*Chuck Swindol tells the story of how we plan ahead for temptation.*

*“Son,” ordered the father, “don’t swim in that canal.”*

*“OK, Dad,” he answered. But he came home carrying a wet bathing suit that evening.*

*“Where have you been?” asked the father.*

*“Swimming in the canal,” answered the boy.*

*“Why did you do that?” the father asked.*

*“Well, Dad,” he explained, “I had a bathing suit with me and I couldn’t resist the temptation.”*

*“Why did you take your bathing suit with you?” he questioned.*

*“So, I’d be prepared to swim, in case I was tempted,” he replied.*

The boy had set himself up for failure – predisposed to disobey his father by first entertaining the thought and then planning ahead to act on it. This morning we are pressing on in the Book of Judges and we are going to be in **Chapter 14,** where we will see Samson doing pretty much the same thing.

If you remember from last week, we read a lengthy introduction about Samson, and we learned that before his birth, he was given a special task by God – that being to begin the deliverance of the Israelites from the Philistines. If you recall, God’s people had grown comfortable and accustomed to their oppression by the Philistines, so much so, that they did not cry out to God for help, so God was determined to shake things up a bit between them – to create some tension and strife in their unhealthy and stagnant relationship.

Now knowing this background should help us to understand the life of Samson, but it will also reveal the providence of God at work – and in spite of Samson’s sin and moral weakness, God will still accomplish His divine purposes through Samson.

So, let’s start, Chapter 14 beginning with **verse 1**.

**1Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. 2So he came back and told his father and mother, “I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife.” 3Then his father and his mother said to him, “Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she looks good to me.”**

When you go to the wrong place looking for the wrong thing you are pretty much guaranteed to find it. In this passage, Samson visits the Philistine city of Timnah, a city that he did not belong in, looking for love in all the wrong places – and sure enough he finds it. Samson sees this beautiful Philistine woman, and its lust at first sight. He apparently didn’t even talk to her but that didn’t matter – she looks good and now he wants her for his wife. So, Samson goes back home, and tells his parents *“go get her for me.”*

Normally in Israel, parents decided who their children should marry; or at least they had a very important voice in that decision. And it was the parents who were responsible for making the marriage arrangements. Samson was willing to let his parents make the arrangements, but that woman was going to be his – end of story.

Well, his parents objected to this because Scripture was very clear that there was to be no intermarriage between the Israelites and the foreign inhabitants. They urged Samson to consider an Israelite woman, but Samson tells his parents she’s the one for him because *“she looks good”* which is better translated *“she looks right in my eyes.”* So, this really shouldn’t surprise any of us because Samson was just like the rest of God’s people – doing what was right in their own eyes.

Samson ignored God’s command regarding marriage and he also disregarded his parent’s wise advice. Samson was not pleasing the Lord, and he was not pleasing his parents – he was however pleasing himself. *“She looks good to me and that’s all that matters.”* I wonder how many people have made that mistake?

Now **verse 4** is an interesting verse, a key verse for Chapters 14 and 15.

**However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.**

If you think about it, this must have been a confusing time for Manoah and his wife. Samson was their miracle boy because Ms. Manoah was barren. The angel of the Lord gave the birth announcement, that’s how special he was. Samson was blessed by God and was Nazirite at birth – set apart, dedicated to God from the womb. Samson was a child from God, but he surely isn’t living like it.

Can you imagine the questions that Manoah and his wife might have had? Why is God allowing this to happen? Is this what God intended for our son? Can God still use Samson or has he blown it? They didn’t know what to think about their son, but unbeknownst to them, in spite of Samson’s disobedience and rebellion, God was working behind the scene, using Samson’s behavior for His purposes.

Now this brings up an interesting paradox that exists between the freewill of man and God’s sovereignty – His will. It’s a paradox because both of these truths, that seem to contradict each other, somehow coexist. God gives us freedom to choose, but in spite of our choices – right or wrong – wise or foolish, God still accomplishes His sovereign will.

This is exactly what Joseph told his brothers who sold him into slavery – which was an evil act on their part. But we know the rest of the story. Joseph is a slave and falsely accused by his master’s wife of attempted rape, he’s thrown into jail, and hears a couple of dreams by other inmates and interprets them. Later the Pharaoh of Egypt has his own dreams and Joseph is pulled out of jail to interpret them. When all is said and done, Joseph is made the second in command of all Egypt and he saves all of Israel to include his brothers who sold him into slavery in the first place. And in **Genesis 50:20**, Joseph told his brothers:

***As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.***

Here’s another example, this time from the New Testament. In **Matthew 26**, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and has been betrayed by Judas. Peter takes a swing with the sword and cuts off the ear of the slave of the high priest. Jesus tells Peter to put away his sword, explaining that He could have called 72,000 angels to come to His rescue if He so ordered. Then Jesus says in **verse 54,**

***“How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?”***

The betrayal by Judas was wicked. The arrest of Jesus by the religious leaders was evil, but it had to happen because it was all part of God’s sovereign plan. It’s an interesting and confusing paradox. Let me try to explain it another way.

*On our 25th wedding anniversary, Trish and I went on a seven-day Alaskan cruise. We departed Seattle and made our way through the inward passage of Alaska, we stopped in several ports like Skagway and Ketchikan, then we returned to Seattle as scheduled. On the cruise ship, we were amongst hundreds upon hundreds of other passengers who could freely move about as they wanted. They could eat, sleep, play, lounge on the deck, go to shows, be entertained, read, or just do nothing. They even had a midnight chocolate buffet which was utterly sinful. Whoever created that will surely go to hell. Passengers were able to exercise their freewill all over the cruise ship – but make no mistake, the cruise ship was under the rule and control of the Captain. And this ship, under the rule of the Captain, carrying these passengers who are exercising their freewill, are on a steady course towards a predetermined port, according to the speed and direction and purpose ordered by the Captain.*

So, we see both freewill and sovereignty are at work at the same time, and this is what we are seeing here with Samson. God uses Samson’s rebellious choices – which are wrong, to accomplish His purposes, and if Israel will not take action against the Philistines, God will use Samson to cause the Philistines to take action against the Israelites. Remember, God is shaking things up between them.

**Warren Wiersbe** says *"When God isn’t permitted to* ***rule*** *in our lives, He* ***overrules*** *and works out His will in spite of our decisions.”* In other words, God can bring something good out of the stupid things we do – but that is no excuse for the stupid things we do. And in Samson’s case, he is not done with the stupidity. Let’s continue with **verse 5**.

**5Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him. 6The Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. 7So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson.**

Apparently, the parents give in to Samson’s demand and they are reluctantly going to Timnah to make the negotiations for marriage. Samson is traveling with them, but they don’t seem to be walking together. They seem to be separated by some distance and time, and while on the way, once again Samson ventures off and heads to a place that he does not belong – a vineyard. For a guy with a Nazirite vow who is supposed to have nothing to do with grapes, a vineyard was the wrong place to be heading to, and as he is approaching the vineyard, a young lion rushes toward Samson, and just as quick, the Spirit of the Lord empowers Samson and he tears this lion apart. When Samson rejoined his mother and father, he did not bother to mention his killing of the lion. They did not know what had happened.

And so, they continue onto Timnah, and once there, he finally talks with the woman. *“Hello, I love you.” “My parents are here to arrange for our marriage.” “So, tell me, what’s your name?”* It’s funny, but I think that’s what happened and the marriage is arranged by the parents.

Now we are not told here, but an interval of some time, usually between 6 to 12 months would have elapsed before the actual marriage took place, so Samson would have returned home with his parents to wait it out.

**8When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion. 9So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.**

According to our passage, Samson and his parents make their return trip to Timnah, and Samson ventures off again to view the lion’s carcass. Apparently, the dead carcass had really dried up after several months in the sun, and a swarm of bees were in it with honeycomb dripping with honey. This should have been “off limits” to Samson because it was dead and would have defiled him as a Nazirite, but that didn’t stop him. He scooped up some of the honey and went back to his parents. When he reached them, he gave them some of the honey, not bothering to mention where it came from.

Warren Wiersbe asks the question, *“How many Christians today defile themselves just to enjoy a little honey?* Maybe it’s a book or magazine, a movie, a website, or a questionable friendship. It might seem sweet for the moment, but as a believer, you know deep down inside it is “off limits” and you are asking for trouble.

**10Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. 11When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12Then Samson said to them, “Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. 13But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes.” And they said to him, “Propound your riddle, that we may hear it.” 14So he said to them, “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” But they could not tell the riddle in three days.**

Now the time has come for the wedding. In order to understand this, we need to know a little bit about the marriage customs of Samson’s day. Basically, it all started with the agreement to be married. That agreement—called a betrothal—was usually arranged by the parents. The betrothal period lasted anywhere from 6 to 12 months, and at the end there was a seven-day wedding feast. After the feast, the marriage could be consummated.

So, it’s time for the feast, which is this weeklong stag party with 30 groomsmen who were likely provided by the bride’s family. The word feast is to be translated more literally a “drinking party.” If his scooping of honey from the lion’s carcass violated his Nazirite vow, this drunken stag party, likely with wine from the vineyard, tells us that the Nazirite vow really was not that important to Samson.

Well, during the party, Samson challenges the party goers with a difficult riddle. We don’t know the reason for the riddle, maybe it was customary, but what is clear was that the answer to the riddle would be impossible for anyone to answer unless Samson told them. No one knew about the encounter with the lion, not even his parents knew about it, and for three days the party goers could not solve the riddle.

**15Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson’s wife, “Entice your husband, so that he will tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father’s house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?” 16Samson’s wife wept before him and said, “You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told it to me.” And he said to her, “Behold, I have not told it to my father or mother; so should I tell you?” 17However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. And on the seventh day he told her because she pressed him so hard. She then told the riddle to the sons of her people. 18So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down,**

**“What is sweeter than honey?  
And 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.”**

Here we see the party goers’ resort to physical threats against the woman’s family, and instead of asking for Samson’s help, she lets him have it for seven days. When he couldn’t take it anymore, Samson gives in and tells her the answer to his riddle. She in turn, tells the party goers and it goes south really quick. Samson loses the bet and he is humiliated.

I wonder how his wife felt being called a heifer. The proverb simply means, *“You couldn’t have done what you did if you hadn’t broken the rules,”* because heifers weren’t used for plowing.

* Guys, never, never, never refer to your woman as your “heifer” or the next dead carcass we find might be yours.

**19Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father’s house. 20But Samson’s wife was given to his companion who had been his friend.**

Since Samson lost the bet, he has to find 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes. So, he goes to a nearby Philistine town, kills 30 men, strips them of their belongings and clothes, and settles the bet. Samson is angry because he has been publicly humiliated—betrayed by his bride and embarrassed by the groomsmen.

But if Samson wants to get angry with anybody, he should look in the mirror. That’s the man who set him up for failure. In our story, Samson lived by sight and lust and not my faith. He disobeyed God’s command not to seek a marriage relationship with a foreign woman, He disregarded the wise counsel of his parents, and Samson defiled his Nazirite vow on several occasions.

Samson was from God, he was blessed by God, he was called by God, but he often went his own way and drifted from God.

If the truth be told, we are no different from Samson. That’s why he’s such a popular character in the Bible. We are just as messy as he is, just as rebellious, just as disobedient, just as hard-headed, just as selfish, just as lustful, and just as prone to wander off to do our own thing – doing what is right in our own eyes.

But God has a will and it’s a sovereign will. And in spite of us, He has chosen to love us, to be gracious to us, to be patient with us, to forgive us over and over again – all the while accomplishing His divine purposes in us and through us.

There is a song that came to mind this morning and it’s called Canvas and Clay by Patt Barrett.

*In my mother's womb  
You formed me with Your hands  
Known and loved by You  
Before I took a breath  
  
When I doubt it, Lord, remind me  
I'm wonderfully made  
You're an artist and a potter  
I'm the canvas and the clay  
  
You make all things work together  
For my future and for my good  
You make all things work together  
For Your glory and for Your name  
  
There's a healing light  
Just beyond the clouds  
Though I've walked through fire  
I see clearly now  
  
I know nothing has been wasted  
No failure or mistake  
You're an artist and a potter  
I'm the canvas and the clay  
  
You make all things work together  
For my future and for my good  
You make all things work together  
For Your glory and for Your name*

That song is a paradox and it’s the Gospel truth.

Source Material:

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The Expositors Bible Commentary – Frank E. Gaebelein

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