

ISSUE

20.7

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

February 18
2018

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



Samson: An Alternative View

By Kyle Pope

If you have studied what the Bible says about Samson you may, like many of us, have come away puzzled and questioning how such a seemingly carnal and impulsive man could be considered among the great figures who acted **“by faith”** (see Heb. 11:32-40). The usual explanation is that, in spite of his shortcomings, God used him to deliver Israel. This may be the best way to understand Samson, but in doing some study of the book of Judges some years ago I became uncomfortable with the fact that I often found myself apologizing for the behavior of one whom the Holy Spirit counts among the faithful. A closer look at the texts describing this man made me wonder if my own view of Samson’s “wild man” image had been colored more by Hollywood than by what the Scripture actually says about him. A new movie is now in theaters that may well paint the same picture. In light of this I offer the following points as a possible alternative interpretation of this puzzling man.

A Nazirite for Life. Before Samson is even born his parents are told, **“...the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death”** (Judges 13:7, NKJV). The Nazirite vow was an institution set up by God under mosaic Law whereby a person dedicated himself to God for a period of separation. During this time the person was neither to eat or drink anything that came from the vine (Num. 6:3-4). The Nazirite was not to touch a **“dead body”** (Num. 6:6). Even if family members died he could not touch them (Num. 6:7). If he accidentally came in contact with a dead person there were sacrifices that had to be offered to cleanse the Nazirite (Num 6:9-11).^{*} Most notably the Nazirite was not to cut the hair of his head (Num. 6:5). This served as a visible indication that the person was set apart unto God. Of such a person

it is said that **“his separation to God is on his head”** (Num. 6:7b). While this was usually a temporary thing, Samson was set apart to God in this way his entire life. He would tell Delilah shortly before his death that he had **“been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb”** (Judges 16:17). Visibly any Israelite could see that Samson was dedicated to the service of God.

The Spirit of the Lord Moved Him. One of the first things that is said of Samson is that **“the Spirit of the LORD began to move him”** (Judges 13:25). The Hebrew word translated “move” is *pa’am* meaning “to thrust, impel, push, beat persistently” (Gesenius). Throughout the book of Judges the operation of God’s Spirit in the lives of the judges is often manifested in great strength or military prowess (e.g. Othniel – 3:10; Gideon – 6:34; Jephthah – 11:29). It is significant to note that there are more references to this fact in the life of Samson than any other judge (see Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). Hand in hand with some of the incidents where we “scratch our heads” puzzled by Samson’s behavior Scripture declares that the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, or moved him. If God’s Spirit is

with him and working through him, we should be cautious about jumping too quickly to conclude that Samson acted sinfully.

Taking a Philistine Wife. One of the first things that puzzles us about Samson is his request that his parents arrange a marriage for him with **“a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines”** (Judges 14:1). The Israelites were expressly forbidden to intermarry with pagans (Deut. 7:3). Because of this his parents were disturbed by his request, but the Bible says, **“his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel”** (Judges 14:4). Many translations have capitalized the pronoun “He” in the phrase “He was seeking” making it sound as if God was seeking an occasion. In the Hebrew the antecedent of the pronoun “he” may be found in the phrase “His father and mother” at the beginning of the verse. If that is the case, it tells us that Samson was setting up this marriage **“of the LORD”** and that he was **“seeking occasion to move against the Philistines.”** If we consider this as his motive, we can see Samson every step along the way acting upon the opportunities that are set before him to **“move against the Philistines.”**

For example, before his marriage can be consummated Samson throws a feast (14:10). During this seven-day feast he poses a riddle to 30 of the Philistine men at the feast (14:12-13). During the feast the men threatened to kill his betrothed wife, if she will not find out for them the solution (14:15). She does and Samson travels from Timnah to the coastal Philistine city of Ashkelon, and kills 30 men bringing their clothes to the 30 men at the feast (14:19a). Was this carnal impulsiveness or “seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines”?

He does not go back to his betrothed wife, but home to his parents (14:19b). Thus, the wedding to a pagan woman is never actually consummated. When sometime later he does go to her at Timnah, she has been given to another man (14:20-15:2). In response to this Samson sends foxes with torches on their tails to burn Philistine crops (15:3-5). Again, is this carnal impulsiveness or “seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines”? The Philistines in their anger over the burned crops burn his betrothed wife and her father (15:6). Samson, in response to the murder of his betrothed wife, moves against them **“hip and thigh”** (a Hebrew idiom for ferocity) with a **“great slaughter”** (15:7,8). Again he is “seeking occasion to move against the Philistines.”

As he holds up in the cleft of the rocks of Etam, men of Judah, feeling the pressure from Philistines who had come up to seize him, come and take him bound to the Philistines at Lehi (15:9-13). Samson, through the Spirit of the LORD breaks the bonds and kills 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:14-17). He again finds another “occasion to move against the Philistine.”

Water from the Rock. After this slaughter the care that the Lord has for Samson is seen in a tender event in which his life is preserved. Thirsty after the battle with the Philistines, Samson prays to God for water and is miraculously given water from a rock that splits (Judges 15:18-20).

The Harlot of Gaza. The most puzzling events for many of us come in the last chapter that describes his life. It begins, “**Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her**” (Judges 16:1). Does this man, moved by the Spirit of God, separated unto His service as a Nazirite, who is seeking occasions to move against the Philistines give himself to fornication with a Philistine whore? Perhaps. However, let’s be careful to recognize what is and what is not said about this situation.

Gaza was a major coastal city in the heart of Philistine territory some distance from his own home near Zorah and Eshtaol. Samson, by then notorious for his slaughter of scores of Philistines walks into the heart of his enemies’ territory. Where would one stay in such a city? The homes of ordinary citizens of a Philistine stronghold would probably not be open to such a noted enemy. On the other hand, the home of a harlot would be much less discriminating. The Hebrew does not use language that is explicit with respect to whether he committed fornication with the woman or simply stayed with her. The phrase “**went in to her**” in Hebrew is literally “**went to her.**” The same wording is used in Genesis 38:16 of Judah and Tamar where fornication is clearly involved, but also in Joshua 2:1 of Rahab and the spies where fornication is not involved. The text says that the men of the city hearing that he had come into the city wait to seize him in the morning (16:2). Samson has other plans. The text says, “**Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight**” (16:3a, KJV). The New King James version, perhaps optimistically, adds in

italics “**Samson lay low till midnight.**” Then, in the middle of the night, he removes the gates and bars of the city gate and carries them into Israelite territory near Hebron (16:3). Is this the behavior of a wild impulsive fornicator or a man “seeking occasion to move against the Philistines”?

Love for Delilah. Finally, the Bible tells us that Samson, “**...loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah**” (16:4). Hollywood, and even some Biblical reference books jump to the conclusion that Delilah was a Philistine. The text doesn’t say, as was said of his betrothed wife that she was “**of the daughters of the Philistines**” (14:1). Sorek was a river valley running between Zimnah and the area of Zorah and Eshtaol where he lived. The text doesn’t tell us the complete nature of their relationship (i.e. whether they were married or not). Nor does it explicitly indicate that it was a sexual relationship, only that Samson was in her room (16:9) and lulled to sleep (16:19). We often conclude that Delilah was Philistine because she so readily agrees to deliver him to the Philistines for 1100 pieces of silver (16:5). This fact may tell us merely that she was wicked, greedy, and like the men of Judah, willing to deliver a fellow Israelite over to the Philistine overlords.

At any rate, Delilah begs Samson to tell her the secret of his strength. Three times he deceives her and three times she arranges for Philistines to come and seize him. After each incident, Delilah pouts and complains that Samson must not really love her to have deceived her so. Is Samson really so blinded by his love for her that he doesn't recognize that he was the one who had the right to be angry at a woman who had tried three times to deliver him to the Philistines? Either Samson is behaving foolishly or he is again "seeking occasion to move against the Philistines."

At last he reveals to her, **"No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man"** (16:17). This seems foolish to us that Samson would give such important information to this wicked woman. Perhaps he did allow his love to blind him. Or perhaps, as he had done by allowing the men of Judah to bind him, he was even then, "seeking and occasion to move against the Philistines." Samson lost his

strength when this is done (16:19). When he awoke for the first time in the entire record of Samson the Bible says, **"the LORD had departed from Him"** (16:20). Was this because God saw his behavior as rebellion against Him? Perhaps. Or, was it simply that it could no longer be said of Samson that **"his separation to God is on his head"** (Num 6:7b)? Had Samson been granted strength in such a condition it would have appeared that Samson's own strength delivered him.

Samson is taken, his eyes are put out, and he was forced to be a grinder in a Philistine prison (16:21). Over time his hair grew back and he was brought to a temple of Dagon that the people might make a spectacle of him. He prays to God, pushes down pillars of the temple collapsing it on the people and killing 3000 Philistines and himself in the process (16:23-30).

Conclusion. Was Samson a carnal impulsive wild man ready to violate his separation to God and fornicate with pagan women at will? Perhaps. It may be that God worked through him to deliver Israel in spite of these failings. However, given the fact that the Holy Spirit counts Samson among the faithful; works through him time and time again; and Samson himself claims to have kept his Nazirite separation from the womb, it seems only fair that we give him the benefit of the doubt and consider that his actions all along the way may have been **"of the Lord"** as Samson was **"seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines."** If so, Samson is seen not as a foolish, impulsive wild man, but one who creatively infiltrated the homes, lives, and strongholds of the enemy to undermine and tear down their dominion over Israel.



* The emphasis in this instruction for Nazirites seems to involve human bodies. The same phrase in Hebrew translated "dead person" when used in Leviticus 21:11 refers to human bodies. Uncleanness from the carcass of an animal with paws in general only made one unclean until evening (Lev. 11:27,28). Samson doesn't consider the touching of the lion's carcass to have broken his Nazirite separation to God (see Judges 14:9 & 16:17).