

The Man Who Had It Made!

Cycles of Sin . . . Stories of Grace – Part VI

Judges 13, 14

Introduction

Hetty Green was possibly America's greatest miser. She died in 1916, leaving an estate valued at over one million dollars. In our day, it would be valued around ten million dollars. Hetty never enjoyed what she had. In fact, she always ate cold oatmeal – oatmeal because it was cheap and cold because she said it cost too much to heat it. Her own son lost his leg to amputation because Hetty wasted so much time looking for a free clinic that he was not examined early enough.

The story of Hetty Green leads to the conclusion that she had so much, yet lived as though she had absolutely nothing.

There is a story in the Bible, as we continue our study through the book of Judges, that resembles this woman. It is the story of Samson, which finally brings us to the judge we know a little about. The more I studied this man, the clearer it became that he was like this miser. He had so much; he had everything that really mattered, yet lived as though he had absolutely nothing.

When we think of Samson, we typically think of a couple of things. He was a man who:

- never cut his hair – a Nazirite;
- was powerful and strong – the Hercules of the Old Testament;
- was a heavyweight who was finally knocked flat by a featherweight named Delilah.

Samson has so much to teach us. We are given the secret of his success, the secret of his strength, and the secret of his failure. God, however, records more information about other things concerning this man than these.

Samson was a judge that God gave more time to, in the book of Judges, than any other judge. In fact, Samson is the only judge in which we read an entire chapter about his mother and father. The more I prepared, the clearer it became that our first study of Samson needed to focus for a while, on his parents – Mr. and Mrs. Manoah.

The Life and Times of Samson's Story

Let us start at the beginning of Samson's story. Turn to Judges 13:1.

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.

The backdrop of this story is the Philistine domination of the Israelites. These people were undoubtedly Israel's worst nightmare.

I Samuel 13 records that under the Philistine rule, the Hebrews were not allowed to do any metal work lest they make spears and swords. A farmer could not sharpen his axe without the permission of these tyrants.

The Israelites were oppressed by the Philistines longer than any other nation. This enemy was not conquered, in fact, until King David finally wiped them out.

In conjunction with the Philistine domination, however, we read of Israelite apathy and rebellion. This is the one time in the book of Judges that there is no word of repentance; no cry for help from Israel. They never ask for mercy; they never ask God to send a deliverer.

Again, Samuel's books inform us that the priesthood was itself, immoral. Eli was the high priest during this time and spiritual apostasy and idolatry were rampant.

When we read and study these chapters, we discover that Israel is silent and the people have become assimilated into the Philistine kingdom. The Israelites had even openly begun to intermarry with the pagan Philistine women. This was a violation of the Abrahamic covenant.

Against this backdrop, we are introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Manoah. We are never given Mrs. Manoah's name. Look at Judges 13:2.

There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children.

Notice the way their world is interrupted in Judges 13:3.

Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman, and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son."

What wonderful news this is to this woman! These are words she never thought she would hear.

What follows reveals the reasons these two were selected by God. Notice Mrs. Manoah's words, in Judges 13:6-7, as she runs to her husband to tell him the news.

Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a

Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

I can just see Manoah looking at his wife and saying, "Honey, have you been in the wineskins again?!"

Ingredients of a good marriage

It is interesting, however, that what corresponds between them is a lesson on the ingredients of a good marriage! Let me give these ingredients.

- Ingredient number one is mutual respect.

Manoah never doubts his wife. You may remember some of the earlier Old Testament couples who laughed at news from God. Manoah believes her story, even as wild as it sounds.

- Ingredient number two is spiritual oneness.

Manoah's wife comes to him with the news and Manoah takes it to God and leads her in prayer. At this crisis; this crossroad in their experience, what does Manoah do? He says, "Honey, we had better pray about this."

Look at Manoah's prayer, in Judges 13:8. It is great.

Then Manoah entreated the Lord and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom You have sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born."

We so often, seem to run everywhere but to God for advice.

Now the angel of the Lord reappears, not to give added information about parenting Samson, but to give added information about himself. Notice Judges 13:17.

And Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?"

Manoah still does not recognize that this is *the* angel of the Lord. This is theologically a theophany. A theophany is a visible expression of a sliver of God's glory. No one has ever seen God in all His glory and lived. This is a visible expression of God – perhaps even pre-incarnate Christ.

The angel's answer to Manoah's question is tremendous. Look at Judges 13:8.

But the angel of the Lord said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful.”

This word “wonderful” could be literally translated “incomprehensible,” or in our American terminology, “too much”. Not to trivialize this, but it is like a teenage girl describing her heartthrob to her mother, “Oh, Mom, he’s just too much!” – and he probably is!

In other words, the angel of the Lord is indescribable. He is saying that it is “too much” for Manoah. His finite mind could not grasp everything about the angel of the Lord.

Continue to Judges 13:19.

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the Lord, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on.

Judges 13:20 tells us the wonder He performed.

For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground.

Skip to Judges 13:22-23.

So Manoah said to his wife, “We will surely die, for we have seen God.” But his wife said to him, “If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time.”

- Ingredient number three is mutual teachability.

I can hear Manoah say, “You’re right, honey, I didn’t think of that.”

This spiritual leader in the home allows his wife to instruct him spiritually.

Not only is the dedication of this couple to each other obvious, but their dependence on God is, as well. You need to recognize that God has not really come through for this couple thus far. Barren wives were considered to be under some form of punishment from God, so Manoah’s wife was supposedly being judged by God for something she had done. And Manoah was a poor peasant farmer. Financial prosperity was another sign of God’s blessing in the

Old Testament. This couple had every reason to believe God had abandoned, not only Israel, but them. They had been dealt a terrible hand and had every right to grow bitter, yet they had continued to believe.

Let me interject, at this point, the first of several principles of application from the story of Samson’s life.

1. It is possible to have the best of life in the worst of times!

It was not an easy time to live and love and believe and trust. It was a terrible time to raise a family. The Philistine’s dominating immorality was rampant.

Have you ever considered the fact that there has never been an easy time to live a godly secure life? Has it ever been easy to have a marriage that honors God? Has it ever been easy to raise a godly family? Has it ever been easy, as a single, to live a life of purity? I do not think it has been.

Let me read a quote from a national periodical, *The world is too big for us. Too much going on, too many crimes, too much violence and excitement. Try as you will, you get behind in the race. It is a strain to keep pace . . . and still, you lose ground. Science empties its discoveries on you so fast that you stagger beneath them in hopeless bewilderment. The political world is news seen so rapidly, you’re out of breath trying to keep pace with who is in and who is out. Everything is high pressure. Human nature cannot endure much more!*

This sounds like something out of this morning’s “News and Disturber,” but it is a quote from *The Atlantic Journal* of 1833.

Has the world ever been secure? Has it ever been easy?

Take it from Mr. and Mrs. Manoah that even in times like their time, it is possible to have the kind of life that honors God. Life was as difficult, trying, and immoral then, as it is today. Yet we find in this passage, a challenging, refreshing story of marital love and commitment. We cannot scream “pressure” in sinning; we have no excuse on the basis of our culture.

The Lessons and Truths from Samson’s Story

Something happened, however, between Judges chapters 13 and 14! We are not told what, but we know something rather strange happened.

Parental commitment would be obvious to any reader – this dad and mom were committed to raising this Nazirite Samson for life. And they did the job as best they could.

We read in the latter part of Judges chapter 13 of young, strong Samson. In Judges 13:25, we are told,

And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him

...

The word “stir” is the word used of a musical instrument that is being tuned by the musician. Samson is being readied to be played upon by the Spirit of God.

However, the first few words of Judges chapter 14 shout problems! Something has gone wrong! What is wrong?!!

Samson’s hair was long – he had never had a haircut. He had never touched a wineskin – not Samson. He had never touched a dead body. These are the three standards of separation for a Nazirite!

Yet, in Judges 14, we find Samson headed for a Philistine village to pick a wife. What is the problem?

Let me give a second principle of application.

2. Samson grasped the code of separation, but missed the concept of holiness.

Samson had it all on the outside. He looked like a Nazirite – smelled like one – sounded like one. Inside, he was a pagan.

The same problem exists today, in trying to keep a balance between how we look and what we are like on the inside.

Elizabeth Elliot writes about a young man who was eager to forsake the world and to follow Christ closely. He asked the question, “What must I forsake, besides sin?”

The answers he received were recorded: *Forsake colored clothing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments. If you are sincere about following Christ, do not take warm baths and never shave your beard. To shave is to attempt to improve on the work of Him who created us.*

This was written in the second century. One hundred fifty years after Christ was on earth, this was a prevailing opinion among believers. The search for balance has been around for 1,900 years.

The concept of holiness is internal, yet at the same time, the outward appearance marks us as much as it did Samson. To be seen today as believers, do not abandon physical appearance. Samson’s physical appearance was not mere legalism – it marked him.

Today, anyone who mentions dress is considered a legalist. Was the apostle Paul a legalist? *No!* Read the passages in which he had the audacity, under inspiration, to tell women how not to wear their hair and what kind of jewelry not to put on. Look at I Timothy 2:9 to see this for yourself.

Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.

Paul is telling women to wear no gold or pearls. He is even telling them to stay away from exorbitantly priced clothing!

All the husbands are thinking, “Yes, Stephen, preach it brother – more, more! Are you listening, honey, he’s preaching the whole council.”

In Paul’s day, though, it was the harlot who braided her hair. She wore a backless dress, and by braiding her hair she exposed herself as much as possible to men. She was laden with gold jewelry and literally, jingled when she walked. She was a walking advertisement. Because of her prosperous occupation, she was capable of buying the most expensive fabrics that ultimately, made her look her best and more importantly, drew the most attention.

I remember hearing Chuck Swindoll preach on this subject and he made a very interesting observation. He said, “Husbands, wake up to the way your wives dress – they may be unconsciously asking for your attention.”

I will take that a step further and say, “Fathers, wake up to the way your daughters dress . . .”

Husbands and Dads, your wives and your daughters may be unconsciously asking for your attention – and they may seek it elsewhere.

The point to Paul’s passage, and the point today, is dressing in a way that desires attention. God wants us to dress in a way that gives attention to Him.

The problem with Samson, however, is that he followed the outside standards, while ignoring inner holiness. His hair was long, but his heart was disobedient.

Let us go back to Judges and take a look at principle number three.

3. Anyone who ignores internal quality will be governed by external attraction.

Look at Judges 14:1-2.

Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. 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."

The custom of this day was for the parents to arrange the marriage. This text is interesting because in the Hebrew, the word "woman" is emphasized.

Samson is saying, "Dad and Mom, I was in Timnah the other day and I saw a woman! Get her for me."

There is nothing wrong with physical attraction, by the way. I married the woman who knocked me out! I remember our first encounter in college in the British Literature class. I used to love to go to British Literature! I sat in the back and watched that blue-eyed, brunette on the left near the window!

The problem is not in being physically attracted – the problem occurs when we look at the wrong person. Samson was looking in the wrong direction; he was off limits.

His parents react with shock, according to Judges 14:3a.

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?"

There was quite a falling-out over this. You could hear it three blocks down. Mr. and Mrs. Manoah were going crazy, saying, "We raised you a Nazirite! We've done our best for you. Now, it's time to choose a wife – is no one among the Jewish nation good enough for you?! You go seeking one of *them*!?"

They were completely right!

You can almost see Samson's teeth clenched with defiance as he says, in Judges 13:3b,

... *"Get her for me . . ."*

Notice that the very first recorded words of Samson are, "I saw a woman!"

This is what will take his life in the end.

Let me give the fourth principle of application.

4. A parent, committed to the Lord, may never reap godliness in a child.

I have talked with parents with broken hearts. I have received phone calls in my years of ministry, such as, "Stephen, my son or daughter, has been picked up by the police. Would you come down to the station?"

It is possible for spiritual parents to raise children who decide to reject their values. Samson had been given so much, but rejected it all. Look at the resources Samson squandered:

- He had been born miraculously. My own wife was a miracle baby – she was not supposed to be born. That is special. Perhaps you are one of those too. Samson was not even supposed to be conceived – it was miraculous! I am sure they reminded him, saying, "Listen, you're special!"
- He had godly parents who loved the Lord and each other.
- He was blessed with a unique mission from God.
- He was empowered by the Spirit of God to do the work.

He had *all* of that, yet he said, "Goodbye!" to it all.

Samson means "sunny". "Sunny" was the light of his parent's lives, but he grew up and broke their hearts. When he came home and said, "I've seen a woman in Timnah and I want her!" – their world fell apart.

Let me give the fifth principle of application.

5. Samson's own life mirrored the failure of Israel as a nation.

Samson's life is a sermon all by itself! Look at ways it reflected Israel's failure:

- Samson refused the authority of God’s word – so did Israel. They were idolatrous and they were intermarrying with the Philistines.
- Samson refused the parameters of the Nazirite vow, as we will see – Israel rejected its covenant.
- Samson refused the counsel of his godly parents – the people of Israel ignored the counsel of the priesthood, their spiritual authority. Eli was the priest at this time, according to the Samuel’s book, so perhaps the fact that he was a weak, inconsistent leader contributed to the reason the people did what they did.

Now notice a phrase that is repeated twice in Judges 14:

- Verse 3b – . . . *she looks good* . . .
- Verse 7 – *So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson.*

Turn to the end of this book of Judges. It says it all in Judges 21:25b!

. . . everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

The nation of Israel did whatever looked good to them. Samson lived this way and died tragically. The nation of Israel would not experience liberty again for many, many years.

Let me add the sixth principle of application because it is important at this juncture.

6. The failure of God’s people never derail the purposes of God.

God intentions do not become paralyzed by our sin. God is sovereign – His work will go on.

Samson would fulfill his destiny by beginning the delivery of Israel from the Philistines – even in his disobedience. God will fulfill His purposes.

Look at Judges 14:5-6.

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. 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.

Skip to Judges 14:8-9.

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. 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 scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.

Why did Samson not tell his parents these things? Because Samson had violated a Nazirite vow – he had touched the dead body of an animal.

Does God strike Samson down? Does a voice thunder from heaven? No. Samson, in fact, brashly turns this episode into a riddle at his wedding party.

Look at Judges 14:10.

Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this.

There is a problem with this in that the Hebrew word “feast” could be literally translated, “drinking party”. This may also be an instance of Samson violating the Nazirite vow to never to drink from the fruit of the vine.

Did God thunder from heaven? Did judgment fall? No. However, even though Samson was sinning, God was fulfilling His purposes!

Samson, though, took God’s silence as approval or apathy! This leads to the next principle of application from Samson’s life.

7. One of the most deceptive incentives to sin is the idea that God does not seem to be in a hurry to execute judgment.

We may live our lives rebelling against God and He may never strike us down. However, our lives will pay many times over the penalty for our sin. Our foolish hearts can be so hardened that we think because God does not strike, we are okay. Look at Ecclesiastes 8:11.

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. We think we are getting away

with it! For twenty years, Samson will get away with it. But God eventually, will call. Samson will forfeit a full reward. We will not tarry on this point, since I have previously addressed this subject.

Look at Judges 14:12a. The party is thrown and the riddle is given.

Then Samson said to them, "Let me now propound a riddle to you . . .

Skip to Judges 14:14a.

So he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet." . . .

We know Samson is talking about the lion and the honey. The Philistine men cannot figure this out, however. They will lose the bet and owe Samson thirty new Easter outfits. So they pressure the little bride, "Use your charm on him – cry a little."

Note Judges 14:16a.

Samson's wife wept before him and said, "You only hate me, and you do not love me . . ."

Fellows, do you know what this means? This means wives have been doing this to their husbands for 5,000 years and we still have not figured it out!

Continue to Judges 14:17a.

However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. And on the seventh day he told her because she pressed him so hard. . . .

Samson will lose the bet and also his wife.

The trouble is – Samson will not learn from this experience! This leads me to the final principle of application.

8. A person controlled by passions, may never gain insight from their past.

We do not necessarily learn from our mistakes, unless we allow God to teach us.

The key word in Judges 14:17 is "pressed". The same word is found in Judges 16:16 when Delilah "urged" Samson to tell her his secret. Two chapters later, he falls prey to the same thing with another woman, named Delilah. He is overcome by her tears and literally, her "pressure". He gives away a secret that ultimately, will jeopardize his life.

A person who is controlled by their emotions and passions is a person who is floating through the sea of life without a compass; they are moving without understanding!

It is no wonder that Solomon wrote, probably from experience, in Proverbs 5:20-23,

For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?

For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths.

His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin.

He will die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.

In closing, the last record of Samson's parents is found in Judges 16:31. God, by the way, evidently gave them more children.

Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. . . .

Samson – the man who had it made, threw it all away! He had it all and threw it all away!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/10/1992 by Stephen Davey.

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