

Thoughts From Other Minds:

As we focus on the teaching of this chapter [Judges 14], we must take some time to think about the secret of Yahweh's purpose (esp. v. 4).

Manoah and his wife were upset. They'd had another go around with Samson their strong-willed child. Samson had been to Timnah. He had seen a girl. He was determined. His father must arrange for the marriage.

Father and mother were shattered. They had lived in hope of his birth (ch. 13) and now this. You can imagine the scene. 'But she's a Philistine,' Manoah half-pleaded, half roared. Surely the Angel of Yahweh hadn't had this in mind (13:5). 'Get her as my wife,' Samson persisted (v. 2). Father and mother explode: 'Isn't there any girl in all Israel who could please you, that you have to go off to Philistia to find a wife? Samson, that girl's a pagan!' Samson looks Manoah in the eye, his words come out deliberately through clenched teeth: 'Get her for me' (v. 3, emphasis in Hebrew). His reason? 'For she is right in my eyes' (v. 3c, literal translation). Grief and misery in one home in Zorah that evening. 'But his father and his mother did not know that this was from Yahweh, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines' (v. 4).

We must discuss the interpretation of verse 4. As the reader can see, I take the clause he was seeking to refer to Yahweh. It is, however, frequently taken as referring to Samson, as if all the hoopla over the Philistine girl was a cover-up for Samson's real purpose. In that case the secret is Samson's. Yet in my view the 'he' is almost certainly Yahweh. First, 'Yahweh' is the nearest and most natural grammatical antecedent for 'he' in the sentence. Secondly, Samson appears to be driven only by his own glands ('for she is right in my eyes,' v. 3) rather than by any hidden anti-Philistinism. Someone could claim that Samson's words in verse 3 are merely his way of concealing his true motives from his parents. But not likely – even the narrator indicates that Samson's pleasure rather than his purpose carried the day ('she was right in the eyes of Samson,' v. 7). Samson is a typical Judges man (17:6; 21:25), high on doing his own thing. Verse 4 then tells us of Yahweh's – not Samson's – secret. Yahweh is after an opportunity for striking the Philistines; he seeks grounds for opening a quarrel.

Here would have been real comfort for Samson's parents had they known; they didn't realize this situation was 'from Yahweh'; they couldn't see that Yahweh 'was seeking an occasion against the Philistines.' This does not mean they were wrong to object to Samson's desires and action. Nor does it mean that Samson's desires were virtuous or that his bull-headedness was right. It means that neither Samson's foolishness nor his stubbornness is going to prevent Yahweh from accomplishing his design. Yahweh can and will use the sinfulness or stupidity of his servants as the camouflage for bringing his secret will to pass.

Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges, Such a Great Salvation*, pp. 167-169.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

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Sermon: "Samson – beginning the beginning of salvation" (text: Judges 14:1-20)

Scripture: Judges 14:1-20

Sermon Notes

Introduction: We begin by setting Samson in the wider biblical setting. The chapter ends with him killing thirty Philistines to get their clothes to pay his wager with his wedding companions. Why are others mass murderers, but Samson a man of faith?

At the beginning in Genesis we find that the Bible is particularly interested in the violence that proceeds from the enmity that God put in place between the two divisions in the human race—those who are for God and those who are against him.

We see this in Cain and Abel; Abel was a man of faith in God (Heb 11:4) but Cain was of the evil one and murdered his brother, because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous (1 Jn 3:12).

Seth took Abel's place—and then there were two streams of humanity, one from Cain and one from Seth, which by Noah's time had merged so that the whole human race, Noah excepted, was so wicked that God drowned them all (1 Pet 3:6).

God started again with Abraham, making his family into a nation, God's kingdom (Deut 33:5). Israel was to be a holy people; gross sinners were to be put to death; they were to be separate from other nations and their gods. In Canaan they were to drive out the Canaanites and serve the Lord alone—but they did not do so.

So the Lord gave them to serve their enemies; when they called for help, he gave them saviours, judges, who saved them from their enemies. Each of their victories anticipates the Lord's final victory over evil and evil people; we are not to lament the bloodshed but to anticipate this victory with glad thankfulness (Jdgs 5:31).

1. Samson—doing what was right in his own eyes

Samson was the Lord's answer to Israel's captivity by the Philistines. They had done evil; he gave them into their hand forty years—but God never intends to destroy his people, only to discipline them. This should be a great comfort to us as believers, we are his sons; he will discipline us, but never cast us off (Heb 12:7-9).

God did not intend that Israel should happily co-exist with the Philistines; what happened before the Flood was in likely to happen again; God's promise to send the Saviour (Gen 3:15) was in danger; something had to be done, and that something was Samson, for he would 'begin to save Israel from the Philistines' (13:5).

Yet young Samson is a disappointment, for instead of wanting to save his people from the Philistines he wanted to marry a Philistine! But he was a man of faith—what sort of believer would want to do that? No believer ought to want to do such a thing (cf. 2 Cor 6:14-16) – but Samson did not have at first the faith he had later.

At first he was very much a man of his age, doing what was right in his own eyes (vs. 3, 7, 17:6). What, then, of his mission to save his people from the Philistines? Here is a mystery: his wilfulness was 'from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel' (v. 4).

God's enemies were ruling over God's people; God had used them to punish them for their sins, but it could not continue, for they were 'marrying' into the Philistine family! And so the Lord would use Samson's desire to marry a Philistine to unmarry Israel from the Philistines! By it Samson would begin to save Israel.

Perhaps you might think this would work for you; that your desire to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever in some way might be 'from the Lord'. We are not to guess at God's secret will; we are to obey his commands. Not to do so would be sin, and dangerous, as bringing on us his discipline, or even proving we are not his.

2. Samson—doing the Lord's saving work

Samson was heading for matrimony—but on his way he met a lion, which came towards him roaring—and then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and bare handed he tore it in pieces (v. 6). He is often depicted as having extraordinary physique—but he didn't; his strength was supernatural, of the Spirit of the Lord.

There is much we would like to know about this incident; how come he was separated from his parents? Was he in the vineyards (cf. v. 8) - but as a Nazirite, what was he doing there? What was right in his own eyes? How did he clean up afterwards? Was this the first time he knew what his gift from the Lord was?

Did he know he could do it, or did it just happen—the lion roared, sprang, and Samson caught it (by the jaws?) and tore it in pieces? Is it significant, that the saviour needed to be saved? Or are we to contrast his great strength with his weaknesses, and especially his holding a drinking feast (v. 10—'feast').

He supposed that the Philistines were like him and his. The apostle Paul contrasts believers and unbelievers by fundamental differences (2 Cor 6:14-16) but it is easy for young Christians with limited knowledge of outsiders to say 'Why shouldn't I marry him/her', or 'Why not partner with an unbeliever in a business venture.'

Samson parties and jests with the Philistines, expecting them to play fair—but they do not; they pressure his wife, who pressures him until he tells her the answer to his riddle; Philistine like, she betrays him, and he knows it (v. 18) - and so he goes to Ashkelon (25 miles) and kills thirty men for their cloths to pay the wager. Samson sought justice, and the Lord began to save his people from the Philistines.

The killing was a display of the Spirit's power. It was messy—but so was the cross, for real sins demand a real sacrifice and a real Saviour. It was small, only a beginning—but we must not despise the way God begins small, quietly; with the first stirrings of his Spirit in conviction of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus for life in him; for fresh beginnings, by which we continue through our troubles in the faith.

My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Does setting the actions of Samson in the wider biblical context help with understanding the difference between his killing Philistines and mass murders? If so, how?
2. How do the victories of the various judges point us to the end of history, and how should we respond as we read their exploits? (cf. Judges 5:31).
3. 'God destroys his enemies but disciplines his sons'. How do we see this illustrated in his provision of Samson for Israel, and what does it mean for us, his adopted children through faith in the Lord Jesus? (cf. Heb 12:7-9).
4. How did Samson disappoint his parents? Is it true to say that he reflected Israel? Was their disappointment justified/not justified? (cf. 2 Cor 6:14-16, v. 4).
5. How was Samson disappointed by the Philistines? How do we know that his reaction was not mere personal pique or revenge? (vs. 18-19).
6. Two things may offend us about what Samson did; firstly, it was messy; secondly, it was very small; what answer would you give from the scriptures to each of these objections?