

1. We now come to one of the most familiar characters in the bible: Samson. (As in "And Delilah".) We get four chapters dedicated to his story including one that's mostly about his parents. We're going to cover this saga in two lessons. He's considered the "last of the judges" (in Judges) as the prophet Samuel in "First and Second Samuel" is sometimes considered a judge. Judges had more chapters after Samson's story, but they deal with stories about Israel at that time, and not judges.
2. Before I go any further, let me give you my lesson title, "Opportunities wasted". One of the great mistakes made by saved Christians is wasting the gifts God has given us to make a difference for Him. As I love to preach, it's one thing to be saved, it's another to do something with it! All of us have special gifts we do better than others. All of us have things we enjoy doing. The great joy in life is to use our gifts and doing what we love, to make a difference for God. When we do that, it's something that will last more than our lifetime. There is no greater purpose for living than to use our lives to make a difference for the God who created us.
 - a) That leads me back to Samson. Here's someone God definitely called to make a difference for Him. He's listed in the New Testament "Hall of Faith" (Hebrews Chapter 11) as he did make a difference for God, but Samson also blew it big time. He violated the rules he was supposed to obey. Those rules were specifically told to Samson through his parents, and they were part of the Old Testament law.
 - b) It's interesting to compare and contrast the last great judge we studied a few chapters ago to Samson, that being Gideon. He was a man who was too scared to be used by God and Gideon needed to be persuaded to have the courage to make a difference for God. Here we have Samson, a man of great strength and obviously given a gift by God. An angel got dispatched by God to Samson's parents to say in effect, "Samson is going to be special, but here are the rules you two and him must obey in order to be special!" As we study these four chapters, it becomes obvious that Samson violated all those rules, and he wastes the opportunities given him to really make a difference for God.
 - c) For us the point is we each have abilities and talents that we can use to make a difference in the world for the God we claim to serve. We can waste away our lives doing things that won't matter for eternity or we can use the gifts He's given each of us to make a difference for Him in the world around us. That's why I call this lesson "Wasted Opportunists". It'll fit Samson well and it's also a blatant warning to us as Christians that God gives all of us opportunities and gifts that can be used by Him. Yes it requires sacrifice and hard work. It also means trials and errors to figure out how we can best be used by Him. God can't use us if we're not willing to be used in the first place. That's the point here.
 - d) What if you say, "I go to church regularly. I give at church and I do things at my church." Is this a lecture about not doing enough? Hardly. If you are involved in some capacity to make a difference for God, I'm not knocking that effort. The question to ponder is are we using the gifts God's given us to make a difference for Him? Are we wasting our lives just doing what's necessary both at home and at church or are we involved in a way where we can use the gifts God's given us. For many of us, the answer is already yes. For others, the lesson here is about pondering what we enjoy doing and finding ways to use our gifts for us to make a difference for Him. Samson blew that opportunity big time. A big reason he is described in detail in the bible as to teach us about wasted opportunities.
 - i) I always need to add the point that some things have to be done whether we have a gift for it or not. As I like to joke, no one has the spiritual gift of taking out trash, but it must be done. We also need time to relax and be with our families. This isn't a "24 hour a day" request to do some special project for God. It's a reminder we're created for the purpose of glorifying God with our lives, and the biggest waste of a life is to never use it to make a difference for Him.

3. As I was studying these chapters, a thought occurred to me. There are very few bible characters, where we get a lot of information about their parents and how the key character was raised. We do get that for Moses. We also get that for Jesus. The prophet Samuel also comes to mind as we read about his mother and how he was first dedicated to God. Other than these "biggies" it's rare for the bible to discuss a main character's parents and upbringing. Obviously another exception's Samson, or I wouldn't bring it up here! My question is why does Samson get the same treatment as say Moses or Jesus when it comes to family background? Why do we get a whole chapter that tells us about Samson's parents and how they were instructed on how to raise Samson? If his life is "such a waste", why give us all these details? Part of the answer is the reminder that God calls many people to serve Him, but few actually "step out in faith". All of us have backgrounds that in effect make us what we are, for better or worse. If we've accepted Jesus as both our savior as well as the Lord of our lives, we have been called just as much as Samson has. The big question we each must answer is what have we "done with it"? We get details about Samson's background for us to realize Samson like us has been called to make a difference, but he wasted the opportunities given to him. One of the lessons of these chapters for us is not to repeat his mistakes.
 - a) Are we saying we have to be perfect? Of course not. The issue is a willingness to be used by God for His kingdom. If we're willing to be used by God, He will lead us in a way that we can be used by Him. A classic Christian expression is, "God's not looking for ability, as much as He's looking for availability". Yes we have gifts God wants us to use, but first we have to make ourselves available for Him in order to use our gifts!
4. With that said, let me give a brief overview of these two chapters, and then I'll start my verse-by-verse commentary on these two chapters.
 - a) Chapter 13 is all about Samson's parents. It's given because they were given instructions on how to raise Samson. Speaking of not wasting opportunities, a key ministry is how we raise our children as the bible requires. His parents didn't have children before Samson. An angel shows up to say in effect, "You'll have a son and he's going to be special! You two (mom & dad) need to do a few things while raising Him that God's requiring of you!"
 - b) In the Old Testament there is a thing called a "Nazirite Vow" (Numbers Chapter 6). It was a short-term commitment that required no alcohol or even to take products associated in the making of wine. Samson was unique as God required him to live that way all his life. His parents were told never to cut Samson's hair as a sign that God separated him in order to be something special. Chapter 13 also deals with "nervousness" about Samson's parents dealing with an angel. The wife reassures her husband that if God was going to kill them, why did the angel accept our sacrifices we made when we were with him? That episode's given to reassure us that when we're called to make a difference for God, we shouldn't worry about what God "can do to us", but focus on what He's called us to do.
 - i) But I haven't gotten any special messages from God? Welcome to the club. All we are required to do is use the bible as our guideline as how we're supposed to live our lives. Then we're free to do what we want within those guidelines. The secret of course is then to find ways to use our gifts to make a difference for him.
 - c) In Chapter 14 we get introduced to Samson himself. If you're thinking what about Delilah, she doesn't come on the scene until Chapter 16. Until then, we just get Samson!
 - i) Chapter 14 focuses on the story of Samson getting a Philistine (non-Jewish) bride.
 - ii) I should back up and say at this time, the Israelites were being oppressed by these people (who lived near the Israelite coastline) and were a "big pain in the side" for the Israelites all the way through the time of King David and beyond. They were not one of the nations God called to wipe out, but they were living in the land of Israel and were a problem for the Israelites for many generations to come!
 - iii) The bottom line's God used the fact that Samson wanted to marry this foreign girl. The story involves the murder of some Philistines, based on a bet, Samson killing a lion with his bare hands and the Samson never actually marrying this girl.

- iv) The point of the story is the Philistines suffered losses due to Samson's strength. It is a reminder that God used Samson in a mighty way, even though he wasted his opportunities to lead as God desired he lead.
 - v) OK, enough of that, time for my verse-by-verse commentary to give the details!
5. Chapter 13, Verse 1: Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.
- a) Let's remember where we left off. Israel just had close to a fifty-year period of no enemies dominating them. We had a handful of good judges with little information given on each of them. Now all of sudden, we find out the Israelites are spending forty years dominated by a group that has never been discussed in the bible to date.
 - b) Time for a little background on the Philistines. They were not one of the nations that God told the Israelites to wipe out. They probably migrated from Greece or Phoenicia. They just appear on the scene in the bible. If you've been "around a while" and follow the news, most likely you'd be somewhat familiar with the term "Gaza strip". It's a portion of the land of Israel in the northern part of that country. Anyway, the Philistines controlled five cities in that area as the bible will speak a lot of the five "Lords" of the Philistines.
 - i) They dominated over the Israelites because they had better "metal technology" and they had iron the Israelites didn't have. They'll be around for a few centuries. It is not until the great Assyrian and Babylonian Empires rose, that they're completely wiped out once and for all.
 - ii) Bottom line they were a pain in the Israelite's side for centuries and on a time line, this is the first we read of them.
 - iii) God didn't care for them in the sense that He promised that the land of Israel was only for the Israelites as long as they obeyed Him. God used the Philistines to test the Israelites and get them to turn back to Him on a number of occasions.
 - c) After 40 years of being controlled by this group, I'm guessing the Israelites were now used to this situation and weren't doing much about it. We don't read of them asking for God's help. That's the situation. However, God wanted the Israelites to have a close relationship with Him and this group harmed the Israelites dependence upon God. All of that leads to the next key plot twist in this chapter, Verse 2:
6. Verse 2: A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. ³ The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. ⁴ Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, ⁵ because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."
- a) As you start to think about the book of Judges as a whole, you might notice those picked to be judges come from all over Israel. My simple point is there is no pattern to where the judges come from. It's a reminder to us that God picks who He picks. It tells that anyone willing to be used by God can. Yes He picks us! Since we never know how God wants to use us, there's no greater privilege in this life than to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Don't wait for a special sign to make a difference for Him. Find something you can do and just start! Nothing God likes better than when we make ourselves available for His use. With that understand, sometimes God "goes out of His way" to pick someone as we'll read in this chapter.
 - b) The chapter starts with a husband and wife couple in one of the Israelite tribes called Dan. This couple didn't have any children and I'm sure they tried for a long time. In Verse 3, an angel shows up and tells the wife (who's by herself), "You're sterile (can't get pregnant) as well as childless, but I tell you that you're going to have a son! However, realize this son comes with a "price". He is to be dedicated to God all of his life."

- c) I'd like to pause at this point to talk to any readers dealing with "barrenness". There is an international ministry called "Hannah's ministry". It is designed for women who desire to have children but can't. I'm sure a lot of women try things like "doing the Samson parents thing" thinking they're pleasing God by living a certain way. The truth is God's got His reason for opening and closing all wombs. We can't make God act a certain way by doing any sort of religious rituals. Living the Christian life is about accepting His will versus doing whatever we want to. I've personally known women who've suffered this way. If this is something you can relate to, Google that ministry. There's help out there!
- d) Meanwhile, as I said in my introduction, this child is to live his whole life with a "Nazirite Vow". It is based on Numbers Chapter 6. Anyone can take this vow. It is designed to be a short-term commitment. The idea is to do some outward special signs as a witness for God. It's a way for those around us to realize we're dedicating ourselves to God. Even Paul helped a young man with that vow by financially supporting it. (Romans 12:1-2). In effect, John the Baptist was also under this vow as he was dedicated to serving God from birth as an angel told his barren parents how John the Baptist was to be raised. In some ways, the story of the parents of Samson (this chapter) is similar to Luke Chapter 1 and the story of the Baptist's parents and how that John was to be special.
- e) Think about this story from the women meeting this angel. It says he looked like a man and didn't scare her away by any "angelic" looks. What's interesting is the wife is never named by name. It might be because in that culture a woman's testimony doesn't have the same weight as a man's testimony. (Don't blame me. It's how it was!) I think her name was hidden from the record as a "type of Holy Spirit". What I mean is God's Spirit only works in the background. The job of the Spirit is to glorify God by guiding us on how we live. Could I be out in left field here? Sure, so I'll drop it at this point.
- f) Anyway this angel who just looked like a man said to her, "You're going to have a son. He will be a Nazirite all of his life". That means he is never to drink alcohol of any kind. That vow also requires avoiding grape products of any time to "avoid the appearance that he is drinking". He is also never to get a haircut his entire life. Realize that none of these things makes us "more religious". It's about being a witness for God and these outward signs in that culture are a way of showing that Samson will be a witness for God.
- g) The other thing the angel specified is to in effect "Eat Kosher". Leviticus 11 has a whole set of rules of what Jewish people can and cannot eat. As opposed to the angel saying, do not steal, or kill or make idols, why single out the food laws? Same as the grape issues. It is about living differently from everyone around us as a living witness for God. I suspect most Israelites didn't follow the food laws that closely, since they were "under the thumb" of the Philistines at this point in history. Whatever the reason the angel singled this out!
- h) Anyway, this woman will soon get what she desired, to have a child. The cost is she must do the "Nazirite" rituals for life. Notice in Verse 4 the rituals aren't just for her son, but for her as well! God wants her to be a witness for Him even before Samson was born!
- i) Finally, let's talk about this angel's prediction about what Samson's going to do. The angel mainly told "mom" how she was to live and that her son was going to do the same. What isn't discussed until Verse 5 is "why": The angel said, "He'll begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines".
 - i) Notice the angel did not say, "Your son will wipe them out completely".
 - ii) Notice the angel did not say, "Your son will make them all your slaves."
 - iii) The angel did not say, "Your son will make them return from where they came".
 - iv) So why did the angel say "He will begin"? Yes God knows all things. That group's going to be a problem for the Israelites for many generations to come!
 - v) Part of the answer's that God wanted to keep them around as He had use for them in the future. For example King David (roughly 100 years later) worked with them when the first Israelite king (Saul) tried to have David killed.

- vi) Bottom line, God wanted the Philistines to suffer in Samson's time, but he God did have His reasons to keep them around longer.
 - vii) Finally, a comment about the word "Philistine" as in effect that word is still part of our vocabulary. Let me explain: By the time the Romans conquered and destroyed Israel in 70 AD, they wanted to insult the Jewish people. Therefore, they renamed that area "Palestine" which is a Latin equivalent of the word Philistine. That nation was gone by the time of the Babylonian Invasion (about 500 years before Rome). It is only used as an insult to the Jewish people. Since the God I worship happens to be "Pro-Israel", I NEVER refer to the land of Israel as "Palestine". Also, if you don't know the modern Palestinians aren't related to these Philistines. The Palestinians today took their name from the fact that the land of Israel was called "Palestine" when they started living in that area.
 - viii) Meanwhile, I believe we were studying, Judges Chapter 13. We got up to Verse 6.
7. Verse 6: Then the woman went to her husband and told him, "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name.⁷ But he said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death.' "
- a) Remember that the unnamed wife saw this angel/man all by herself. Her husband wasn't there. She needed her husband to know all of this since, he's needed to make the baby, as well as keeping the Nazirite vow with her.
 - b) First a few words of what angels look like. This one wasn't wearing wings and looked like a normal human. Since the wife called the angel "awesome" I suspect the angel was good looking or stood out from a crowd in some way. So do angels have wings or not? I'd guess they can have the appearance of a human or have wings in the "heaven world" or there is more than one "type". Don't know. All I do know is that this angel (to be verified coming up in a few verses) had the ability to look human.
 - c) The wife effectively tells her husband, "Let's have sex, as we're going to have a son. Then when we have him, we're to raise him as a Nazirite from birth and we must live a Nazirite lifestyle ourselves. Now take your robe off and let's get it at!" (OK, I added that last part!)
 - d) So why don't we get blunt messages like this from God today? Part of the answer is we've got the bible to teach us how to live. My answer is also, "God can say whatever He wants when He wants, as He's God and we're not. We can't force God to do anything". I've seen and heard some pretty amazing stories of things people claim God told them. Verification isn't necessary to me because I've watched those same people use their lives for His glory. If He said things to people, who am I to argue or verify or not verify?
8. Verse 8: Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."
- a) In case you forgot, Manoah is the husband's name. The wife's name isn't in the text. Why is he praying this prayer? One reason may be cultural. Women's "word" didn't hold a lot of value (again, blame the culture, not me!) or maybe he just wanted proof that she wasn't drinking or dreaming this story. I take it he did like the "sex part" because he believed the part about having a boy! What confused Manoah was, "OK, I get the fact that we're not to let him drink alcohol and he has to eat "kosher", but what do we do with him after that?"
 - b) Since Manoah was surrendering his will to God's and accepting what's going to happen, it is time for God to answer him and give him more instructions.
9. Verse 9: God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her.¹⁰ The woman hurried to tell her husband, "He's here! The man who appeared to me the other day!"
- a) I tend to think about strange things sometimes. For example, why didn't this angel appear to both of them, while, they were sleeping? Why did the angel start with her alone again?

- b) The answer is the woman thought of this angel as just some "holy man". Therefore he had to "wander into the scene" from outside. She'd recognize the angel. Therefore she needed to be on the scene for that second appearance. It adds a touch of drama to the story that the angel appeared to her again first and she had to get her husband!
 - c) Anyway now that "the" angel is on the scene time for the three of them to talk!
10. Verse 11: Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the one who talked to my wife?" "I am," he said. ¹² So Manoah asked him, "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?"
- a) First notice that Manoah believed what his wife said. Besides he was talking to the angel who made that proclamation, so what else could he say? I'd bet what Manoah is thinking is, "OK, if we do all of this, what does that mean for our son and for us? Will he be a king or a great ruler in Israel? Will he wipe out the Philistines?" Manoah is pondering why he and his wife should do all of this. What's in it for them? Notice in the next verse, those questions never get answered. It's a reminder to us that God calls us to do certain things. The "why" is His business! Our job is just to be obedient to what He calls us to do. We're His servants and not vice versa! OK then, Verse 13.
11. Verse 13: The angel of the LORD answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her." ¹⁴ She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her."
- a) Bottom line is Manoah isn't given any new information here. He's told pretty much what the angel said to his wife on the first visit. It's the angel saying in effect, "That's what the God who created the Universe told you to do, so stop asking questions and be obedient to those orders! The key Nazirite vow points are repeated about no alcohol and keeping that "kosher" diet. The no haircut part wasn't repeated, but that point still stands.
 - b) Before I move on, let me answer the question, why aren't Christians required to avoid the "bad animals" as stated in Leviticus 11? Because Jesus said in Matthew 15:10-11 as well as Mark 7:14-23 in effect, there's nothing a man can eat that is sinful. (That is my very loose translation). Also in Acts Chapters 10 and 11 is the story of Peter told to kill and eat those animals he sees, which includes "non-kosher" animals. It reminds us that the Gospel is for all people, not just those from Jewish backgrounds. Because of those verses and others, is the reason the Christian church didn't require Christians to eat that way. Not having those restrictions, also imply all people can be saved by the Gospel message. That's why when the Christian church got organized, they decided it was ok for Christians to not follow the diet laws of the Old Testament law. Enough of that, back to Judges.
12. Verse 15: Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you." ¹⁶ The angel of the LORD replied, "Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD." (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.)
- a) Well, since Manoah couldn't get any new information out of this angel, he decided maybe I can show some hospitality and fix him a meal! In a sense Manoah said, "kick back for a while we make some "lamb stew" for you". Since a man of God was in their presence, I'm betting Manoah is thinking, "Maybe I can bribe him with a nice meal to tell me more!"
 - b) That's why the angel said, "Even if you delay me, I won't eat the food." I have no idea if an angel needs to eat food. I suspect not, but I don't know. I do know we eat when we get to heaven, so our new bodies will be able to taste food. I've no idea how digestion works for our new "bodies designed for heaven", but I'm digressing from the main topic again!
 - c) The angel says in effect, "If you feel like killing a goat, offer up the animal to God as burnt sacrifice". OK, what's that all about? A burnt offering is a way of expressing a complete commitment to serving God. By having this couple do that, it's a way to show God, they are willing to take on this Nazirite commitment of living that way as well as raising their son to be to live that way.

13. Verse 17: Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?"
 - a) Remember that Manoah still thinks he's talking "just to a man" who has some special way of getting messages from God like prophesy. Since they're already having a conversation, it's a natural thing to ask, "What's your name, so we can honor you, when all this occurs?"
 - b) Verse 18 is the angels' response:
14. Verse 18: He replied, "Why do you ask my name?"
 - a) It is beyond understanding. He does not deny having a name, just that it's "beyond your comprehension". Many Christian scholars argue we've got a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. It could be or could not be, but that debate point is out there. Even if it is God, why didn't He just say "Jehovah"? I suspect the reason is that because Manoah still thinks he's talking to "just a human" and the angel or God, is about to set him straight!
15. Verse 19: Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: ²⁰ As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. ²¹ When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD.
 - a) Give Manoah and his wife a little credit here. They did what the angel told them to do. A goat was offered as a burnt offering to God. While that was occurring, "all of a sudden the angel went up in flame with the offering".
 - b) A reason why Christians argue this is Jesus is because the word LORD (when it's written in all capitals) means the most holy name of God is used that's often translated Jehovah. Whether or not this angel is Jesus, is debated. We won't get in trouble on judgment day if we hold one view or the other.
 - c) The site of the man (angel) going up in the flames of the burnt offering, made the couple realize this was not just a man they were talking to, but "the" angel of God, which again is why scholars argue it's Jesus Himself. The act got the couple to bow to the ground as they realized who they were dealing with. In fact, it scared Manoah half to death as we'll see:
16. Verse 22: "We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!" ²³ But his wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this."
 - a) You have to admire the wife's "voice of reason" while the husband was panicking. She is the one who said, "Hey, if God meant to kill us, why did He accept the sacrifice?" Now it is time for us to get busy and make a baby! Get your clothes off! (You can tell where my mind is at while I'm writing this!)
17. Verse 24: The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, ²⁵ and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.
 - a) The next verse jumps to the birth of Samson himself. I'd be willing to bet that the fact the "Lord blessed him" is to describe the fact he was physically strong and obeyed his parents commands as to how he was to live. Verse 25 described the specific location where they're living. It's in the north part of Israel near where the Philistines were!
 - b) Samson's name means "sunny". I suspect it had to do with a "new day of overcoming the fact the Israelites were going to overthrow the Philistines (or so the parents believed!)"
 - c) Before I move on, let's discuss why all of this "background" is here. Part of it was to show how Samson's parents committed their own lives to making a difference for God by doing what the angel told them to do. Part of it was to show that Samson was raised by Godly parents and therefore he had "no excuses" for disobedience. The advantage of growing up as a Christian is one knows what to do and not to do. The disadvantage is we're held accountable for that knowledge. OK, then, time to move on to a "grown up" Samson.

18. Chapter 14, Verse 1: Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman.² When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife."
- a) Back in the last verse of Chapter 13, it said the "Lord began to stir up Samson". I mention that as Samson desired to marry a specific Philistine woman. As we'll read in Verse 4, it's part of God's plan to "cause trouble" among the Philistines.
 - b) Remember that Samson's parents were "devout Jewish". Over and above the normal parts of their religion I'm betting they kept up their end of the bargain with the angel and were still doing the Nazirite vow themselves. Both the Old and New Testament teach that we're not supposed to marry outside of our faith. (Leviticus 18:18 for example) Why? It causes friction in a marriage as the devout say, Christian parent wants to raise the children "one way" and the other won't go along with it. I'm oversimplifying it, but it's biblical to require to marry "one's own". I could give a lecture on "mixed marriages" or "Evangelical dating", but let's just say it will save a lot of heartache down the road to marry someone who shares one's religious beliefs. One of the hardest things I've seen couples go through is when one becomes the "Strong Christian" into the marriage and the other isn't interested. I've seen marriages end over this divide. Enough of that, back to the story.
 - c) In that Jewish culture, it was expected of the parents to arrange marriages. As the father of two daughters, I like that idea! So as opposed to Samson courting this Philistine girl, he is asking his parents to "arrange it" to make her his wife.
 - d) Given the religious Jewish background, Verse 3 is very logical:
19. Verse 3: His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"
- a) Notice mom and dad aren't putting their foots down and saying, "We won't do this. God's not going to approve and we all have this "Nazirite Vow" thing going! I see his parents in effect catering to Samson's desires because they remember God told them he'd be a factor in the downfall of the Philistines. Even though the parents believed it was a bad idea, the idea of going against Samson's wishes probably made them more nervous.
 - b) I remember a lecture a few years back by an older gentlemen in his 90's. They asked him what's the biggest change you've seen in your lifetime? He responded when I was young the parents ran the household. Today children run it! He meant it in that parents cater to their children today much more. In that sense Samson was ahead of his time!
20. Verse 3 (cont.) But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me."⁴ (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.)⁵ Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother.
- a) The town that Samson and his parents lived was less than 2 miles from "Timnah" where a lot of Philistines lived. It's also where his "bride to be" lived.
 - b) The text also says that God "arranged this" as an occasion to strike a blow to Philistine!
 - c) That leads to the question, "Is God working behind the scenes in our lives?" Could be, and who are we to argue or question Him. I believe we should just go through life, making the best decisions we can within a biblical framework and if God's "pulling the strings" so be it. We should control what we can control and let God worry about the rest.
21. Verse 5 (cont.): As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him.⁶ The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat.
- a) Here we get the first demonstration of God giving superhuman strength to Samson, or at least he had it on "special occasions". I don't know about you, but I don't know of anyone who could rip apart a lion like it was a young goat!
 - b) Verse 5 also shows the first mistake Samson made: A Nazarite is supposed to avoid grape products of all types. It's about avoiding the appearance of not "messing up".

- c) I heard an interesting analogy based on this verse. Here's Samson being where he wasn't supposed to be in a vineyard). First Peter 5:8 describes Satan as a "roaring lion" that wants to devour us. The idea isn't that Satan is lurking behind every bush. It's that he and his demons desire we be a bad witness for Jesus. My point is here was Samson going where he wasn't supposed to be (in a grape field). All of a sudden a "roaring lion" appears. It took the intervening of God in order to prevent that lion from killing him. I'm not saying that Satan was that lion. I'm saying it does make a good analogy that our only protection against "the" roaring lion is our trust in the God of this universe!
- d) Meanwhile, back to the story:
- 22. Verse 6 (cont.) But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done.⁷ Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.⁸ Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey,⁹ which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.
 - a) For the few of you who don't know the story, Samson went back into the vineyard, and he saw the dead lion's carcasses. Why did he go back? Sometimes the shock of what we did makes us want to return to the scene of the crime. Anyway, bees were making their home in that carcasses and Samson ate from that.
 - b) So why didn't Samson tell this to his parents? Verse 6 says he didn't mention killing the lion. Verse 9 says he didn't tell them about the honey! If it was me and I killed a lion with my bare hands, I'd be shouting it to anyone willing to listen. I suspect Samson knew it was wrong to be in the vineyards, so that's the reason for Verse 6. One of the rules God gave to the Jewish people was they're not to touch a dead body. Doctors didn't know of germs until fairly recently. It was for the Israelites own protection that God didn't allow His people to go near dead carcasses. (Numbers 19:11). Some argue it only applies to a human carcass, but I'd say "Samson was pushing his luck here!"
 - c) Samson did give his parents some of the honey, but he never explained the "how he got it" part as his parents also took the Nazirite Vow and yes, this was pushing it or a violation!
 - d) Meanwhile, back to the wedding plans:
- 23. Verse 10: Now his father went down to see the woman. And Samson made a feast there, as was customary for bridegrooms.¹¹ When he appeared, he was given thirty companions.
 - a) Remember that Samson and his parents traveled into a Philistine town. The parents had to talk to the girl's parents and arrange this. Meanwhile, Samson bought a big pile of food and was arranging a wedding fest for the town. Since a wedding was planned, locals did decided to "give Samson 30 friends". The idea in essence is since Samson was marrying a Philistine girl it was time to "have the friends intermingle as well".
 - b) By the way, in that part of the world, a marriage feast was a week long! It was a time for celebrating and lots of alcohol. Even though I doubt Samson drunk himself, we'll be with a lot of drunk people for a week and I'm guessing part of the supplies Samson ordered is a lot of "booze" for the party! It's another example of Samson compromising on the vow that the angel pronounced on his life.
 - c) Here's a question: If Samson was "blowing it" why didn't God take away his strength at this point? Part of the answer is God wanted to use Samson in a mighty way as we'll see in a few verses. Still Samson was "blowing his witness" for God which is why we're not reading of any "conversions" during the wedding feast!
- 24. Verse 12: "Let me tell you a riddle," Samson said to them. "If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes."¹³ If you can't tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes."
 - a) So what did people do for entertainment for seven days? A riddle to solve was one way!
 - b) Samson proposed this riddle with "30 new suits" on the line for the winner!

- c) Keep in mind the wedding was a seven-day drinking party. The Hebrew text implies that! A riddle wasn't required, it was just one way to "pass the time" and give everyone a thing in common to talk about and discuss. Having a wager on the outcome also added to the atmosphere and again gave the guests something to discuss and try to solve.
- 25. Verse 13 (cont.) "Tell us your riddle," they said. "Let's hear it." ¹⁴ He replied, "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet." For three days they could not give the answer.
 - a) Samson's riddle had to do with the dead lion and the bee's honey inside of it. However, it stumped the guests at the party, and by "Day 3" the guests were getting frustrated by it!
- 26. Verse 15: On the fourth day, they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death. Did you invite us here to rob us?"
 - a) At this point the Philistines wanted to play rough. They told the bride, find out the riddle answer or else we'll kill you and your father by burning you in your own house. Wasn't that a bit drastic? It's a bunch of drunk men who wanted to save their pride! Remember that God was behind the wedding. We'll see how this plays out!
- 27. Verse 16: Then Samson's wife threw herself on him, sobbing, "You hate me! You don't really love me. You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer."
 - a) As almost all men know, a woman's most powerful weapon is crying. Men will often do anything just to bring tears to an end!
 - b) Notice the bride refers to the guests as "her people". I'm sure she's in fear for her life and the life of her family here, so she "cried it up" (maybe sincerely) for the sake of her life!
 - c) The next verse is Samson's answer:
- 28. Verse 16 (cont.) "I haven't even explained it to my father or mother," he replied, "so why should I explain it to you?" ¹⁷ She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people.
 - a) The tears got to Samson by the seventh day. I suspect Samson held out as long as he did as he wanted to win the bet himself. However, all the crying probably drove him crazy.
 - b) The sad thing is even though her tears prevented fiery death now, she'll still die that way later in the story. It was God's punishment for working against His judge, faults and all!
 - c) OK John, this is a good story and most of us know it well. Why should we care? Keep in mind that God was working behind the scenes for His glory here. Even if we're going to something as "innocent" as a wedding, remember we're always on the clock for Jesus!
 - d) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me quickly discuss Christians and drinking. The bible definitely condemns being drunk, but never drinking alcohol. The question to ponder is, are we a good witness for Jesus in those situations? I've had a glass of wine with the wife on many occasions, but I tend to be on the safe side in public settings as again, I'm still on the "clock for Jesus" and I try to keep that in mind.
 - e) The most logical application has to do with being a good witness for Jesus in gatherings of both believers and nonbelievers. Doesn't mean you have to stand on the table and preach. It does mean we're "on the clock" and we should act accordingly. We never know who is paying attention to us in such a setting. Back to the story:
- 29. Verse 18: Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" Samson said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle."
 - a) Here's a key moment in the story, when the Philistines at the party solved the riddle. The next sentence verifies that Samson knew they didn't solve it on their own, but got it only because they pestered his wife to reveal the answer.
 - b) The good news is this got Samson ticked off. Remember that God wanted to use him as to lead a revolt against the Philistines. The bad news is Samson lacked any leadership skills for others to follow. Samson get "got ticked off by himself" and did damage.

30. Verse 19: Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he went up to his father's house.²⁰ And Samson's wife was given to the friend who had attended him at his wedding.
- a) In case you care, the city called Ashekon is about 20 miles away from where the party was located. Samson figured if I'm going to kill people to collect 30 garments, I should do it at a distance where people wouldn't find out that quickly. Imagine being so angry that these people solved his riddle, he traveled 20 miles to go kill 30 men for their clothes so he'd be able to pay off the bet.
 - b) So was it God's will for Samson to kill these men? Tough question. God desired that His people not be oppressed by anybody. This action was in effect the start of a war between the Philistines and the Israelites. It's "God's will" in that God wanted to use Samson as to show other nations that "He's God and He's the one who provided Samson with all of the strength that He has.
 - c) Realize we have a time gap here. By the time Samson traveled there, killed 30 men, as well as the journey back the wedding was over. Samson probably thought, "OK, I paid off my debts, now I can spend some time with my new bride".
 - d) However, the father of the bride gave her to one of the 30 men who represented Samson. Why did he do this? I suspect out of fear of the Philistines. Remember the father in law is a Philistine. Their leaders threatened to kill him if the riddle wasn't solved. Samson took off to go do the killing and the father in law thought, "Well, that's the last we'll see of him as he ran off after he lost the bet".
 - e) For better or worse, that's the story to date. We're only half way through this story, which is why I'm in effect leaving us hanging until the next lesson.
 - f) A few final words on why we should care about all of this. The answer is God gives each of us Spiritual gifts that He expects us to use for His glory. To find out what is your gift, I would say ask people who know you well. Figure out what you enjoy doing, and then go find a way to use that gift to make a difference for God.
 - i) Samson had the gift of physical strength. He should have used it to lead Israel for a fight against their enemy. It's a little like a sports star who tells the other players, "just give me the ball and get out of my way". It's not leadership, and that's a major waste of one's talent. I've watched many a great player lose games since it's a team sport and no one is helping.
 - ii) That's sort of the point here. Samson was given a gift by God. He used that gift to harass an enemy. At the same time, He never led as God desired a judge to lead. I compare it to a selfish sports star, as in effect, it's the same thing.
 - iii) Bottom line, pray for God's guidance how we're to use our spiritual gifts. Then we need to be willing to work with others to make a difference for Him. Often, a gift will require a lot of trial and error as to best use those gifts. That is part of the joy of watching how God works in our lives. With that said, hope you learned a few things you can apply to your own life based on the good and bad of Samson. We will continue his saga in the next lesson.
31. Heavenly Father, Help us not to waste the most valuable thing you've given us, our time. Help us to realize that time is the most valuable thing we own. Also make it obvious to us how it is You desire to use us for Your glory. May we work as both individuals and as a team to make a difference for You in the world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.