

**“It Was of the LORD”
(Did God Want Samson to Marry a Pagan?)**

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*But his father and his mother knew not that **it was of the LORD**, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. (Judges 14:4)*

Recently, I was asked to explain this passage of Scripture. In the context, Samson demands to marry a Philistine woman against the protests of his parents. This was a direct violation of God’s commands to His people against marrying pagan women:

And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods. (Exodus 34:16)

Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)

If we read Judges 14:4 literally, it *appears* as if God is the direct cause of someone violating His commandments, thus making His own character appear questionable. It implies that Samson’s sexual lust and willingness to marry pagans was the result of God’s doing.

A number of commentaries on Judges 14:4 claim that even though this was a clear violation of God’s divine statute, God had a “secret purpose” in bringing this about, which was the destruction of Israel’s enemies. However, if an all-wise God must move people to sin in order to fulfill His purposes—*secret* or otherwise, then He can be neither wise nor holy. Paul writes:

But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? (Romans 3:5-7)

James also wrote, “*For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*” (James 1:20). In simple terms, **God does not need our sin to bring about His purposes**. Furthermore, God would never subject man to temptation for any reason. Again, James said, “*God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*” (James 1:13b).

So how do we reconcile Judges 14:4 with the truth that God does not want or need sin to accomplish His plans? It helps us if we take the time to learn Hebrew background, expressions and phraseology from which Scripture is derived. Certain expressions in Scripture, when

rendered “word for word” in English, need to be understood from a *Hebraic* perspective. For example, the phrase “It was of the Lord” does not necessarily mean that God is the “divine manipulator” of the event:

It is a solemn, but not unusual expression in the Hebrew tongue, to say of a thing beyond measure great, that it is of the Lord; not always meaning hereby, that God himself is the immediate cause of it, but signifying it to be such, that naturally no account is easy to be given of it.¹

Hence the statement “It was of the Lord” is an expression unique to the culture in which the Bible was written. It is what language experts refer to as an *idiom*. The Bible has many idioms that were pretty much transliterated into the English language. One of those idioms is one in which *God is said to do that which He merely permitted*. This is otherwise referred to as the “Hebrew idiom of permission.”

While explaining the authority to remit sins that our Lord delegated to His apostles, Thomas Jackson writes:

.... and this authority our Saviour expresses according to a well-known idiom of the Jews’ language. It is no wonder, then, **that God is said to do that which He permitted men to do**, when they had by their sins provoked Him to withdraw from them the restraints of His providence and grace. Inattention to Scripture forms of expression is one of the most fruitful sources of theological error.² (Emphasis added)

Jackson noted that our neglect of Hebrew idioms is the primary source of error. No doubt, that this inattention of this truth has led many to read in Scriptures such as Judges 14:4 the false idea that God moved Samson to sin.

Jackson goes on to explain how Judges 14:4 is to be understood through the lens of this the Hebrew idiom of permission:

Samson’s marriage with a heathen woman, belonging to the original inhabitants of Canaan, was a direct violation of the law of God. He had said to His people, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.” (Deut. vii. 3.) When Samson set his heart upon such an alliance, his parents attempted to dissuade him from the enterprise, and urged him to turn his attention to some daughter of Israel, as his future wife; but in this it is said, “His father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that He sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.” (Judges xiv. 4.) The meaning, we apprehend, is, not that it was “of the Lord” that Samson should break His law; but that as Samson was bent upon this unholy connexion, and would not be satisfied without it, God would not interpose His power to prevent it, but would overrule it for good, as He often does the evil actions of bad men. To Samson and his family the consequences of this marriage were most disastrous, as might be expected; but it led to beneficial results so far as the people of Israel were concerned. At this time they suffered greatly under the oppressive dominion of the heathen, who still dwelt in the land. By means of this marriage Samson was brought into direct intercourse with these oppressors; he destroyed their power, and

¹ Shuckford, Samuel **The Sacred and Profane History of the World. Connected from the Creation of the World to the Dissolution of the Assyrian Empire** (London: W. Baynes, 1808), pp. 39, 40

² Jackson, Thomas **The Providence of God, Viewed in the Light of Holy Scripture** (London: John Mason, 1862), pp. 300, 301

liberated his own people, though he brought upon himself great dishonour, and even lost his life. Samson sinned, and endured the bitter penalty of his waywardness and folly; but “it was of the Lord” to bring good out of the evil, by making it a means of relief to His suffering people.³

As Jackson explained, it was Samson who was determined to violate God’s clear commands. God, being an omni-resourceful God, would find a way through Samson’s rebellion to accomplish His purpose for Israel. Nevertheless, this does not infer that God authored the event. That is why we must read Judges 14:4 as *idiomatic* rather than *literal*:

Ch. xiv.v.4 *Of the Lord*, in the Scripture idiom, does not necessarily imply that the event to which it may refer originated with God, but merely that he, to whom all things are known, had determined to make it subservient to accomplish his purposes. Samson grievously erred if the female was an idolator.⁴

Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser also saw how reading Judges 14:4 with the idea that God *literally* brought about Samson’s rebellious behavior demonstrates a flawed understanding of the text. Kaiser explains that it must be examined in light of the Scripture idiom of permission:

The sin of Samson must not be attributed to the Lord, but the deliverance of the Israelites by Samson was from the Lord. Remember, **scriptural language frequently attributes directly to God what he merely permits.**⁵ (Emphasis added)

Kaiser, as others, agree that Scriptures appearing to make God the author of sin must be read in a permissive sense. While God permitted Samson to sin and had the ability to work around his sin to accomplish His goal, as Kaiser further explains, this does not mean that God wanted or needed the sin itself:

My conclusion is that Samson was neither directed nor tempted by God to do what God had specifically prohibited in His Word. God wanted the defeat of the Philistines, but that did not give Samson carte blanche. Moreover, God’s blessing on one or more aspects of a person’s life is no indication that everything that person does is approved. Samson was plain bullheaded about this decision, and he refused to listen to his parents or to God. But neither Samson’s foolishness nor his stubbornness would prevent the design of God from being fulfilled.⁶

As Kaiser noted, when we examine Samson’s behavior, we cannot necessarily see any influence on God’s part. As another scholar noted, Samson, being an only child, may have possibly been engaging in “bratty” behavior:

This chapter opens with the courtship and marriage, which was properly reprovved by his parents as contrary to the Mosaic law. Samson, as if often the case with only and darling sons, was wayward; he had not been subjected to control, and would not now submit to it. The matter, however, was

³ Ibid, pp. 301, 302

⁴ Davidson, David **The Comprehensive Pocket Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with Explanatory Notes by David Davidson** (Edinburgh: James Brydone, 1848), p. 181

⁵ Kaiser Jr., Walter C. **Hard Sayings of the Bible** (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), pp. 196, 197

⁶ Ibid, p. 197

“of the Lord:” **not by his direction or approbation, but by the permission of his providence;** and it formed an essential link in that chain of events which led to the liberation of Israel from the Philistines.⁷ (Emphasis added)

It is possible that Samson was raised in a way that would ingrain in him a selfish attitude though the Bible appears to be silent on whether or not this is true. The most important thing for our purposes here is to understand that God did not influence it. Therefore, the statement, “it was of the Lord” must be understood as permissive rather than causative on God’s part.

Other scholars believe that Samson’s persistence to marry the Philistine woman was due to a desire to infiltrate their country and bring Israel’s deliverance:

Many Philistines were living in the villages of Dan across the border from their own land. They were not of the seven nations devoted by Moses to destruction, but still, it was contrary to the law of Moses that the Israelites should marry them. This law Samson was either ignorant of, or disregarded it. The expression, “She pleaseth me well,” is translated by some, “She answereth my purpose well:” and is coupled with the words, “It was of the Lord,” to show that Samson planned this in order to have a quarrel with the Philistines from their oppression. **“It was of the Lord” in the sense that the Lord permitted it,** that Samson might push forward, and in his individual capacity, forced to become God’s agent in the punishment of the Philistines.⁸ (Emphasis added)

While this appears to be a different perspective from the previous quote, what is most important for our study is that both scholars understand God’s role in a *permissive* sense. God simply is not in favor of His people marrying those who could influence their hearts away from the true God:

Samson’s parents viewed his plan to marry the woman as unwise, but it was “of the Lord.” **This means that God permitted it, though it was not a marriage that He preferred.** It did not violate the Mosaic Law, and it was a situation God would use to punish the Philistines (Jdg_14:4; cf. Jdg_14:19). This fact did not mitigate Samson’s guilt, but it shows how God providentially overrules human folly and brings His will to pass in spite of it (cf. Psa_76:10; Rom_8:28).⁹ (Emphasis added)

Such marriages are not God’s preference and He could not have endorsed Samson’s behavior regardless of the outcome. However, He did not restrain Samson but allowed him to go forward with this unadvised act. Perhaps a better rendering of Judges 14:4, based on the exegetical evidence is as follows: *“But his father and his mother knew not that the LORD would overrule this to bring about His original intentions to deliver Israel.”*

Nonetheless, it is wise for the reader to keep in mind that any Scripture which seemingly makes God appear to be the author of sin, sickness and catastrophe must be interpreted through the Hebrew idiom. We have a number of books on this subject with more soon to be published.

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⁷ Patton, William (Editor) **The Cottage Bible and Family Expositor: Genesis-Song of Solomon** (Hartford: Case, Tiffany, & Burnham, 1842), p. 383

⁸ Towner, D. B. “Daily Scripture Readings” in **Record of Christian Work, Volume 13** (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1894), p. 336

⁹ “Judges 14:4” in Constable, Thomas L. **Expository Notes of Dr. Constable**, E-Sword edition

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