

MOTIVATION, SOVEREIGNTY, AND PARENTING

(Judges 14:1-20)

Lawson Younger

Motivated by Self-Interest. The picture of Samson that emerges from this section is anything but positive. What is morally right in Samson's life is determined by Samson himself, not by God or his Law. Samson is driven by the sensual: his instincts, his lusts, his appetites/his gratifications. He manifests a total disregard for human or divine authority. He shows no regard for God's Law, for his special Nazirite status. Even Samson's first prayer is motivated by self-interest and personal gratification.

In matters of motivation, Samson is no different from the Philistines! He is motivated by revenge and retaliation, and he commits murder, destruction of private property, and so on. In many respects Samson manifests a number of characteristics of the fool in the book of Proverbs (Prov. 10:1, 23; 13:20; 15:20; 17:12,21,25; 18:6; 19:13,29:11).

And the Judahites are no better. Everyone—Philistines and Israelites—are only concerned about what is being or has been done to them. The section seems to be nothing but reprisals and counter reprisals. The point is that God's people are working on the same principles and exhibiting the same behavior as the unbelieving, "uncircumcised" Philistines. Is it possible that God's people today might be doing the same?

Yahweh's Involvement. While it is unquestionably a difficult verse, 14:4 documents Yahweh's involvements in this section. As pointed out above, Yahweh's "seeking" does not imply that Yahweh "incites" Samson's lustful desire for the Timnite woman. Rather, it suggests that Samson's sinful actions nevertheless accord with Yahweh's will. Thus, God uses Samson in spite of his wrong motives and actions (cf. Gen. 50:20). The fact that Yahweh works his will in spite of our sinful motives and actions has been demonstrated over and over again—in the case of every cyclical judge except for Othniel. It just happens in the case of Samson to a much greater extent since his sinfulness is so great.

Thus, it is abundantly clear that without God's involvement behind the scenes, left to himself, Samson would never have become involved in God's plan for delivering Israel. In fact, left to themselves, the Israelites would have been satisfied to continue to coexist with the Philistines. Hence in this context God's people seem perfectly content to maintain the status quo in relationship to unbelievers. But the Lord has other plans for his people, both then and now.

Warning. The passage is a warning to us concerning what characteristics we should not want in our lives. In Samson, Israel has a judge who determines what is right and wrong purely based on his senses. Today we are encouraged to live life in this way. We are persuaded by commercials to "just do it," that if we like something to go for it. Ads are directed to our senses—appearances are everything. If you don't have the right stuff, you're nothing. Sex is



used to sell everything from cars to ice cream, even "rice"! Samson lived in a fashion that our culture would endorse— at least in his willingness to gratify every inclination of his heart.

Authority Issues. Unfortunately, in Samson, we also see the disrespect for authority, particularly in parental authority. Never has parental authority been as low as in our present society. God has given us parents so that we can learn about authority. If we cannot respect parental authority, how can we submit to the authority of God? If we are chosen by God to lead, it is important that we learn submission to authority first, and respecting our parents is the first step in such a process. It is not insignificant that the fifth commandment, "honor your father and your mother," is the pivotal commandment between the God-oriented commandments (the first four commandments) and the human-oriented commandments (the last five commandments).

And as for the authority of God, in many respects we might say, what God? For many, if there is a God, he is either unable or not interested in doing anything in the world. His self-revelation in his Word is denied. His Law ignored. Samson could certainly find his place among many folk in our society today who live life as though there were no true and living God—and certainly no coming judgment by this God.

The thing that is so sad about Samson is that he obviously believes that there is a God—even that this God is Yahweh, the God of Israel (since he prays to him). In the ancient Near East, there were no atheists; everyone believed in God or the gods. But in spite of a theological acknowledgment of this on Samson's part, he lives his life like those who do not believe that there is a God. There is perhaps nothing more tragic than seeing a believer live his or her life this way.

Samson and his contemporaries care about what is done to them. They count up his atrocities and even the score when the opportunity presents itself. Samson, the Philistines, and the Judahites all are motivated by revenge and retaliation. In our cities today this is unfortunately the way things are as well. Moreover, disregard for private property, life, and limb is paramount.

The passage is obviously also a warning of the imminent destructive aspects that result from such characteristics. Those in present culture who live according to the "Samsonite" code—"what's right in my eyes, I do"—face the grim prospect of much suffering in this world and in the world to come. There cannot be a greater contrast between the "Samsonite" code and "Jesus" code—"others first" (cf. Othniel).