

Finer Grounds

Judges and Ruth

Lesson 9: God Shines Through Brokenness (Judges 14-16)

I will readily admit to being perplexed by some of the actions of our next judge. According to my husband, if I were a man I might more fully understand these chapters. Nevertheless, there is much that we as Christian women can glean from these accounts of Samson. He is much more three dimensional than our flannelgraph lessons would lead us to believe.

Read Judges 14:1-9

Even though the writer recognizes God's part in the confrontations between Samson and the Philistines, he depicts Samson's actions as selfishly motivated.

Bible Marking: Mark each time in the Samson narrative that the words see, look or their synonyms are used. This will highlight Samson's focus on physical things.

Describe Samson based on this encounter with his parents.

Samson's parents recognize that his wanting to marry a Philistine woman would have been undesirable. In fact, one of the primary causes of the Israelites downfall was their continual desire to marry those who were idol worshippers. In Judges 14:4, we see a clue that tells us God will work this out for the benefit of the Israelites. As

long as there was complacency on the part of the Israelites with regard to the Philistines, they would not be delivered. It was only when God inserts tension into the situation that things begin to change.

Are there areas of your life that you are a little too comfortable with the captivity of sin?

What can you do to begin removing yourself from this bondage?

Samson's encounter with the lion may seem random; however, it serves to highlight a few things essential to the narrative. It also acts as a catalyst for more tension between the Philistines and Samson. This lion attack demonstrates just how powerful Samson was when the "Spirit of the Lord came upon him." But this account not only showcases Samson's great strength, it focuses our attention on his chief weakness: the lust of the flesh.

How did Samson violate the Law in Judges 14:9 (Hint: Leviticus 11:24-25, 39; Numbers 6:6)?

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Not only did his self-indulgence cause him to violate his Nazarite vow, it caused him to break the Law for ordinary Israelites as well. He didn't just stop there; Samson carelessly offered the honey to his parents causing them to unknowingly break the Law.

We often look at Samson with disdain for these actions and they certainly aren't praiseworthy; however, we must be willing to see ourselves in this story. Have you ever led someone you love into sin? Have you ever found yourself standing in the back of the church building gossiping about your sister in Christ and before you knew it others were joining in? Have you ever lauded a book or movie that didn't pass the Philippians 4:8 test? Have you ever demonstrated a disrespectful attitude to your husband to your friends or children? Sisters, we are just as guilty as Samson!

What are some of the ways that you have led others into sin?

How can you be more vigilant this week to prevent this from happening?

Read Judges 14:10-20

It was the custom of the day for a groom to have thirty friends join him for this week long wedding celebration; however, in Samson's case these men had to be brought to him. Moreover, the men mentioned here are referred to by the Hebrew word for "choice young men." In other places throughout Judges, this term refers to

warriors (Block 319). It would seem as if the Philistines were making sure that Samson was surrounded by men who would keep him in line.

Describe the wager Samson made with his thirty companions at the party.

In these verses, we see the first time that Samson was outwitted by a beautiful woman. His wife played on his guilt and emotions to discover the answer to the unanswerable riddle he proposed. Upon learning the answer, she promptly betrayed his trust.

How did Samson respond to his riddle being answered?

The picture we are painting of Samson seems quite undesirable. His arrogance, impulsivity and temper continually shine through. It seems unimaginable that God could use this man to fulfill His plan. Fortunately for us, God delights in using flawed people to accomplish His will.

According to Judges 14:20, what happened to Samson's wife?

Read Judges 15:1-8

Samson returned home to an unsavory scene, his wife was given to one of Samson's companions from the wedding feast. Her father tries to smooth things over by offering another

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daughter; however, Samson leaves in a fury to seek revenge on the Philistines.

How did Samson retaliate against the Philistines?

Samson was definitely creative and incredibly determined when it came to vengeance. Imagine the time and effort it would take to capture 300 foxes (or jackals depending on how you translate the Hebrew word). Finding a way to house and feed them until he obtained them all would have been difficult and costly. Not to mention the problems that would have come with tying their tails together. This was a man that knew how to hold a major grudge.

More than likely the purpose of tying their tails together with the torch was so that they would struggle, stop and run in indirect paths. Tying a torch to one fox and having it move quickly in a straight line would have caused the flame to go out and not as much of the field would have caught fire.

Read Judges 15:9-20

In your own words describe the events that transpire in these verses.

The men of Judah wanted to avoid conflict at all costs. This would have been an excellent point for them to rally around their God-appointed leader; however, they decided it would be far easier and less costly to hand Samson over to the Philistines. Right then, the Israelites made a

detrimental choice. They would rather live in bondage to God's enemy than to stand up for His will.

List a time in your life when you have accepted the easy way rather than God's way.

What actions can you take today to begin to build the confidence to stand for God?

This encounter between the Israelites, Samson and the Philistines only serves to amplify the tension. We do see a period of 20 years while Samson is judging Israel without major incident, the Philistines would never forget the thorn in the flesh he was to them.

Read Judges 16:1-3

Now we are introduced very briefly to the second problem-causing women in Samson's life, the harlot in Gaza. Samson has not given up his selfish, lustful ways and is still breaking Jewish Law. This incident would once again bring the conflict between Samson and the Philistines into focus. In typical Samson bravado, he carries the city gates and places them on top of a mountain.

Read Judges 16:4-22

And now, the moment we have been waiting for, the arrival of one of the most infamous leading ladies in all of scripture: Delilah. Once again, a woman would be the source of great strife for Samson.

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Describe the details of each of Delilah's attempts to find out Samson's secret.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

In the end, Samson's lust and prideful attitude got the better of him. Delilah was eventually able to persuade him using the same tactics that his bride did at their wedding feast.

What did the Philistines do to Samson according to Judges 16:21?

What began to happen in Judges 16:22?

Here at what would have been the lowest point in his life, God showed him compassion. God would take this broken, humiliated man and use him to accomplish amazing things.

Read Judges 16:23-31

Describe the celebration that the Philistines hosted.

What last heroic act did Samson execute?

Sometimes when our pride is broken, we see God's will the most clearly. For the first time in the narrative, Samson desires to use his strength to fulfill God's purposes instead of serving his own selfish desires. This is the single most important act in Samson's life and will be the reason he is listed in the hall of faith in Hebrews 12.

Have you ever had a time in your life where you were in a place of brokenness and God used you?

Samson began the deliverance of the Israelites from the Philistines. In this study, we will not see the completion of this liberation, for that story you'll have to read 1 Samuel. The concluding chapters of Judges will paint a grim picture of the state of affairs throughout Israel. For now I will leave you with this thought. Will you humble yourself to be used for God's will or will you let a prideful attitude hinder your actions?