

Judges 14A

- Having studied the parallels between Samson's arrival and the arrival of Jesus to Mary and Joseph, let's move forward to see what God has planned for this remarkable man
 - Last time the angel of the Lord departed from Manoah and his wife having given instructions concerning their son
 - Now at the end of chapter 13, the time has come for the birth of Samson
 - And then very quickly we move into Samson's life as an adult
 - We start at the end of chapter 13

[Judg. 13:24](#) Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the Lord blessed him.

[Judg. 13:25](#) And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

- The child Samson is born
 - Last time I taught, I mentioned that Samson's name can be translated son of light
 - In Hebrew it's *shimson*, and that word has other potential meanings
 - It can be translated deliverer or savior
 - And it can also be translated strong or daring one
 - Of course, these names are reminders that Samson's life will at times be a picture of Jesus
 - In fact, one small detail at the end of chapter 13 offers us another of those connections between Samson and Jesus
 - In the story of Jesus, we're given the details of Jesus birth and just a little bit about his growing up
 - But for the most part, Jesus' early years is a mystery
 - We hear Jesus grew and was blessed

- Then the story of Jesus in the Gospels jumps immediately to His entry into ministry
- Similarly, the story of Samson jumps from the announcement of his birth to his life as an adult
 - At the end of v.24 we hear that Samson was blessed by the Lord
 - Then we reach a bridging verse connecting his birth to his adult life in chapter 14
 - And in both the Gospel and in the story of Samson, the bridge between the birth and the start of the man's service is the Spirit
 - In the Gospels, the Spirit's arrival at the baptism of John leads Jesus to begin proclaiming the Gospel and performing miracles
 - And this will be the same pattern in Samson's life
- In v.25 we hear that the Spirit of God begins to stir in Samson's life in a place called Mahaneh-dan
 - This town was located about 14 miles due west from Jerusalem in the Shephelah
 - The shephelah is a region of foothills connecting the coastal plain with the mountains of Judea
 - Samson lived in this region and did most of his service to the Lord here
 - You may remember we learned earlier that the idolatry of Israel prompted the Lord to bring two oppressors against the nation during this cycle
 - He brought the Ammonites from the east and Philistines from the west
 - Jephthah raising armies in the east to battle the Ammonites who attacked from east of the Jordan
 - And Samson was called to defeat the Philistines in the West
 - In fact, the service of these two judges overlapped for the first few years
- But the style of each man was very different, to say the least

- Jephthah was a man who used his mouth to convince others to fight with him
 - And he relied on armies to accomplish the Lord's work
 - But Samson never relies on others
 - He is a one-man personal deliverer
- Also, we remember that during this time there is no indication that the nation of Israel responds to the Lord's work through these men
 - There is no national response, no national repentance
 - Moreover, when Samson's time as judge comes to an end, the enemy is still present
 - His defeat doesn't come until David
 - Each other these details are opportunities to draw additional parallels between Samson and the Jesus as we go along
- Of course, not everything this man will do is intended to represent Jesus
 - In fact, as we leave chapter 13, we see a man with great potential, divine appointment and Spirit empowerment
 - But as we enter chapter 14, we'll find that this man doesn't live up to his potential in all cases
 - Samson is arguably the most powerfully endowed judge in the book
 - And yet he accomplishes the least of any judge
 - Nevertheless, the Lord's sovereign will ensures that Samson accomplishes at least what the Lord intends
 - Though Samson's sin brings great turmoil back upon his head, literally
 - So we begin with Samson's pursuit of a Philistine wife

Judg. 14:1 Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines.

Judg. 14:2 So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

[Judg. 14:3](#) Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me."

[Judg. 14:4](#) However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

- Samson is living near Zorah in the Shephelah and he visits another small village about 4 miles away called Zorah
 - This entire region is under Philistine control at this point in Israel's existence
 - Remember, these people ruled over Israel
 - But there was an uneasy cooperation between the Philistines and Israel
 - Israel traded with these people and relied on their expertise with iron
 - But in the end, their rule oppressed Israel, resulting in the loss of land, crops and peace
 - These conditions were similar to the ones that greeted Jesus upon His first coming
 - The people of Israel were under Roman oppression
 - Rome held all the cards, yet the Jews were able to operate with a degree of freedom
 - Still, they were often pressed into slavery, their lands were taken and taxed
 - And they felt the yoke of Gentile authority over them
- Into this environment, the Lord brings Samson to deliver his people, and right away we see him taking an interest in marrying into the Philistines culture
 - Samson tells his parents he saw a woman in Timnah he wanted to marry
 - He says I saw a woman, but in Hebrew the word for woman is in the emphatic position indicated she is the "one" for him

- In effect, Samson has declared this woman is to be his wife, and he's directing his parents to arrange the marriage details for him
- This was the customary way for any marriage to take place
- But of course the parents' concern is in the fact that this woman is a Philistine woman
 - How is Samson going to deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines if he's marrying into their family
 - They suggest to Samson that he should look within his own family for a daughter to marry, that is among the Danites
 - Or at least among the people of Israel
- But Samson answers abruptly telling his father to get her because she looks good to me
 - The response is shocking dismissive of his father's authority, which tells us something of Samson at this point
 - He's a brash, self-willed young man prone to acting according to his fleshly desires
 - And he certainly doesn't take kindly to advice from elders
- At this point we might think that Samson's choice is automatically a mistake, since the Jews weren't supposed to marry people like the Philistines
 - In reality, the Law given to the nation only stipulated that Israel couldn't marry the Canaanites because of the curse God places on those people
 - But the Philistines aren't Canaanites
 - They are descended from Japheth, the other of Noah's three sons
 - Therefore, there was nothing inherently sinful about marrying a Philistine
 - Moreover, we have v.4 staring us in the face
 - In that verse we learn that the Lord was working to bring about this marriage for reasons of His own
 - But as we'll see, this doesn't mean that the Lord wanted Samson to be married to a Philistine woman

- Rather, the Lord wants to use Samson's sinful desire for this woman
- The Lord will use it to propel Samson into his proper place as a judge and destroyer of Israel's enemies
- Now at this point, his parents agree to support his request, so the family travels down to Timnah to arrange the wedding details as was customary in this day

Judg. 14:5 Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him.

Judg. 14:6 The Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.

Judg. 14:7 So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson.

Judg. 14:8 When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion.

Judg. 14:9 So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.

- Apparently as Samson and his parents traveled the short distance to Timnah, Samson turned aside into some vineyards near the town
 - Perhaps Samson wanted to obtain some grapes to present to the family or as a snack after the hour long walk through the hills
 - As he goes alone into the vineyard, Samson is attacked by a young lion
 - In the Hebrew, it says the lion roared to encounter Samson
 - But then it says the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon Samson
 - And as a result, Samson literally ripped the lion body apart with his bare hands
 - In the way a man might separate the limbs of a small lamb
 - Obviously, this is a supernatural outcome, as the Lord placed the lion at the disposal of Samson's strength
 - There is no indication that Samson thought himself capable of such an act before it happened

- On the contrary, it appears that Samson is prompted into this action by the Spirit of the Lord
- And once it's over, Samson must have had a hard time making sense of it
- But we can see it with some hindsight and understand the message easily enough
 - The Lord has placed in Samson a special call and supernatural ability to defeat his enemies
 - In this case, the enemy of the moment was the lion
 - On paper, that lion would have had a field day with an single, unarmed man
 - But because of the Spirit, Samson prevailed
- So the lesson for Samson is that he is prepared by God to win battles against God's enemies
 - But of course, Samson has to be willing to enter the battle
 - Samson has to do as the Lord expects by fighting the ones oppressing Israel, for that's what God has purposed
 - Yet instead of battling Israel's enemies as God intended, we find Samson journeying to marry a Philistine woman
- These moments are typical for how God gets our attention and obedience when we're wavering in the work He has given to us
 - We have our marching orders, or at least we think we know what God wants for us
 - We've heard that quiet voice speaking to our conscience
 - We have been equipped in some way and we see how the pieces fit together in our life
 - But something stops us from moving ahead in what God has directed
 - We hesitate, maybe because it demands too much change, too much sacrifice, too much faith

- So we turn aside, and we chase after something sweet, something that pleases us
 - We may think that settles the matter, case closed
 - But the Lord loves us and wants what is best for us, so He pursues us
 - And that pursuit means he brings us surprises, roaring lions out of nowhere
 - Whatever He does, it disrupts our plans, it shocks us, leaves us feeling vulnerable and weak
 - And then His Spirit fills that void
- When we come through one of these trials, we may feel differently about our life, our choices, our desires to serve God
 - The shock to our system opens a door for the Lord to woe us back to Himself
 - But the outcome isn't certain
 - Sometimes we listen, and sometimes we don't
- Here was Samson's chance to rethink he life course, to turn down his Philistine wife and make his life purpose about defeating the Philistine enemy
 - Instead, Samson keeps the moment a secret, pretending it didn't happen
 - Samson was probably mystified by the experience
 - But that's not why he's keeping secrets
 - He's tossing aside an opportunity to turn back from his fleshly desires to following the Lord
 - And that's to be expected in this time of men doing what was right in their own eyes
 - In v.7 we're told that when Samson meets Timnah again, she looks good to him
 - Literally, it says she looked good in the eyes of Samson
 - Sounds familiar doesn't it?

- This woman seems good to Samson, but she's not good in the sight of the Lord
- At this point in the story, a covenant of marriage was struck, and Samson returned home with his parents
 - At a later point, the time came for the betrothal period to end and the marriage to be consummated
 - Marriage in this day was a two-part process
 - The man and woman were betrothed by an agreement between the families
 - And then after a period when the groom prepared a home for his bride, the marriage would be completed
 - In Philistines culture, the final act of marriage was a week-long feast celebration at the bride's house
 - This celebration was paid for by the groom's family
 - So in v.8 we see Samson returning now to the bride's house some weeks later for that feast
 - As Samson makes the trek back to Timnah, he still has on his mind that moment with the lion
 - So we're told he turned aside again to see what had become of the lion carcass he tore apart earlier
 - As we consider what Samson found, notice for a moment Samuel's choice of verbs throughout this account
 - In v.1, v.5 and again in v.7 we're told Samson "went down"
 - The phrase suggests Samson taking a fall into temptation and sin
 - And twice now Samson has "turned aside" as well
 - Also suggesting a departure from obedience
 - These terms are intended to emphasize Samson's poor choices in every case
- As Samson encounters the carcass of the lion, he sees something unexpected

- In the animal's remains, bees have established a hive and produced honey
 - Normally, bees wouldn't use rotting flesh as a home
 - Flies yes, but bees no
 - Knowing this isn't the normal behavior for bees tells us that this is a moment the Lord has produced to create a test for Samson
- What's the test? Well, the test involves his Nazarite vows
 - Inside the carcass of this dead animal the bees are producing honey, something sweet and desirable
 - Samson could look upon this scene and take away a valuable lesson from the Lord
 - He could recognize that his destruction of an enemy produced opportunity for a sweet reward
 - But that reward can only come through obedience to the Lord's commands
- But unfortunately, Samson fails the test
 - He is too eager to obtain the sweet reward and to do so according to his own ways
 - He reaches in and takes some of the honey for himself
 - In doing so, he comes into contact with a dead animal, in direct disobedience to this Nazarite vow
 - Obviously, the Lord placed the honey inside the dead animal to create this test to know if Samson would be true to his word
 - Instead, Samson fell into disobedience
- Even worse, Samson decides to take some of the honey to his parents and offered it to them without telling them of its origins
 - In the process, he thoughtlessly and selfishly brought defilement to them as well
 - They didn't know it of course
 - But that makes it all the worse in that Samson was willing to bring others along with him into sin

- His mother had sanctified him by her willingness to observe the vows herself
- And now her sacrifice was repaid with Samson's deception
- Why did Samson share the honey with his parents?
 - Was it purely thoughtless or did he have a purpose in it?
 - It seems as though he was repeating the pattern of the woman in the Garden
 - Once sin has taken hold in our hearts, we look for opportunities to share it with others
 - Because it soothes our wounded conscience when we bring others with us into our sin
 - Just as woman gave the fruit to her husband to eat

[Judg. 14:10](#) Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this.

[Judg. 14:11](#) When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.

[Judg. 14:12](#) Then Samson said to them, "Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes.

[Judg. 14:13](#) "But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Propound your riddle, that we may hear it."

[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.

- Then once again, we're told that Samson and his father "went down" to Timnah for the feast
 - The Hebrew word for feast is a very specific and infrequently used word that means a drink banquet
 - In other words, this is a feast centered on drinking wine
 - Which indicates that Samson broke the second major feature of his Nazarite vow, to not drink fruit of the vine

- At this week-long feast, the bride's family invited 30 guests to the banquet as a sign of honor to Samson
 - Part of the festivities included social games of proposing and solving riddles of one kind or another
 - Early in the week Samson proposes one such riddle
 - He thinks back to the lion and the honey thinks he could stump the crowd
 - But a riddle this good deserves a wager
 - So Samson proposes that if the riddle can't be solved by the end of the seven-day feast, the 30 guests would owe him each a linen wrap and set of party clothes
 - Linen wraps were large piece of fine linen they were worn next to the body
 - These were rather valuable items since they weren't used except at formal occasions
 - Likewise, the change of clothes refers to festive garments that were quite expensive
 - Apparently, Samson was quite a clothes hound, and these things interested him
 - If they could solve the riddle within the seven days, then Samson owed each man the same
 - So each man was risking one set at the prospect of gaining a set of clothes
 - But Samson was risking 30 for the sake of gaining 30
 - Obviously, he was brash and confident in his own ability
 - And he was a risk taker...none of these qualities suggest a man listening to or following the Lord's Spirit
- Obviously, this is a pretty good bet for the wedding party, so they agree
 - And then Samson gives the riddle
 - Out of the eater came something to eat
 - Out of the strong came something sweet

- Obviously, we know that Samson is referring to the honey inside the body of the lion
 - But the clues are obscure enough that no one could guess what Samson was describing
 - In fact, for three days of the feast, the family came together to eat and contemplate the puzzle, but none could guess
- Samson appears to have won the bet
 - But not so fast
 - The Lord brought these circumstances together in order to move Samson in the right direction
 - You see even though Samson has done the wrong thing in pursuing this woman, the Lord is working ahead of Samson to turn things right
 - Remember, we heard in v.4 that the Lord had a plan here
- Next time, we see how the Lord turns the tables on Samson
 - For now, put Samson aside and ask yourself is the Lord using your disobedience to bring you to a crisis moment?
 - One where you will have to make a new course?
 - He is more than capable of turning us in the right direction
- But there is the easy way and the hard way
 - The easy way involves God speaking to us, the Spirit lead us, and us listening and following
 - It's easy only by comparison to the alternative
 - The alternative is much harder
 - It involves turning aside, going down and seeking our own course
 - And then the Lord turning the tables on us at the right moment, so that we will stop in our tracks and begin to serve Him
 - As Samson will see, it's a harder way by far