

SAMSON—A MAN OF RIDDLES

Presented by

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Before I present my sermon to you, I first want to do something rather unusual. In fact, my guess is that you have never had a preacher begin a sermon this way before. Believe it or not, I want to give you a riddle. Here it is:

“Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet.”

Do you know the answer to this riddle? Or, do you know where this riddle came from? The riddle comes from the book of Judges in the Old Testament. In Judges 13, we learn about a man by the name of Manoah whose wife gave birth to a son whom he called Samson. In Old Testament times, before the people of Israel had kings, God appointed judges to rule over Israel. One of the most famous of those judges was a man named Samson. Samson was a Nazirite, which means that he was set apart for God’s service and that he therefore could not cut his hair or drink any type of alcoholic beverages.

However, Samson was not famous for his wise rulings or for how well he governed as a judge. Instead, he was most famous for his immense physical strength. Judges 14:6 tells about a time when Samson came upon a wild lion that attacked him. But Samson tore the lion apart piece by piece with his bare hands and then went on his way. Some time later, Samson came back by the place where he had slain the lion. And guess what he found? Inside the lion, a swarm of bees had made a hive. And inside the hive was a honeycomb full of honey.

On another occasion in Judges 15:15, Samson went into battle against the Philistines, who were Israel’s most feared enemies, and killed a thousand warriors all by himself, using nothing but the jawbone of a donkey!

Another time, Samson did something that most men could only dream of accomplishing. While he was visiting the city of Gaza, the men of that city decided they would kill Samson early in the morning. When Samson learned of their plot, he walked to the city walls at midnight and removed the two huge doors that guarded the entrance into the city. And he did this all by himself! In fact, the Bible says that Samson tore down not only the two doors, but also the wooden posts and metal bars that fastened them to the walls. And that’s not all. Samson put the two giant doors on his shoulders and carried them approximately **40 miles away** toward the city of Hebron, which sits on a hill about 2,800 feet above sea level! What a walk **that** must have been!

Can you imagine having that kind of strength? And can you imagine how silly the men of Gaza must have felt when they awoke the next morning and discovered that Samson had torn down the huge gates in the city walls that were supposed to protect them from invaders? And can you imagine how bad those

men felt when they learned that Samson had carried their city's gates **40 miles away** to the top of a mountain? Of course, Samson did not come by this strength naturally. The Scriptures make it clear that "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him" to make such feats possible (Judges 14:6). And that brings us back to our riddle.

"Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet."

Who said this? And why? Here are the answers. Thirty men came to see Samson. Samson threw a great feast, at which these thirty men were present. The Bible says in Judges 14:12-14,

"Then Samson said to them, 'Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing.' And they said to him, 'Pose your riddle, that we may hear it.'"

Samson's riddle was as follows:

"Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet."

The young men did their best to try to solve Samson's riddle, but they could not. So what is the answer to the riddle? The phrases, "out of the eater" and "out of the strong," refer to the lion that Samson had killed. The phrases, "something to eat" and "something sweet," refer to the honey.

In many ways—like when he gave his riddle—Samson was smart. But in some ways he was not. For example, Samson loved a Philistine woman named Delilah who was very wicked. She discovered that the secret of Samson's great strength was that he could never cut his hair. So, while he was sleeping, she cut his hair, robbed him of his strength, and turned him over to his enemies, the Philistines. The Philistines put him in chains, put him in prison, and poked his eyes out, making him totally blind.

Why did these bad things happen to Samson? It was because he had disobeyed God. In Deuteronomy 7:1-3, God had told the Israelites not to marry people outside of their own nation. But in spite of God's instructions, Samson did what he wanted to do. And what was the end result? Samson was captured by his enemies, was deprived of his judgeship, and eventually even lost his life—all because he did not obey God.

So what is the moral to this story? The moral is that no matter how strong or how smart we may be, neither strength nor intelligence can take the place of obedience to God. That is a lesson that Samson, unfortunately, had to learn the hard way—and it cost him his life.

We today may not be as strong as Samson was, and we may not be able to make up tricky riddles like he did. But we can do something that Samson did not. We can obey God. So ask yourself, which would you rather be in God's sight—strong and tricky, or humble and obedient? To ask is to answer, is it not?