**Samson’s Marriage and Vengeance on the Philistines**

Last week we studied the birth of Samson which was heralded by none less than Jesus Himself appearing as the angel of the Lord. As Matthew Henry wrote, the Samson described in the next few chapters is not the man we would expect given his special designation from heaven and a Nazarite. At the beginning of chapter 14, his first recorded action as an adult was to give in to the lust of the eyes. He chose as a wife a woman known to him only by her attractive appearance and worse yet, she was a Philistine. The 2 warnings most often given by God to the Israelites before they went into Canaan were to not worship the gods of the Canaanites and not to intermarry with them. Engaging in either of those would inevitably lead to the other. Samson asked his parents to get her for him and they responded as one would expect: they admonished him to choose an Israelite woman, preferably from the tribe of Dan. They did not realize that the marriage was actually ordained by God (see v. 4) as He meant to use the marriage to provoke a confrontation with the Philistines who ruled over Israel at the time.

Samson went with his parents to Timnah where the woman he wanted lived. On the way it appears that Samson was alone in a vineyard when he was attacked by a lion which he killed with his bare hands, enabled by the Holy Spirit. In verse 6 we read that he did not tell his parents what he had done. After meeting with the woman, he returned home then went back to Timnah later to take her as his wife. On the way, he stopped to examine the lion’s carcass, again without his parents. He scooped some honey from a hive he found in the lion’s body which he ate and shared with his parents. He probably violated the Nazarite vow by eating grapes in the vineyard and ate food out of a dead, unclean animal.

At Timnah, there was a feast for the bridegroom which was customary and it was attended by 30 men who were probably Philistines. At the feast, Samson gave them a riddle to solve, “Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet”. If they could solve the riddle before the end of the feast, Samson promised to pay them 30 sets of clothing but if they could not, they would owe him 30 sets of clothing. As the deadline approached, the men had not solved the riddle and went to Samson’s wife, threatening to kill her and her family if she did not get the answer for them. After constant badgering, Samson finally told his wife the answer and she relayed that to the 30 men. When they solved the riddle, Samson realized that he had been betrayed by his wife. He went to Ashkelon, another Philistine town and empowered by the Holy Spirit, killed 30 men and removed their clothes to pay off the wager. He returned to his father and the chapter closes with his wife given to the friend who attended him at the wedding.

In chapter 15, Samson returns to visit his wife, taking a goat as a gift to her only to discover that she had been given to his friend. Her father offered him the younger sister as a substitute. Samson was so angry that he tied 300 foxes together in pairs and attached torches to them before setting them loose to run through the grain fields of the Philistines. They burned up not only the grain but also the vineyards and olive groves. When the Philistines discovered the Samson had done it because his wife was given to another, they burned her and her father. Samson retaliated by slaughtering many of them then he went to stay in a cave at the rock of Elam which was in Judah.

The Philistines pursued Samson and went to the men of Judah demanding that they turn Samson over to them. Three thousand of their men went to Samson telling him that the Philistines ruled over them and they would hand him over to them. The powerful tribe of Judah was so meek that they did not ask Samson to lead them in a revolt, preferring to sacrifice Samson to save themselves. Samson went willingly, not wanting to fight his fellow Israelites. When the Philistines approached him, he broke free from the ropes that bound him. Again the Holy Spirit came upon him and he killed 1,000 of his would be captors them with the jaw bone of a donkey. Afterwards, Samson was so thirsty for water that he cried out to God, acknowledging that God himself had given him the victory. Matthew Poole wrote that God afflicted him with thirst to remind him of his weakness and that God was responsible for his success. Hearing Samson’s plea, God provided water to revive him and he led Israel as a judge for 20 years.

We previously discussed how Samson is seen as a type of Christ. His birth and the birth of Jesus were both miraculous and foretold by angels. There were expectations of their coming, neither of which was realized. Jesus was expected to be a king and Samson was expected to come as a practicing Nazarite. Samson did not tell of his killing the lion as it would have revealed his great strength. Jesus kept his identity as the son of God a secret. Finally, Samson gave himself up willingly just as Jesus did. It is ironic that Jews gave up Samson to gentiles while gentiles gave up Jesus to Jews.