

# Samson: sinful behaviour under the sovereignty of God

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 02 November 2014

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, now we come to our reading from the Bible, and perhaps you would turn with me to the book of Judges, chapter 14, and you'll find this on page 214 in our church Bibles, page 214.

Last week we read Judges 13, which tells the story of Samson's wonderful supernatural conception and birth and the preparation for his arrival.

And now we have the first incidence of his life as he begins to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. So Judges, chapter 14.

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah.

Now get her for me as my wife. But his father and mother said to him, Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives or among all our people, that you must go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?

[ 1 : 12 ] But Samson said to his father, Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes. His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he, the Lord, was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah.

And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.

But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.

After some days he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey.

[ 2 : 19 ] He scraped it out into his hands, and went on eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother, and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.

His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.

And Samson said to them, Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes.

But if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes. And they said to him, Put your riddle, that we may hear it.

And he said to them, Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet. And in three days they could not solve the riddle.

[ 3 : 31 ] On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?

And Samson's wife wept over him and said, You only hate me, you do not love me, you've put a riddle to my people, and you've not told me what it is. And he said to her, Behold, have not told my father or my mother, and shall I tell you?

She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted. And on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people.

And the men of the city said to him, on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion? And he said to them, If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle.

And the spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and struck down thirty men of the town, and took their spoil, and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house.

[ 4 : 39 ] And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man. Amen. The word of the Lord.

And may it be a blessing to us. Good.

Well, let's open up at Judges chapter 14. Judges 14. Sinful behavior under the sovereignty of God. That's my title. So Judges 14, page 214.

214 in our Bibles. Now last week we read Judges chapter 13. And Judges chapter 13, I think created in us a sense of great expectations.

The first eleven judges, whose lives are told in the book of Judges, they come into the story ready-made as adults, as grown-ups, if you like. But this final judge, the twelfth and last, Samson, is uniquely introduced by a long birth narrative.

[ 5 : 47 ] Really, it's a miraculous conception narrative. The angel of the Lord, that is really the Lord in person, in human form, comes to Samson's parents, Manoah, and his wife, and he tells them that they are soon to have a son who will be a Nazirite from the womb onwards.

In other words, a boy specially dedicated and set apart for the Lord's service. And as chapter 13, verse 5 puts it, and I pointed this verse out particularly last week, that gives us the clue to Samson's role.

At the end of chapter 13, verse 5, the angel says to Samson's mother, he shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and, here's his role, he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

So he's to be a saviour, with a small s, a saviour for Israel. And Israel needs a saviour. It's a grief and an outrage that Israel is now a subject nation.

Scarcely 300 years have passed since Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan into the Promised Land to take possession of the land of Canaan, which was their God-given heritage.

[ 6 : 56 ] And already, less than 300 years later, they are under the heel of a pagan oppressor. And if you just look at chapter 13, verse 1, you'll see that they have now been subject to the Philistines for 40 years.

But that's not the beginning of it. Before them, they've been under the heels of, well, going way back, the Mesopotamians for 8 years, the Moabites for 18 years, the Canaanites for 20 years, the Midianites for 7 years, and the Ammonites for 18 years.

So is this the freedom and joy and fulfilment of living in the Promised Land? Is the one true God reigning over his liberated people? Well, in the ultimate sense, of course, God is reigning.

But in the more immediate sense, he's not. Because the Israelites now are being ruled over by Gentile pagan powers. Why? Because they had not been thorough in obeying the Lord.

The Lord, do you remember, had commanded them to drive out these pagan nations when they came into Canaan. But they had not had sufficient will and resolve to do it. And the result was that the pagan nations, whom they should have subjugated, began to subjugate them.

[ 8 : 09 ] And the Lord successively sent 11 judges to rescue the Israelites. And each judge played his or her part. Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

Some of you, of course, will know that list off by heart. Most of you, including me, probably don't. But then, chapter 13. Chapter 13, it's as though a fanfare is now being sounded.

Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da. We have this extended, detailed narrative, not only of miraculous birth, but miraculous conception. And it's so much, I pointed this out last week, it's so much like the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, which announces the miraculous conception and birth of John the Baptist and of the Son of God himself.

So surely this twelfth and final judge is going to be the judge that leaves all his predecessors in the shade and brings Israel out onto a new plane of peace and joy and godliness.

Just look at the final verse of chapter 13, 1325. And the Spirit of the Lord, Samson has grown up now, the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahanadan between Zorah and Eshtol.

[ 9 : 24 ] It's a verse that whets our appetites with anticipation of what the Lord is now going to do through his servant, Samson the Nazarite, by the Holy Spirit, who is beginning to stir him.

And then chapter 14. Is this the kind of figure that chapter 13 leads us to expect? Is this a man of godly stature to rank with the likes of Moses and Samuel and Daniel?

The first thing he does is to go to the village of Timnah. Three or four miles down the road from his own home in Zorah, in Judah. And he spots a pretty girl there, a Philistine girl.

And he very much wants her and he decides that he must marry her, despite the fact that the law of Moses, the law of God, strictly forbids the Israelites to intermarry with their pagan neighbors.

Is this the way a man acts when the Spirit of the Lord is beginning to stir him? Something is stirring Samson when he sees this pretty girl.

[ 10 : 25 ] I think we all know what it is, but it doesn't sound like the Spirit of the Lord. Well, friends, this is the dark and difficult puzzle which is raised by not just Judges 14, but by the whole of Samson's life.

Back in chapter 13, verse 5, the angel explains that Samson is to be a savior of Israel to save them from the Philistines. And the story of his fearsome deeds, recorded in chapters 14, 15, and 16, indeed shows that he does bring rescue to Israel.

And he's mentioned in the same breath as David and Samuel in the great Hebrews chapter 11, as a man of great faith and perseverance. But his character and his behavior don't seem to match the expectations raised by chapter 13.

So we have to ask the question, why did God raise up and use a character so flawed? Why didn't God raise up someone like Daniel at this stage in Old Testament history?

Somebody marked out by shining integrity and godliness. Well, let me say this first. Samson's nature seems to express or to mirror the nature of the people of Israel at this stage.

[ 11 : 44 ] It's often pointed out that a nation gets the kind of leadership that it deserves. Another way of putting this is to say that a nation's leaders will usually reflect the values of that nation.

And the author of Judges shows us right at the beginning of chapter 14 what Samson is like, what sort of a character he has. He's a grown man, but obviously he's still very young.

He goes to Timna, less than an hour's walk from Zorah where he lived with his parents. And verse 1, he saw a Philistine girl. The text doesn't suggest that he spoke to her, still less that he made any attempt to speak to her parents.

Young men, let me give you a bit of advice. If you're going to court to a girl, if you're going to court a girl, do remember that she has a mother and a father. They may prove to be a rather important piece in the jigsaw.

Anyway, Samson sees this girl in verse 1 and in verse 2 he goes straight back to his own parents and he says to them, well, it looks rather bland in our English version.

[ 12 : 47 ] I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timna, our version reads. But apparently the Hebrew text is much more colorful and much more emphatic. And what he really says is, boy, have I seen a drop-dead gorgeous girl at Timna.

Now, get her for me as my wife. What a rude young man. He doesn't even say please, does he? Now his parents, obviously upset, say to him in verse 3, Samson, is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, a Jewish girl, or among all our people, that you must go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?

But Samson says to his father, now notice this, get her for me, for she is right in my eyes. Just notice that last phrase, she is right in my eyes.

Now hold that phrase in your head and turn with me to the last verse of the book of Judges. That's chapter 21 and verse 25. 21, 25.

It's a famous verse. We'll look at this in a few weeks' time, I'm sure. 21, 25. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

[ 14 : 04 ] So that's what Samson is like. His life is a mini-reflection of the life of everybody else in Israel. They've turned their backs on the teaching of Moses. What they need is a king, a godly king who is going to lead them back to the way of life taught by Moses.

But they have no such principle operating in Israel. Each individual is simply making up his own rules for conduct and behavior. Samson's parents knew clearly that Moses' law taught that a Jew must marry only a Jew.

But Samson was saying, in effect, Moses can go whistle. I'm going to marry this Philistine girl. Now, the author of Judges, having written the first three verses of the chapter, realizes that what he has just written is bound to be rather shocking for the reader.

The reader is reeling. Haven't I just read, says the reader, in chapter 13, verse 25, that the spirit of the Lord is beginning to stir Samson? Isn't chapter 13, verse 25, the curtain raiser for chapter 14?

So how can this young man, in whom the spirit of the Lord is stirring, possibly behave in such an anti-Moses, anti-God manner, doing simply what is right in his own eyes, but what is clearly not right in the sight of God?

[ 15 : 22 ] So the author then slips in verse 4 so as to give the reader some inside knowledge of what is really going on behind the scenes. Verse 4 will help the reader not to have an apoplectic fit and throw the book on the fire in disgust.

So the author writes in verse 4, his father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he, that is the Lord, was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

At that time, the Philistines ruled over Israel. So his father and mother didn't know that it was from the Lord. Now these verses 1 to 4, they raise the difficult question.

Here's the hard question. Do flaky means justify good ends? Is it right that God should exploit or use bad behavior so as to achieve happy results or godly results?

Now we'll return to that question in a few minutes' time. But I want us to see how that question becomes even more pressing when we look at the next incident in Samson's spirit-impelled life.

[16:33] Verse 5. His parents, by this stage, have clearly capitulated to his pressure over the Philistine girl. So they accompany him down the road to Timnah so as to meet the family, the Philistine family, and to make the necessary arrangements for the wedding.

But Samson and his parents clearly get separated on the road between Zorah and Timnah. Perhaps his mother and father were a bit elderly. Maybe they sit down for a rest at the roadside, have their sandwich and a little cup of tea.

And Samson says to them, I'm just popping across into the vineyard for a few minutes. Back soon, mother and father, I promise. Now, should a Nazirite be entering a vineyard?

Samson was a Nazirite and a Nazirite's vows forbade him three things. Haircutting, wine, and all grape products, and the touching of dead bodies.

So for Samson to go for a nonchalant, innocent kind of stroll in a vineyard suggests that he might just not be taking his Nazirite vows too seriously.

[17:37] Look at those nice grapes. Juicy, succulent grapes. I might just reach out my hand and have one or two. There are no tigers in the Bible.

Tigers were always found, still are, further east. China, India, places like that. But lions were common throughout the Middle East in Samson's day. In fact, I discovered that lions didn't disappear entirely from the land of Syria until 1850 AD.

It's not very long ago. Well, there happened to be a young lion in the vineyard. And that's verse 4. 5 puts it, it came at Samson roaring. Now, friends, if you see an MGM film, you know the old lion at the beginning of the film?

His head is encased in a little kind of laurel leaf thing, isn't he? And he doesn't roar, does he? It's nothing more than really a little bit of a grunty growl. I won't imitate the grunty growl, but you've all seen the MGM lion.

Now, the Hebrew word used at the end of verse 5 apparently describes a very different kind of roar, the terrifying blood-curdling roar of a lion as it pounces upon its prey.

[18:52] So what happens here? Now, remember verse 4, the Lord was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. That's what's going on. So verse 6, and everything that follows verse 6, makes sense against the background of what we know from verse 4.

So the lion rushes at Samson, and at the same moment the spirit of the Lord rushes upon Samson, and with nothing in his hand, no club, no spear, no sword, Samson tears the lion to pieces as one tears a tender young goat.

Then Samson goes back to the road and rejoins his mother and father. Maybe there was a stream there in the vineyard or a drinking trough for animals or whatever, and maybe he was able to clean himself up a little bit first.

Hello, mother. Hello, father. Nice to see you again. Hello, son. What have you been doing? Oh, not much. Just a little natural history. Just observing the wildlife of Israel, flora and fauna of Israel, especially the fauna.

Now let's go on down to Timnah, shall we? Let's go to... Now this is a small point I want to make now, but you'll see that the author of Judges four times speaks of Samson and his parents going down to Timnah.

[ 20 : 02 ] Verse 1, Samson went down to Timnah. Verse 5, Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. Verse 7, then he went down and talked with the woman.

Verse 10, his father went down. Now if you look at a Bible atlas, it's always a good thing to do. If you look at an atlas that shows the contours of the hills, you'll see that Zorah, where Samson lived, is up in the hill country of Judah, whereas Timnah, only three or four miles away, is further down below to the west towards the Judean plain.

It's a little bit like coming down from the Campsy Fells into the city of Glasgow and the Clyde Valley. So the vineyard was probably situated on a west-facing slope, a nice spot for a young lion to enjoy his afternoon rest in the sunshine until disturbed by a Nazirite looking for grapes.

Now a little geographical detail like that word down, it's not a highly significant element in the story, but it's worth noticing because it helps you to picture the scene more clearly in your mind.

Well now back to the story. In verse 7, we're told that he meets the young woman. He's only seen her back in verse 1, but now he actually meets her and talks with her.

[ 21 : 17 ] And, says verse 7, she was right in Samson's eyes, echoing what he'd said to his father back in verse 3. And clearly, although the text doesn't actually say it, an agreement is now made with her and her family so that she will marry Samson.

Now verse 8, some days later, no long engagement this one, just a few days later he returns to take her to marry her. And his parents are obviously with him.

And he can't resist turning aside into the vineyard again. Well, if you've killed a lion with your bare hands, of course you want to revisit the scene of your triumph.

So he leaves his parents just for a moment. He goes to the scene of battle and lo and behold, the opened up cavity of the lion's chest is full of bees and honey. If you have a Lyle's golden syrup tin back at home, have a look at the picture.

Have a look at the famous logo on the front. You'll have seen it. It's Samson's lion and there's a swarm of bees and his riddle is quoted there. So he fills his hands up with the honey, eats some of it, rejoins his parents on the road, gives them some honey, they eat it.

[ 22 : 31 ] Lovely honey, son. Where on earth did you find this? Oh, mother, I'm a student of natural history, as you know. I know about insect life in Judah. So, verse 10, they go on down the road to Timnah.

And the events of the next seven days provide exactly the opportunity that the Lord is looking for in verse 4. An opportunity for Israel to begin to throw off the iron grip of the Philistines.

Now, the local wedding customs here are obviously very elaborate and they must have cost Samson, or more likely his parents, an arm and a leg. Samson now has to prepare a seven days feast for 30 young men.

Now, can you imagine how much food 30 young men are going to put away in seven days? Now, we need to bear in mind that the Israelites and the Philistines, they're two nations who are living very close together, but with a sense of animosity and distrust.

The Philistines, we know, have the whip hand. They're in charge. But their Israelite neighbors would have been both resentful of them and perhaps somewhat afraid of them. It would have been rather like parts of Europe in the Second World War when Nazi troops were occupying parts of France and the Netherlands and even the island of Jersey.

[ 23 : 51 ] Tension, difficulty. So, a mixed marriage like Samson's with an Israelite marrying a Philistine, that would have created a tense seven-day wedding celebration.

You might say, standard of food, five star. Standard of conversation at the table, one star, I guess. So, on the first day of the feast, there is Samson sitting as host at the head of the table and he looks balefully down the table at these 30 young Philistines who are filling their faces with the good food that has almost emptied his bank account.

And he says, right, my boys, I've got a bet for you. Take me up on it if you dare. I'm going to tell you a riddle. If you can solve my riddle before the seven days of the feast are up, I will give you 30 new suits of clothes.

But if you can't solve it, you will give me 30 new suits of clothes. How about it? And they say, verse 13, bring it on, big boy, we're up for it.

Now, just think of this. 30 new suits of clothes. How much does a new suit of clothes cost today? I know. I went and bought one not very long ago from a shop near here.

[ 25 : 04 ] I think it cost about 200 pounds. Was that a good buy? Not bad. Now, just think of that. 200 pounds in today's money for a new suit.

This bet, over 30 suits of clothes, that would have been worth something like 6,000 pounds in today's money. So if Samson won his bet, it would set his bank balance back straight again.

Okay, he says, here's my riddle. Out of the eater, something to eat. out of the strong, something sweet. You have seven days starting now.

Now, we know the answer. We know about the lion and the honey. We are the privileged readers. But, of course, these 30 young men haven't a clue. How could they have? It's an impenetrable riddle to them.

And after three days, they are none the wiser, but they're very frustrated. They have steam coming out of their ears. Now, there's an old saying that says, blood is thicker than water.

[ 26 : 09 ] National allegiance is going to prove stronger here than marital allegiance. So on day four of the feast, the 30 Philistines say to Samson's Philistine wife, their fellow Philistine, look, sweetheart, if we lose this bet, we are going to lose a lot of money.

You are going to have to get Samson to tell you his riddle, and then you are going to tell us. And if you don't, we are going to burn down your house with you in it. Now, that would have been a strong incentive to the poor girl to do their bidding, I guess.

So, she goes to Samson and she bursts into tears. But can you blame her? And she says to him, you hate me, you don't love me, you've told my people a riddle, but you haven't even told me.

Now, remember, blood is thicker than water on Samson's side as well as on his wife's side. So, he replies, look, I haven't even told my mother and my father what the riddle is.

Can you honestly expect me to tell you? You're only my wife. Anyway, she keeps up the emotional pressure. Day five, day six, day seven.

[ 27 : 17 ] Tears at breakfast, tears at lunch, tears in the evening. There are a hundred handkerchiefs hanging on the line. Okay, okay, he says. You are driving me absolutely mad. I will tell you. So, the whole story eventually comes out.

Lion, carcass, bees, honey, everything. She dries her eyes and smiles. You're a sweet boy, she says. I'm just popping out for five minutes.

I'll be back very soon. Won't be long. So, she is back in five minutes. But by this time, the whole town knows the answer to the riddle. It's day seven of the feast and we're at verse 18.

And just before the sun slips down below the horizon to mark the end of the day, the men of Timnah come to him. What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?

Gotcha. And he replies, his blood pressure rising, if you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle. And then, verse 19, for the second time in the chapter, the spirit of the Lord rushes upon him.

[ 28 : 25 ] He goes to Ashkelon, one of the leading cities of the Philistines. He kills 30 Philistine men, strips them of their fine clothes, and takes the suits of clothes back to Timnah so as to settle his bet.

But he is so angry with Timnah and with his wife that he refuses to stay with her in Timnah, he stalks back up the road to Zorah to his parents. And, verse 20, his wife is unceremoniously given in marriage to his best man.

It's a sorry tale, isn't it? If anybody here is a filmmaker and wants to make a blockbuster of a film, you could hardly find better material than Judges 13 to 16.

Well, friends, what are we meant to make of this extraordinary story? It raises a number of very tricky questions for us. For example, what is God really doing in all this?

Is God acting in line with his own character? If Samson is a man filled or stirred by the Spirit, why doesn't his life show the fruit of the Spirit as taught by the Apostle Paul?

[ 29 : 34 ] It's questions of that kind that we must face. Now, let's start with an important clue. Verse 4, his father and his mother did not know.

Notice the did not know. His parents did not know that Samson's rapidly arranged marriage to this Philistine girl was from the Lord. Now, we the readers, once we've seen verse 4, we know, but Samson's parents don't.

They're in the dark. Now, look on to verse 6. Samson kills the lion, but he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. So again, we know perfectly well what Samson has done, but his parents don't.

Then look on to verse 9. Samson gives some of the honey from the lion's carcass to his parents, but he doesn't tell them where he's got the honey from. We the readers know we're privileged, but his parents are in the dark.

Then verse 14. Samson puts his riddle to the young men of Timna. Now, we the readers, we know exactly what the riddle means, but these young men are clueless until Samson's wife gets the truth out of him by wearing down his resistance.

[ 30 : 47 ] We know, but they don't. And finally, at the very end of the chapter, there is something that Samson doesn't know, but we do. What he doesn't know is that his wife has now been given in marriage to his best man.

And if you look on to the first two or three verses of chapter 15, you'll see that Samson, a few days later, goes to visit the woman that he thinks is his wife. He even takes a young goat with him as a let's make friends again present.

But when he gets to Timna, her father won't let him go to his wife's bedroom. And then the truth comes out and her father says to him, the truth is, Samson, I thought you hated her, so I've given her in marriage to your best man.

Light the blue touch paper and stand clear. We'll see how Samson reacted to that discovery next week. Now this series of facts, known to the reader but unknown to the actors in the drama, is one of the things that makes this story so exciting.

When the reader knows things which the people in the story don't know, the reader gets excited because he knows that when all is revealed, there are going to be some explosive scenes, as indeed there are.



[ 31 : 58 ] But these don't know factors are not equally weighty and important. The ones to do with the dead lion and the honey, they're fairly minor. Probably Samson hides the truth about his adventure in the vineyard from his parents because he doesn't want them to know that he's really sitting rather loose to his Nazirite vows.

As a Nazirite, he's to have nothing to do with wine and grapes. Samson, says his mother, why did you go into that vineyard? What you weren't thinking of, were you?

Oh, no mother. Samson, have you, a Nazirite, been touching a dead lion, a dead body? Haven't we been training you these 20 years to be true to your vows? But the really important don't know is the one in verse 4 and that is the one which opens up the meaning of the whole story to us.

Always the most important question to ask when we're reading Old Testament history is the question, what is God doing through the ins and outs of the story in front of us? And verse 4 here tells us exactly what God is doing.

He is using Samson, Samson's weaknesses and moral deficiencies as well as his strengths, to further his purpose, which at this point in history is to rescue Israel from the oppressive rule of the Philistines.

[ 33 : 21 ] That, of course, is the theme of the whole Bible. God is working out his great purpose through history to rescue his people from the kingdom of darkness and Satan and to establish them in the peace and joy of his own glorious eternal kingdom.

Friends, if you're a Christian, that's where you're headed for the glorious eternal kingdom of the Lord God and his son Jesus. We who are Christians have been rescued by a better savior than Samson.

But Samson was a savior of Israel. And if you look back to chapter 13, verse 5, you'll see that that was the original brief for Samson, which the angel of the Lord gave to his mother before he was even conceived.

He will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. So I think we can come to a conclusion like this. God is never the author of wrongdoing.

Never. Samson's sins, moral deficiencies, and misbehavior, they are Samson's responsibility. His rudeness and disobedience to his parents, his insistence on marrying a girl from outside the covenant people, his failure to take his Nazirite vows seriously, above all his lack of sexual self-control.

[ 34 : 39 ] All these things are sinful, and nothing lets Samson off the hook for them. But God, so as to bring about his greater and merciful purposes, is sometimes willing to use even sinful actions and behavior to achieve his ends.

And isn't this true, and I think this will help us, isn't this true of the moment which stands right at the center of human history, and that is the death of Jesus? Think of Peter's words as Peter preached in public in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and explained what had just happened.

He says this about the death of Jesus. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Now this shows the strange and wonderful way that God works out his plans. At the level of human morality, it was a lawless, wicked act to put Jesus to death.

But at the level of God's foreknowledge and plan, it was the very thing that he had purposed since before the world was created. And so with Samson, at the level of his own morality, he behaved sinfully.

[ 35 : 57 ] He was a blockhead, he was a libertine, he was a loose cannon. But at the level of God's plan and purpose, he was a mighty savior. The great Bible commentator Matthew Henry, writing in about 1700 AD, says this about Samson.

He was a paradox of a man who did that which was really great and good by means that seemed weak and evil. It's a comfort to us, isn't it, to know that God will sometimes turn even our most ungodly behavior to good ends, even to ends that bring salvation to others.

us. But friends, we must be very careful and not seek to justify immorality and sin in ourselves, because our savior calls us always to turn away from evil and to plant our footsteps in his.

We must not presume upon him. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Dear God, our Father, we acknowledge indeed that Samson was a paradox of a man.

[ 37 : 20 ] And we realize that we'd be wrong to think that it might have been better to have somebody of the character of Joseph or Daniel to do this work. Somehow this was part of your purpose.

And we do pray that you will help us to accept this, dear Father, and to be glad and grateful. We think of the way that Samson takes his place in Hebrews chapter 11 as one of those who persevered in faith.

Indeed, he judged Israel for 20 years. And we realize there was much more to his life than these incidents of violence and bloodshed. So we do thank you for him.

And we pray that as we continue to study his story with all its paradoxes, he will help us to understand the greater and lasting and eternally everlasting work of the great savior our Lord Jesus.

And in his name we ask it. Amen.