

Judges

Chapter 14

Samson's Marriage

Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. ² When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." ³ His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." ⁴ (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.) ⁵ Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. ⁶ The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. ⁷ Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her. ⁸ Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, ⁹ which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass. ¹⁰ Now his father went down to see the woman. And Samson made a feast there, as was customary for bridegrooms. ¹¹ When he appeared, he was given thirty companions. ¹² "Let me tell you a riddle," Samson said to them. "If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. ¹³ If you can't tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes." "Tell us your riddle," they said. "Let's hear it." ¹⁴ He replied, "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet." For three days they could not give the answer. ¹⁵ On the fourth day, they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death. Did you invite us here to rob us?" ¹⁶ Then Samson's wife threw herself on him, sobbing, "You hate me! You don't really love me. You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer." "I haven't even explained it to my father or mother," he replied, "so why should I explain it to you?" ¹⁷ She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people. ¹⁸ Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" Samson said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle." ¹⁹ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he

went up to his father's house. ²⁰ **And Samson's wife was given to the friend who had attended him at his wedding.**

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)

young Philistine woman. 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 (see note on 1Sa 14:6). (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 one for me. 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 *this 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 ... came upon him.* See 13:25; 14:19; 15:14; see also notes on 3:10; 11:29. (CSB)

The mighty deeds of previous judges also are ascribed to the descent of the Holy. (TLSB)

tore the lion apart. 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)

sets 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 ... came 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 *friend*. 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)

best man. 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)