



Judges - Chapter Fourteen

II Judges 3:7-16:31 - The Downward Spiral of Israel's Apostasy (continues)

II.m Judges 13:1-16:31 - Samson (continues)

Summary of Chapter Fourteen

Samson saw a Philistine woman and desired her so he asked his parents to negotiate for her to become his wife. They protested, wanting a Hebrew wife for him, but he insisted and they did as he asked, unknowingly obeying the Lord's will.

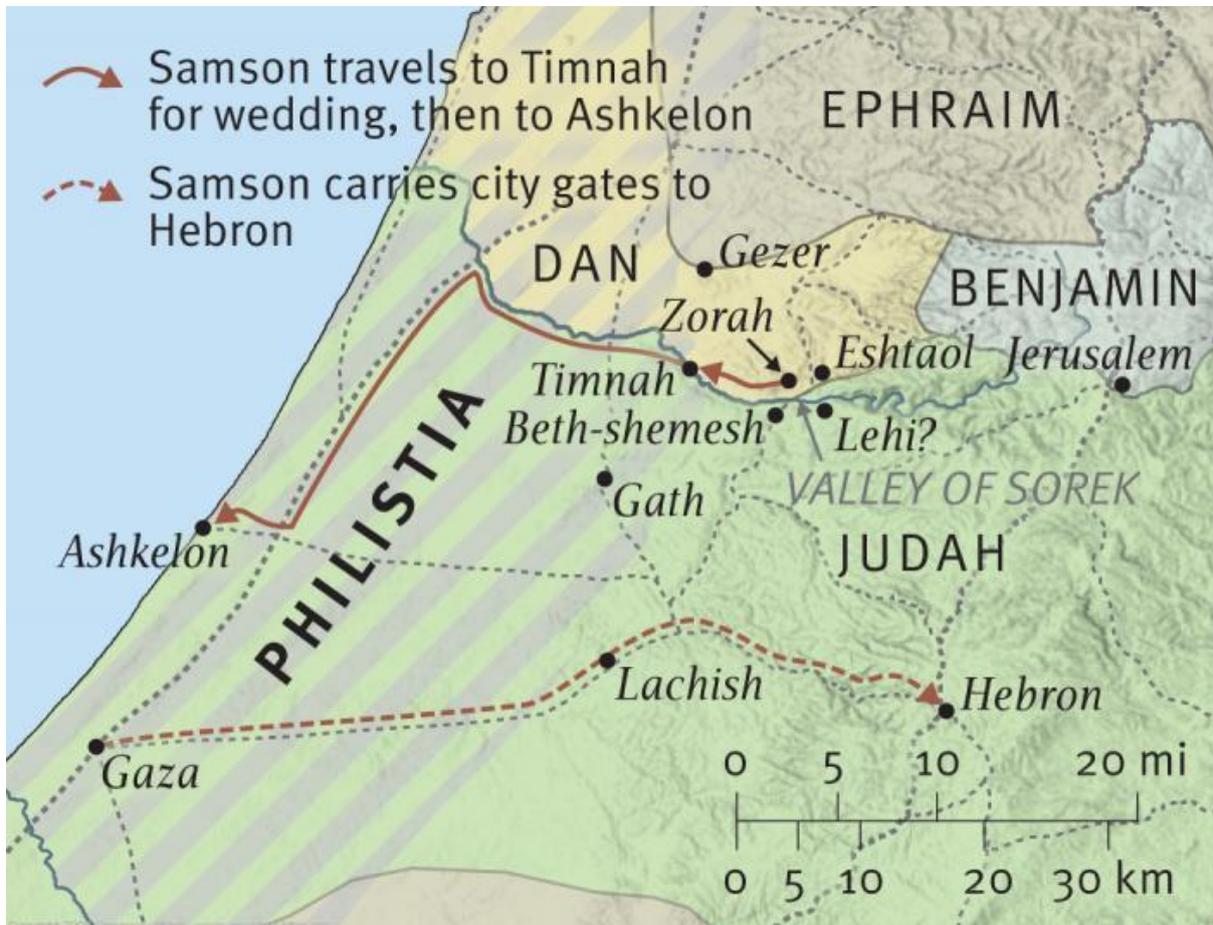
At his wedding feast, Samson told his thirty companions a riddle based on a feat of strength he had displayed. When they could not solve it, they enlisted his wife's help and she extracted the answer. In his rage at this trickery, Samson killed thirty Philistines to obtain the garments he owed his companions. In his absence, his wife was given to his best man.

II.m.ii Judges 14:1-15:20 - Samson and the Philistines, Part 1

Samson's exploits fall into two segments (Judges 14:1-15:20 and 16:1-31), each climaxing with a mass destruction of Philistines, followed by a comment about his judging. Within these are ten feats of strength and heroism, five in each segment. In three of these, the Spirit of the Lord 'rushed upon him' (feats 1, 2, and 5). Perhaps significantly, this did not happen in the second segment (Judges Chapter 16), when Samson was acting more on his own and increasingly falling out of touch with God, culminating with the Lord leaving him completely (Judges 16:20).

Part 1 recounts Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman and the resulting cycle of offence and retaliation. Marriages with unbelieving foreigners were prohibited for Israelites; refer to Genesis 24:2-3 and 26:34-35, Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:3, and Samson's demand for a wife was against the tradition in which a marriage

was arranged by the parents, as in Genesis 24:1-4 and 38:6. Despite this, and despite the mostly sinful life he led, God intended to use Samson for his own purposes.



Samson's Exploits

The Philistines ruled over Israel during Samson's lifetime, and Samson was raised up by God to begin to deliver Israel from them. Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman in Timnah led to a number of encounters with the Philistines, often resulting in their harm at Samson's hand.

II.m.ii.1 Judges 14:1-20 - Samson's Marriage

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Once Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw a Philistine woman.

Judges 14:1

Timnah is located at modern Tel Batash, which lies in the Shephelah or foothills near the southern bank of the Nahal (or dry river bed) Sorek. Excavations here have uncovered a thriving Philistine city during the period of the Judges, i.e.

during the Early Iron Age, with impressive fortifications constructed of mud-brick on stone.

At Timnah he saw a Philistine woman. This seemed to be a case of love at first sight for Samson. He saw this woman and he instantly wanted to marry her. However, it will be revealed that the hand of God seems to have been involved.

There is an interesting link here to the patriarch Judah, from whose descendants kings and the Messiah would come. It was in Timnah where he slept with his daughter in law Shelah and getting her pregnant, believing her to be a shrine prostitute. The account is told in Genesis Chapter 38.

² Then he came up, and told his father and mother, ‘I saw a Philistine woman 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 your kin, 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, because she pleases me.’

Judges 14:2-3

The uncircumcised Philistines is a title of derision since circumcision was a sign of covenant faithfulness by the Israelites. It is a title that is used on a number of occasions; refer to Judges 15:18, 1 Samuel 14:6, 17:26, 17:36, and 31:4, 2 Samuel 1:20, and 1 Chronicles 10:4.

Get her for me, because she pleases me is literally, ‘she is right in my eyes.’ What Samson really cared about was how things looked to himself, not how they looked to the Lord. This self-centred demand contrasts with being ‘right in the Lord’s eyes’ (Deuteronomy 6:18 and 12:25), and foreshadows the negative conclusions concerning the entire era, that everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6 and 21:25).

In demanding a Philistine wife, Samson showed a sinful disregard for his parents and for God’s will: <<Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly>> (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

Bound by romantic feelings, there are many people who still demand from God a mate out of God’s will. The command to the Israelites to not intermarry with the pagan nations around them is often applied to the Christian today because of what Paul has written: <<Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what

fellowship is there between light and darkness?>> (2 Corinthians 6:14). If someone marries an unbeliever or if someone becomes a Christian before their spouse, there are specific commands applying to their situation. However, the church should not be dogmatic in its approach to such relationships. There are many examples where believers are happily married to unbelievers with not detrimental impact on their faith. There are equally as many poor marriages that were arranged within church situations because it was deemed 'to be God's will' that they should do so. What is required is sound judgement and discernment in gauging the appropriateness of a given relationship. The apostle Paul clearly wrote that one must do all that is possible to stay in the marriage, and be the best spouse they can be; refer to 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

⁴ His father and mother did not know that this was from the Lord; for he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

Judges 14:4

This was from the Lord. Despite Israel's apostasy and Samson's unsavoury life, God would use Samson for his own purposes. Refer to Judges 13:16 and 16:20 for similar comments.

God did use Samson mightily; but God used Samson despite his sin, not because of it. It is fair to suppose that God may have used Samson in a far greater way if he made himself a clean vessel according to the principle of: *<<In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work>>* (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

As the rest of the chapter shows, some good ultimately came out of this ungodly marriage. Many Philistines were killed and they were kept off balance in their attempts to dominate the Israelites. However, none of that justified Samson's actions. Although God can make even the evil of man to serve his purposes, it never justifies the evil that man does.

For he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines. In accomplishing this purpose, God did not make a reluctant Samson pursue the Philistine woman for marriage. God allowed Samson to do what he wanted to do, although the act itself was sinful. God allowed it for reasons in both Samson's life and for reasons on a larger scale.

There is also the possibility that God was preparing the Philistines as he had done generations earlier with the other inhabitants of the land: *<<For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel*

in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed, and might receive no mercy, but be exterminated, just as the Lord had commanded Moses>> (Joshua 11:20).

⁵ Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. When he came to the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion roared at him. ⁶ The spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as one might tear apart a kid. 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 pleased Samson.

Judges 14:5-7

When he came to the vineyards of Timnah. Samson was dedicated to God with a lifelong vow of a Nazirite: *<<Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines>> (Judges 13:4-5).* Nazirites were to have nothing to do with grape products in any form: *<<they shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink; they shall drink no wine vinegar or other vinegar, and shall not drink any grape juice or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All their days as nazirites they shall eat nothing that is produced by the grape-vine, not even the seeds or the skins>> (Numbers 6:3-4).* Samson was dangerously close to significant compromise.

The spirit of the Lord rushed on him. The OT speaks many times of God's Spirit acting upon individuals, usually to empower them for some service for the whole people of God. In Judges this is described by the Spirit being upon (Othniel, 3:10; Jephthah, 11:29), clothing (Gideon, 6:34), stirring (Samson, 13:25), or rushing upon someone (Samson, v.6, v.19, and 15:14; and Saul, 1 Samuel 10:6, 10:10 and 11:6; and David, 1 Samuel 16:13).

He tore the lion apart with his bare hands as one might tear apart a kid. Although Samson flirted with compromise, both with his impending marriage and the vineyards of Timnah, he still had miraculous strength and courage because the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "If that roaring lion, that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour, find us alone among the vineyards of the Philistines, where is our hope? Not in our heels, he is swifter than we: not in our weapons, we are naturally unarmed: not in our hands, which are weak and languishing; but in the Spirit of God, by whom we can do all things. If God fights in us, who can resist us? There is a stronger lion in us than that against us." The Holy Spirit of God wants to come upon God's people and give them power

but power for something far more important than ripping apart lions. The Holy Spirit comes upon Christians and indwells them for the empowering to live for God as they should and for the power to tell others about Jesus effectively.

She pleased Samson. This does not mean that she was a good woman for Samson to be attracted to or to marry. It is possible to fall in love with someone who is actually a very bad match. This is why Proverbs 4:23 says: <<**Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life**>>, where keep it literally guard or protect. If a person does not guard their heart, they can and often does end up in trouble.

⁸ After a while he returned to marry her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and 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. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.

Judges 14:8-9

The carcass of the lion. Samson's contact with the dead lion violated his Nazirite vow, a status he was to maintain from birth to death.

He scraped it out into his hands, and went on, eating as he went. When Samson gathered honey from the dead carcass of a lion, he expressly violated his Nazirite vow, which stipulated that a Nazirite should never touch a dead body or carcass; refer to Numbers 6:6-7. Significantly, Samson did this after he was remarkably filled with the Holy Spirit. This shows that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit does not automatically make a person godlier. An outpouring of the Holy Spirit gives one the resources to be godlier, but it does not do it to them. A person can be wonderfully gifted by the Holy Spirit and yet very spiritually immature.

But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion. Samson did not tell his parents where he got the honey from because he knew it was a compromise of his Nazirite vow. Samson had consecration, or at least the appearance of it, without communion. This was only good for the sake of image. The empty nature of his consecration would eventually be evident.

In the killing of the lion and the sharing of the honey, Spurgeon saw a spiritual picture of the work of Jesus Christ for those who would come to him: "And what a type we have here of our Divine Lord and Master. Jesus, the conqueror of death and hell. He has destroyed the lion that roared upon us and upon him see our triumphant Lord laden with sweetness, holding it forth to all his brethren, and inviting them to share in his joy." Spurgeon had in view the same lion as did the apostle Peter: <<**Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a**

roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour>> (1 Peter 5:8).

In the same way, Samson shared the sweetness of his victory over the lion with others. Spurgeon pointed out that this is, by analogy, a pattern for the way Christians should share the Gospel:

- Samson brought the honey first to those nearest to him.
- Samson brought the honey in his hands, in the way available to him.
- Samson actually gave them some of the honey to taste.
- Samson brought the honey modestly, not boasting about killing the lion.

¹⁰ His father went down to the woman, and Samson made a feast there as the young men were accustomed to do. ¹¹ When the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.

Judges 14:10-11

Samson made a feast there. A feast is Hebrew *mishteh*. This word denotes a feast that especially includes alcohol, another violation of Samson's Nazirite vow.

It is unclear if this means that it was either Samson or his father who arranged the marriage feast. Culturally, it would normally be the bride's father who would make the arrangements as seen with Jacob's marriage feast: <<*Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.'* So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast>> (Genesis 29:21-22).

They brought thirty companions to be with him. It was not, and never has been too difficult to get many people to be part of a drinking feast.

The modest consumption of alcohol is not forbidden for Christians; in fact, Jesus drank wine on numerous occasions: <<*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'*>> (Luke 7:34 NIV). However, they need to be aware of the dangers that overconsumption can bring and also be mindful that they may have alcoholics in their fellowship. It would be wrong to bring such temptation upon such people and place them in harm's way, just as Samson did to himself in this situation.

¹² Samson said to them, 'Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments.

¹³ But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen

garments and thirty festal garments.’ So they said to him, ‘Ask your riddle; let us hear it.’¹⁴ He said to them,

‘Out of the eater came something to eat.

Out of the strong came something sweet.’

But for three days they could not explain the riddle.

Judges 14:12-14

Samson’s riddle, Hebrew *Khidah*, is the best example of a riddle in Scripture. Other examples include the queen of Sheba’s ‘hard questions’ for Solomon, the same Hebrew word, *khidah* in 1 Kings 10:1, and Daniel’s ability <<*to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems*>> (Daniel 5:12a).

God indicates that his words to Moses were clear and not in riddles (Numbers 12:8), yet he does allow his servants to sometimes speak to his people in a less clear manner: <<*O mortal, propound a riddle, and speak an allegory to the house of Israel*>> (Ezekiel 17:2), and: <<*I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them*>> (Hosea 12:10 NIV). Even Jesus often spoke in a manner that was hard for his followers to interpret: <<*Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them*>> (John 10:6), thus, towards the end of his earthly ministry, he spoke clearly: <<*I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father*>> (John 16:25).

The seven days of the feast. This period was usual for a wedding feast in the region as seen in Jacob’s marriage to Leah: <<*Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.*>> *Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife*>> (Genesis 29:27-28), and was the period of time that certain festivals were celebrated, such as the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 23:15).

I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments. This literally describes a fine suit of clothes one would wear at an important occasion; therefore thirty fine suits were wagered. Like most betting, this friendly wager would turn into something not quite so friendly.

Out of the eater came something to eat. This was a clever riddle, using his recent experience of finding honey inside the carcass of the lion, and Samson showed that even if he was weak morally he was not weak intellectually.

¹⁵ On the fourth day they said to Samson’s wife, ‘Coax your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father’s house

with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?’¹⁶ So Samson’s wife wept before him, saying, ‘You hate me; you do not really love me. You have asked a riddle of my people, but you have not explained it to me.’ He said to her, ‘Look, I have not told my father or my mother. Why should I tell you?’¹⁷ She wept before him for the seven days that their feast lasted; and because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her. Then she explained the riddle to her people.¹⁸ The men of the town 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 ploughed with my heifer,
you would not have found out my riddle.’

Judges 14:15-18

The fourth day. The Hebrew text has ‘seventh day’ (v.18); the NRSVA translation and others are based on Greek and Syriac versions. The difference is only one letter in Hebrew, which could easily have been miscopied by a scribe in an early manuscript. Fourth fits better with the immediate context since v.14 mentions three days of futile guessing about the riddle.

So Samson’s wife wept before him, saying, ‘You hate me; you do not really love me’. Samson’s Philistine wife knew how to manipulate the situation and how to make herself a burden to her husband until she got what she wanted from him: <<*It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful wife*>> (Proverbs 21:19), and: <<*I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:26). Some people will make themselves a burden to their spouses until they get what they want. This tactic is used because it often works in the short term; but it can poison the relationship and ends up costing more than it gains.

Because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her. A woman easily manipulated the world’s strongest man. This weakness of Samson will later be the cause of his downfall. The willingness of Samson’s Philistine wife to side with her people against Samson shows a fundamental weakness in their marriage. She did not fulfil the idea essential to marriage of leaving one’s father and mother to be joined in a one flesh relationship to their spouse (Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5).

Yet this also shows why it was wrong for Samson to marry a Philistine. There can be no expectation that someone who does not love the God of Israel to build a marriage on God's principles. Ruth, a Moabite, accepted God before she even met Boaz: <<***But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God'***>> (Ruth 1:16). However, the reason Samson's wife cooperated against her husband was also somewhat complicated. She acted out of fear because of their threat: **we will burn you and your father's house with fire**. If she told Samson about the threats, he could have more than handled the situation. She apparently did not feel safe with Samson, even though he would have been her best protection in that situation.

If you had not ploughed with my heifer. This may have been a proverbial saying in Samson's time since heifers were occasionally used for ploughing: <<***The elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked, one that has not pulled in the yoke***>> (Deuteronomy 21:3). Here, it is a coarse reference to their manipulation of Samson's wife. Samson's use of this proverb showed the anger and bitterness he felt at being manipulated. Samson's wife won what she wanted through manipulation, but she lost her husband's heart.

¹⁹ Then the spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he went down to Ashkelon. He killed thirty men of the town, took their spoil, and gave the festal garments to those who had explained 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.

Judges 14:19-20

Then the spirit of the Lord rushed on him. The Spirit of the Lord did not come upon Samson to avenge the hurt feelings of a husband. God's strategy was larger: <<***for he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines***>> (v.4). Therefore he used this occasion to pour out his Spirit on Samson to fight against the Philistines.

He killed thirty men of the town, took their spoil, and gave the festal garments to those who had explained the riddle. Samson paid off the bet, but he did it at the expense of the Philistines. He killed thirty of these enemies of Israel, and gave their garments to satisfy the debt.

Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man. Samson won the battle, but lost the war. His wife left him and went to his best man. This is directly opposite to the teaching of John the Baptist: <<***He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled***>> (John 3:29).

It is interesting to think what Samson and his wife might say if they went in for marriage counselling.

What Samson might say to a marriage counsellor: “I love my wife, but it seems that we are not moving in the same direction. All I hear is nag, nag, nag; I finally do what she nags me to do, but by then I’m angry and the situation is worse than ever. I need to feel that she supports me, and that she is on my side. I think she wants to give up on the marriage, if she has not already.”

What Samson’s wife might say to a marriage counsellor: “My husband is a good guy, but he does not meet my needs. It was love at first sight for us, but now things have gone downhill. There are things I need him to do and to be that he just cannot, or will not. He does not respond to my needs and then we just get into a big fight, and no one is happy. I wonder if he loves me anymore.”

Samson was at fault for not guarding his heart against falling in love with a woman he had no business falling in love with. He was at fault for not founding the marriage on God’s principles. He was also at fault for not responding to his wife’s manipulations with love, free from anger.

At the same time, Samson’s wife was at fault for siding with others against her husband. She was at fault for not telling her husband what the real problem was. And she was at fault for manipulating her husband by being such a bother until she got her way. Most of all, she was at fault for giving up on the marriage. Samson did not leave her; she left him.

One might agree with the comments of Charles Spurgeon: “Samson himself is a riddle. He was not only a riddle-maker; but he was himself an enigma very difficult to explain.”