

Samson's Marriage

14 Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. 2 When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." 3 His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"

Timnah—Today is an archeological site that has yielded rich insights and was overrun and populated by the Philistines in Samson's day. However, it was a tribal allotment to the tribe of Dan, which at this time is further south than the Dan we visited which way north.

Philistines—The Philistines were a sea-faring coastal people who migrated from Indo-European nations to the north. They are referred to as the "uncircumcised Philistines" because other Semitic tribes also practiced circumcision of male children. But the Philistines imported from the far north. Think of these guys like the Vikings.

But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." 4 (His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.) She's the right one—this phrase in Hebrew is literally "she is right in my eyes." Here we have a young man who embodies the spirit of his age—everyone did what was right in their own eyes instead of living in submission to God's law and his word.

While his parents protested, they didn't realize that his self-centered desire was part of God's plan—God is the one who is seeking an opportunity to confront the Philistines. And so the whole marriage to this young Philistine woman is a set up.

5 Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. 6 The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. 7 Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.

Young Lion—travelers feared these Asiatic lions who were considered the strongest most fierce land animal in Israel at the time. The worst lions to face were the young ones who could be particularly ferocious. But, we read, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him in power so that he killed the lion as if it were a young goat, and slaughtered it right there. Samson's strength is supernatural, and we learn later that should the Spirit of the Lord depart from him, he would become as weak as any other man. Meaning he doesn't look like Thor.

8 Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. 9 He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.

Honey—archeologists have found several large beekeeping farms in this very area.

Scooped with his hands—this is the first time he breaks a condition of his anointing and empowerment by touching a dead body. He is technically, ritually impure. The fact that he shares the honey with his mother and father but doesn't tell them where he got it means he has a blatant disregard for their ritual sanctity also.

Folks, we are not here dealing with a spiritual man. This act of carelessness was recorded by the scribe to remind his fellow Jews that the first step toward being out of compliance with God's word is his ritual impurity.

10 Now his father went down to see the woman. And there Samson held a feast, as was customary for young men.

11 When the people saw him, they chose thirty men to be his companions.

To see the woman—the fact that he's never had a conversation with the woman until now speaks volumes concerning his character. Not only are we dealing with a man who is not spiritual, he is also vain and superficial.

Held a feast—the Hebrew word here for feast means “a drinking party.” The strong implication is that Samson partook of the strong drink available at the feast, and this would be the second way in which he finds himself to be out of compliance with his calling. Nothing from the grapevine, not even non-alcoholic juice, was to pass his lips.

12 “Let me tell you a riddle,” Samson said to them. “If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. 13 If you can't tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes.”

“Tell us your riddle,” they said. “Let's hear it.”

14 He replied,

“Out of the eater, something to eat;
out of the strong, something sweet.”

For three days they could not give the answer.

The Philistines then threaten the young woman by killing her family—which later we learn they do it anyway. She nags him, manipulates him, and finally he relents and foolishly tells her the answer to the riddle.

The Philistine hosts then answer his riddle and he replies,
If you had not plowed with my heifer you would not know that answer.

Riddle—unsolvable riddles and ciphers were all the rage in the Ancient world. Samson employs one here to take advantage of the Philistines, but then foolishly reveals the secret to his wife, whom he calls a heifer, and she gives him up. This scene highlights the fact that throughout his life he will display a mischievous streak. A real practical joker. And this is yet another sign of his lack of character and his juvenility. He's not mature yet, he's not a man; he's an ill-behaved and impetuous boy waving around a really powerful gun.

19 Then the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of everything and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he returned to his father's home. 20 And Samson's wife was given to one of his companions who had attended him at the feast.

The Spirit of the LORD—yet, we see that his gifts and calling operate despite his infantile sense of humor and his obvious lack of character or concern for others.

Ashkelon—the major cities of the Philistines along the coast were Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza. The distance from Timnah, which is kind of inland to Ashkelon today, is about a 45-minute drive, but about a 7-hour walk. So he takes his vengeance out on 30 men in Ashkelon, robbing them of their clothing to pay his debt due to an ill-advised wager.

Samson's Vengeance on the Philistines

15:1ff. During the wheat harvest, Samson visits his wife, but her father refuses to let him see her and offers her younger sister instead. Angered, Samson decides to harm the Philistines. He captures 300 jackals, ties them together in pairs with torches between their tails, and sets them loose in the Philistines' fields, destroying their crops. When the Philistines learn of Samson's actions, they burn his wife and her father to death. Outraged, Samson vows revenge and attacks the Philistines, killing many of them. He then hides in a cave in the rock of Etam.

15:9ff. The Philistines camp near Lehi in Judah. The people of Judah question their motive, and the Philistines reply that they want to capture Samson and treat him as he treated them. Three thousand men from Judah confront Samson in the cave, expressing their submission to the Philistines and intending to hand him over. Samson requests that they spare his life, and they agree to only bind him. As they lead him toward Lehi, the Philistines approach, but the Spirit of the Lord empowers Samson, causing the ropes to burn away and freeing his hands.

15 Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.

16 Then Samson said,

“With a donkey’s jawbone

I have made donkeys of them.[a]

With a donkey’s jawbone

I have killed a thousand men.”

17 When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi.

18 Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the Lord, “You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” 19 Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi.

20 Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

Jawbone—this is now the third instance of being out of compliance. First, he touches a dead lion, then he likely drinks wine at his feast, and now he touches a fresh jawbone. Nevertheless, he is able to operate in his gifting, at least for now. He slays 1,000 men.

He cried out to the LORD—now, this is the first time we see any spiritual activity in his life. And his first prayer? Does it begin with thanksgiving and praise to the God of heaven who richly supplied him with all things? Does it begin with a desire to Bless the LORD for all his goodness, his mercy and unfailing love? Nope. It’s just a desperate hail marry pass, hoping God will give him what he needs. Once again, we see a young man who is just entirely focused on himself and his desires. He has no regard either for God’s glory or the nation’s good.

We draw some timely principles from this story today.

Samson was a chosen but foolish man. Now, before noting his character deficiencies and before highlighting all the ways that Samson got it wrong—we must first note that God has Sovereignly called him, and God uses his life as Israel’s judge and leader—not in light of his character, but despite his lack of it.

God is faithful, even when our heroes falter.

No doubt, however, that the author of the story means to paint a picture for us—it’s a morality play about how to avoid personal ruin by growing up and becoming an adult. It is ironic that the wisecracking wordsmith in Judges 14 is actually characterized as a fool. This conclusion is evident when Samson’s actions are evaluated against the teachings of the book of Proverbs.

The first thing we observe about a fool is...

- A fool brings sorrow, grief, and bitterness to their loved ones. Prov 10:1; 17:21, 25; 19:13, “A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother; a wise son is teachable, but a mocker will not hear their father’s rebuke; A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the mother who bore him.” We see this so clearly in Samson’s interactions with Manoah (Judg. 14:2–3). Like a child, demanding that his father and mother get him what he wants. Disobeying Moses’ law to honor his father and mother. He instead dishonors them, and it does not go well with him.

A fool brings grief and anguish to the hearts of their parents.

- A fool also displays disregard for the spiritual health of others. Prov 10:17 “Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.” Samson has no regard for the fact that he’s made his family unclean by giving them the honey from a dead animal (Judg 14:2, 3, 9).

The foolish person has little unease for leading others astray. They have no regard for the spiritual health and well-being of those closest to them—and how their hardness of heart toward the LORD effects the children in their home, their coworkers, and their parents.

- A fool wastes precious time on childish pranks. Prov 10:23 “A fool takes pleasure in juvenile schemes” (Judg 14:14–18). Right up to the moment the Spirit of the LORD left him in Chapter 16 (which we’ll get to next week), he is still playing games. He is still tempting fate with his antics. At some point, the adolescent must become an adult—not obsessively tricking people with infantile pranks but viewing the world around them with sober eyes, with honor and respect for others. Illus. Growing up in my dad’s house, we were absolutely forbidden to pull pranks on each other. My dad had zero (and I mean zero) tolerance for them. After I went off to college, I found that very often guys on my dorm would pull pranks on each other. And one particular shower prank with a bucket

of cold water on the guy in the shower stall next to me, triggered me. As his friends went down the hall laughing, I calmly got dressed, followed the guy to his room, and warned him that he should never ever do that to me. He got the message. I felt bad about how coldly and intimidatingly I had handled that. So began to pray and reflect on why I hated pranking. It wasn't just that my father instilled that in me, it's that I saw it how God sees it. It's laughing at someone else's expense—usually at the expense of their dignity and their honor. And God hates it. Samson loves to jerk people around. And it is evidence that he's still just a boy and a bully.

- Fools become isolated. Prov 15:22 “Plans fail for lack of wise counsel, but with many advisors, they succeed.” Prov 12:15 “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.” Samson is a man without an ally. Samson's isolation prevents him from hearing the truth about himself. When men become isolated, they become self-serving. Notice that he makes no effort to appeal to the Judahites who've become complacent and apathetic, allowing the Philistines to rule over them.
Listen, a true ally will support you but also challenge you. A true ally will encourage you, but also tell you the truth about yourself. Samson is a man without a confederate, a friendless man who has chosen isolation. On occasion, people leave their spouses to seek a better sex life with someone who isn't their wife. Often, you'll see these people reemerge on Facebook, posting about how grateful they are for God's unconditional love. Listen, I don't care how much these people extol “the reckless love of God”—or how much they appeal to God's “unconditional acceptance” of them—the fact is that they are an isolated, sinful, lustful, self-centered person has walked away from relationship with God—and they don't even know it. They think they are in right standing with God because God couldn't possibly take his wrath or judgment out on them.
- Fools become skirt chasers. His fondness for foreign women epitomizes foolishness. Prov 2:12–19 “Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, 13 who have left the straight paths to walk in dark ways, 14 who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, 15 whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways. 16 Wisdom will save you also from the adulteress, from the perverse woman with her seductive words, 17 who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. 18 Surely, her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. 19 None who go to her return or attain the paths of life again.” What is the wise sage of proverbs saying? A fool is driven by his lustful desires because it leads ultimately to ruin and death. Paul said, “Make no mistake about it, those who practice sexual immorality have no inheritance in the Kingdom of God.” Samson's youthful lust goes unchecked for 20 years—now in his 40's he's sad and alone and in bondage to his perverse lusts. And you may get

away with being a young buck, a playboy sowing your wild oats and wreaking havoc for a while. For a season in your life you may find the notion of commitment, settling down, becoming a one-woman man unimaginable. Who would want that? But some day you'll be a man in your 40's, 50's—and you'll no longer be the hot playboy, you'll just be a sad old man with a boy's lust. And you'll be alone. And when a cancer diagnosis strikes, or a debilitating disease comes calling, you'll have no one in your life to share your pain, your grief, your joy.

- Fools get even at all costs. Romans 12:19 “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” cf. Judg. 15:3–11. Samson’s life is characterized by the reflexive need to take revenge for slights. From the beginning to the last prayer on his lips, he asks God to help him. Not to help him bring glory to the God of Israel, or shalom to God’s holy land—but to strengthen him once more so that he may take revenge on his enemies. This guy’s life was characterized by the need for payback. But the wise will offer forgiveness and leave payback up to God. Do we trust the LORD to judge wisely? Do we trust him to settle accounts on the day of his wrath and judgment? Folks, we must.
- But Samson is a chosen fool. God has chosen him to lead the people, despite his immaturity, foolhardiness, and his impulsivity. Proverbs 16:9: “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps” (see also Prov 19:21; cf. Judg 14:4).

Application: Over time, the mature man or woman of God learns that sometimes their first impressions are wrong, sometimes their deepest instincts aren’t dependable, and their innermost longings/desires are wrongheaded. It is the mark of maturity to wait, delay gratification, to pray through a decision, to seek counsel from trusted advisors, and to tread cautiously into big, life-altering choices.

By contrast, the immature rush in foolishly, seek self-indulgence above all else, have little or no concern for the consequences of their impulsivity, send no prayers heavenward for guidance or the Spirit’s leading, no gratitude for the things given and richly supplied by God, unable to tolerate hearing the truth about themselves.

And I’m here to say that if you require every longing and desire of your flesh met instantly, to be coddled and never told the truth about yourself, to be praised for your brilliance and effortless competence—then congratulations—you are a toddler.

Samson’s story, no doubt, is a morality play. It shows us the futility of extending our adolescence. It paints a graphic and tragic picture of people who just never grow up.

By contrast, God has called us to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And with his help, that's what we will do.

Next week, we'll draw a contrast between Samson and the Christian. How does the believer today have God's empowering presence to accomplish what the LORD has called us to?