

# **Honey From a Carcass**

## **(Judges 16)**

At the end of chapter 15, you probably found yourself saying, “Go ahead and finish the story!” To end the Samson saga in the blind darkness of a Philistine prison in Gaza is almost too much to bear. However, God was not finished with Samson yet. In the end, evil and hatred and lust did not win! Good did triumph! Because our God is the God of second chances, the account of what follows in this story gives meaning to the life of Samson and hope to the rest of us.

### **CELEBRATION IN GAZA**

After the capture and humiliation of Samson, the Philistines gathered in the temple of their god, Dagon, to celebrate. They interpreted their success against their longtime nemesis in the following poem:

Our god has given our enemy into our hands,  
Even the destroyer of our country,  
Who has slain many of us (16:24).

In their exuberance they praised their god and called for Samson to be brought out to “entertain” them. It must have been a pathetic sight to behold when the once-proud, invincible Samson was led out into that pagan temple filled with three thousand Philistine men and women, all jeering at the blind Israelite and mocking his God. The walk out of the prison and into the crowded, noisy temple was probably the worst moment of Samson’s life, yet God was about to do something He had often

done before and has continued to do since: He was about to bring honey from a carcass!

### **OUT OF THE EATER. . . .**

Earlier in Samson’s life, on his way to Timnah to make plans for his marriage to a Philistine woman, Samson had been attacked by a young lion. This potential tragedy quickly turned into a mighty victory as “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him” (14:6), and Samson was able to tear the lion apart with his bare hands. Later, when he returned for the wedding, he left the road to check on the remains of the lion. The Scriptures do not tell what degree of decay the carcass was in—whether it was still rotting or had already dried up, leaving only a skeleton. Whatever the case, in place of the once-threatening lion were now a swarm of bees and an abundance of honey! Samson ate some and took some for his parents to enjoy.

Samson was able to enjoy a delightful snack, but I believe that something much richer and powerfully symbolic was taking place here. Samson expressed it himself in the riddle he created from the experience:

Out of the eater came something to eat,  
And out of the strong came something sweet  
(14:14).

The idea of “honey from a carcass” is the perfect metaphor to describe the entire life of Samson! The stench of death followed him

throughout his tragic life, but God steadily transformed the stench into sweetness. What began with self-absorbed lust ended in selfless sacrifice; what started with rage and violence and death ended in giving life. Honey, indeed, came from a carcass. Here is how it happened.

### **BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE**

When Samson was brought into the temple of Dagon for the thousands of Philistines to mock and ridicule, he asked the servant who led him to put his hand where he could feel the pillars that supported the temple. The Philistines had no way of knowing that this was a different man from the blind and bald Israelite prisoner they had brought in from Delilah's bed. During his long months in bronze shackles turning a mill, Samson's hair had begun to grow back. I like to imagine that in this dark midnight of Samson's soul, he woke up to who he was, what God had planned for his life, why such incredible disaster had befallen him, and how all these events might be working to serve the purposes of God. Whatever his exact frame of mind, as Samson listened to the jeering mob of Philistine lords, he prayed, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes" (16:28). Then, pushing against the two central pillars of the temple and shouting, "Let me die with the Philistines!" he brought the temple down upon himself and on the heads of the Philistine leaders. Although some today are bothered by Samson's apparent suicide, I believe that he is rather to be regarded as a casualty of Israel's war against the Philistines—a war in which he fought bravely and died honorably.

In death, Samson was treated as a hero. His family went to Gaza, retrieved his body, and took it to the family tomb between Zorah and Eshtaol, burying it in his father's tomb. Much of his life had been spent among the Philistines, but in the end, Manoah's prodigal son finally came home!

Samson's life was a tragedy, but his "tragic" death was an answer to the prayers of the oppressed in Israel. The Scriptures observe that when Samson pulled down the Philistine temple, "the dead whom he killed at his death

were more than those whom he killed in his life" (16:30). Although Samson had lived a far from holy life, the purposes of God had been accomplished through him. His mother had been told before Samson's birth that his mission in life would be to "begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines" (13:5). When the dust settled and all the bodies were buried, it became clear that God had accomplished in Samson's life what He had planned to accomplish. Indeed, God proved that He was in control even in an out-of-control life! Because of that, the sweet taste of honey replaced the nauseating stench of death.

### **THE BIGGER PICTURE**

When we begin to see the way God worked through the disasters in Samson's life to bring about His purposes, we begin to see what is happening on a larger scale in the Book of Judges as a whole. Even though Israel failed to recognize Him as King, God was ruling over Israel's history. Even amid all the chaos produced by the descending cycles of Israel's disobedience, God was able to realize His goals of deliverance and redemption. Out of the wretched carcass of Israel's wickedness, He created the sweet honey of salvation. In the bigger picture of the entire Old Testament, we also see God moving history in the direction of his ultimate choosing. Through the creation and the fall of mankind to the election of Israel and the kingdom of Israel, through the exile in Babylon to the return of the captives to Jerusalem, God relentlessly moved the history of His chosen people toward the One who stands as the goal of all history, Jesus the Christ! Jesus, one might say, is the ultimate expression of God's ability and nature to bring honey from a carcass.

### **THE HONEY PRINCIPLE**

The concept of "honey from a carcass" is operative in many ways in God's world today. For instance, it is true in the tragedies we see on each evening's newscast or on the front page of each morning's newspaper. The slaughter in Bosnia, Rwanda, or whatever troubled area was featured on last night's news, fills our noses with the stench of death. As people of God, we know that this news is only part of

the picture. Because we feed our souls on stories such as Samson's, we live with the confidence that our God can somehow produce honey from this carcass. The world may despair, but we have seen God bring good out of evil before, and we are certain that He will do it again! The blatant wickedness and wanton bloodshed in our streets cause us to cry out, "How long, O Lord?"; yet the cry itself expresses the confidence that our God can bring honey from a carcass. Death, destruction, hatred, wickedness—those pieces of hell that spill over into our world—are not the final word. God is King! He rules today even as He did in Israel, and He still knows how to bring honey from every carcass that stinks up His creation.

The "honey-from-a-carcass" principle is also operative in the area of physical death. Jesus demonstrated this in His public ministry one day when He was entering the town of Nain (Luke 7:11–17). Meeting a funeral procession which was leaving the town as He and His large entourage approached, Jesus realized that He was watching a widow bury her only son. Her grief and her desperate situation touched Jesus deeply. He said, "Do not weep" (Luke 7:13), and then He revived the young man. His miracle that day displayed more than His miraculous powers; it demonstrated His "resurrection nature." At another funeral He defiantly declared, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Living as we do in a dying yet death-denying society, we must remember and reflect on the nature of our God to overcome death. We will grieve, but we will not "grieve, as do the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The reason? We are children of the God who brings honey from carcasses.

This same principle is also seen in our spiritual lives. Since all of us are sinners, we all carry around painful memories of our own sin and guilt. We have all made foolish mistakes in life, and we all have hurt others deeply. As a result of these failures, our tendency is to drag around with us the sins of the past, much like dragging around a smelly carcass. Everywhere we go, the smell goes with us. People who did not even know us "back then" and who have not been hurt by our behavior still have to smell the carcasses we carry with us! I

sometimes wonder if even when the church assembles (perhaps *especially* when the church assembles) we are not a gathering of people dragging in the carcasses of our past sins and failures.

The good news for all of us is that God always begins with death when He makes us alive in Christ. When Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus of their salvation, he began by reminding them of how dead they were before obeying Christ (Ephesians 2:1–10). God always begins His work with dead people. Not sick, not dying, not troubled, not dysfunctional—dead! Dead, as in lifeless, decaying, and smelly. Because of His nature, He takes what is dead and makes it alive! Christians are all "the formerly dead." God did not begin with a spiritually-alive person in any of us. This leaves us with a decision about the past: We can lay down the carcasses we have persisted in carrying around and accept the honey-sweet gift of salvation that God offers us, or we can continue to drag around our rot from an already-forgiven past.

As the familiar song declares, God does not summon us to bring perfection to Him; He invites us to bring Him our "broken lives":

Bring Christ your broken life, so marred by  
sin.  
He will create anew, make whole again;  
Your empty, wasted years he will restore,  
And your iniquities remember no more.

Bring Him your every care if great or small—  
Whatever troubles you—O bring it all!  
Bring him your haunting fears, the nameless  
dread,  
Thy heart He will relieve, and lift up thy  
head.

Bring Him your weariness, receive His rest;  
Weep out your blinding tears upon His breast;  
His love is wonderful, His power is great,  
"And none that trust in Him shall be desolate."

Blest Savior of us all! Almighty friend!  
His presence shall be ours unto the end;  
Without Him life would be how dark, how  
drear!  
But with Him morning breaks and heaven is  
near!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T.O. Chisholm, "Bring Christ Your Broken Life." Copyright, 1963, Renewal. Leon B. Sanderson, Owner. Used by permission.

Beginning with spiritually dead carcasses, God makes us alive when we come to faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), confess Him as Lord (Romans 10:10), repent of our sins (Acts 2:38), and are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:4). Paul described the “honey-from-a-carcass” nature of salvation as rising to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

### CONCLUSION

When Paul had been a Christian for more than twenty years, he wrote about how God continually brings sweet blessings out of unlikely sources:

Romans 8:35–37

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”

When God sees brokenness, he sees opportunity for restoration. How marvelous it is that our God continues to bring honey from carcasses! ■

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