

JUDGES

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 13

1. Who were the oppressors of Israel in the days of Samson?
2. How long did they oppress Israel?
3. Of what tribe was Samson a member?
4. What kind of vow was Samson to keep throughout his life?
5. What was the name of Samson's father?
6. Could Samson keep his vow and drink wine?
7. Could Samson have his hair cut and keep his vow?
8. Could Samson eat of unclean animals and keep his vow?
9. Could Samson eat grapes and still keep his vow?
10. What kind of animal did Samson's father offer to the angel?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 14

- Vv. 1-11 *Preparations for Samson's marriage in Philistia.* Samson saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. He asked his father and mother to arrange for marriage. They hesitated but were not firm in opposing the marriage. Consequently, arrangements were made for the marriage; and Samson, his mother, and his father went down to Philistia for the wedding feast.
- Vv. 12-18 *Samson's riddle.* The famous riddle of Samson—"Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweet"—arose out of his experience with the lion. He had killed the lion and later had found bees with honey in the carcase. He had taken this honey and

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eaten it. He challenged the Philistines at the marriage feast. He said he would give them thirty changes of raiment if they guessed his riddle. If they could not guess it, they were to give him an equal amount of clothing. After seven days the Philistines persuaded his wife to find out the meaning. She then told her friends; and as a result, Samson was expected to award the prize.

- Vv. 19-20 *Samson's first slaughter of the Philistines.* Since the Philistines had tricked Samson into revealing the meaning himself, Samson was enraged. He went and slew thirty Philistines and gave their clothing to the scheming lords of the Philistines. From this point forward, he becomes the great protagonist against the Philistines on behalf of Israel.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Ruined character often begins at home.* Samson's unbridled passion was evident to his parents, but they were not strong enough to oppose him. The Scripture writer says that it was of the Lord to find an occasion against the Philistines. Sometimes even what appears bad can turn out for the good; but more often than not, such a spoiled child as Samson proves to be a grief to his parents.
2. *Broken vows lead to broken hearts.* Samson was a Nazarite. As a Nazarite he was not supposed to eat anything unclean. He was not even to touch a dead body. He not only touched the carcass of the dead lion, but took food out of it and ate it. This was the first of

the parts of his vow which he broke. God suffered long with him; but when he openly flaunted his breaking of his oath by allowing his hair to be cut, the Spirit of the Lord departed from him (16:20).

3. *Affairs of the heart run deep.* The Philistines used Samson's wife to find out the meaning of his riddle. Her love for him was not true, but Samson was shocked when he found marriage vows were so lightly esteemed among the Philistines as to allow his father-in-law to give his wife to another man. When he learned that his wife had been married to another, he brought a great destruction upon the land of the Philistines. Many men have committed heinous crimes because the marriage vows which have been exchanged are lightly esteemed by their partners. In a very real sense, they twain become one; and any violation of this principle brings great distress.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Samson and the Woman of Timnath 14:1-7

And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

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.

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.

4 But his father and 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.

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.

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.

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

1. *Where was Timnath?* 14:1

Timnath appears in many different place names. For example, Timnath-serah appeared in Joshua (19:50 and 24:30). A town by the name of Timnath is mentioned in Joshua 15:57 and located in the southern part of the hill country of Judah, some eight miles west of Bethlehem. The Timnath where Samson went to get his bride must have been a town on the northern border of Judah (Joshua 15:10). This place lay between Beth-shemesh and Ekron. This place was assigned to Dan (Joshua 19:43). Being on the frontier, it must have changed hands from time to time. Ahaz took it from the Philistines (II Chronicles 28:18), and we learn from Assyrian inscriptions that Sennacherib captured a Tamna after the battle of Alteka before he attacked Ekron. A deserted ruin called Tibneh now stands on the southern slopes of the Wady es Surar, or the valley of Sorek. The spot is thus two miles west of Beth-shemesh, where there are a spring and evident signs of antiquity.

2. *Why did Samson ask his parents to get a wife for him?*
14:2

It was not customary in the era of the judges for a boy to make arrangements for his own marriage. Throughout patriarchal times the father made arrangements for the marriage of his son. Abraham sent Eliezer to seek a

wife for Isaac (Genesis 24), and Jacob arranged with Hamor for Shechem, Hamor's son, to marry Dinah, Jacob's daughter (Genesis 34). Such a custom prevails today, demanding that a man have a near kinsman to speak to the father of his intended bride. When the dowry has been arranged, an engagement is announced. After considerable time, a wedding feast is held; and the marriage is consummated.

3. *Why did Samson's parents try to discourage his intentions?* 14:3

Manoah and his wife called the Philistines by the same epithet used by David when he met Goliath. They looked upon the people as "uncircumcised Philistines." There was no stigma upon the Philistines because they failed to practice the rite of circumcision insofar as any physical strength or weakness may have been involved. The stigma arose from the fact of their not being under the covenant which God made with Abraham. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant. Those who were circumcised belonged to God. These Philistines were descendants of Ham and were not a part of the covenant nation of God. As a result, Samson's parents felt it was inadvisable for him to marry such a woman. They would have much preferred his marrying some girl from Israel.

4. *In what way was God seeking an occasion against the Philistines?* 14:4

Christians believe all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28). Looking back upon many unfortunate circumstances, Christians can still see the hand of God in their lives. Such was the interpretation of the relationship of Samson with the woman of Timnath. The author of the book of Judges declares it was God's will for strife to arise between the Israelites and the Philistines. Samson was an instrument in God's hand. This does not mean God approved of Samson's intentions to

marry a wife from among the uncircumcised Philistines. God often uses the wickedness of men to bring honor and glory to His Name. He works out His will in spite of the weakness of men.

5. *Were lions plentiful in Palestine?* 14:5

Samson met a lion on the way down from his home in Dan to the home of the father of his bride-to-be in Philistia. Benaiah, one of David's mighty men, distinguished himself by killing a lion in a pit in the time of snow (II Samuel 23:20). Such wild animals do not seem to be numerous in the Promised Land, but one of the curses which was pronounced upon the people when they turned their backs upon God was the sending of wild animals among the Israelites (Leviticus 26:22). We do not read of the kings of Israel or Judah going on lion hunts or of the people themselves engaging in such pursuits of wild beasts. This indicates the scarcity of such wild animals in Israel. Such a reference as this of Samson's killing a lion is unusual by its very nature.

6. *Why did Samson not tell his parents about killing the lion?* 14:6

One of the parts of Samson's Nazarite vow was his oath to refrain from touching a dead body. When he killed a lion, he violated this part of his vow. He must have refused to tell his parents about this encounter because he knew of their desire for him to keep his vow. He was not proud of this feat of strength, for he was unwilling to keep his vow perfectly.

Samson's Feast and Riddle 14:8-20

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.

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.

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

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

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:

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.

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.

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?

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?

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.

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.

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.

20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

7. *Why did Samson not tell his parents where he got the honey?* 14:9

Another part of Samson's vow was his oath not to eat any unclean food. The people of Israel were allowed to eat honey. The land is described as a land flowing with milk and honey; but since the honey was in the sun-bleached carcase of a dead lion, the food would be unclean. Even Samson's mother had been told by the angel who announced Samson's birth that she should not eat any unclean food. If Samson had told his parents where he got the honey, his mother at least would have refused to eat it. He also would have revealed his violation of his Nazarite vow.

8. *Why did the Philistines give Samson thirty companions?* 14:11

Commentators are divided over the reason for the Philistines providing thirty young men to be with Samson. They ask whether it was to honor the bridegroom or to watch him. From the first, suspicion must have been in the Philistines' mind as this passionate, young Israelite

came among them. It must have seemed necessary to have as many as thirty to one in order to awe Samson. In the course of a feast there often would be quarrels. Without a strong guard on the Hebrew from Dan, Timnath might have been in danger.

9. *Where did Samson get the idea for his riddle?* 14:12

Samson's experience with the lion must have been a traumatic episode. In the course of the wedding feast, the company fell to composing riddles. Samson, probably annoyed by the Philistines who watched every movement, gave them his riddle. The terms he proposed were quite fair. In his riddle, we see a man perfectly self-reliant, full of easy superiority, courting danger, and defying his opponents. The thirty may win if they can. In that case, he was willing to pay a forfeit. When he put forth the riddle he couched it in these words, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." The riddle itself is a curiosity of old world banter. Some see in it a kind of gospel for the Philistines. It is true that like many witty sayings, the riddle had a range of meaning far wider than Samson intended. Any adverse influence conquered, any temptation mastered, any difficulty overcome, any struggle of faithfulness will supply us not only with happy recollections but also with arguments against infidelity. Anyone who can glory in his tribulations that have brought experience and hope, whether he be in bonds and imprisonments, or at liberty, can use this riddle. Vigor comes from what threatens life; joy comes out of sorrow. The man who walks with God is helped by the forces which oppose him. Samson demanded, however, a particular interpretation of his riddle.

10. *Did Samson gamble with his riddle?* 14:12, 13

There was no gamble involved in the proposal Samson made to the Philistines. It was a promise on his part to

give them a reward if they could find the answer to his riddle. On the other hand, if he was able to propound a riddle which defied them, they in turn were to reward him with thirty changes of garments and thirty sheets. The reward was proportionate to the number of companions given to be with Samson. It was a matter of each of his companions giving a reward to him. He probably never entertained the thought of their being able to learn the meaning of his riddle, but he was willing to reward each of them if such an event came to pass.

11. *How long did Samson's wife try to learn his riddle?*
14:17

His wife wept before him during the seven days of the banquet. Such a statement is not at variance with the statement made in verse fifteen. The woman had evidently already come to Samson every day with her entreaties from simple curiosity. Samson resisted them until the seventh day. At that time she became more urgent than ever because of the threat on the part of the Philistines. On the seventh day he finally told her, and she immediately went to those who had enticed her to wheedle the answer out of her husband. As a result the Philistines were able to come to Samson before sundown and give the answer to his riddle.

12. *What was the meaning of Samson's answer to the Philistines?* 14:18

Samson said that they would have been unable to find out the meaning of his riddle if they had not used his wife unfairly. John Milton in his poem, "Samson Agonistes," puts the answer in poetical form by saying, "You had not found out my answer I trow; if with my heifer you did not plow." It is not very complimentary to refer to his wife as a heifer, but the meaning of his statement is quite clear.

13. *Why did Samson kill the thirty men?* 14:19

He was angry. He had promised the thirty men who were his companions at the wedding feast that he would give them each a change of raiment and thirty sheets of cloth. He went out to find thirty men whom he could kill. He evidently took their garments and gave them to his companions. The thirty whom he killed were evidently not the thirty who were given to be his companions.

14. *How did the Spirit of the Lord cause this?* 14:19

God empowered him. The Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol according to the statement made in Judges 13:25. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, he was evidently able to perform deeds which he was not physically equipped to do without God's help. It was a supernatural gift; and as long as he was keeping his Nazarite vow, the Lord was with him.

15. *Why was Samson's wife given to another man?* 14:20

Samson's father-in-law looked upon his daughter more as chattel than as a person. He was anxious to get dowries from young men who wanted to marry his daughter. If one young man did not give the father satisfaction, he felt perfectly at liberty to arrange for his daughter's marriage to another man. Such a low view of marriage was prevalent in countries where they did not have the full revelation of God. Even among some of the Israelite people marriage did not have its high and holy estate to which it was raised in the teaching of Jesus. Nonetheless, Samson appears to be enraged when he learns later that his wife had been taken from him and given to someone else.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 14

1. In what city did the Philistine woman whom Samson wanted to marry live?

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2. What kind of animal did Samson kill?
3. What kind of food did Samson get from the carcase of the dead animal?
4. How many companions were given to Samson at the wedding feast?
5. How many days did Samson give the Philistines to learn the meaning of his riddle?
6. What reward did Samson promise to give the Philistines if they learned the meaning of his riddle?
7. What was Samson's riddle?
8. What was the answer to Samson's riddle?
9. Where did Samson go to kill the Philistine men?
10. How many men did he kill?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 15

- Vv. 1- 8 *Samson burns the Philistines' fields.* Samson left Philistia after he had killed thirty men to give changes of garments to the men who found out his riddle by their devious ways. Later he returned and found that his father-in-law had given his wife to another man. This so enraged Samson that he caught foxes, tied a firebrand to the tails of each pair, and set them loose in the standing grain-fields. This brought a great devastation on the land.
- Vv. 9-13 *Samson delivered to the Philistines by the men of Judah.* Samson went up into the hill country of Judah to hide from the Philistines after he had destroyed their fields. The men of Judah were distressed when the Philistines came after him and asked Samson to give up himself to the Philistines. When the men of Judah promised Samson that they would do no harm