

Home Group study: week beginning 15th November 2020

Flawed Heroes — Samson: The Thin End of the Wedge

If you've ever read P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves & Wooster books, or seen them on TV, you'll know that a little white lie, always to save hurting someone's feelings, or failing to correct a misunderstanding for the sake of politeness, leads Bertie Wooster deeper and deeper 'into the soup', and his 'gentleman's gentleman' Jeeves has to come up with a clever plan to get him — and everybody else — out of the soup without offending anybody. Can you think of any other stories, films — or even personal experiences! — where a 'little white lie' gradually leads into total disaster?

Read: Judges 13: 1-5; 13: 24-14: 4; 14: 10-20; 15: 1-16

Discovery

13: 1-5. Verse 1 sounds very familiar! Can you remember from what Malcolm Kayes said on Sunday how this occasion differed from the other (many) occasions where Israel had 'done evil in the eyes of the Lord'? This time, as the Philistines (despite their reputation) weren't as bad as the previous oppressors, Israel didn't even bother calling out to the Lord. Why do you think God stepped in to save them?

What is a 'Nazirite' (v5)? See what is said about Nazirites in Numbers 6: 1-9. You will see that normally someone decided to be a Nazirite for a period; Samson on the other hand has been called out to be a Nazirite by God.

13: 24-14: 4. What does 14:2 tell us about Samson's attitude? Does he seem like a person who has been called to a special dedication to God?

How does God regard Israelites who marry people from other cultures: especially those who are oppressing them? Can we therefore explain v4?

14: 10-20. How would you describe Samson's behaviour through this episode?

Again, is Samson really living in line with his dedication to God? In what ways is he (a) living like a man dedicated to God and/or (b) *not* living like a man dedicated to God?

What are we learning about Samson's character?

15: 1-16. Samson started out back in 14:12 with a bit of a wind-up of 30 Philistines in the expectation of personal gain. Talk about the progression that follows on from that.

Where has it now ended up?

Understanding

The Israelites, it would seem, weren't too worried about being dominated, or oppressed, by the Philistines. The Jewish people have always remembered their heritage of being freed from oppression by Moses. Why do you think they're not asking God to deliver them this time? What does that suggest about their lives at this time?

Can we see from Samson how sin can escalate in our lives? What aspects of Samson's character lead to this escalation?

Look at **Judges 13: 5** and **15:20**. What was God setting out to achieve when he called Samson to special dedication as a Nazirite? Does he achieve it? Do you think this was God's chosen way of achieving his purposes? If not, what does it say about God's sovereignty?

Samson's behaviour is pretty bad and it's about to get worse: Dave's sermon next week will almost certainly need an 18 certificate and we hope he doesn't get our YouTube channel banned! Yet how is he remembered in Hebrews 11: 32-34? And that's in a line-up that includes the likes of Abraham, Jacob and Moses!

Application

As we've already seen in this series, none of us can be disqualified from serving God.

God uses Samson to fulfil his purposes, even though he's even more flawed as a character than others we have looked at so far. What does it tell us about the way God regards us?

Does God's ability to use someone as sinful as Samson suggest we don't need to worry too much about sin? Can we depend on God's grace to cover us regardless of our lifestyles?

More to the point, *should* we depend on God's grace to cover us regardless of our lifestyles?

What does Paul have to say about this in Romans 6: 1-2? And what does Proverbs 7: 22-23 say about the young man who is seduced by the adulteress? How does that accord with the attitude in our world that so long as you're not harming someone you can do as you like?

Are there parallels between the attitude to sin in our society today and what we can conjecture was going on in Israel under Philistine rule? What should we do about our own sinful attitudes?

Finally two quotes from Malcolm's sermon for us to ponder:

- A ship's place is in the sea: but God help it if the sea gets into the ship.
- God's grace isn't a licence to sin, but a freedom from sin.