

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #20

Judges 14:1-20

The providential sovereignty of God is a great mystery, but it is also a great encouraging blessing. When you see a believer who loves God's Word and is trying to do God's will you obviously sense God is at sovereign work. But what is so difficult to grasp is that the same God has a sovereignty at work when you see a believer who doesn't seem to love God's Word or will.

The story of Samson is a story that is perplexing. On the one hand, you have the providential sovereignty of God that is completely at work in every part of Samson's life and on the other hand, you have Samson, who is a man dominated by his fleshly appetites and emotions and not by the Word of God. Samson at times seems to be irrational and emotional and not logical, and yet God is still sovereign.

I have come to the conclusion that no matter what is happening in a person's life, whether that person is yielding to God or not, God is still sovereign and He is still working out His providential plan. Even though we may not see it or sense it, God is still sovereign.

Last time we were together we saw that Samson was born and "the LORD blessed him" (13:24). These words mean that God's hand was on Samson and he grew mentally, physically and spiritually at an extraordinary level. We learn from **Judges 13:25** that the Spirit of the LORD began to stir Samson. What this means is that Samson started to be moved by God while he was in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. This stirring probably had to do with him gaining a great dislike for the Philistines and having extraordinary strength to be able to do something about the Philistines. It is really odd, but more than any other judge in the book of Judges, the Scriptures says God's Spirit moves in him (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). The thing we see here is:

GOD SOVEREIGNLY WORKED WITH A VERY WORLDLY AND FLESHLY SAMSON TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE TO DESTROY MANY PHILISTINES.

Many commentators who have written on the subject of Samson address the fact that Samson is a tragic story because he gave in to his fleshly passions and never did become what he could have become. It is true that he was a very flesh driven man, but I am not so sure he didn't accomplish what God wanted him to accomplish. Certainly there are many lessons we may learn about not following our emotional passions; however, I am not sure we can say if we do follow our passions God won't accomplish His sovereign will regardless. There are ten narrative parts:

NARRATIVE PART #1 – Samson sees a Philistine woman and wants to marry her.
14:1-4

Samson had a real weakness for Philistine women. **A big problem of his life is that he never said no to any temptation.** As **verse 1** begins, Samson had traveled about four miles from Zorah to Timnah, which was a city on the border of the Philistine land. Actually, this land was assigned to Dan (Josh. 15:10; 19:43), but the Philistines were occupying Israel's land.

Apparently the Philistines maintained somewhat of a peaceful relationship with Israel and many from Israel didn't even seem to mind that they ruled over them (Judges 15:11).

Now Samson had not gone to Timnah to get closer to God, he had gone there to party. He went there to probably do a little drinking (we will show in a moment) and check out the girls. While Samson was in Timnah he spotted a Philistine woman. The text is careful to point out that the thing that led him to this woman was that she "looked good." He saw her and she looked good (**14:1-2, 3, 7**).

We must assume the woman had a good figure and good face. Frankly, I don't know too many men who would choose a woman who "looked bad." But the emphasis here is that this decision is being made solely on the basis of her looks.

He does not check up on her spiritual condition. He does not even check up on her personality. He doesn't know what her emotions are like. She could be some emotional nut case, but he doesn't bother looking at that because "she looked good." It is so interesting that Samson's weakness is his eyes, which he will eventually lose.

Men need to be careful here as do women. Wise is the man or woman who looks for a mate that has a great personality and loves God. If you make your choice simply on how a man or woman looks, you can end up with a mate who can make your life miserable.

Verse 2 says that Samson went back to his parents and told them that he saw this Philistine woman in Timnah and he wanted his parents to go and negotiate with the bride's father and get her for him. Back in this culture, the normal custom was that the parents arranged marriages, which isn't all that bad of an idea, especially if you have parents who love God and His Word. We have met some girls in our churches that if Mary and I could have arranged it, we would have had our boys marry and had they done it, they would have been married to a great, God-honoring girl who would have loved them and loved the Lord. Of course we live in a society in which parents are afraid to spank their children so our society will not support you picking the mate.

According to **verse 3**, both of Samson's parents were against him marrying a Philistine woman. The Israelites were supposed to marry other Israelites; those who were part of the covenant and Samson's parents were not happy with the idea that he marries a woman not connected to the God of Israel. This was a direct violation of the Law of God which said don't intermarry with pagan people (Deut. 7:3-4). Furthermore, his parents knew that God had a claim on his life and they were dead set against Samson marrying this girl. But Samson said, this is who I want; get her because she looks good to me. **Samson was controlled far more in life by his lust of his eyes than the Law of God.**

Now there are three things you young people want to see here:

- 1) Samson was not interested in obeying the Word of God in marrying this girl.
- 2) Samson goes against the council of his godly parents.
- 3) Samson will not be happy at the end of this story.

Now carefully notice **verse 4**. **What Samson's parents did not know is that all of this was part of the sovereign plan of God to start destroying the Philistines who were dominating Israel.** The angel of the LORD does not come back and tell them. They are distraught, but God was still sovereign.

Parents, when you are distraught because your children are making wrong, stupid, sinful choices and unbiblical decisions, take comfort in the fact that your God is still sovereign. What exactly was part of the sovereign plan of God? Samson looks at the face and figure of a Philistine woman and wants her, even though she does not know God. God's sovereignty is at work right there.

The flesh weakness of Samson is used by the sovereignty of God to accomplish His will. Every one of us has flesh weaknesses. We need to get on top of them, because if we don't those weaknesses can destroy us. But even if that happens, God is still sovereign.

NARRATIVE PART #2 – Samson goes to meet the woman and kills a lion with his bare hands. **14:5-6**

On the way to meet the Philistine woman, a young lion came roaring toward Samson and God's Spirit came upon him and he tore him apart with his bare hands. Now there are three things we want to observe about this:

First, it happens in the vineyard areas of Timnah (**14:5a**). Apparently, Samson leaves his parents and turns into this vineyard area because his parents do not see the lion and he does not even tell them about it. Now why would Samson go into the vineyard without his parents?
1) Perhaps he wanted to do a little drinking and he didn't want his parents to know;
2) Perhaps he knew a short cut to get to the Philistine woman.

We may recall that Samson is supposedly under a special Nazirite vow, which means you don't want much of anything to do with vineyards; you don't even eat grapes. We may be getting a glimpse here of the fact that Samson was a closet Nazirite vow breaker. Samson should not be anywhere near a vineyard.

Second, Samson was enabled by God to kill this lion with his bare hands without any weapon. Many believe that this lion was actually a warning from God to Samson that you are walking in the wrong direction. He should never have been in the vineyard because it was to him forbidden by God. When you get off on a wrong path and you belong to the Lord, God will usually send a warning. In any case, Samson ripped the animal apart with his bare hands. When you are being used by God, you don't need a bunch of weapons, because the only weapon you need is God on your side.

Third, Samson did not tell his parents about the lion episode (**14:6**). What this means is apparently he didn't have any noticeable traces on him, such as scratches of a lion or blood on his clothes that would indicate he had even been in a fight with a lion. He was strengthened by God to rip it to shreds with his bare hands.

Satan will come after you as a roaring lion from the vineyards of the world. You stand your ground, resist the Devil and he will flee from you.

NARRATIVE PART #3 – Samson meets the woman and when he returns to marry her he scrapes some honey out of the lion's carcass . **14:7-9**

Samson and his parents arrive in Timnah; he talks to the woman, she still looks good to him and arrangements were made by the parents to return for the wedding. They went home and finally the time came to go back for the wedding. On the way back to Timnah the second time, Samson decided to go look at the carcass of the lion and he discovered that a swarm of bees were in the carcass and it was dripping with honey. Bees will not go near a carcass that is putrid. In dry climates the stench is minimal and the flesh rots quickly. It has been observed in the Middle East that the dead carcass of an animal can almost be completely dried in 24 hours.

Samson scraped out the honey with his bare hands, and he ate and he gave some to his mother or father and did not tell them about the lion. Of course, this meant that he had to touch a dead body which is another violation of the Nazirite vow.

The first violation is going into the vineyard. The second violation is touching a dead carcass. Now there have been various views as to why didn't Samson tell his parents:

- 1) Some suggest because he didn't want them to know he had touched a carcass to get this honey. He broke the Nazirite vow and was ashamed and didn't want his parents to know it.
- 2) Some suggest he didn't tell them because he was humble.
- 3) Some suggest he didn't want to spoil his parents appetite by telling them where he got the honey.
- 4) Some suggest because he was planning to make a riddle out of this and he didn't even want his parents to know, so there would be no chance of any leak of information.

NARRATIVE PART #4 – Samson's father and thirty guests of the bride show up to the wedding. **14:10-11**

When the time came, Samson and his parents went back to Timnah for the wedding. The Hebrew word "feast" (*misteh*) is a word that means place of drinking. They were not drinking Coke and Pepsi. It is clear that at this wedding feast there was plenty of alcoholic drinking. Again remember the Nazirite vow in which one was not supposed to drink. As one writer said there can be little doubt that the "fruit of the vine passed between the lips of Samson the Nazirite" (Herbert Wolf, *Judges*, p. 468).

Verse 11 brings out the fact that when the Philistines saw Samson, they brought in about thirty groomsmen to be with Samson. Samson had not brought any of his Israelite friends so the Philistines rallied around him, and he developed thirty new friendships at his wedding.

When you are doing wrong the world will embrace you. When you belong to the Lord and you are out in the world, you will make a series of friendships that in the end will cost you.

NARRATIVE PART #5 – Samson gives a riddle to the thirty guests and makes a bet with them that they cannot solve it. **14:12-14**

Now a wedding feast went on for about seven days and it was not uncommon for some people to like to play games and solve riddles. You typically do have some sort of entertainment at the wedding reception, so these kinds of games were relatively normal.

At the wedding Samson made a bet by proposing a riddle to the thirty guests. The bet was this: if they could tell him the interpretation to the riddle in seven days, he would give them thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothing. If they could not tell him, then they had to give him thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothing. Since Samson had not even told his parents, there would be no chance of them figuring the riddle out.

His riddle is kind of like, as one writer said, a Mohammed Ali challenge; “What floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee?” But this one said “out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” Hebrew poetry typically does not rhyme, but this did.

NARRATIVE PART #6 – Samson’s wife is threatened by the thirty guests and told to find out the interpretation of the riddle. **14:15**

For three days these thirty guys tried to solve this riddle and couldn’t so they decided they needed some help. These were supposed to be some Philistine family friends. They went to Samson’s wife and told her that if she did not find out this riddle at the end of seven days, they would burn her and her father’s house.

NARRATIVE PART #7 – Samson’s wife cried and nagged Samson until he told her. **14:16-17**

Gary Phillips called this chapter “The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe” (*Judges*, p. 219). It is obvious that Samson’s wife feared for her life and what she should have done is go tell Samson. But instead of telling him the truth, she decides she will use a woman’s tactic which is still used today. Now I am not saying that any lady here uses this tactic, I am just saying that it is a tactic that is used to this day by some women who do not go to TCBC.

The tactic is called marital emotional blackmail and it is a simple tactic for a woman to use and it is comprised of three parts: 1) Cry; 2) Nag; 3) Tell your husband he doesn’t love you. Day after day she did this and she was relentless. She cried and she pouted and she pressured and she said “Samsey, you really don’t love me because if you did you would tell me the riddle”; “Samsey, you hate me or you wouldn’t hide the riddle from me”; “Samsey, you don’t trust me, I am your wife and I won’t tell anyone.”

Samson said I haven’t even told my mom or dad, but finally after seven days of her whining and nagging this thing broke Samson down and he told her. Samson had strength to physically fight off a lion but he could not emotionally fight off his own wife.

I want to speak to you ladies here for a moment in light of what God reveals in this context. You can probably get most men to do just about anything you want if you use these tactics. If you cry and if you relentlessly nag and tell your husband he doesn’t love you, you will probably wear him down to the point where he will give in to whatever it is you want. **But you need to know this- if this is the way you get it, it will not be a happy ending. In the end you will lose your husband’s respect and affection even though you got what you wanted; you will pay a price. A far better approach is to calmly tell your husband the truth and let him make a decision and pray for him as he does and then don’t throw some emotional fit if the decision does not go your way. You will earn his respect and affection for the rest of your life.**

NARRATIVE PART #8 – Samson’s riddle is told to Samson. **14:18**

The next day, the thirty men told Samson the interpretation to his riddle. Samson did not back out on his deal and say “I will not pay you because you have cheated.” Technically, he could have, but **God’s sovereign plan is for him to kill Philistines**. Samson knew that his wife had told them. In fact, he calls his wife a “heifer,” which any way you look at is not a flattering term of matrimony. Samson does not need to go back on his word, because he knows deep down inside I have power from God to be able to meet this obligation another way.

NARRATIVE PART #9 – Samson is empowered by God to kill thirty Philistines. **14:19**

Samson killed thirty Philistines and took the spoil and gave the spoil to the thirty who told him the riddle. God was using Samson to kill Philistines.

NARRATIVE PART #10 – Samson’s wife was given by her father to Samson’s friend.
14:20

Samson went back to his father’s house feeling betrayed by his own wife and the father of the bride gave his wife to another guy. The end result of this story is a deserted wife, a betrayed husband, discord in the family, bloodshed and death. This is not a happy story.

Young people take a good look at this story. There are women who will pick out a young man simply because he is handsome or has a good physique. Some women go “goo-goo gaga” for some guy who they don’t even know anything about. They don’t know if he works or is lazy or will provide for her. They don’t know if he would love her or love God.

There are young men who will pick a woman because she is beautiful. She has a good face and figure and that is it. S. Lewis Johnson said he saw young men pick a girl because she looked good and they didn’t even know if she could cook a pancake or fry an egg. They don’t know if she knows how to clean a house and they don’t know a thing about her spirituality. That is a very foolish way to pick a mate. If there is a key lesson to learn it is a lesson of look for a man or woman who loves you, loves God and loves the Word of God. Look at the person—look at God’s Word- listen to Godly parents.

This is not a happy story, but this story is all part of the sovereign plan of God to destroy Philistines. God is sovereign in everything and He does work out His will. God did not direct Samson to give in to his fleshly lusts, but He did not abandon Samson when he did. He sovereignly worked out His plan.