

The Book of Judges

Lesson 11: Samson's Marriage and Riddle -- Judges 14:1-15:20

Picture a young man walking down the road to Timnah, the dust of the vineyards rising around his sandals, his eyes scanning the streets of a foreign town. He is strong, set apart from birth, marked by a vow, promised by an angel before he was even born. And what is the first thing we hear him say? Not a prayer. Not a question for his parents. Not a thought about the God who raised him up to deliver Israel. We hear, 'I saw a woman at Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. Now get her for me as my wife.' From the very first sentence, you can feel where the trouble is going to live. It lives in the eyes.

When his mother and father object, reminding him gently that this woman is one of the uncircumcised Philistines, Samson does not pause. He does not weigh their counsel. He simply repeats his demand and adds the line that becomes the haunting refrain of this whole book: 'Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.' Right in his eyes. Not right in God's eyes. Not right for the calling on his life. Right in his eyes, which is exactly what everyone in the days of the judges does when there is no king and every man does what is right in his own. You and I have said those same words, maybe never out loud, but in the quiet place where appetite argues with conscience and usually wins.

And here is the strange wonder of this story. While Samson is chasing what looks good to him, God is quietly at work in the background, mysteriously seeking an occasion against the Philistines. The text tells us plainly that his parents did not know this was from the LORD. God does not approve of Samson's choices, but neither is God thwarted by them. Out of a tangle of bad decisions, a lion, a swarm of bees, a clever riddle, a betrayed secret, thirty murdered men, three hundred foxes, and a donkey's jawbone, the Almighty is weaving a deliverance Samson barely understands and never quite cooperates with. It is enough to make you marvel at how patient and how purposeful our God really is.

By the end of this passage you will watch a man so strong he can tear a lion apart with his bare hands, yet so weak he cannot govern his own appetites. You will see him cry out to God in raw thirst after a great victory, and you will see God answer with cool water from a split rock. There is a sermon in all of it for us, because we are not so different. We carry callings we neglect, vows we forget, eyes that wander, and a God who keeps pursuing His purposes and keeps answering our cries even when we have made a mess of things. Let us walk slowly through Samson's wedding and riddle, and let us ask the Lord to show us our own hearts in his.

Group Discussion: Where in this passage do you see God's hidden hand at work, and how does it change the way you read Samson's clearly sinful choices?

Personal Reflection: Name one area of your life, an appetite, a relationship, a habit, where you have lately been guided by what is 'right in my own eyes' rather than what is right in God's. What would it cost you to surrender it this week?

Read Judges 14:1–15:20

Study Questions

1. What does Samson's demand, 'Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes' (14:3), reveal about the spiritual condition both of Samson and of Israel in the days of the judges, and how does this phrase tie into the book's recurring refrain?
2. Think honestly about your own decisions this past month. Where have your eyes led your will, choosing what looked good or felt good over what you knew to be right? What did it cost you?
3. Judges 14:4 says the LORD was 'seeking an occasion against the Philistines.' How can God be sovereignly working His purpose through Samson's sinful choice without God approving or causing that sin (compare Ezekiel 18:20; Genesis 50:20)?
4. Where in your life right now do you most need to trust that God is quietly at work for good even though circumstances, including your own failures, look like a tangle of bad decisions?
5. Samson tears a lion apart by the Spirit's power (14:6), then later scoops honey from its carcass and eats it (14:8–9). Given his Nazirite vow against touching the dead (Numbers 6:6), what does this incident teach about the slow erosion of consecration?

6. What small compromise have you allowed yourself recently, telling yourself it does not really matter, that is quietly eroding your own consecration to the Lord?
7. Samson's bride pressures and betrays him, and the marriage that was 'right in his eyes' brings disaster (14:15–20). What does this account, read alongside the New Testament, teach about being unequally yoked and entangled with the world (2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1)?
8. Where are you most tempted to be 'unequally yoked,' to bind yourself closely to people or pursuits that pull you away from God? What boundary do you need to draw?
9. Hold two truths together from this passage: God genuinely uses Samson, a deeply flawed and self-willed man, to begin delivering Israel, and yet Samson remains fully accountable for following his appetites and neglecting his consecration. How does Scripture keep both God's overruling providence and human responsibility in view, and what does this say about how God can use you without excusing your sin?
10. Samson cries to the LORD in his thirst and God graciously provides (15:18–19). Name one specific appetite or one 'what is right in my own eyes' that Jesus is reshaping in you right now, and what would it look like to cry out to Him about it this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Numbers 6:1-21, the law of the Nazirite vow that frames Samson's lifelong consecration and his repeated violations of it; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, Paul's call to come out from the world and not be unequally yoked, the New Testament weight behind Samson's failed marriage; Genesis 50:20, Joseph's testimony that God meant for good what men meant for evil, the clearest parallel to God's overruling providence in Judges 14:4; Ezekiel 18:20, the soul that sins shall die, guarding human responsibility against any idea that God's sovereignty cancels accountability; Romans 8:28, God working all things together for good for those who love Him, the New Testament confidence that mirrors His hidden work through Samson.

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com