

JUDGES SESSION #17

We pick up the story of Samson again and turn now to look at a major source of his character weaknesses:

D) Samson's **Ungodly Attitudes**

Judg 14:1-4

Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. ² So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

³ Then his father and mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"

And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."

⁴ But 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.

- Samson's home was in the area of Zorah & Eshtaol, two Israelite towns just a short distance s.w. of Jerusalem; & very close together
- **Timnah** was only a 1 hr walk from Zorah; but Timnah was a **Philistine** town
...the proximity & ease of movement indicates this domination by Philistines was **peaceful** in nature (but that much more **dangerous** in its subtlety)
- notice how his demand in vss. 2 & 3 reveal his ungodly attitudes:

1. He **rejected authority**

- his desire to marry a Philistine girl went against his parents' wishes
- and it was also a violation of God's laws for His people, as Deut. 7:3 records:
"Nor shall you make marriages with them [ungodly tribes in the land]. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son."

2. He **adopted pagan social values**

- 'she's the right one for me'; 'she pleases me well' - lit. "she is right, pleasing in my eyes"
 - compare this phrase with the theme verse of Judges: **21:25** "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what...?
- what was right *in his own eyes*."
 - Samson: is a self-confessed spiritual anarchist
- at the same time there is a startling phrase in vs. 4: "it was **of the Lord**"
 - something similar is recorded in 1 Kings 12:15 when most of Israel turned against King Rehoboam: "So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was *from the LORD*, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken"

Here, Samson is acting in accordance with his own temperament, personality etc.; he is **not a robot** at all; and yet, **God** is using him & the incidents he creates in order to **further His purposes** of halting the Philistine domination of His people

...Robert Farrer Capon states this apparent contradiction in a memorable way:

God rides the bicycle of history with no hands

- yes, God will absolutely accomplish His divine purposes in world history
- but individual people, including Samson... and you & me...are free to make our choices as to how we live and whether to submit to His Lordship;
- consequently, we will bear responsibility for those choices

- in the next verses of chapter 14 we encounter one of the most famous of Samson's stories which becomes the basis for...

E) Samson's Unusual Riddle

Judg 14:5-9

⁵ So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah.

Now *to his* surprise, a young lion *came* roaring against him. ⁶ And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though *he had* nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

⁷ Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

⁸ After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey *were* in the carcass of the lion.

⁹ He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave *some* to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

- this famous incident with the **lion** sets the stage for Samson's riddle during his wedding feast
- notice that he encounters the lion only when they got close to Timnah, "to the vineyards of Timnah" – rather as if the lion is 'protecting' the Philistine territory
- and Samson, empowered by God's Spirit, tears it apart with his bare hands
 - there is a significant parallel in the next chapter (15:14) when the *Philistines* themselves come "roaring" against him
 - and once again the Spirit of God comes upon him
 - and once again he tears apart... the *ropes* binding him
- in other words, as James Jordan points out, God's man with God's power exercises victory over the enemy and the guardians of enemy territory
 - Paul expressed something of this truth in Rom. 8:37 – even though we may "face death all day long" (vs. 36) "we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us."
- so, after visiting his prospective wife, on the way back home Samson turns to see the lion carcass and finds **honey** in it
 - ...which gives him material for his puzzling riddle at his wedding feast

Judg 14:10-14

And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so. ¹¹ And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

¹² Then Samson said to them, "Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. ¹³ But if you cannot explain *it* to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing."

And they said to him, "Pose your riddle, that we may hear it."

¹⁴ So he said to them:

"Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet."
Now for three days they could not explain the riddle.

- in ancient times, the ability to pose difficult riddles or succeed in song/poetry contests was part of being 'macho' – being **clever** as well as strong
- high stakes involved -- the clothing spoken of here was very precious & people of the day would only own one such change of clothing

Judg 14:15-18

¹⁵ But it came to pass on the seventh* day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? *Is that not so?*"

¹⁶ Then Samson's wife wept on him, and said, "You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained *it* to me."

And he said to her, "Look, I have not explained *it* to my father or my mother; so should I explain *it* to you?" ¹⁷ Now she had wept on him the seven days while their feast lasted. And it happened on the seventh day that he told her, because she pressed him so much. Then she explained the riddle to the sons of her people. ¹⁸ So 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 solved my riddle!"

- now it becomes clear why Samson did not tell his parents about the lion – **only his wife** would be the one to know the answer to the riddle; if the Philistines got the answer right, he would know exactly who betrayed him
- ...so this was a **test** of whether she would trust him or side with her own people

- the 30 Philistine men threaten his wife, she reveals answer – her loyalty never shifted to Samson at all
- and Samson gets angry

Judg 14:19

¹⁹ Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of *clothing* to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father's house.

- he kills 30 men in *Ashkelon* (one of the 5 major Philistine cities) - far enough away not to create immediate repercussions for his family in Zorah – but it's one more violent action that will move him into more trouble once again in the next chapter
- James Jordan suggests an interesting **parallel with the NT**
 - Jews of Jesus' day represent the Philistines in this story
 - Judas was a picture of the wife (betraying with a kiss)
 - the betrayal price was 30 pieces of silver (compared with 30 changes of raiment here)
 - ...NT Israel should have responded to God's offer in Jesus with repentance & faith; but they refused & betrayed him – the result was their own destruction

- back in Samson's story, destruction will be an ongoing theme as we next see:

F) Fiery Revenge

Judg 15:1-8

After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into *her* room." But her father would not permit him to go in.

² Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. *Is* not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead."

³ And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!" ⁴ Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned *the foxes* tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. ⁵ When he had set the torches on fire, he let *the foxes* go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards *and* olive groves.

⁶ Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?"

And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

⁷ Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease." ⁸ So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

- Samson & his father-in-law have 2 different views of what had happened!
 - Samson thought he was married to this girl but had **offended** the family by stomping off to his own home in anger after the ceremony; so now he comes back bringing a goat as an **apology** gift
 - his father-in-law thought Samson had divorced his new wife (the word “hated” in vs. 2 is not a description of emotion but a formal legal term used in divorce proceedings in those days); so he had already given away the wife to another man
- Samson’s anger flares up again and he uses a unique method to burn down the crops of the Philistines – 150 pairs of foxes tied together by a burning torch between their tails!
- this burning of the Philistine crops **fuels the feud** between them & Samson, leading to the inevitable **retaliation** by the Philistines
 - they burn his ‘wife’s’ family with fire
 - ...there is a tragic **irony** here – the Philistines at the wedding party threatened this very thing if she didn’t reveal the answer to Samson’s riddle; but now it happens anyway
 - Satan is a very hard taskmaster!
- then **Samson retaliates** with another attack (vs. 8)
- but he first claims that this will be the last time (“after that I will cease” vs.7)
- but of course it isn’t because retaliation/revenge is a **dreadful treadmill** which knows no ‘last time’ until one of the parties deliberately absorbs the wrong done, without retaliation
- our tv newscasts are often full of reports, esp. from the Middle East, illustrating how relentless this treadmill can be and how difficult it is for any of the parties involved to absorb the wrong without retaliation
- so what should **our attitude** be when tempted to get revenge?
 - here’s what God says in **Rom. 12:17-20 (LB)**

“Never pay back evil for evil... Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it. [Don't take the law into your own hands.] Instead, feed your enemy if he is hungry. If he is thirsty give him something to drink and you will be "heaping coals of fire on his head." In other words, he will feel ashamed of himself for what he has done to you. Don't let evil get the upper hand, but conquer evil by doing good.”
 - God reserves the right to dispense justice; if *we* usurp that right, God cannot defend us
- God apparently used Samson’s anger & revenge motivation to bring **judgment** on the Philistines; these were unusual times calling for unusual methods ...and showing again how **God’s sovereignty** can still be worked out even in the midst of man’s ungodliness
- God is well able to use “our failures as the foundations for His success”, as Jackman & Ogilvie put it
- this doesn’t excuse our sinful failings, nor Samson’s either; but by continually turning the spotlight on God, the Book of Judges highlights not only God’s sovereignty but also the immense measure of **grace** He extends to us