

6. Samson and His Women: The Folly of Passion

Biblical material: Judges 14-16.

Quotes:

Seduced, shaggy Samson snored.
She scissored short. Sorely shorn,
Soon shackled slave, Samson sighed.
Silently scheming,
Sightlessly seeking
Some savage, spectacular suicide.
Stanislas Lem

Questions

Why would God want to act through Samson—what are the dangers here? Are we to take from this story just the usual lessons of avoiding seductive women, or is there more to it? How could Samson’s story have ended up differently? Was Samson’s strength in his “magic hair”? How can God validate such violence? What kind of God is represented here?

Discussion/ Comment

The story begins with Samson choosing a wife from the enemy—the Philistines. His parents are appalled, and try to talk him out of it. But the Biblical record observes, “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.” Judges 14:4 NIV. Already a difficult verse in a book full of difficult verses. Because in the time of the Judges all were doing what was right in their own eyes, it’s hard to see what really is right!

Whatever the case, certainly Samson’s choice of wife brought nothing but trouble—for all. In the first confrontation with the Philistines, Samson poses the riddle—which his wife persuades him to share with her and then informs her countrymen. Hardly surprising when they threaten to burn her and her father to death. (Note in passing—that is exactly what happens to her and her father later, Judges 15:6).

Samson’s passionate life, full of fighting and lust, is a conflicted tale. Surely the context and societal circumstance explain some, yet it is hard to read some of the commentary that, “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men...” Judges 14:19 NIV. In fact every time the “Spirit of the Lord’ comes upon Samson, he carries out violence...

The climax of the story is with Delilah, though his role as leader of the Israelites for twenty years must not be forgotten. (And what this man of God was doing with a prostitute in Gaza is best left unexamined!).

It seems almost inconceivable that after repeated betrayals Samson should continue to be with Delilah. She had made her loyalties very clear—they were to her people, the Philistines, and not to Samson. But Judges 16:4 makes it clear he had fallen in love with her. (So that makes it OK, right? No—this is a good illustration that we do not, should not, simply follow our feelings. We may have our feelings, but we are not required to act on them).

Samson seems to think he can go on playing with fire and not get burned. Delilah complains that Samson is making a fool out of her by lying about the source of his great strength.

Why does he not respond that she should not be trying to betray him to the enemy? After such repeated evidence, why didn't he just leave? The reply must be that he became so sure of his own strength, and his own ability to outwit his foes, that he went along with her little game. Only to discover that this was no little game, and that by truly betraying his God through the casual negation of his Nazirite vow, he ended up as a blinded slave.

Notice in the story how the Philistines worked through Delilah. She must have known what happened to Samson's wife. And she clearly demonstrated no true love to Samson. So what was he thinking? How was he representing God to those around him? And even at the end, what was achieved by his murderous suicide, except more hatred, bitterness, and suffering? It is a sad episode for a people who knew the true God, but did not witness rightly.

And God? Weeping for foolish Samson, with all his misused power. For his people, led by a intemperant strongman easily distracted by pretty women. For the Philistines too, who did not receive a good picture of the true God, and who mourned their dead at the hands of this foolish "man of God."

Ellen White Comments

The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life. A young woman dwelling in the Philistine town of Timnath engaged Samson's affections, and he determined to make her his wife. To his God-fearing parents, who endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, his only answer was, "She pleaseth me well." The parents at last yielded to his wishes, and the marriage took place...

God's promise that through Samson He would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" was fulfilled; but how dark and terrible the record of that life which might have been a praise to God and a glory to the nation! Had Samson been true to his divine calling, the purpose of God could have been accomplished in his honor and exaltation. But he yielded to temptation and proved untrue to his trust, and his mission was fulfilled in defeat, bondage, and death...

The Israelites made Samson judge, and he ruled Israel for twenty years. But one wrong step prepares the way for another. . . . He continued to seek those sensuous pleasures that were luring him to ruin. "He loved a woman in the valley of Sorek," not far from his own birthplace. Her name was Delilah, "the consumer." . . . The Philistines kept a vigilant watch over the movements of their enemy, and when he degraded himself by this new attachment, they determined, through Delilah, to accomplish his ruin...

Three times Samson had the clearest evidence that the Philistines had leagued with his charmer to destroy him; but when her purpose failed, she treated the matter as a jest, and he blindly banished fear...

Samson's infatuation seems almost incredible. At first he was not so wholly enthralled as to reveal the secret; but he had deliberately walked into the net of the betrayer of souls, and its meshes were drawing close about him at every step...

God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited. {CC 131-4}

