

Trouble in Timnah

Judges 14

Slide 1

Last week we learned that Samson was one of several “miracle” babies born to women who couldn’t conceive except by God’s power.

Then, an angel of the Lord arrived and told Manoah’s wife she was going to conceive and have a son. After which they were given instructions on how to raise this miracle baby.

They were told that Samson was to be a Nazarite from birth meaning, among other things, he was never to cut his hair, never drink wine nor strong drink, and never touch anything unclean.

By chapter 14, Samson is at least old enough to consider marriage, but instead of choosing a spouse from the women of Dan, or from another Israelite tribe, he had fallen in love with a pagan Philistine woman.

Samson may not have known it, but this first encounter, as recorded in Scripture, would lead to a lifetime of problems, heartache, and a lot more. He was about to have trouble in Timnah.

Slide 2

Judges 14:1-2, *“Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. 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.”*

Why did Samson go to Timnah in the first place! Admittedly, the Philistines did rule over Israel at the time, so perhaps there was a political aspect to this like paying taxes or being counted for a census.

Regardless of the reason, while he was in Timnah, Samson became attracted to a Philistine woman which was wrong on many levels.

First, intermarriage with pagans was strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses.

Second, there's no indication that she was attracted to him. In so many words, all Samson said was *"I saw her, I want her, now go get her for me."*

Third, and finally, Samson is dragging his parents into this and they knew it wasn't good!

Look at the response of his parents: Judges 14:3-4, *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?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." (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.)"*

His parents seemed to have, not only a better and stronger faith than Samson, but they were also aware of the trouble that was bound to happen in a mixed marriage.

You must understand, the Philistines were not a godly people. They worshiped Dagon, a god that was half man and half fish.

They had little, if anything, to do with Israel's God. Besides, they had conquered Israel and believed Dagon was stronger than the God of Israel.

How could any good come from a relationship with someone who worshipped Dagon, whether marriage or anything else?

Yet, something good was happening, even though none of the parties involved knew it at the time.

God would never approve of an Israelite marrying a pagan but, in this case, knowing how basically stubborn Samson was, God allowed him to follow his own course.

Samson was going to accomplish God's will even though he didn't know it.

Remember, God told Samson's parents that their son would "*take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.*" Could this be the beginning of the beginning?

Slide 3

In verse 5 we learn that Samson's parents relented to Samson's wishes and traveled with him to Timnah.

Judges 14:5a, "*Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah...*"

Notice, the write mentions the "*vineyards of Timnah.*" Why? Probably as a reminder of Samson's and his mother's instruction by the angel of the Lord.

Then, as they passed the vineyard, Samson faced the first real test of his strength.

Judges 14:5b-6, "*...suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. 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.*"

Whether the lion actually attacked Samson, or whether he went chasing the lion, is unknown.

But, one thing is certain, the Spirit of the LORD came “*powerfully*” upon Samson. So powerfully “*that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat.*”

The tearing of any kind of flesh isn’t easy, no matter how much strength a person might have. That Samson was able to survive this attack is proof of God’s love and protection for him.

Apparently, he was alone, because even though the text states, “*As they approached the vineyards of Timnah,*” the next sentence reads, “*But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done.*”

Why didn’t he tell his parents? It could be that Samson was afraid they might interpret this as God’s disapproval or proof that God didn’t want the marriage to happen?

Or maybe he didn’t want them to know he had broken a portion of his Nazarite vow. You see, Samson was determined to have this Philistine woman as his wife.

Judges 14:7, *Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.*

Think about this verse. He had told his parents that she pleased him, but this reads like he had never actually talked to her before this time.

Now, between verses 7 and 8, a period of time takes place; we’re not told how long, other than it was “*Some time later.*”

This is probably when Samson proposed marriage to the Philistine woman, and, incredibly, she accepted!

Customs about proposals and marriage vary depending on the situation: Rebekah left her family to marry Isaac, sight unseen; Jacob worked seven years each for Leah and Rachel.

Then, in verses 8 and 9, we see another of Samson's sins or violation of his Nazarite vow.

Judges 14:8-9, "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. 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."

Remember that Nazarites were not to go near any dead thing and a lion's carcass would certainly meet that description.

The lion's body had decayed to the point where bees had built a hive with a honeycomb. Samson grabbed some of the honey, ate it, and even gave some to his parents, he didn't say where he found it.

This makes the second secret that Samson hasn't shared with his parents.

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Verses 10-14 tell us a little about Samson's wedding, which should have been a happy day for him.

Judges 14:10, "Now his father went down to see the woman. And there Samson held a feast, as was customary for young men."

Manoah, Samson's father, came down to the wedding but his mother's not mentioned. We don't know why; some think she may have been ill, or she may have died by this time. At any rate, only Manoah came to the wedding.

One of the things Samson did for his wedding was hold a feast at which time Samson put forth a "riddle," and made a wager.

Samson told the Philistines if they couldn't guess the answer, they would have to provide him 30 sets of clothes.

If they guessed the answer, then he would give each of them a new set of clothes.

Judges 14:11-13a, *When the people saw him, they chose thirty men to be his companions. "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. If you can't tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes."*

Samson believed he could outwit the Philistines otherwise, I doubt he would've made such a wager. Who wants to lose?

Judges 14:13b-14a, *"Tell us your riddle," they said. "Let's hear it." He replied, "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet."*

Needless to say, the Philistines couldn't figure it out. Judges 14:14b, *"...For three days they could not give the answer."*

They didn't want to lose, either, especially to someone whose land they had conquered and ruled over!

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The first thing that Samson's "friends" did was put pressure on his bride to help them get the answer.

Judges 14:15, *"On the fourth day, they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death. Did you invite us here to steal our property?"*

Note how they accused her of wanting to “take what they have,” as though she wanted their clothing!

Then Samson’s bride began to show her true self. Instead of being loyal her new husband, she used tears and maybe a tantrum to get what she wanted.

Judges 14:16, *Then Samson’s wife threw herself on him, sobbing, “You hate me! You don’t really love me. You’ve given my people a riddle, but you haven’t told me the answer.”*

Samson, as a typical male, simply brushed it off by saying in verse 17, *“I haven’t even explained it to my father or mother,” he replied, “so why should I explain it to you?”*

Then the bride became desperate and cried for the whole seven days of the feast. Judges 14:17a, *“She cried the whole seven days of the feast.”*

How she was able to keep the tears going isn’t revealed. It’s almost too hard to believe, but she did! Eventually, Samson had enough and threw in the towel, so to speak, and told her the answer.

Judges 14:17b, *So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people.*

And what did she do? Did she thank him for his answer? No. Did she express her love for him? I don’t see it. Did she ever reveal the threats that the Philistines had expressed? No record of it anywhere.

The one thing she did was promptly tell the others the answer to the riddle. Tell me, is that an example of genuine love.

Then to add insult to injury, the Philistines came to him *“Before sunset on the seventh day.”*

They waited just before the deadline, then approached Samson, probably with smirks on their faces, while he thought he had won.

Judges 14:18a, *Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?"*

No wonder *Samson said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle.*

He wasn't happy with what had happened. He'd been tricked and betrayed. That had to hurt. The last two verses give a summary of what happened next.

Slide 6

Conclusion

Then, the Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson for the second time. He went to Ashkelon, several miles away, killed 30 men and gave their clothing to the guests.

Judges 14:19a, *"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."*

After this, went back home, angry and hurt. Judges 14:19b, *"Burning with anger, he returned to his father's home."*

But what about Samson's bride? Her father, probably thought that Samson was never coming back, so he gave her to the "best man."

Judges 14:20, *"And Samson's wife was given to one of his companions who had attended him at the feast."*

Thus ends Samson's trouble in Timnah. The guests got the clothes, in payment for the wager; the girl got a husband, but not the man she married; the bride's father "saved face" by not having a jilted bride, and Samson left Timnah with nothing but heartache.

So, what can we learn from Samson's tragedy that we can apply to our lives? First, we must understand that to believe in God and be called by God is only good if a person actually lives it out!

For us Christians today, we must remember to take action. James 2:26, "*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*" As Christians we know what we are called to do and strive to do it!

And the second lesson is that all people, including Christians saved by grace, are prone to sin! Samson, even though he sinned much, his faith grew and in the end he died for the glory of God.