

Judges

Lesson 28

(iii) The Feast (14:10-11)

After delivering the honey to his parents, it was time for the father and Samson to return to Timnah to have the marriage and the feast following the marriage. Verse 10. *“Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. ¹¹ When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.”* (14:10-11)

As indicated in verse 10, the feast was something for the young men. This would not be a short event. The marriage feast lasted seven days as we will see later in verse 12. Who will be at the feast? The feast would have been for the male relatives of the woman and of Samson. However, Samson did not bring anyone with him for the feast, save his father, who would have taken part in the event. Perhaps that was because the marriage was not approved by Samson’s Israelite cousins and friends, as it should have been. The writer tells us that *“When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.”* Evidently, the woman had several brothers who would have been part of the feast as well as the woman’s father. We are not told why the *“they,”* who would have been the woman’s relatives, brought thirty friends with them. Perhaps it was because the woman’s relatives were afraid of Samson and thought they needed help in case some ill event occurred.

But there is another possibility here. Perhaps the writer is simply telling us that upon the arrival of Samson and the announcement of the feast, the woman’s family brought thirty men to be with Samson at the feast. It may have been as simple as that.

It is important to notice that Samson’s father approached the woman first. It was customary for the father to announce to the bride that the groom was ready to marry the woman. The father would then leave the prepared chamber where the bride and groom would become man and wife. The couple would remain in the chamber, or bedroom, for seven days. Then, at the end of the seven days, the couple would exit the chamber and the new husband would host a wedding feast for seven days. Not said here, but in most of the cultures of that day, the husband would have a wedding feast for the male relatives and friends while the wife would have a wedding for the female relatives and friends in a different location. In this case, Samson’s feast was attended by Mrs. Samson’s male relatives and their friends and only Samson’s father from his family and friends.

(iv) The Riddle (14:12-14)

At the feast, and on the first day of the seven-day event, Samson decided to pose a riddle. Verse 12. *“Then Samson said to them, ‘Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. ¹³ But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes.’ And they said to him, ‘Propound your riddle, that we may hear it.’”*¹⁴ So he said to them,

*“Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet.”
But they could not tell the riddle in three days.”* (14:12-14)

For whatever reason, Samson propounds this riddle with the challenge and reward for those who can reveal the answer. It is here that we are told this is the normal wedding feast that lasted seven days. It is a tough riddle that had never been heard before. It was a riddle developed by Samson based on his experience over the past few weeks. For three days, the men could not come up with an answer to his riddle. They decided to sabotage Samson by pressuring his wife.

(v) The Sabotage (14:15-17)

The plan to sabotage Samson began on the fourth day of the feast with a visit to Samson's wife. Verse 15. *"Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson's wife, 'Entice your husband, so that he will tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?'"*¹⁶ Samson's wife wept before him and said, *"You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told it to me."* And he said to her, *"Behold, I have not told it to my father or mother; so should I tell you?"*¹⁷ However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. *And on the seventh day he told her because she pressed him so hard. She then told the riddle to the sons of her people."* (14:15-17)

It is clear from this passage that the relatives and friends of Mrs. Samson were not happy with the marriage, neither were they happy to be confounded by Mr. Samson. Not only were they willing to sabotage Samson by using his new wife, but they were willing to kill Mrs. Samson and her father and destroy her family home with fire. Pressured, Mrs. Samson begged for the answer to the riddle. But Samson would not share the answer. He had not even told his parents the answer. Why would he tell her the answer? Nevertheless, the writer tells us that she begged and *"wept before him seven days while their feast lasted"* trying to get the answer out of him. This statement causes a problem. The men came to her demanding her help to find the answer on the fourth day. The feast only lasted seven days. How could Mrs. Samson have cried for the answer for seven days if she was only under the threat for three days? Two possibilities. First, she, too, was inquisitive about the answer and began asking Samson for it on the first day of the feast when he spoke the riddle. But, I do not think that is the case here. For the second reason is much better. In my mind, the verse should have been translated *"she wept before him the rest of the seven days while the feast lasted."* That is a far better reason. Nonetheless, on the seventh day, Samson relented and told her the answer.

(vi) The Answer (14:18)

Nonetheless, Mrs. Samson shared the answer with her relatives and friends. Verse 18. *"So the men of the city said to 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 to them, *"If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have found out my riddle."* (14:18)

The men had answered Samson's riddle before the deadline. The feast would have ended at the end of the seventh day, and that meant the feast would have disbanded at sunset, the beginning of the eighth day. Notice the anger of Samson. *"If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have found out..."* His implication in his words is that they had done something criminal. Oxen are teamed together in pairs to plow, both tied to the same yoke. The oxen learn to pull together and in the same timing. As such, when the same two oxen are paired together, they become extremely efficient in their work together, both sharing the load. When an ox is injured and cannot work, the remaining oxen will struggle with a new partner. Here, Samson is using that application to indicate that Mrs. Samson was their partner. Samson and his wife were rightly yoked together. The men had dishonored Mr. and Mrs. Samson by breaking the yoke relationship and inserting a new partner. He calls his wife a *heifer*. In so doing, he is accusing Mrs. Samson of willfully aiding the men in the pursuit of the answer. At the time he said this, he more than likely did not know they had threatened her.

(vii) The Anger (14:19-20)

The anger of Samson did not subside. He had a debt to pay. He would make the relatives of the men at the feast pay the debt. Verse 19. *"Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house."*²⁰ But Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his friend." (14:19-20)

Notice the Holy Spirit was all over Samson and, therefore, approved of what Samson was about to do. The wedding feast was in the tribal area of Dan, on the northern border of the area. These particular Philistines were living in Timnah because they were part of the Philistine faction that was controlling Israel at the time. Perhaps, they had been assigned to Timnah by the Philistine kings. No oppression was loosely organized. They were all under the thumb of at least one king and at least one commander. Samson did not break his promise in Timnah by killing the men who had plowed with his heifer. Rather, he went to their home country and collected the resources to pay the debt of the riddle from their Philistine kin. He went to one of the five major Philistine cities, in the Philistine controlled area that today we call the Gaza Strip. He went to Ashkelon. Ashkelon, in the Philistine area is almost twenty-five miles from Timnah. Samson killed thirty Philistines and took their garments back to Timnah where he paid his debt. Knowing the strength and vitality of Samson, infused with the Holy Spirit, he probably left the feast when the riddle was revealed, traveled to Ashkelon through the night, arrived somewhere around daybreak, killed the men, gathered their clothing and returned to Timnah before sunset. Then, still furious from the events of the past two days, he left Timnah and went home in Zoroh to calm down.

The passage ends with an interesting verse. *“But Samson’s wife was given to his companion who had been his friend.”* Samson did not have any friends or relatives at the wedding save for his father and mother. The English translation here is misleading. One of the terms of a wedding was the necessity of a best man. The best man is called the *“friend of the bride-groom.”* The friend of the bride-groom was responsible for everything, including the care of the bride, the groom, the feast, etc. This man would also act as the master of ceremonies, introducing the couple and announcing the wedding. Samson did not have such a friend of his own, so one had to be selected from among the thirty. No doubt, it was a close friend of Mrs. Manoah’s family. In Samson’s case, he would have been a stranger. Be that as it may, when Samson went home after paying the debt, Mrs. Samson’s father thought that Samson had abandoned her and the marriage thinking he *“hated her intensely”* which we will read in verse 2 of the next chapter, chapter 15. With that thought, the father gave Mrs. Samson to the best man, the *“friend of the bride-groom”* to be his wife. She was damaged goods. She was a married woman who had been abandoned in her father’s eyes. We were not told about the dowry that Manoah paid the father for Samson to marry his daughter, but surely one was paid. No marriage occurred without one. What was the purpose of the dowry? It was a payment made to the father of the bride for the purpose of caring for the married daughter if she became a widow or was abandoned by her husband. In her father’s eyes, it looked like Samson had abandoned his daughter. More than likely, he gave the dowry to the best man if he would take her as a wife. It did not matter if he was already married. In those days, multiple wives were permitted especially in the pagan countries such as Philistia.