

Judges 14B

- Samson is a judge of Israel, but he's also an impulsive, rash, stubborn and prideful man
 - The Lord raised him up to begin the defeat of the Philistines
 - But instead, he's chasing after their daughters seeking a wife
 - Last week we saw him travel to Timnah with his father to secure a bride
 - Samson went against the counsel of his parents and against desires of the Lord
 - On the way down to be betrothed, the Lord placed a lion in his path and then endowed Samson with supernatural power to defeat the lion
 - The Lord intended that the encounter would impress the truth on Samson's wandering heart
 - The Lord called Samson to engage and defeat Israel power enemy, the Philistines
 - He was given his position of authority and power by the Spirit for that purpose
 - And yet here he was going the wrong way to marry the enemy
 - Nevertheless, Samson kept the moment a secret and went forward with his plans
 - Samson was betrothed and then after a brief time of waiting, he returned to the town to claim his bride in a week-long marriage feast
 - On the way back he decided to take another look at the lion he had killed some months earlier
 - And to his surprise he discovered bees had made a hive inside the dead animal's carcass
 - This was an unnatural behavior on the bees' part, indicating the Lord was speaking to Samson once more with a test
 - Would Samson understand that something sweet awaited him if he acted in obedience to defeat God's enemies?

- Or would he try to obtain the reward by his own hand, defiling himself in the process?
- As we saw last week, Samson failed his test
 - He reached in with his bare hands and scooped up some of the honey
 - In the process, he broke one of his Nazarite vows
 - The Nazarite vow prohibited touching unclean things, the fruit of the vine and cutting his hair
 - Now one of his vows had been broken
 - Then, Samson arrives back in Timnah and the wedding feast begins
 - The feast last seven days
 - And at the end of the feast, the couple is officially married
 - As I mentioned last week, Samuel chose to use a Hebrew word for feast that is very specific and rare
 - He used a word that means a drink banquet
 - In other words, this is a feast centered on drinking wine
 - Which indicates that Samson has now broken the second of his three Nazarite vows, never to drink the fruit of the vine
 - Only one of his vows remains intact at this point
- Finally, we learned last week that during this week-long feast, the festivities included social games of proposing and solving riddles
 - Early in the week Samson proposes a such riddle from what he saw in the lion's dead body
 - His riddle is given to us in v.14

Judg. 14:14 So 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.

- We can see what it means clearly, but that's because we already know the answer

- But if you didn't know the backstory, then it would have been a difficult mystery
- Samson knew it would be difficult, so he wagered 30 pairs of fine clothes with the guests of the banquet
 - And as we can see at the end of v.14, even after three days of gathering and discussing the riddle, no one could solve it
 - And now the game has become more than a game
 - There is honor on the line to say nothing of the bet
 - So the tension is building for someone to win the bet before the seven days are up
- Samson appears to have won his bet
 - But not so fast
 - We learned back in v.4 that the Lord was working behind the scenes in this situation
 - Though Samson has done the wrong thing in pursuing this woman, the Lord was using it to propel Samson in another direction
- So now we see how the Lord turns the tables on Samson
 - We return to the feast week, now on the fourth day
 - And the bride-to-be's family is getting nervous and desperate to win
 - And they don't play fair

Judg. 14:15 Then 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?"

Judg. 14:16 Samson'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?"

Judg. 14:17 However 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.

- Now on the fourth day, some of the 30 wedding guests began to get worried they might lose this bet
 - Whether for the sake of honor or treasure, they decided they had to do something to ensure Samson didn't win
 - So they corner Samson's bride
 - Notice Samuel calls her Samson's "wife" in v.15
 - But that doesn't mean that Samson and this woman were already married
 - They were only betrothed until the end of the seven-day feast
 - But in that day, the term wife was applied to betrothed women just as to fully married women
 - The Philistines guests threaten the woman that unless she shares the answer to the riddle, they would burn down the girl's father's house
 - They also say have you invited us to impoverish us?
 - In that culture, if you invited someone to a wedding, you were legally obligated to care for them properly
 - Not only was it a social disgrace to fail to care for guests in the right way, but there were financial implications as well
 - If you didn't, you would be expected to compensate them for their loss
 - A dissatisfied guest could claim a goat or sheep as compensation for not receiving proper treatment
 - So obviously if a guest were required to leave behind a valuable set of clothing was an even greater disgrace, which explains their anger
 - Nevertheless, their claims of impoverishment are an exaggeration, to say the least
 - More likely, they are incensed at the idea of a Hebrew getting the better of a room full of Philistines
 - Remember, the Jews and the Philistines were "frienemies"
 - So after hearing their threats, Samson's future wife is understandably concerned

- They say they will burn down her house, which is essentially a death threat against her and her family
 - But she doesn't know the answer to the riddle either
 - Samson hasn't confided in her to this point
 - So she has no choice but to try to get the answer out of her husband and then pass it along to the guests
- Already we see the allegiance of this woman is with her people, the Philistines, rather than her husband to be, Samson
 - Here in lies the essential problem with Samson marrying a woman from the Philistines
 - A pagan Gentile isn't going to suddenly switch allegiance to the Jewish people of Yahweh
 - She will forever feel that tug back to her people
 - And over time, she will draw Samson away from the Lord and from the mission He gave Samson
- The same stands true for God's people throughout history
 - The world doesn't gain inspiration from association with God's people
 - The world tempts us into disobedience
 - Sure, the Lord may and occasionally does use a relationship between a believer and an unbeliever to bring new faith
 - But many more times, the enemy uses a relationship to stumble a believer
 - That's why scripture forbids believers from becoming yoked to unbelievers
- When the wife-to-be approaches Samson for the answer, Samson isn't willing to give up the solution to his riddle, for obvious reasons
 - At the end of v.16 Samson says he didn't even tell his parents the answer, so why would he tell her?
 - That comment is interesting because it reveals something of Samson's attitude toward his future wife and marriage itself

- Samson seems place his allegiance to his parents above that to his wife
- The command of scripture is that a man should forsake his father and mother and cling to his wife
- But in the same way this woman is clinging to her Philistine family, so is Samson clinging to his parents
- Granted, they aren't married yet, but the wedding is only days away
 - Obviously, this isn't the best way to start a life-long relationship
 - Neither person seems to trust or respect the other very much
 - And now we start to see the hand of God working in the situation
 - He's exposing the weakness of the relationship
 - And He's preparing for even more dramatic events
- So what does any good woman do when she isn't getting her way with her husband?
 - She cries and she claims she isn't loved
 - I call this a litmus test
 - Whenever a wife (or husband) turns a specific request into a test of love, they have created a litmus test for love
 - In v.16 the woman claims that Samson only hates her and doesn't love her
 - Why? Because he hasn't told her the answer to the riddle
 - So we're to believer that this action above all else is a fair measure of Samson's love?
 - It's as if the love one person has for another is compressed into a single defining act on upon which the entire relationship rests
 - Children and teenagers fall for this tactic, claiming they will "die" or run away if they don't get their way
 - But these kind of tactics have no place in an adult relationship

- Nevertheless, what man can resist a woman crying?
 - Well, apparently Samson could, at least for a while
 - She comes to Samson on the fourth day but he holds out until the seventh day
 - In v.17 the English translation makes it sound as if she cries for an additional seven days
 - But the proper understanding is that she cried for the duration of the seven days
- So Samson endures four days of crying and hysterics of one kind or another
 - And I guess it finally wore him down, because she pressed him so hard, we see in v.17
 - Many men can identify with Samson's plight
 - And some men might take consolation in knowing that if the mighty Samson couldn't hold out, then what man could?
 - But that's not the right way to understand this moment in our study
 - The proper way to interpret these events is to ask the question:
 - If Samson couldn't withstand the corrupting influence of a weeping Philistine woman for four days, how could he stand up to the entire Philistine army?
 - Here again, the Lord is demonstrating that this marriage is a terrible outcome for Samson and the people of Israel
 - And therefore, the Lord is using Samson's weakness and this woman's corrosive influence to stop the marriage
 - Samson tells her the answer, and of course she goes immediately to her people and shares the answer
 - Notice Samuel says that these are her people, reminding us of her true allegiance
 - And immediately on that same day before the sun goes down (and thus the day ends), the 30 guests give the answer

Judg. 14:18 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 found out my riddle.”

- In v.18, they solve the riddle and name the lion and the honey as the answer, something they only could have known with the woman's help
 - As Samson hears their answer, he immediately knows that his wife-to-be has betrayed his confidence
 - He says that if they had not “plowed with his heifer” they would not have known the answer
 - To plow with his heifer is an expression that means they found a harvest using his property
 - In the expression, Samson is comparing his wife to a cow, and the comparison is intentional
 - We use that expression to refer to a woman's appearance, but in Samson's day cows weren't thought to be ugly
 - But they were thought to be stubborn, dumb and in need of taming
 - Such is the way Samson thought of this woman, in many ways he's correct
 - But he could have just as easily been talking about himself
 - It was Samson's own stubbornness and rebellious spirit that put him in this situation
 - He was dumb to propose the bet and to trust that woman, to say nothing of his interest in marrying her
- Now remember, this scene is playing out only an hour or two before they were to cement the marriage, consummating it in the marriage tent
 - But Samson is coming to know his prospective wife with a proper understanding

- She has betrayed him and dishonored him
- And she has also impoverished him
- Ironically, she was trying to prevent the “impoverishment” of her guests, but in the process she impoverishes her future household
 - So now the Lord steps in at the eleventh hour to stop the marriage and bring Samson back to his calling and mission

Judg. 14:19 Then 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.
Judg. 14:20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his friend.

- The Spirit leads Samson to depart from the wedding feast immediately without completing the marriage ceremony
 - This is the ancient equivalent to leaving the bride standing at the altar
 - But the situation is a little more complicated than that for Samson
 - Because the original agreement to marry was considered binding
 - The only way to officially end the engagement would be to divorce the woman
 - Nevertheless, Samson leaves as impulsively as he entered the relationship, though this time the Spirit is leading him away from the woman
 - And under the Spirit's influence, Samson goes to one of the five key Philistines cities, Ashkelon
 - The city is about 23 miles southwest of Timnah on the Mediterranean sea
 - A modern city is still there today
 - Samson has traveled here to settle his wager, which he is obligated to pay
 - But Samson knows he has been tricked by the Philistines, so he feels no obligation to pay with his own money

- Instead, he's going to make the Philistine people pay the wager
- He finds and kills thirty wealthy Philistine men and takes their fine clothes so he can pay the debt
- With the thirty sets of clothes in hand, he returns to Timnah and pays his debt
- And in anger, he leaves the town without finishing the marriage and without taking his wife with him
- What do we conclude from Samson's actions?
 - Was he murdering innocent men to pay a wager?
 - While we've certainly seen judges doing bad things in the book of Judges, this seems to be a new low, or is it?
 - Remember, Samson took this action under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord we're told
 - And the key to understanding what's happening here is found in a single word in v.19
 - In v.19 Samuel writes that Samson took the clothes as "spoil"
 - The word in Hebrew is chalitsah, a word only Samuel uses here and in 2Samuel
 - It means war booty, the spoil that one army captures from a defeated foe
 - The fact that Samuel uses this word indicates that he views Samson's actions against the Philistines to be an act of war
 - And this makes sense, given that Samson was raised up by the Spirit to conduct war against Israel's enemies, the Philistines
 - The problem isn't that Samson killed these 30 men...the problem is Samson hasn't been killing more
 - He should have the armies of Israel defeating the Philistines
 - Or at the least, he should be prosecuting the war on his own
 - But one thing is for sure...he shouldn't be trying to make peace with them by marrying their daughters
 - And yet that's exactly where Samson has been up to now

- His actions against these Philistines was motivated for carnal reasons, but still the Lord is using Samson's sin to achieve a good outcome
- The Lord is using Samson's impulsiveness and selfishness to change Samson's direction and bring him back to obedience
 - Of course, killing those 30 men hardly achieved the end the the Lord desired, but it's a start
 - But it kept Samson from marrying this woman
 - And it put his focus back on defeating these oppressors of Israel
 - After Samson returns with the clothes and storms off without his wife, the family is mortified
 - Samson has ruined the family's wedding and brought dishonor on the woman
 - Nothing, absolutely nothing, was more dishonoring to a woman than to become betrothed but not see her marriage come to pass
 - We'll see later in chapter 15 that Samson still intended to marry the woman
 - Or at least he came back to that desire once he cooled down
 - But the Lord takes the next step to ensure Samson can't change his mind and go back to her
 - When the woman's family realizes Samson was gone, they quickly enlisting one of Samson's friends to marry the woman in his place
 - We don't know who this companion was, but he seems ready and willing to take the woman as a wife
 - We can assume she must have been a woman many men desired
- And this brings us to the end of our introductory episode in Samson's story, and this isn't even the strangest thing we'll see in his story
 - This man is an example of how far disobedience and carnal living can take us away from God's heart

- Samson's self-willed behavior left him with no honor, no wardrobe, no wife and no satisfaction
 - He's angry, sulking and frustrated
 - Remember this story when you find yourself in the midst of these feelings about life
 - Angry at God and the world
 - Sulking and pouting over not getting what you want or expect out of life
 - Frustrated in achieving your goals or desires, marveling at your bad luck or so it seems
- Maybe the story of Samson will come to mind, and when it does I hope it will lead you to ask the question, "What is God trying to tell me?"
 - That's the question Samson should have asked himself in the midst of his circumstances
 - Instead, he had a pity party
 - What might he have achieved for the Lord and God's people had he awoken to his own selfish cause for his misery?
 - Perhaps this story might be useful to the Spirit in us one day for the same reason
 - See your circumstances as the outworking of the Lord to produce repentance and a obedience
 - Don't saw "Woe is me"
 - Say "Your will be done"
 - Let's make 2016 the year we obeyed
 - A year we turned from the persistent sin and frustration it produces
 - And turn to the Spirit and accept our mission to serve Him in obedience