

Sermon 12: Judges 14: Samson the Man

OUTLINE

Distracted deliverer
Unwitting tool
Unholy Nazirite
Greedy groom

INTRODUCTION

The last chapter ended on a very promising note, 13:25, 'And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.' We are expecting great things after a miraculous birth; after a Gideon like visitation, and now these words that indicate that God is working in Samson to do His will. But this chapter proves to be a great disappointment. Samson proves to be a disappointment in every area of responsibility. We see that as he goes about investigating the enemy moved by the Spirit of God to deliver but he gets distracted with a pretty Philistine girl; we see him as a demanding and entitled child who disrespects his parents; despite being set aside by God to deliver His people, Samson is used despite himself as an unwitting tool; we see him disregard his sanctity as a Nazirite, impulsive, indulgent, casual and deceitful; as a bridegroom and wedding host he is demanding. From one point of view he is a perfect picture of our imperfection. Samson is the judge with the most details about his life. What are we to make of a life like his, a constant string of failures, a life like ours? We can certainly take away the reminder that we are sinners, but in truth this is a backdrop for the main thing that God is doing. God continues to be in the midst of His people; His faithfulness is seen in His fatherly dealings with Israel; God is continuing to fulfil the promises to Abraham that from him a Savior will be born that will bless the nations. Even when things are at their darkest, God is faithful; God is sovereign. So our focus in the text today will be upon Samson the man and his many imperfections. This is not an attempt to preach a moralizing sermon where we simply conclude, 'Do better than Samson.' We should of course be holy where he was not, but we also want to see what God is doing and how He acts. The key words that help us make sense of what we are seeing are in v4, 'His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.' God is seeking an opportunity against the Philistines, God has a plan that He is bringing to pass. These apparently random and sinful events are God using these far gone Israelites and Philistines despite themselves to advance His purposes. Israel is in a terrible position of apathy, they have become assimilated and conditioned by their infiltration and oppression. The savior God has miraculously provided is more like them than one of God's people, yet God's will cannot fail. He bring enmity between the Philistines and Samson, He will cause Samson to use his gifts to deliver Israel, God will give Samson and the Philistines full sail letting them take their fill of the headwinds of their desires and steer them into His purposes.

Distracted deliverer

14:1, 'Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.' Let me indulge in a little imagination at this point. Imagine for a moment that Samson is not all bad, but like all human beings there are moments of tenderness, of good intentions. Imagine that his parents shared the

story with him about his miraculous birth as they explained why he could not cut his hair like other people and eat and drink all the same things. I can imagine a young man who would have moments of thoughtfulness who would see the evil of the Philistines, who would hunger for the liberty God gave Israel from Egypt, who would wonder about how the promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. As I read 13:25 and hear about the Spirit stirring him, I imagine that this might have included some planning and desiring. And so when I see Samson going into Philistine territory I am giving him the benefit of the doubt and see him setting off with good intentions to do some reconnaissance in order to fulfil his purpose in delivering Israel. And then he sees a pretty girl and the wheels come off. Samson was weak when it came to pretty girls. Here was a young man instead of harnessing his passions and taking them captive to the duties he had to fulfill. We see a young man who is ruled by what he desires and can with one sighting of a pretty girl abandon the laws of God. Some might have described Samson as headstrong, bullish, determined; but these are pretty words used to dress up the sin of his weakness and lust.

V2, 'Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." The word 'saw' is a prominent and repeated word in this text. There is an emphasis being placed on the lust of the eyes. Samson sees her and wants and demands her. We get a sense of his disrespect towards his parents as he orders them to get her as his wife. Now the law of God is clear with regards to being unequally yoked. Exodus 34:13-16, 'You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.' It is important to remember Othniel the first and best of the judges and compare him with Samson the last and worst. Othniel married a godly woman Achsah; Samson is here marrying a Philistine. Othniel had no conversations recorded because there was nothing important that was sinful that was being done; here we are given all the juicy details of the argument Samson had with his parents.

V3, 'But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes." Her parents give some push back, mentioning that the girl is a Philistine, but it is not clear whether their concern is ethic and racial or religious. They do not make a case based on God's law and the conditions of the Mosaic covenant along with warnings about idolatry, they only mention her ethnicity. God of course is not against interracial marriage, only interreligious marriage. Samson retort is telling, 'she is right in my eyes.' The book of Judges talks about the big problem being that every man did what was right in his own eyes. Samson is a living personification of this tendency. This statement can have two meanings, firstly, that we do whatever we want; but it can also expose the way in which we rationalize our sins as goods that we should and must have. And you can imagine the rationalization around this action. Samson would talk tell himself a story about his situation and rationalize his actions to himself so that it would appear that he was pursuing the right not the wrong. He would talk about his loneliness; he would talk about his needs; he would talk about her loveliness; perhaps he would even entertain high ideals of

converting her and her family to the right religion; of how this union would put him in a position to negotiate peace terms with the Philistines and even be helpful to his role as deliverer. As someone has said, 'No man is a villain to himself.' This does not mean that he is not a villain just that he is able to lie to himself about the good or bad he is doing. Once again we need the objective standard of what is right in God's eyes to be our guide.

This does raise the question: when looking for a spouse what should be right in our eyes? We should be looking for a godly spouse first and foremost. True you should be attracted to your spouse, but godliness is the beauty that does not fade and can grow in its brightness.

Unwitting tool

V4, 'His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.' As we come to a verse like this many end up scratching their heads. This verse seems to imply that Samson sinfully marrying a Philistine girl is God's will. Some might even think that the Holy Spirit which came upon Samson in 13:25 even 'led' him into this action. What do we make of such a verse? We are very in tune to these sorts of issues because in the West we have had many years debating how God relates to evil. The existence of God has been called into question and the favourite attack against God is the argument of God not being good because of the problem of evil, and a verse that seems to make God the author of evil as we have in Judges 14:4 seems to play into the antagonists hands. The bible however is pre-western and has no qualms about making it appear as if God is the author of evil. The basic worldview of the Bible is that God is fully in control and all things that happen come to pass because it is His will. It is only by ongoing discussion and investigation into the text that we see that the philosophical categories of first and second causes, as well as the difference between God auctioning things and God allowing things are satisfied unselfconsciously in the scriptures. Here is another example.

2 Samuel 24:1 (ESV) "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah." 1 Chron. 21:1 (ESV) "Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel." From the context we can clearly see that David sinned, (2 Sam 24:10), yet the language of the text is emphatic. God is said to have 'incited David', and even to have told him to do it. Yet as we turn to 1 Chronicles 21:1 we see that Satan did it, so who did it, God or Satan? And the answer is, both! We would describe it in terms of primary and secondary causes. However, this still puts God in the driving seat, let me read you a few comments others have made about these texts. Walter Kaiser an OT scholar says, "It is also true, according to Hebrew thinking that whatever God permits He commits. By allowing the census taking, God is viewed as having brought about the act. The Hebrews were not very concerned with determining secondary causes and properly attributing them to the exact cause. Under divine providence everything ultimately was attributed to Him; why not say He did it in the first place," (Walter Kaiser, quoted from 2 Samuel, by Dale Ralph David, p261). The Bible understands the devil's allowed actions as God's willed actions. The bible sees David's sins as God's allowed actions, and in Judges 14:4, God is not making Samson sin, He is not putting sin into his thought, He is allowing Samson to be his sinful self so that there is no violation of the will of the creature and God is not the author of sin.

God is going to use Samson despite himself. Samson will go on pursuing his sinful desires but God will use his sins to forward His own purposes of delivering Israel. The Philistines and Israel were becoming entwined and the difference between them unidentifiable. Intermarriage was seen to be OK by a younger generation, the status quo of the Philistines being the rulers was accepted, the lack of repentance and crying out by Israel is probably the greatest sign of spiritual death. God is not going to leave things as they are even though there is no one seeking Him and repenting that He might respond to them. He will use Samson to upset the Philistines, to provoke them and thereby separate them. Samson uniting himself to the Philistines will be the very thing that drives a wedge between them so that Samson deals some heavy losses to them.

Unholy Nazirite

We come now to the preamble before the wedding and here we see Samson compromising his vows. These details might seem insignificant but we will see that the event with the lion will lead to a riddle being put to the Philistines which leads to the Philistines threatening his new wife, which leads to Samson killing 30 Philistines in a rage; which leads to Samson abandoning his new bride in a huff; which leads to her being given to someone else, which escalates the tension between Samson and the Philistines according to God's will.

V5-6, 'Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. ⁶ Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.' This story reports an extraordinary miracle. It is not just some random retelling of great deeds, but a deed linked to the developing plot of Samson's life. Typical of Samson's life we see the Spirit of God enabling a great and mighty act that is sullied by his keeping it secret from his parents. This too will play into the developing plot.

V7, 'Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.' Here we see the romance continue. You can insert all the usual stuff about first love, and batting eyelids and make it seem sweet and innocent, but it is all sullied by Samson's headstrong intent on doing whatever he likes.

V8-9, 'After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. ⁹ He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.' A beehive in a carcass is a very rare thing in nature, if not impossible. Yet here it is. Samson is a Nazirite who cannot touch dead bodies, and yet he eats honey from a dead body and contaminates not only himself but his parents as well. A man called to be holy, then that man giving up his holiness to enjoy something sweet, sound familiar? This is sin. It sells itself with sweetness but contaminates. We are reminded of the lying nature of sin, the cost of sin, the deadly way it separates us from God, and the way in which it impacts our loved ones.

Greedy groom

We come now to the wedding. V10-14, 'His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. ¹¹ As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. ¹² And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, ¹³ but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it." ¹⁴ And he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet."

And in three days they could not solve the riddle.' Samson dutifully fulfils the role of providing a week long stag feast for the young men. It appears that the opportunistic Philistines could not say no to free booze and saddled Samson with 30 unasked for drinking companions. It appears that this goads Samson into a confrontation camouflaged in a riddle challenge. Samson makes a bet that they can't answer his riddle, the prize being 30 changes of clothing. Perhaps Samson was trying to get some revenge for the forced feast he was now having to pay for. Samson uses his recent events with the lion as the source for his riddle, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." And after three days they had not found the answer.

V15-20, 'On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" ¹⁶ And Samson's wife wept over him and said, "You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" ¹⁷ She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. ¹⁸ And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" And he said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle." And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. ²⁰ And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.'

Samson's foolish and greedy pride puts his new wife at risk as her family is threatened so that she will extract the answer from Samson. He cannot resist her tactics and charms and gives in. Samson realizes that he has been played and out of a sense of revenge he goes to another Philistine city and kills 30 Philistines to settle the debt. The Spirit of the LORD is upon Samson to strengthen him, not because the Spirit is given in response to his holiness, but because God has a purpose to bring Samson and Philistia into conflict. And so God advances His plan by His Spirit despite the sin and folly of Samson and the Philistines.

Now I could not help myself as I thought about how to bring Christ through this passage. There are many warnings about allegorizing the text to try and find Jesus where He is not. I have tried to resist this blatant allegorizing of the text and instead I want to show how Christ is an opposite to Samson, that Samson's actions and his sins in them are a contrast to Christ and His obedience and deliverance. Compare Samson with Christ then. Samson goes into the place of the enemy for a wife and sins to have his bride; Christ comes into enemy territory and converts for Himself a bride and present her to Himself perfect.

Samson sought his own will pursuing his own selfish ends; Christ emptied Himself of His prerogatives and served. Samson went against the will of his father; Christ fulfilled the will of His Father. Samson has the Spirit of the Lord upon Him and sinned; Christ had the Spirit of the Lord and was sinless. Samson slew a lion but was contaminated by it; Christ slew a lion put an end to any uncleanness that could come from it. Samson contaminated his loved ones with his sins; Christ sanctifies His loved ones. Samson was a bridegroom who grudgingly provided wine; Christ is the bridegroom who willingly turned water into wine. Samson exposed his bride to danger; Christ faced danger for His bride. Samson out of revenge provides new garments for the wedding guests; Christ willingly and at great cost to Himself dressing us for the wedding feast. Samson abandons his bride; Christ will never abandon us.