

Judges Chapter 14

Verses 1-4

“She pleaseth me well”:

The Philistines were not among the 7 nations of Canaan which Israel was specifically forbidden to marry.

Nonetheless Samson’s choice was seriously weak.

Samson sins here, but God is sovereign and was able to turn the situation to please Him (verse 14).

He was not at a loss, but used the opportunity to work against the wicked Philistines and provided gracious help to his people.

He achieved destruction of these people, not by an army, but by the miraculous power of one man.

Judges 14:1 "And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines."

A city which by lot fell to the tribe of Judah, but was afterwards given to the tribe of Dan, and now in the hands of the Philistines (Joshua 15:57).

Judah is said to go up to it, because the place where he lived lay below it (Gen. 38:13).

But Samson is said to go down to it, because he lived above it.

The Jews differ about the reconciliation of these two places.

Some say there were two of this name, the one is a descent, and the other is an ascent.

Others say there was but one, so situated, that they that came to it on one side ascended, and they that came to it on the other side descended.

Bochart approves of the former.

According to Bunting, this was twelve miles from Eshtaol, where Samson lived.

"And saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines":

Who at this time dwelt there.

He saw no doubt many other women besides her, but he took special notice of her, and entertained a particular affection for her.

In other words, on the sight of her, Samson fell in love with her.

Even though this was in the tribal territory of Dan, we know this is in the hands of the Philistines at this time.

We remember from the previous lesson that the children of Israel had been delivered into the hands of the Philistines by the LORD.

In Judges 13:5, we read that the angel said that Samson would deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines.

This Philistine woman would not be a choice a Hebrew would make.

Judges 14:2 "And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife."

Of his passion of love, being desirous of having their approval and consent, in which he acted a dutiful part, and what became him.

And may be an example to children to communicate with their parents, and have their opinion and consent before they engage in such an enterprise, even before courtship.

“And said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines”:

Whom he had a good liking of, and a strong affection for.

He is very open and ingenuous in his account, and does not go about to hide anything from his parents.

Or color things over, or conceal her nationality.

But frankly tells them she was a Philistine woman, which he knew would at once bring an objection against her.

"Now therefore get her for me to wife":

For it seems it was the custom then, when a young man had found a woman he liked, that it was left to his parents to request of the woman and her friends about the marriage of her to him.

It was the custom of the Hebrew families that the father of the groom to be and the father of the bride to be would make the transaction for marriage.

The father of the groom would pay the dowry to the father of the bride.

Judges 14:3 "Then his father and his mother said unto him, [Is there] never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well."

Samson's parents were astounded that their son would break the Law of Moses, which absolutely forbade an Israelite to marry a foreigner (Deut. 7:1-4).

Another possible translation of "for she pleaseth me well" is "she looks good to me", anticipating the time when "every man did [that which was] right in his own eyes" (17:6), rather than "what is right and good in the sight of the LORD" (Deut. 6:18).

The father and the mother did not approve of her, because she was not a Hebrew.

They wanted their son to marry someone within the 12 tribes of Israel.

They did certainly not want him to marry the daughter of their oppressors, the Philistines.

The Hebrews were all circumcised.

They believed anyone not circumcised did not belong to God.

They did not want their son to marry this woman.

They were not opposed to him marrying, just the marriage of someone who was a Philistine.

We do not quite understand this, but this too was part of God's plan.

Judges 14:4 "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."

How could "Samson's disobedience be "of the LORD"?

The best way to understand this is that the LORD did not want Samson to marry the Philistine girl but used Samson's disobedience for His glory.

God is never responsible for evil acts, but He is so wise that He uses evil acts to accomplish His good purposes.

The Nazarite vow had placed Samson in the hands of the LORD.

Everything that happened to him was part of God's plan to destroy the Philistines.

Even Samson was probably not aware that God had placed this desire in his heart for this Philistine for God's purposes.

Judges 14:5 "Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him."

They were prevailed upon to go with him, either because they perceived his affections were so strongly set upon a wife.

That they thought it advisable to agree to it, lest it should be of bad consequence to him, or because he let them know that the thing was of God, and what was his design in it.

"And came to the vineyards of Timnath":

The land of Canaan was a land of vineyards, and particularly that part of it which was inhabited by the Philistines and Phoenicians.

And though we nowhere read of the wine of Timnath, yet frequent mention is made in authors of the wine of Ashkelon, Gaza, and Sarepta, inhabited by the above people.

These vineyards seem to have lain somewhat out of Samson's way; but hither he turned on some account or another from his parents, perhaps to eat some grapes.

"And, behold, a young lion roared against him":

Not a whelp, that is expressed by another word, but one more grown, and is afterwards called a lion simply.

And, by the Targum, a lion, the son of lions or lionesses.

Which seeing him in the vineyards, where he was lurking, came out to meet him, and roared at him in a hideous manner, and came up to him to destroy him.

It seemed that Samson and his parents lived in the hills.

Timnath was in a valley.

It was well known for its grape vineyards.

This lion was between the age of a cub and an adult.

It lunges at Samson.

Verses 6-10

Hiding the truth is often a sign of disobedience.

Samson did not tell his “father or his mother” about these things because his actions clearly violated the Nazirite vow (Lev. 11:27; Num. 6:6), as did the “feast” he gave, which in Hebrew refers to a drinking party.

Judges 14:6 "And the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and [he had] nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done."

"Came mightily upon him":

Stirred up and increased his courage and bodily strength.

"As he would have rent a kid":

As soon and as safely.

"He told not his father or his mother":

Lest by their means it should be publicly known.

For he wisely considered that it was not yet a fit time to awaken the jealousies and fears of the Philistines concerning him, as this would have done.

The spirit of the LORD filled Samson and strengthened him so greatly, that he killed this lion with his bare hands.

He did not tell anyone.

They probably would not have believed him anyway.

This was to show Samson himself, how strong he was with the power of God in him.

Judges 14:7 "And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well."

“Talked”:

Such conversation was not acceptable in the East, unless a couple was betrothed.

This is just a time of getting acquainted.

It seemed as Samson talked to her, he liked her even more.

Judges 14:8 "And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, [there was] a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion."

“He returned to take her”:

Usually a year until the wedding.

All the preliminaries being settled between the parents, he returned to Timnath to take his bride by the same road which he and his parents had travelled by before.

And remembering his killing the lion, very naturally turned aside to see what had become of the carcase.

"And, behold, there was a swarm of bees":

This has been objected to as improbable, because bees would not approach a putrefying body.

But as a considerable time had elapsed, it is very possible that either the mere skeleton was left, or that the heat of the sun had dried up the body and reduced it to the state of a mummy without decomposition.

As is said to happen often in the desert of Arabia.

This is speaking of another time, after the dowry has been paid and the transaction finished between the fathers.

This is speaking of the lion he had killed with his bare hands on a previous visit to the vineyard.

He turned aside at the same vineyard, and the carcase of the lion was there.

A swarm of bees had set up in this carcase, and they had even made honey there.

Judges 14:9 "And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion."

“He took thereof in his hands”:

Some scholars suggest that Samson violated his Nazirite standard by coming in contact with a dead body (see note on 13:5).

Others reason that (Numbers chapter 6), specifies the body of a person, not an animal.

Whether or not he sinned here, the context does show instances of him sinning.

The parents would not have eaten this honey, had they known it came from a carcase of a lion.
He and his parents ate this honey.

Verses 10-20

Samson had a motive for vengeance against the Philistines:

They solved his riddle by seducing his wife, and he had to pay them what he had promised.

So under the power of "the spirit of the LORD, he killed 30 Philistines who were the enemies of God, and plundered what he needed to pay his debt.

Judges 14:10 "So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do."

At Timnath, whom Samson had espoused.

The Targum is, "about the business of the woman;" and about the consummation of the marriage with her.

They all three went, the father, the mother, and the son, as appears from the preceding verse.

"Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do":

At the time of marriage.

This was the nuptial feast common in all nations.

But it seems the custom now and here was for the bridegroom to make it.

Whereas from other instances we learn, that the father of the bridegroom used to make it (Matthew 22:2).

And the Vulgate Latin version here renders it.

"And he made a feast for his son Samson":

The Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions add, seven days, and so long this feast was kept (Judges 14:12).

Now this marriage of Samson with a daughter of the Philistines was a type of the marriage of Christ with his people, especially with the Gentile church.

Such as were not of the commonwealth of Israel, but sinners of the Gentiles, very ignorant of divine things, reproached by the Jews, and their calling an offence to them.

And may fitly express the love of Christ to his church, though unworthy of it.

Which is a love of complacency and delight, arising from his own good will and pleasure, and not owing to any superior beauty, excellence, worth, or worthiness in them.

They being no better than others, children of wrath, even as others (see Judges 15:2).

As well as there is an agreement in the manner of his obtaining and betrothing her.

Which was by applying to his father to get her for him, and being gotten and given, be betrothed to her.

So Christ asked his people of his father to be his spouse, which request being obtained, he betrothed them to himself in righteousness.

And the Gospel feast, or ministry of the word, is kept and continued on account of it (see Psalm 21:2).

This going down of Samson's father to the woman is some sort of preparation for the groom.

Perhaps it was to tell her of his coming.

"Samson making a feast" was the wedding feast.

This was a custom of the days.

Judges 14:11 "And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him."

That is, the Philistines, the citizens of Timnath, when they saw that he was come to consummate his marriage.

"That they brought thirty companions to be with him":

To be the bridegroom's men, or children of the bride-chamber, as they are called (Matt. 9:15).

Or friends of the bridegroom (John 3:29), to keep him company during the nuptial feast.

This they did according to custom, and in honor and respect unto him.

Though some think, and so Josephus, that they were brought to be guards upon him.

Observing that he was a man of great might, strength, and courage, so that they were afraid of him, lest he should have some design upon them.

But it is not certain that there was anything very visible or terrible in him, more than in another man.

Which showed him to be of extraordinary courage and strength, since it was but at times the Spirit of the LORD came upon him.

And as yet he had done nothing to their knowledge which showed him to be such.

Had they indeed known of his encounter with the lion, they might have had such thoughts of him, but this they knew nothing of.

This is saying that the father and mother and 30 companions went out to meet Samson to be part of the wedding party.

Judges 14:12 "And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find [it] out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments:"

His thirty companions, very likely on the first day of the feast.

"I will now put forth a riddle unto you":

A secret, hidden, complicated thing, not easy to be understood.

A dark saying, wrapped up in figurative terms.

And this he proposed as an amusement to them, to exercise their wits.

Which it seems was usual to entertain guests with, and might be both pleasing and profitable.

"If ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast":

For so long the nuptial feast was usually kept (see Gen. 29:27).

If they could find it out.

And with clearness and certainty explain the riddle to him within that period of time, which was giving them time enough to do it in.

"Then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments":

That is, every man one of each.

By "sheets" he means, as Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret it, a covering of the body in the night next to the flesh, in which a man lies, and was made of linen.

Meaning either what we call shirts, or bed sheet.

And by change of raiment, a suit of clothes worn in the daytime.

"Riddle", in this verse, means hard questions, or dark questions.

The sheets, spoken of here, are linen garments worn next to the skin.

They might even be called shirts.

Samson had to be a wealthy man to offer such a valuable prize.

Judges 14:13 "But if ye cannot declare [it] me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it."

Explain the riddle in the space of time allowed.

"Then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments":

So many shirts and suits of apparel.

"And they said unto him, put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it":

Not thereby to judge whether they would agree to his proposals, but hereby suggesting that they accepted his terms and conditions.

Either to give or receive the above premium, if they did or did not hit on the explanation of the riddle.

Samson feels safe that they will not be able to give him the solution to the riddle.

It is interesting that there were 30 guests and the challenge was for 30 change of garments.

Perhaps it was one for each person there.

They have agreed, and want to hear the riddle.

Verses 12-14

The word translated "riddle" is translated elsewhere "hard questions" (1 Kings 10:1), "dark sayings" (Psalms 49:4; 78:2; Prov. 1:6), or "dark sentences" (Dan. 8:23).

The same word is used of Ezekiel's fable concerning the two eagles (Ezek. 17:2).

Judges 14:14 "And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle."

Out of a devouring eater, such as the lion is, came forth honey.

Or that was taken out of it, which Samson, and his father and mother ate of.

And which was the common food of some persons, as of John the Baptist.

"And out of the strong came forth sweetness":

Not only out of that which was strong in body while alive, but of a strong and ill scented, as the carcass of a dead lion is.

And out of that came forth honey, than which nothing is sweeter.

Josephus expresses it, "that which devours all things furnishes out pleasant food, when that itself is altogether unpleasant".

"And they could not in three days expound the riddle":

So long they labored to find it out, but then began to despair of it.

This would be a difficult thing, because no one but Samson knew that he had killed the lion.

Surely no one but Samson, knew of the honey in the carcass of the lion.

They could not figure this out.

Judges 14:15 "And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? [is it] not [so]?"

Not on the seventh day of the feast, for some time before that they applied to his wife, and she pressed him hard to disclose it.

But on the Sabbath day, as Kimchi, and so Jarchi says, on the seventh day of the week, not on the seventh day of the feast.

For it was the seventh day of the feast.

This is so clear, that the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, instead of the seventh, read the fourth day.

"That they said unto Samson's wife, entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle":

That is, persuade him to tell the meaning of it to her, that she might declare it to them.

"Lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire":

In which she now was, not as yet being taken home to her husband, and her in it.

This they said to terrify her, and make her persistent with Samson to explain the riddle to her, if he had any value for her, and her life.

"Have ye called us to take that we have?"

Invited them to the wedding feast, to strip them of their clothes, and even take their very shirts off of their backs, which they must have been obliged to part with, if they could not explain the riddle.

Or send for other suits and shirts from their own houses:

"Is it not so"?

Verily this is the case, nor can it be understood otherwise than a contrived business between thee and thy husband, to get our raiment, woolen and linen, from us.

Now it appears that the people he told the riddle to are Philistines.

They have threatened to burn her and her father's house, if she does not find out what the riddle means.

They are blaming her for inviting them to the wedding feast.

These feasts lasted 7 days.

They tried at first to figure out what it was, and when they could not, they threatened the bride to cause her to find out for them.

Verses 16-18

"Samson's wife wept":

She cheated and manipulated, working against Samson's expectations that the men must come up with the answer.

The men also cheated and threatened, having murder in their hearts (verse 15).

The battle with the men at Ashkelon, about 23 miles away, was a part of the war between Israel and Philistia.

Judges 14:16 "And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told [it] me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told [it] my father nor my mother, and shall I tell [it] thee?"

When she came to him to get out of him the explanation of the riddle, thinking that her tears would move him to it.

"And said, thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not":

Another artifice she used, well knowing he could not bear to have his affection called in question, which was now very strong, as is usual with newly married persons.

"Thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people":

Her countrymen, fellow citizens, and neighbor, and could not but be dear to her, and respected by her.

So that what affected and afflicted them must have some influence upon her.

"And hast not told it me":

That is, the explanation of it, otherwise it is likely she had heard the riddle itself told.

"And he said unto her, behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?"

His parents he was greatly indebted to, for whom he had the highest reverence and esteem.

Whose faithfulness and loyalty he had sufficient knowledge of, and yet he had not thought fit to impart it to them.

How therefore could she expect to be trusted with such a secret?

With whom he had not been long acquainted, to know whether she could keep it secret or not.

This is a very good question.

He probably knows that the Philistines are trying to find out the riddle through her.

Judges 14:17 "And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people."

Those that remained of the seven days, from the fourth to this time, as Kimchi seems rightly to interpret it.

Though some think she began to beseech him with tears, on the first day of the feast, to impart the secret to her for her own satisfaction.

And then, after the men had urged her on the fourth day to persuade her husband to it, she continued pressing him more earnestly with tears unto the seventh day.

"And it came to pass on the seven day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him":

Pressed him most earnestly with her entreaties, cries, and tears.

"And she told the riddle to the children of her people":

Though she knew it would be to her husband's detriment, and that he must be obliged to give them thirty sheets of linen, and as many suits of apparel, and though it is probable she had promised not to tell them.

We can quickly see that he can put no trust in her.

The minute he tells her the riddle she tells the Philistines.

It was on the seventh day in plenty of time for them to win the challenge.

Judges 14:18 "And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What [is] sweeter than honey? and what [is] stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle."

And so soon, enough to free them from the obligation they otherwise would have been under, to have given him the sheets and changes of raiment agreed unto.

"What is sweeter than honey?":

Nothing, at least that was known, sugar not being invented yet.

"And what is stronger than a lion?":

No creature is, it is the strongest among beasts (Prov. 30:30).

"And he said unto them, if ye had not ploughed with my heifer":

Meaning his wife, whom he compares to a heifer, young, wanton, and unaccustomed to the yoke.

And by "ploughing" with her, he alludes to such creatures being employed therein, making use of her to get the secret out of him, and then plying her closely to obtain it from her.

And this diligent application and search of theirs, by this means to inform themselves, was like ploughing up ground.

They got a discovery of that which before lay hid, and without which they could never have had the knowledge of, as he adds:

"Ye had not found out my riddle":

The explanation of it.

Ben Gersome and Abarbanel interpret ploughing of committing adultery with her.

In which sense the phrase is used by Greek and Latin writers.

But the first sense is best, for it is not said, "ploughed my heifer", but with her.

They answer Samson just in time to win the challenge.

Their answer is in a form they believe Samson would not recognize, but he quickly lets them know that he knows who told them.

The statement "plowed with my heifer" lets them know that Samson is aware his wife told them.

Judges 14:19 "And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house."

"His anger":

God blesses the one who had been wronged.

Samson's anger may be legitimate, righteous indignation against deceit (compare Mark 3:5).

The battle with the men at Ashkelon, about 23 miles away, was a part of the war between Israel and Philistia.

This may seem cruel, but we must remember that the LORD sent him to deliver the Israelites out of the hands of the Philistines.

Notice the Spirit of the LORD came upon him.

This gave him supernatural strength to kill these 30 Philistines.

He took the spoil from the thirty he killed and gave it to those who had answered the riddle.

His anger was against the Philistines, and against his wife for the treachery his wife had done to please them.

Judges 14:20 "But Samson's wife was [given] to his companion, whom he had used as his friend."

“Samson’s wife was given”:

Another act of treachery was done.

The Philistine father had no reason to assume that Samson would not be back, nor had Samson given word about not returning.

He, as a Philistine, did not want his daughter marrying the enemy.

Her parents probably thought that Samson would no longer want her as a wife, and gave her to Samson's best man at the wedding.

It seemed that Samson's friend also had been a Philistine.

It could even have been the one she told the riddle to.

Chapter 14 Questions

1. The woman that Samson saw in Timnath was a _____.
2. This was the tribal territory of _____.
3. The Israelites, at this time, were in the hands of the _____.
4. Samson was supposed to deliver the children of Israel from the _____.
5. What did Samson tell his father and mother?
6. What reaction did they have to his choice of women?
7. Who paid the dowry to the girl's father?
8. What did his parents call the Philistines in verse 3?
9. His father and mother knew not that it was of the _____.
10. The _____ _____ had placed Samson in the hands of the LORD.
11. Where did Samson go when he ran into the lion?

12. What made Samson strong enough to kill the lion?
13. How did Samson kill the lion?
14. Who did Samson tell about the lion?
15. When he came back into the vineyard, there was what in the carcase of the lion?
16. Who ate honey with him out of the carcase of the lion?
17. Who made the feast?
18. How many companions did his parents bring to the wedding feast?
19. What did Samson offer them, if they could figure out the riddle?
20. What did they give Samson, if they could not figure the riddle out?
21. What was the riddle?
22. What did the men get Samson's wife to ask him?
23. What did they threaten her with?
24. How long did she weep before him, before he told her the riddle?
25. The minute he tells her the riddle, she _____.
26. How did Samson let them know, he knew she told them?
27. How many men did he kill in Askelon?
28. Where did he get the garments to pay for his challenge?
29. Who was Samson's wife given to?