

The Lion, the Snitch and the War on the Philistines

Judges 14

Samson: The OT OG Alpha-Male Chad

A long time ago, in a church far, far away... I used to lead the youth group and teach Sunday School. I had a whole series of Lessons called "Great Disastrous Dates from the Bible". I looked at different relationships for the Bible and drew some principles from the bad ones hoping that the young people I taught would avoid the same sort of fates those relationships did. Today's sermon is not that. But it does involve one of the stories I used in that series. We will be in Judges 14.

This series in Judges has been...surprising to me. And I know in our city group...oh by the way...shameless plug for city groups...if you're not in one and are curious let's chat afterwards...I know in our city group we've had some really helpful and encouraging chats about what God is saying in this book.

One of the biggest things that has struck me, rather quite profoundly, is that God's default disposition is to bless and not curse. In other words, his primary position toward us is NOT to judge us but rather to remove the barrier that keeps us from receiving that blessing. That barrier, of course, is our sin.

God has a peculiar sense of humor to use a book called Judges to teach a thick skull like mine that his intent is always to bless. So, I want to know up front that I am approaching this text from that starting point - that God's desire is to bless his people - and I want to encourage us all to start with that in mind whenever we approach the scripture.

The title of today's sermon begins as The Lion, the Snitch and the War of the Philistines.

Last week, we had a very brief introduction to Israel's next judge, Samson. Monoah and his wife are childless and they are told by the angel of the Lord that they are going to have a son but he will be set apart as a Nazarite.

So let's talk about what it would mean to be a Nazarite because we go right from Samson being born and God appointing him as a Nazarite from birth to him being a full grown man in chapter 14.

You can read the full description in Numbers 6 but Nazarites were men and women that took voluntary vows of consecration or devotion, separating themselves solely to God's purposes - their eyes only on God. Focused on serving only him. These vows were voluntary and often temporary.

They had certain rules that were strictly obeyed. They could not touch any wine or strong drink or any juice of the grape, fresh or dried - kind of like a good baptist. Not even raisins!

They could not cut their hair - so not like a baptist.

They could not touch dead bodies. Any dead body. There were even rules for cleansing oneself for eight days if a Nazarite was with someone and they died suddenly.

Nazarites were to be set apart for God's service, demonstrating a special level of devotion and holiness, like our deacons. They were to live a life of holiness and separation, to seek God's favor for a specific purpose (often through a season of intense devotion through prayer and fasting). They were meant to serve as an example of total commitment to God and demonstrate dependence on His strength.

So, as we come to Judges 14, this is the image that one would have in mind as we read our text this morning. The type of person that you would look at go - yeah...he's a good Nazarite - truly a man of God. Got that picture in your mind?

Good. Let's into Judges 14 verse 1:

14 Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." 3 But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

4 His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

5 Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. 6 Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he

tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. 7 Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.

8 After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. 9 He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.

10 His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. 11 As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12 And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, 13 but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it." 14 And he said to them,

"Out of the eater came something to eat.
Out of the strong came something sweet."

And in three days they could not solve the riddle.

15 On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" 16 And Samson's wife wept over him and said, "You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" 17 She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. 18 And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down,

"What is sweeter than honey?
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.”**

19 And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. 20 And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

Episode Recap: That Nazarite did what!?!

As J-T told us last week, Samson will be the 12th judge that we've seen so far in Judges. And this 12th judge is being set up by the narrator to be the judge of judges. The Alpha judge. Not just raised up in a time of need but dedicated from birth to be a Nazarite judge. If the other Judges were able to do what they did, some as flawed as they were, what would this God-chosen-Nazarite judge be able to accomplish?

If you had this expectation of what a Nazarite should be, this introduction to the man Samson would have to be absolutely shocking. So much goes so wrong right from the beginning of our text.

Maybe we can show a bit of grace to our boy Samson. I mean after all, being a Nazarite was usually a voluntary and temporary vow. And Samson didn't have a choice in that, did he? God chose him to be a Nazarite.

With the vow of a Nazarite came certain restrictions: No wine or strong drink, nothing from the grape. No cutting of the hair. No contact with the dead.

It also meant that they were devoted for a special purpose of God's choosing. They were to have their eyes on God and His calling for their life. That's the picture the reader would have of a God-chosen-Nazarite Judge deliverer of Israel.

But our introduction to Samson is not at all the picture we would have in mind of the ultimate deliverer. Our Samson is really like the OT OG alpha-male chad, isn't he? Totally sigma. No cap.

V1. We start with Samson going to Timnah, which is only 6 miles from the Philistine border. He sees a Philistine woman. The Philistines, you might remember from last week, are the Oppressor de Jour for the Israelites and the ones Samson was born to

deliver his people from. So what better way to do that than to...fall in love with??
Trouble is bound to happen.

V2. He goes home and tells mom and dad about her and says: "Go and get her for me!"
Seems really odd to us but this was very likely how it worked back then. It was not uncommon for families to arrange marriages. None of this would be terribly shocking to the reader. But the fact that it's a Philistine woman is shocking.

V3. Mom and dad would really rather he find a nice Jewish girl. Even a Canaanite but just not an uncircumcised Philistine. Now the term "uncircumcised Philistine" is unquestionably a racial slur. Contemptuous, derogatory and scornful in nature. Somewhat understandable since they are the enemy, their oppressor.

Their pushback is only due to their own bias and not because it was unlawful. They do not say, "Intermarriage with non-Israelites is forbidden by the Lord" (Especially for a Nazarite??) or not even a "You're supposed to deliver us from Philistine oppression, not marry one!"

There is no real push back from mom and dad. Not really. And even though there was the "*can't you find a good jewish girl?*", in the end, they cave and get him the girl. They are complicit in their son's desire for something that God does not desire. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do for our kids and NOT give them what they want.

Even though he's chosen for a purpose, Samson really is determined to live his own life. He ignores their feeble attempts to go a different way and tells them to "Go get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

"Right in his eyes". It's the word - yashar. We tend to put too much emphasis on the visual - he was only interested in her looks. But...the original, yashar, would mean simply that she was right in his mind/opinion. She seemed a good fit, pleasant. According to his standards rather than God's.

Samson, for his part, operates only out of fleshly desire. Samson's eye is on a woman, rather than the Lord.

The reality is, neither his parents nor Samson really cared or thought about what God was really doing even through the parents' neglect and abdication of authority or Samson's careless bravado.

However...we have V4 which is really kind of the parenthesis to let the reader in on a little secret. **“His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.”** God was using his desire for a Philistine woman to free Israel from oppression. That’s what’s meant when it says the Philistines had rule over Israel. Rule means more like dominion. Oppression.

Since the people of Israel did not have the heart to take action, God would. Never miss the parenthesis of someone’s story where God is actually working. Seeing 3 things, when God is really doing 10,000. God is playing 4D chess, while we’re trying to figure out Tic-Tac-Toe.

V5. The next chess piece: a lion. While on the way to the wedding, cuz mum and dad can’t say no to their little sammy-son, they must get separated and out of a vineyard comes a lion. The word describes a “young lion of lions”.

V 6: Then in V6 we read that “the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him”

Let’s pause here for a moment and unpack a little about what’s going on. There is an Old Testament economy and New Testament economy in how God operates in and among His people. God doesn’t change, but how He engages with them was different in the OT compared to how He does with us today. One of those is the operation of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord would come upon individuals to empower them for specific tasks such as leadership, prophecy, or battle. This was seen in figures like Samson, who received supernatural strength, and Gideon, who was enabled to lead Israel to victory. However, this presence was often temporary, as shown in the life of Saul, who initially received the Spirit but later lost it due to disobedience. Even David, after his sin, prayed that God would not take His Spirit from him, highlighting the conditional nature of the Spirit’s presence during that time. Prophets also experienced the Spirit’s empowerment to speak God’s word, but this did not necessarily indicate a permanent indwelling.

This Old Testament economy or pattern foreshadowed the New Covenant, where the Holy Spirit would no longer come and go but would instead permanently indwell believers. Unlike before, where the Spirit’s presence depended on obedience, the New Testament teaches that all believers are sealed with the Spirit, ensuring His constant presence. This means that Christians today do not need to fear losing the Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised that He would remain with us forever. The shift from temporary

empowerment to permanent indwelling reveals God's unfolding plan, providing believers with ongoing guidance, strength, and assurance of their salvation.

So with Samson and his stubborn refusal to honor the calling place on his life, the Spirit literally has to rush upon him in order to do God's will. Not once but twice in our text today.

We don't see this today but I am convinced that different aspects of the Spirit gifting can come and go as the Spirit wills and the need for ministry arises. [EXAMPLE]

So, the Spirit rushes on Samson and gives superhuman strength. And he rips this young lion of lion as one tears a young goat.

Now...I must confess I don't really know how easy it is to tear a young goat...honestly didn't know that was a thing...but I can't imagine that's an easy thing to do so doing so to a young lion of lions must be quite difficult indeed. Superhuman one might say. And that's the point to the reader, right. What Samson did should not have been possible without the power of the Spirit of the Lord.

I gots questions: Does Samson realize the source of this power?? What's his motive for not telling his parents?? This would be the very thing one would gloat about, right??

Then we come to verse V7 and it is the first time he's likely talked to the woman he is going to marry. That's crazy. What does she think of him?? Doesn't matter really because after he talks to her she is still YASHAR, right in his eyes. Weird to us but again, not unusual in those days.

Don't know how long he's there but he makes his trip back home and the narrator brings us to the next chess piece that God is placing on the board to begin the rescue of Israel.

V8-9: return to the lion to find bees making honey - the image is significant for 3 reasons

- It bears the signature of God. Bees don't usually inhabit cadavers. Undoubtedly God's work
- It is patently ironic. In a world of decay is a thriving community! The word is an *eda* bees - community rather than *seres* (swarm). *Eda* always refers to a company of people, usually the Israelites as a faith community - called to be agents of grace and light in the decadent world.

- Sam is also being tested here as he is not to touch anything dead. But this honey, like the Philistine honey he has eyes for, is too tempting not to scoop and eat what is forbidden for a Nazirite. Sam fails the test.

V10-11: Dad goes to make arrangements for the bride, likely a marriage transaction with the family. Samson prepares for a feast. A bachelor party. This party is the word *misteh* and refers to a seven-day drinking party at the home of the bride's parents. Two things are understood by the reader here: 1) we know why Samson doesn't want to tell his parents about the lion or the honey - it is an 8 day purification ritual and it's a seven day party and 2) it's a drinking party. Another Nazirite vow was broken.

The men of the bride's family "give" Samson "thirty companions" - the word is *bahurim* or choice young men - used elsewhere referring to select warriors. There's a hint that the narrator recognizes the military implications of this event.

These "uncivilized" Philistine *companions* are likely there to keep an eye on Samson. Like any wedding, there are cultural norms that are typically at play; Sam is blatantly ignoring his. The companions are fortifying theirs. But the text describes it in such a way that they were either friends or guards. Most likely guards. Hard to know for sure but it's like a hostile gesture wrapped up in a warm smile and a watchful eye. Samson, is after all, an Israelite and the Philistines are their rulers and in God's eyes and the peoples, their oppressors.

V12-13: If they are there to watch Sam, he's not the least bit worried. In fact, he literally makes a joke of it by going and getting a degree at MSU...*Making Stuff Up*. He offers a prize if they can solve his riddle. If they win, a new suit for each of the 30. If they don't, they each give him a new suit.

V14: This is where it gets really interesting. It's a six-word-riddle. Well, 6 words in their language.

Eater comes eat. Strong comes sweet.

Two paradoxes. A consumer produces food. From strength comes sweetness. And being a bunch of "choice young men" and uncivilized Philistines, at a bachelor party, no one was thinking dead lions and honey. If you know...you know.

V15: For three days of the 7 day party, the guards...I mean, companions, are stumped. We know why. Not even Mom and Dad could solve the riddle because he never told them where the honey came from.

By day four, they start to panic and decide to blackmail his wife. And by blackmail, I mean they threaten to burn her and her father's household to death. They even accuse her of being in on it with him. To rob them. She barely knows Samson. Probably haven't even had time to change their social media status to: complicated.

V16: She starts laying in on Samson. "If you really loved me, then you would tell me!" Maybe there's some emotional blackmail there. But it could also be that these men really mean it and if she doesn't get the answer they really will burn her family alive. There could be true distress driving her pleas. Sometimes when someone says, "If you loved me, then..." there could be a real fear behind that. It may not always be simply a form of manipulation. And how could she know if Sam really loves her enough that she could trust by confessing to him that she's being threatened?

Well...we find out the answer to that question soon enough by him basically telling her he hasn't even told his mum and dad whom he does love. Maybe...probably. No, for sure...our OT OG alpha-male chad is definitely a momma's boy.

V17: But for the last 4 days of the 7-day party, she persists. The guards, I mean companions, are partying and she is making Sam's life miserable. On the last day at the last hour he caves and spills the tea.

V18: The tea gets spilled again as she...snitches...she tells the guards, I mean companions. They wait until the last minute just as the clock is about to strike sundown to find Sam and smugly reveal "What's stronger than a lion and sweeter than honey!" Boom. Drop the mic. Pay up!

But here's the interesting part: They even use the same 6 word formula that Sam used in his riddle:

What sweeter honey? What stronger lion?

Probably sounded like Yoda. They really are throwing it in his face. The answer is a riddle of its own too. And perhaps they are taunting Samson because the answer to the question that the guards, I mean companions, seem to imply and Samson's response clearly gets...is his wife.

He's furious. At them, probably at himself (though that might be too much of a stretch) and definitely at his wife. Especially his wife. His response is also another 6 word rhyme-ish retort:

"Not plowed my-heifer. Not solved my-riddle."

It's okay to cringe. To have the ick. It's as bad in the original language as it is in ours.

V19: Samson is nothing if not a man of his word. He goes to get the 30 suits promised at the beginning of the wager. Cheating or not, they answered the riddle. What results from this is the beginning of God's war on the Philistines. God's Spirit again rushes on Sam but rather than tearing apart a lion, he goes on to tear apart 30 Philistines in Ashkelon (20 miles away) and takes their belongings and mockingly presents them to his guards, I mean companions.

V20: The Philistine woman that Sam had eyes for is given as a bride to one of the guards, I mean companions.

So Samson's wife snitches his riddle out to his groomsmen. And, you know what they say, snitches get...to marry the best man?!? And this is the beginning of God's war on the Philistines to rescue His people...yet again.

You can certainly see why this story would make a great episode of Disastrous Dates from the Bible, right? This supposed judge of judges. Born to be the ultimate fighting Nazarite. The 12th judge. The great deliverer. Israel's long-haired, no grape is gonna touch me, avoider of all things dead rescuer. Prone only to take what is right in his eyes. As Daniel Block puts it:

"The only way in which good can come from this man is by [God] overpowering him with his Spirit and driving him to the task of delivering his people, something he is not naturally inclined to do." - Daniel Block

Shadows of the King: Samson? Really?

Our series is called: Shadows of the King. Shadows are a funny thing. The further they are from the source of light, the more skewed they become. As the sun sets and you are farther from that light, your shadow becomes deformed, elongated and exaggerated from what your features actually look like. There is not a one-to-one ratio and it gets harder to form a clearer picture of the real object that is casting the shadow.

This analogy is certainly true of Samson. One who is named as a hero of the faith in Hebrews. Just like we saw with Jephthah, men like he and Samson are only marked as heroes, not because their faith and their faith story are so strong and worthy of emulation, but because the object that creates the shadow is the real HERO. The source of faith.

Remember, we're taking this entire story, and really all of scripture from the starting of: God wants to bless. So...

Let's compare and contrast this very faulty, inadequate, flawed, blemished and fallible shadow like Samson and focus and center on the real thing - Jesus.

Samson was well-pleased with the Philistine woman.
Jesus is well-pleased with us.

Remember the word there was yashar. (Smarty Word) "Right in one's eyes" but not really talking about physical attraction. It's more the idea of a prosperous or pleasant feeling, finding a good fit. **1 Peter 2:9 - "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** **Colossians 1:10 - "So that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."**

Samson says to dad - "Go get her for me!"

The Father says to the Son - "Go get her for us!"

Ephesian 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish

**Don't miss the parenthesis: (They did not know this was from the LORD, He is seeking an opportunity) - I love that. Seeing 3 things when God is doing 10,000. What are the trials in your life that you may not know are from God, for He is seeking an opportunity...maybe not to change your circumstance but to change you, to transform you more and more into the image of His Son?

The Spirit of the LORD rushes on Samson

The Spirit of the Lord resides, dwells, lives in us.

Gifts may rush in and out but always have the Spirit. In full measure, God does not hold back. He is not stingy. **Ephesians 1:13-14** *"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."*

[explain]

The death of the young lion of lions brings forth a community (eda) of bees.

The death of the Lion of Judah brings forth the church, the community of Christ's body. Out of death comes life. **1 Corinthians 15:21-22** *"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."*

Along with that, the riddle that Samson give is the riddle Jesus fulfills:

Out of an all-powerful Judge, could come destruction. He could be the roaring lion. Instead He offers himself as a sacrifice so that we may taste and see that He is good, even sweeter than honey. That he truly satisfies. **Psalm 34:8** *Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"* Eda...a community of life inside the Lion.

Samson kills 30 to clothes 30.

Jesus is betrayed for 30, crucified for our trespass. So that he can clothe us. *The only sin he claimed was ours. The only righteousness we claim is His!* (Keller, I think)

In the end, we see Samson turn from his bride, the one that was his yashar. Gives her up to someone else. Jesus dies for His bride. She is truly his yashar. Of course, I speak of the church. The uncircumcised Philistine. The enemy of God. You and me.

Colossians 2:13-14 *"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."* **John 3:29** *The one who has the bride is the*

bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

This is where Jesus changes the title of the sermon from the Lion, the Snitch and the War on the Philistines to The Lion, the Switch and the Wardrobe of Righteousness.

Col 3: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

"The only way in which good can come from us is by [God] overpowering us with his Spirit and putting to death what is earthly in us, something we are not naturally inclined to do." - Dan Lane (paraphrasing Daniel Block for modern audiences)

If God's desire is to bless, putting our hope in anything other than Jesus to be that blessing is hopeless. The reality is...Samson was never the blessing. No judge could be. They are but mere shadows of the king. Our real hope and God's fulfillment of desiring to bless us is only found, not in the shadow of the king, but in the King himself...Jesus.