Lord Jehovah, remember me, and only this time make me strong. O God, that I may avenge myself (with) the revenge of one of my two eyes upon the Philistines,” i.e., may take vengeance upon them for the loss of only one of my two eyes

(**מִשְׁתִּי**, without *Dagesh lene* in the **ת**: see *Ewald*, § 267, b.),—a sentence which shows how painfully he felt the loss of his two eyes, “a loss the severity of which even the terrible vengeance which he was meditating could never outweigh” (*Bertheau*).

**Judges 16:29, 30.** After he had prayed to the Lord for strength for this last great deed, he embraced the two middle pillars upon which the building was erected, leant upon them, one with his right hand, the other with the left (viz., embracing them with his hands, as these words also belong to יִלְפַת), and said, “*let my soul die with the Philistines.*” He then bent (the two pillars) with force, and the house fell upon the princes and all the people who were within. So far as the fact itself is concerned, there is no ground nor questioning the possibility of Samson’s bringing down the whole building with so many men inside by pulling down two middle columns, as we have no accurate acquaintance with the style of its architecture. In all probability we have to picture this temple of Dagon as resembling the modern Turkish kiosks, namely as consisting of a “spacious hall, the roof of which rested in front upon four columns, two of them standing at the ends, and two close together in the centre. Under this hall the leading men of the Philistines celebrated a sacrificial meal, whilst the people were assembled above upon the top of the roof, which was surrounded by a balustrade” (*Faber, Archäol. der. Hebr. p. 444, cf. pp. 436–7; and Shaw, Reisen, p. 190*). The ancients enter very fully into the discussion of the question whether Samson committed suicide or not, though without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion. *O. v. Gerlach*, however, has given the true answer. “Samson’s deed,” he says, “was not suicide, but the act of a hero, who sees that it is necessary for him to plunge into the midst of his enemies with the inevitable certainty of death, in order to effect the deliverance of his people and decide the victory which he has still to achieve. Samson would be all the more certain that this was the will of the Lord, when he considered that even if he should deliver himself in any other way cut of the hands of the Philistines, he would always carry about with him the mark of his shame in the blindness of his eyes,—a mark of his unfaithfulness as the servant of God quite as much as of the double triumph of his foes, who had gained a spiritual

as well as a corporeal victory over him.” Such a triumph as this the God of Israel could not permit His enemies and their idols to gain. The Lord must prove to them, even through Samson’s death, that the shame of his sin was taken from him, and that the Philistines had no cause to triumph over him. Thus Samson gained the greatest victory over his foes in the moment of his own death. The terror of the Philistines when living, he became a destroyer of the temple of their idol when he died. Through this last act of his he vindicated the honour of Jehovah the God of Israel, against Dagon the idol of the Philistines. “*The dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.*”

**Judges 16:31.** This terrible blow necessarily made a powerful impression upon the Philistines, not only plunging them into deep mourning at the death of their princes and so many of their countrymen, and the destruction of the temple of Dagon, but filling them with fear and terror at the omnipotence of the God of the Israelites. Under these circumstances it is conceivable enough that the brethren and relatives of Samson were able to come to Gaza, and fetch away the body of the fallen hero, to bury it in his father’s grave between Zorea and Eshtaol (see Judges 13:25).—In conclusion, it is once more very appropriately observed that Samson had judged Israel twenty years (cf. Judges 15:20).