

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 14

This chapter treats of Samson's courtship, and marriage of a Philistine woman, (^{<0740>}Judges 14:1-5) of his meeting with a young lion as he went courting, and of his slaying it, and afterwards finding honey in it, (^{<0746>}Judges 14:6-9), of a riddle which he framed out of this incident, and put to his companions at his marriage to solve, giving them seven days to do it in, with a promise of a reward, (^{<0740>}Judges 14:10-14) and of their solving it by means of his wife, who got the secret from him, (^{<0745>}Judges 14:15-18), which led him to slay thirty Philistines, to make good his promise of thirty sheets and changes of raiment, and to leave his newly married wife, who was given to his companion, (^{<0749>}Judges 14:19,20).

Ver. 1. *And Samson went down to Timnath*, etc.] 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, (^{<0657>}Joshua 15:57 19:43). Judah is said to go up to it, because the place where he lived lay below it, (^{<0383>}Genesis 38:13), but Samson is said to go down to it, because he lived above it. The Jews ^{f275} 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 ^{f276} approves of the former. According to Bunting ^{f277}, 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; or, in other words, on sight of her fell in love with her.

Ver. 2. *And he came up, and told his father and his mother*, etc.] Of his passion of love, being desirous of having their approbation and consent, in which he acted a dutiful part, and what became him; and may be an example to children to advise 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, does not go about to hide anything from his parents, or colour things over, or conceal her descent, but frankly tells them she was a Philistine woman, which he knew would at once furnish out 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 entreat with the woman and her friends about the marriage of her to him.

Ver. 3. *Then his father and his mother said unto him,* etc.] What he might expect, and doubtless did expect:

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? none in their own family, nor in the tribe of Dan, nor among the whole nation of Israel, but must go among the uncircumcised Philistines; for though they were not of the seven nations of the Canaanites, with whom marriage was forbidden, yet they not only dwelt where they did, and where the Israelites should, but were idolaters and impure persons, and therefore affinity should not be contracted with them, as being of a dangerous consequence, which might entice to idolatry. Ben Gersom observes, that their Rabbins say he made her a proselyte first, though he did not acquaint his parents with it, and so Abarbinel; but this seems not likely, for, had this been the case, he would have had an easy and ready reply to this objection of theirs:

and Samson said unto his father, get her for me, for she pleaseth me well; or “is right in mine eyes”ⁱ²⁷⁸; not only his eyes were taken with her beauty or external form, but it was right in his sight, in his judgment, to marry her; he having an impulse upon his mind from the Spirit of God unto it, though he did not let his parents know of it, but left them to conclude it sprung from a strong affection to her person. Abarbinel observes, that he only addressed his father, and not his mother, she being most vehemently against the match, and expressing more uneasiness at it than his father did;

but it is most likely that he addressed his father particularly, because he was the proper person to negotiate this affair for him.

Ver. 4. *And his father and mother knew not that it was of the Lord,* etc.]

That he should marry this uncircumcised Philistine; Samson knew it was, and that his desire of having her in marriage did not arise from carnal affection to her merely, being captivated with her beauty and external form, for she was not so very fair, her younger sister was fairer than she, (~~0719D~~Judges 15:2) but he perceived it was the mind and will of God that he should take such a person to wife, by the impulse of the Spirit of God upon him, pointing it, unto him, inclining and urging him to it, suggesting the end and design of it, and the opportunity it would give him of quarrelling with the Philistines, and taking vengeance on them; but this his parents were ignorant of, nor did he let them know that this was of God:

that he sought an occasion against the Philistines; in this way, by this means; they might know he sought to get an opportunity to be avenged on them for their oppression, and to attempt the deliverance of Israel; but they knew not that it was the will of God that a way should be opened for it by this means. Samson might be directed by the Lord to reason thus in his mind, that if he proposed to the Philistines to marry one of their daughters, and they should reject his proposal, this would give him a reason to fall out with them, and fall upon them; and if they should agree to such a match, he might expect they would be kind to him, and to his people for his sake, being in alliance with them, or he should resent it, and take occasion from hence to come to a quarrel with them:

for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel; had invaded their country, and dwelt in their cities, and made them tributary to them, and used them ill; which Samson observing, was provoked to seek an opportunity of avenging the injuries done them, and of delivering them, and he was directed to it this way.

Ver. 5. *Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to*

Timnath, etc.] 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: these creatures, though now more rare in those parts, were at this time frequent, and in later times: (see ^{<0173>}1 Samuel 17:34 ^{<1133>}1 Kings 13:24 20:36) and several writers ^{f279} make mention of lions in Mesopotamia and Syria; and Strabo ^{f280}, and Pliny ^{f281} speak of a city in Phoenicia near Sidon, called the city of lions, because perhaps it had been much infested with them; and for a like reason it may be some cities in the tribes of Judah and Simeon were called Lebaoth and Bethlebaoth, (^{<0152>}Joshua 15:32 19:6).

Ver. 6. *And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him*, etc.] The Spirit of might from the Lord, as the Targum, inspiring him with courage and intrepidity of mind, and increasing his bodily strength:

and he rent him as he would rend a kid; as he came up to him to seize him, he laid hold on him and strangled him, as Josephus ^{f282} says, caught him by the throat, and tore it out; for it does not seem that the carcass was torn to pieces, or limb from limb, by what follows; and this he did with as much ease as if he had had only a kid to deal with:

and he had nothing in his hand; not a staff to keep it off, nor a spear, sword, or knife to stab it with: in this Samson was a type of Christ, who has destroyed our adversary the devil, compared to a roaring lion, (^{<0118>}1 Peter 5:8) to a lion for his strength, cruelty, and voraciousness; to a roaring lion, making a hideous noise and stir when the Gospel was carried unto the Gentiles, and they were about to be called and espoused to Christ; from among whom he was cast out, and by no other weapon than the ministration of the Gospel, accompanied with the power of Christ, and his Spirit:

but he told not his father or his mother what he had done; when he overtook them, as he quickly did, he said not a word to them of his meeting with a lion and slaying it; which, as it showed his modesty in not blazing abroad his wonderful and heroic actions, in which also he was a type of Christ, but his great prudence in concealing this, lest his great strength should be known too soon, and the Philistines be upon their guard against him, or seek to dispatch him privately; though no doubt he had pondered this in his own mind, and considered it as an omen and presage of the advantage he should have over the Philistines his enemies, whom he should as easily overcome as he had that lion, and that without any instrument of war.

Ver. 7. *And he went down, and talked with the woman*, etc.] Entered into a conversation with her, that he might the better judge of her other qualifications, besides that of outward form and beauty, whether she would be a suitable yoke fellow for him; and he talked with her about marriage, and proposed it to her, or talked about her to her father and near relations; and, as the Targum expresses it, asked the woman, not only asked of her consent, but demanded her of her friends: it may refer, as Abarbinel observes, to his father, that he went down and talked with the woman and with her relations about her, concerning the affair of his son's marriage with her:

and she pleased Samson well; he liked her conversation as well as her person, and the more he conversed with her, the more agreeable she was to him, and the more desirous he was to marry her. Though some observe from hence, that she did not please the father of Samson as himself; so Abarbinel.

Ver. 8. *And after a time he returned to take her*, etc.] Matters being agreed on, and settled on both sides, and the espousals made, he and his parents returned, and, at the proper usual time for the consummation of the marriage, he went again to Timnath for that purpose. It is in the Hebrew text, "after days"^{f283}, which sometimes signifies a year, (see ^{<004B>}Genesis 4:3 ^{<0130>}Exodus 13:10) and so Ben Gersom interprets it, that a year after this woman became Samson's wife (i.e. betrothed to him) he returned to take her to himself to wife; and it seems, adds he, that twelve months were given her to prepare herself; and some considerable time must have elapsed, as appears from what had happened to the carcass of the lion, next related:

and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion: just before he came to Timnath he thought of the lion he had slain some time ago, and he went a little out of the way to see what was become of it, or had happened to it. Josephus says ^{f284}, when he slew it he threw it into a woody place, perhaps among some bushes, a little out of the road; for which reason it had not been seen and removed, and was in a more convenient place for what was done in it:

and, behold, [there was] a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion; and though naturalists ^{f285} tell us that bees are averse to flesh, and will not touch any, yet in the course of time that the carcass of this lion had lain, its flesh might have been clean eaten off by the fowls of the air, or was quite dried away and consumed, so that it was nothing but a mere skeleton; a bony carcass, as the Syriac version. Josephus ^{f286} says, the swarm was in the breast of the lion; and it is no more unlikely that a swarm of bees should settle in it, and continue and build combs, and lay up their honey there, than that the like should be done in the skull of Onesilus king of Cyprus, when hung up and dried, as Herodotus ^{f287} relates. Besides, according to Virgil ^{f288}, this was a method made use of to produce a new breed of bees, even from the corrupt gore and putrid bowels of slain beasts; and Pythagoras ^{f289} observes, they are produced from thence. This may be an emblem of those sweet blessings of grace, which come to the people of Christ through his having destroyed Satan the roaring lion, and all his works; particularly which came to the poor Gentiles, when the devil was cast out from them, and his empire there demolished.

Ver. 9. *And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating,* etc.]

Josephus ^{f290} says he took three honeycombs, he means three pieces of the honeycomb, and ate the honey as he went along to Timnath; which he might do without touching the carcass of the lion, and defiling himself thereby, which, as a Nazarite, he was more especially to be careful of:

and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat; who went down with him to the consummation of the marriage, and from whom he had turned a little aside; and now overtook them, and to whom he gave some of his honey to eat, which, having travelled some way, might be grateful to them. The above writer takes no notice of this, but says he gave of it to the young woman whom he betrothed, when he came to her; but of that the text makes no mention:

but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion; either lest they should scruple eating it, being taken out of such a carcass; or that the riddle, which perhaps he meditated as he came along eating the honey, might not be found out, which might more easily have been done, had this fact been known by any.

Ver. 10. *So his father went down unto the woman*, etc.] At Timnath, whom Samson had espoused; the Targum is,

“about the business of the woman;”

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:

for Samson made 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, (see Gill on “^{<412D>}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, (^{<414D>}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 ^{<415D>}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 got and given, he betrothed 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, (^{<421D>}Psalms 21:2 ^{<416D>}Hosea 2:19 ^{<417D>}Matthew 22:2-4).

Ver. 11. *And it came to pass; when they saw him*, etc.] 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 bridechamber, as they are called, (^{<1015>}Matthew 9:15) or friends of the bridegroom, (^{<1019>}John 3:29) to keep him company during the nuptial feast: this they did according to custom, and in honour and respect unto him; though some think, and so Josephus ^{f291}, 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, that 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.

Ver. 12. *And Samson said unto them*, etc.] His thirty companions, very likely on the first day of the feast:

I will now put forth a riddle to you: a secret, hidden, abstruse 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 you can certainly declare it unto me within the seven days of the feast; for so long the nuptial feast was usually kept, (see ^{<1027>}Genesis 29:27,28). 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.

Ver. 13. *But if ye cannot declare it unto me*, etc.] 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.

Ver. 14. *And he said unto them, out of the eater came forth meat,* etc.] 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 scent, as the carcass of a dead lion is, and out of that came forth honey, than which nothing is sweeter. Josephus^{f292} 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 laboured to find it out, but then began to despair of it.

Ver. 15. *And it came to pass on the seventh day,* etc.] 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 importunate 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, woollen and linen, from us.

Ver. 16. *And Samson’s wife wept before him,* etc.] 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 neighbour, 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 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 fidelity and taciturnity 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, not long enough to know whether she could keep it or not?

Ver. 17. *And she wept before him the seven days, while the feast lasted,* etc.] 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. Some, as Abarbinel observes, and to whom he seems to incline, think there were fourteen days, seven days before the festival began, on the last of which they importuned her to

try to get the secret from him, (^{<07415>}Judges 14:15), and that she continued pressing all the second seven days; but it seems quite clear that it was at the beginning of the seven days of the feast that the riddle was put, which was to be explained within that time, (^{<07412>}Judges 14:12)

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.

Ver. 18. *And the men of the city said unto him, on the seventh day, before the sun went down,* etc.] 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. Julian the emperor ^{f293}, in commendation of figs, shows, from various authors, that nothing is sweeter than they, excepting honey:

and what is stronger than a lion? no creature is, it is the strongest among beasts, (^{<2880>}Proverbs 30:30). Homer ^{f294} gives the epithet of strong to a lion:

and he said unto them, if ye had not ploughed with my heifer; meaning his wife, whom he compares to an heifer, young, wanton, and unaccustomed to the yoke ^{f295}; 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 Abarbinel interpret ploughing of committing adultery with her; in which sense the phrase is used by Greek and Latin writers ^{f296}; but the first sense is best, for it is not said, "ploughed my heifer", but with her.

Ver. 19. *And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him*, etc.] The Spirit of might from the Lord, as the Targum; which filled him with zeal and courage, animating him to the following undertaking, and increased his bodily strength to perform it:

and he went down to Ashkelon; one of the five principal cities of the Philistines; it lay near the Mediterranean sea, and, according to Bunting ^{f297}, was twenty four miles from Timnath; why he went so far, is not easy to say; some think there was some grand solemnity or festival observed there at this time, which he knew of, when persons put on their best suits of apparel, and such he wanted: and slew thirty men of them; in vindication of which, it may be observed, that Samson was now raised up of God to be judge of Israel; and that he acted now as such, and under the direction and impulse of the Spirit of God, and the persons he slew were the common enemies of Israel; and if now observing a festival in honour of their gods, they were justly cut off for their idolatry:

and took their spoil; their clothes off their backs, stripped them of their apparel, and even of their shirts, all which he brought away with him: and here it may be observed, that though Samson was a Nazarite, yet not a common one, and was an extraordinary person, and not in all things bound to the law of the Nazarites; at least that law was dispensed with in various instances relative to him, as taking honey out of the carcass of the lion, and here stripping dead bodies which were defiling, and other things:

and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle; to the thirty companions, to whom it was proposed, each man a suit of apparel taken from the thirty men he slew at Ashkelon, and sheets or shirts also no doubt, though not expressed. Indeed some have thought, because they did not find out the riddle of themselves, he did not give them the whole premium, and that by their own consent:

and his anger was kindled; against his wife, for her treachery and unfaithfulness to him, and against his companions for their deceitful usage of him, and against the citizens of the place, who perhaps laughed at him, being thus tricked and deceived:

and he went up to his father's house; left his wife, and her relations, and his companions, and the men of Timnath, and betook himself to his father's house again, as if he had been never married; his parents very probably had returned before him.

Ver. 20. *But Samson's wife was given to his companion*, etc.] By her father, and with her consent, both being affronted and provoked by Samson leaving her, who judged her not only to be injured, but hereby discharged from him, and free to marry another:

and whom he had used as his friend; though there were thirty of them that were his companions, yet there was one of them that was the principal of them, and was the most intimate with him, whom he used in the most friendly manner, and admitted to a more free conversation than the rest, the same that is called the friend of the bridegroom, (~~405~~ John 3:29) while the others were called the children of the bridechamber, (~~405~~ Matthew 9:15). It is not unlikely that this person had too much intimacy with Samson's wife before, and so had the secret of the riddle from her, and so very readily married her, as soon as Samson departed; and all this furnished out an occasion and opportunity, which Samson sought for, to be revenged on the Philistines, as in the following chapter.