

Judges

Chapter 14

Samson's Marriage

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 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." 3 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 to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes." 4 His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. 5 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. 6 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. 7 Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes. 8 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. 9 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. 10 His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. 11 As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12 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, 13 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." 14 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. 15 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?" 16 And Samson's wife wept over him and said, "You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" 17 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. 18 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." 19 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. 20 And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

14:1 *Timnah*. Identified as Tell Batash in the Sorek Valley, west of Beth Shemesh. Archaeologists have uncovered the Philistine layer of the town. (CSB)

Small village c 4 mi from where Samson lived. (TLSB)

saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. The disappointment of Samson's parents (v. 3; cf. Esau, Ge 26:35; 27:46; 28:1) is understandable in light of the prohibition against marriage with the peoples of Canaan (Ex 34:11, 16; Dt 7:1, 3; see also Jdg 3:5–6). (CSB)

14:2 *get her for me.* See Ge 34:4. As the head of the family, the father exercised authority in all matters, often including the choice of wives for his sons (see 12:9; Ge 24:3–9; Ne 10:30). (CSB)

Commanding his parents, rather than making a polite request, showed that Samson was a spoiled child who violated the Fourth Commandment. Parents did not always arrange marriages (cf Gn 28:6–9). (TLSB)

as my wife. Marrying outside of Israel was wrong, as Samson's parents indicate (v. 3). The Law of Moses forbade marrying Canaanites (Dt 7:3–4). Although technically the Philistines were not Canaanites, neither did they worship the one true God. Jsh 13:2–3 counted them among the Canaanites as pagan enemies of Israel. The marriage would go against his Nazirite vow. (TLSB)

14:3 *uncircumcised.* A term of scorn, referring to those not bound by covenant to the Lord, used especially of the Philistines. (CSB)

A number of Semitic people groups practiced circumcision (see, e.g., note, 1Sm 18:25), but the Philistines, who were from Aegean or Greek lands, did not. (TLSB)

right in my eyes. The Hebrew for this expression is similar to that translated “did as he saw fit” in 17:6; 21:25. The author anticipates this theme, which recurs in chs. 17–21. (CSB)

Hbr *yashar*, “straight” and thereby correct. Her appearance pleased him. Perhaps a wordplay because, as his parents noted, the relationship would not at all be right. (TLSB)

14:4 *was from the LORD.* See Jos 11:20; 1Ki 12:15. The Lord uses even the sinful weaknesses of men to accomplish his purposes and bring praise to his name (see Ge 45:8; 50:20; 2Ch 25:20; Ac 2:23; 4:28; Ro 8:28–29). (CSB)

Often, we cannot clearly tell what the Lord is doing with our lives, except we know that He has our good in mind (Rm 8:28). God providentially used even Samson's sins for His purpose of igniting conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines. (TLSB)

ruled. Dominated and likely exacted tribute from them as vassals. (TLSB)

14:5 *vineyards of Timnah.* The Sorek Valley (in which Timnah was located) and its surrounding areas were noted for their luxurious vineyards. (CSB)

young lion. Lions were once common in southern Canaan (see 1Sa 17:34; 2Sa 23:20; 1Ki 13:24; 20:36). (CSB)

14:6 *Spirit ...rushed upon him.* The mighty deeds of previous judges also are ascribed to the descent of the Holy. (TLSB)

tore the lion in pieces. David (1Sa 17:34–37) and Benaiah (2Sa 23:20) later performed similar feats. (CSB)

Emphasis is on the ease with which he handled the lion. Verb suggests tearing down the middle, as in pulling the hind legs apart. To this day in the Near East, young goats and lambs are so torn in pieces after they are cooked. (TLSB)

did not tell his father or his mother. Both Samson and his parents set out for Timnah, but they did not travel together, perhaps because of the tensions between them (v 3). (TLSB)

14:9 Nazirites were forbidden to touch anything dead, so Samson violated the Nazirite vow. The honey also would have been considered unclean, yet he gave it to his parents without telling them. (TLSB)

14:10 *feast.* Such a special feast was common in the ancient Near East (see Ge 29:22) and here lasted seven days (v. 12; see Ge 29:27). Since it would have included drinking wine, Samson may have violated his Nazirite vow (see 13:4, 7). (CSB)

Israelites typically held the wedding feast at the groom's home. Either holding it at the bride's home was a practice at the time, or it was a Philistine custom, in which case Samson was again violating the Law's prohibitions against following the customs of the pagans. (TLSB)

14:11 *companions.* These are the "guests of the bridegroom" (cf. Mt 9:15). They were probably charged with protecting the wedding party against marauders. (CSB)

Normally, the groom would provide his own groomsmen. They had to be provided for Samson, since Israelites would not accompany him in his fraternization with the Philistines. The exchange of gifts and services is typical in wedding arrangements and may have played a role in the tensions that followed. (TLSB)

14:12 *riddle.* The use of riddles at feasts and special occasions was popular in the ancient world. (CSB)

Riddles were often used as entertainment at banquets and to teach wisdom. (TLSB)

changes of clothes. Mentioned, together with silver, as gifts of great value in Ge 45:22; 2Ki 5:22 (see also Zec 14:14). (CSB)

Hugely expensive wager. Commoners did not own changes of clothes, though nobles did.

14:15–16 Samson's wife feared her fellow Philistines' threats against her and her parents. She probably did not realize then just how strong Samson was. (TLSB)

14:16 *don't really love me.* Delilah used the same tactics (16:15). (CSB)

Manipulation, rather than love and trust, manifests itself immediately. (TLSB)

14:17 Samson's wife had been entreating him with tears every day of the feast, wanting to know the answer herself. But not until the fourth day did the Philistine companions come to her with their threats (cf v 15). (TLSB)

14:18 *before the sun went down.* Once the sun went down, the seventh day of the wedding feast would be over, the deadline Samson had set. (TLSB)

my heifer. Samson's wife (see v. 15). Since heifers were not used for plowing, Samson is accusing them of unfairness. (CSB)

Literally refers to imposing hard service on an inexperienced animal, which signifies the manipulation of Samson's wife. Some commentators think Samson was accusing them of having sexual relations with his wife. (TLSB)

14:19 *Spirit ...rushed upon him.* God's purposes for Samson included humbling the Philistines. (CSB)

The Holy Spirit did not give Samson supernatural strength merely to kill lions but to deliver Israel from the Philistines. (TLSB)

Ashkelon. One of the five principal cities of the Philistines (see map of "Five Cities of the Philistines"). (CSB)

Major city of the Philistines, 23 mi away. (TLSB)

spoil. Rather than inviting local retribution by plundering a nearby village, Samson attacked a Philistine city. This escalated the petty personal conflict into a military confrontation. God providentially used Samson's weakness and bad behavior for His purpose of punishing the Philistines. (TLSB)

14:20 *best man.* See 15:2; probably the young man who had attended Samson (cf. Jn 3:29), in all likelihood one of his 30 companions (v. 11). (CSB)

Because Samson stormed out on the last day of the wedding feast, the marriage would not have been consummated. (TLSB)

It would have been embarrassing for the bride to have been abandoned at the very end of the wedding festivities. This "best man" would have been one of the 30 Philistine companions that were provided for him (v 11) and who won the riddle contest (v 18). (TLSB)

Ch 14 Samson sees a Philistine woman and urges his parents to approve an inappropriate marriage with her. Samson is strong physically, but weak morally. Although his long hair marks him externally as a Nazirite, he violates God's Law repeatedly and disrespects his parents. Despite Samson's sinfulness, "the Spirit of the LORD" comes upon him for the sake of God's purposes. God saves Samson and uses him to deliver Israel. God still has a plan and compassion for the weak in faith today. • O Father, I confess that I am like Samson, filled with lusts, disobedience, and violent passions. Forgive my sin, and fill me with Your Holy Spirit, through Your Son, that I might serve Your greater purposes and learn humility through the cross. Amen. (TLSB)