

Immediate Context

We examined the miraculous circumstances surrounding Samson's conception earlier in chapter 13 and we now turn to his birth and first steps into his role as judge and deliverer of Israel.

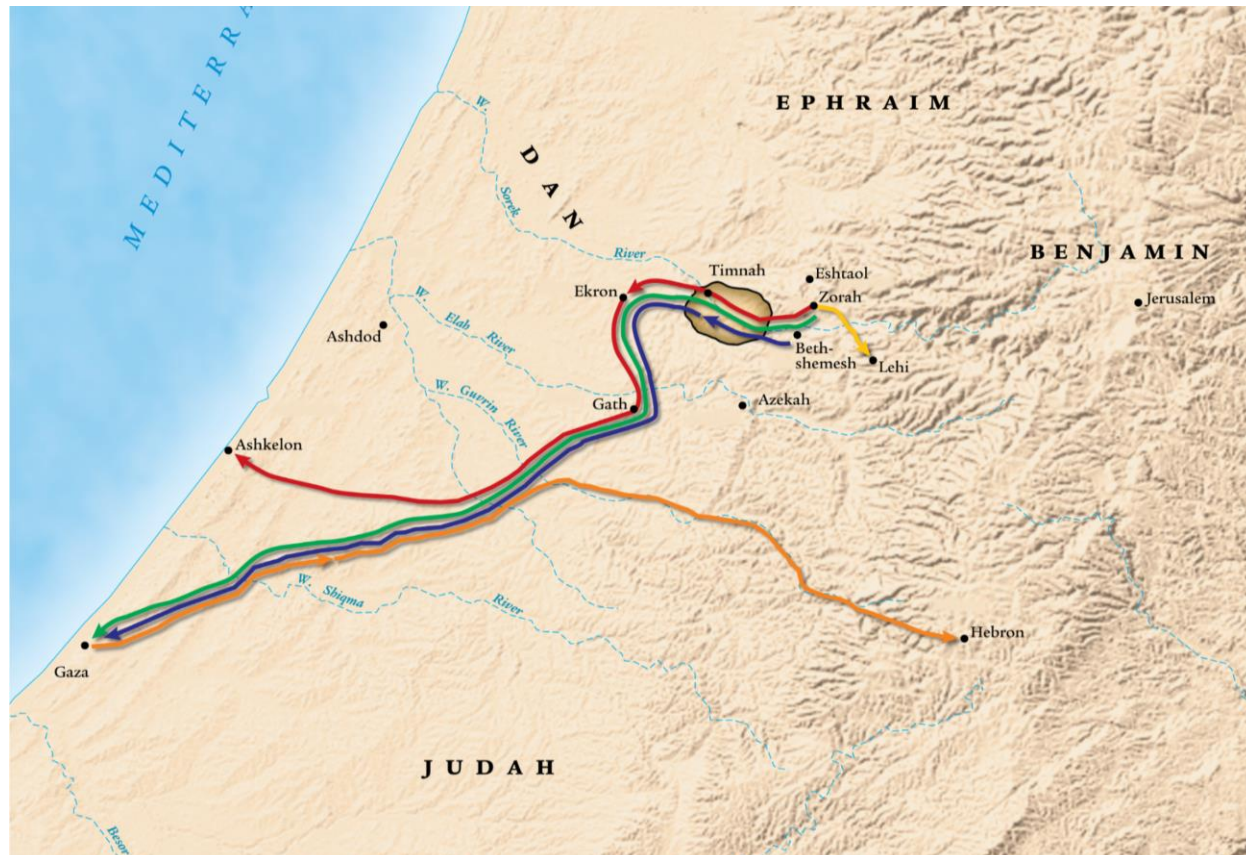
Judges 13:24-25 – The Birth and Growth of Samson

What does the name Samson mean? **Samson means, "little sun."**

How did God begin to "stir" Samson? **The King James translates this very well when it says, "... the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol."** To be stirred is to be moved in some way... in thought, in feeling, in action. As Samson reached adulthood, there were times the Lord revealed His power and purpose to Samson in unique ways. We don't know the details, but we do know that it was building towards his purpose and the events that begin to unfold in this chapter.

Judges 14:1-4 – Vision Problems

We get some important cultural clues about Israel's state of affairs in this passage. First, we find out in verse four that the Philistines were ruling over Israel. Their power expanded from their land on the Mediterranean Coast and extended to all of Israel. Samson went "down" to Timnah... not south, but rather downstream (downhill) from Zorah to Timnah, which was apparently a Philistine stronghold. Interestingly, Timnah was given to the tribe of Dan (*Joshua 19:40-43*) and it bordered Judah's land (*Joshua 15:1-10*). They had lost control of this city.



Unlike the days when Israel was under the reign of various foreign powers, Samson was traveling alone freely and saw a Philistine woman that he wanted to marry and asked his parents to arrange the marriage. What does this teach us about Philistine occupation of Israel? **The Philistines ruled but it does not appear to be in a physically oppressive manner. There is no indication that the Israelites were slaves. They had their own lands and farms and the Philistines allowed intermarriage. The true oppression was spiritual, although Israel is complicit in this.**

What is the repeated theme regarding Samson's attraction to this woman? Read this passage and also verse seven. **He saw her and she looked good to him. There is no indication that she had any spiritual depth, mental acuity, or any other notable trait. Samson is described as a man ruled by his eyes. His literal response to his parents objections in verse three is, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me."**

Considering the bigger picture of the book of Judges, what connection do you see with Samson's attraction to this woman and the nation of Israel? Read *Judges 21:25*. **Like the rest of Israel, Samson did what was right in his own eyes. His desire at the moment dictated the direction of his life rather than God's Word. We will see that to some degree Samson's life is a reflection of the spiritual problems in Israel, down to the putting out of his own eyes at the end of this narrative.**

What is his parents concern about this marriage? Where does it come from? Read *Deuteronomy 7:1-4*. **We can hope that their opposition wasn't a racially-motivated prejudice. We do know that there are biblical grounds for opposing this marriage... it was in direct contradiction to the command of God. The danger of such a marriage was turning the heart of the Israelite away from God and toward idolatry. We will see that Samson is susceptible to the influence of the women in his life... all except the best one.**

What do we learn about Samson? **He is a self-absorbed, shallow, and self-willed young man. He had no regard for God's commands and no respect for his parents' counsel. We learn an important lesson here when it comes to our children and marriage. Rather than focusing on telling your children who to marry, we should focus on teaching them who to be. If they have a heart for Christ above all, they will seek a godly spouse and won't settle for someone who would divert them from Him.**

In Samson's life we also get a close-up view of the generational degradation of Israel. While the parents allowed Philistine occupation but maintained a separate national identity, the next generation was ready to embrace the enemy and erase the lines of their unique calling and position before God. The failure of one generation can be amplified in the next. Given what we have learned about Samson thus far, do you find irony in Samson's desire to marry this woman? Why? **His calling in life was to begin to destroy the Philistines... surely his parents had told him this. Yet here he wants to marry a Philistine, yoking his life to these people for the rest of his life. Like Jonah, Samson's life was headed the opposite direction from God's calling, but like Jonah, God will intervene to get Samson right where he wants him.**

How must we understand the statement in verse four that this whole event was *“from the Lord, for He was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.”*? Was God behind Samson’s lust? Was God behind Samson’s rebellious spirit? Did God approve of this union? Read *Genesis 50:15-21* as a compatible example. We see a great parallel between the spiritual state of Samson throughout his life and of the nation of Israel as a whole. He was a misguided and foolish man in many respects, yet he had a calling from God placed upon him and God would not let him go. God did not make Samson lust after this woman, endorse marriage to a pagan, or encourage rebellion against his parents. Yet, God is all-powerful and therefore able to turn even the most heinous acts of sin into something good. No righteousness accrued to Samson by his sins, yet God advanced the His purposes in this event. The same could be said of the sin of Joseph’s brothers. **They meant it for evil but God used it for good.**

Judges 14:5-9 – The Lion

Did Samson and his parents travel together on this journey? It appears they traveled together to some degree, but Samson took a detour through the vineyards of Timnah on his own.

What is significant about the location where the lion attacked Samson? Why was Samson there by himself? Samson was in a vineyard, which should have been the last place you would find a Nazirite. Seeing that he purposefully took this detour and was not with his parents, indicates that his reasons for being there were not consistent with his Nazirite vow.

Why do you think the Lord empowered Samson to miraculously kill the lion (with no visible injuries after the fight that would peak his parents’ interest)? This was likely the Lord’s way of revealing the means by which He would accomplish His purpose through Samson. It would definitely dwell on Samson’s mind and give him confidence in his next “mission.” God’s purposes with Samson were not based upon Samson’s righteousness or worthiness but rather on God’s faithful commitment to Israel.

Why didn’t Samson tell his parents what he had done? If he told his parents, they would likely ask for more details and may ask to see the carcass as proof. To reveal this information would be to admit that he was in the vineyards, which was contrary to his vow.

Why do you think Samson returned to see the lion’s carcass? This whole event probably seemed surreal to him and seeing the lion’s carcass would validate his recollection and renew his courage.

What is significant about Samson finding and taking honey from the lion’s carcass? As a Nazirite, he was not supposed to touch anything that had died. Taking this honey was a violation of the vow placed on his life. **The only part of this vow that Samson seemed to take seriously was not cutting his hair.**

Why didn’t Samson tell his parents where he found the honey? Again, Samson had broken his Nazirite vow by touching the dead animal and to tell them about the lion and the location of the honey would reveal that he had broken his Nazirite vow in two different ways. Everything Samson was doing at this point (the vineyards, the lion carcass, and the marriage to a Philistine) was in direct opposition to the direction the Lord had charted for his life, but God’s purposes will be accomplished.

Judges 14:10-18 – The Witch

The “feast” Samson prepared was a custom in their culture. The Hebrew word is translated either “feast” or “drink” in the Old Testament, giving us insight into what kind of feast this was. Although we aren’t told explicitly that Samson was drinking, it certainly seems he was enabling others to do so... and not only to drink but to get drunk at a week-long party.

The purpose of Samson receiving 30 companions isn’t immediately clear. They were not Samson’s friends from his youth. They were men provided by the Philistines. Either they were provided by the bride’s family to “hang out” with Samson for the week or perhaps they were provided by the Philistines of Timnah to keep a watch on this Israelite. Regardless of their purpose, Samson tried to make sport with them, proposing a contest in the form of a riddle.

The 30 linen garments and changes of clothes are complete outfits. Either Samson would provide a new outfit for each man, or they would make him the best dressed man in the Middle East. Clothing was not as affordable and available as it is today. Most people would not have many changes of clothing. This was an expensive proposition. Some Bible scholars interpret these garments to be the special (and more expensive) clothing worn at festivals. If so, this makes the challenge even more daunting for Samson and appealing to his companions. Thirty men had a week to find an answer to a short riddle. It would seem the odds are in their favor... until they aren’t.

What does this riddle teach us about Samson? **The death of the lion remains on his mind and the unique situation with the honey is as well. While we don’t know that he intended to tell his companions about killing the lion after the feast concluded, he wants to draw their attention to it. He also sees this very unique situation as an opportunity to gain wealth from his “companions.” We can tell from how he responds later that he didn’t plan to lose... at least not by treachery. He appears to be both competitive and proud.**

What do we learn about the character of Samson’s “companions”? **They are willing to at least threaten arson, if not murder, in order to keep from losing this bet. They weren’t Samson’s real friends and neither were they true friends to the family of the bride. While it is hard to judge a nation based upon the action of a few, the Philistines seem to have an “every man for himself” attitude that could turn them against each other as easy as it could turn them against the Israelites.**

What do we learn about the character of Samson’s wife? **She blatantly deceived her husband for a good portion of the week of their marriage by falsely weeping and begging him for the answer to the riddle. She had a greater allegiance to her family and her people than to her new husband. She then betrays him once she gets the answer the riddle. Although she is acting based upon a threat to her family, her response her character. By her sin she will destroy what she sinned to protect: her family.**

What do we learn about the priority Samson places on his relationship with his bride? **See Genesis 2:24. He is not “leaving and cleaving.” He initially values his relationship with his parents more than his wife and we have already seen how shallow his relationship with his parents is.**

What is Samson's weakness? Though Samson could conquer any man, he could be seduced by his lust and worn down by a woman.

Recall why God did not want the Israelites to intermarry. Does this make sense in light of how Samson's wife was able to manipulate him? This is a good example of WHY God made this prohibition. Samson is not unique in his weakness however. David the great-hearted became a murderer and Solomon the wise became an idolater because of their weakness. One of the most significant decisions you will ever make is who you will yoke yourself to and how you approach that relationship.

What is Samson's attitude towards his "companions" and wife after they solve the riddle? He exposes their deceit and is angry at his wife. Calling your wife a "heifer" is an insult in any language.

Judges 14:19-20 – The Wardrobe

Consider Samson's response. Do you find any virtue in what he did? Beyond the fact that the Lord is trying to create conflict between Israel and the Philistines, Samson kept his vow. In this culture, your vow was your bond. To have a reputation as a vow-breaker would ruin you in business dealings and destroy your reputation.

Samson fulfilled his vow by marching down to the Philistine city of Ashkelon (around 24 miles away) and killing 30 men, taking their clothing, and bringing it back to his wedding companions. Why did the Lord give Samson strength to kill 30 men to fulfill his foolish vow? Remember the Lord's greater purpose. Don't let the failures of the individuals make you lose sight of the good that God is doing. If Israel was not soon separated from the Philistines, they would be lost as a separate people within a few generations.

How did Samson respond to his wife after this incident? There was no communication. He shut down... which would ultimately make the situation go from bad to worse. The next series of events we will study is a downward spiral of increasingly wrathful reaction to sin. God's purposes will be fulfilled despite their sin, but all will suffer loss (see *1 Corinthians 3:10-15*).