

# JUDGES 14

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## SAMSON'S MARRIAGE

The author of Judges skipped over the details of Samson's childhood and adolescence, narrating Samson's birth and then describing his adulthood. The only real information readers are afforded about Samson's younger years is that "the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times" (Judges 13:25).

Judges 14 opens with Samson seeking a wife (verses 1–2). Readers are led to believe that Samson wanted a Philistine wife, which is problematic to say the least since Israel was at that time subjugated under the Philistines (see 13:1). Manoah, Samson's father, resisted this, not realizing that Samson's request was pretext to move against the Philistines (14:3–4). Early in the story Samson is thus portrayed as a wily, shrewd character—a depiction that is reinforced throughout the rest of the chapter with the riddle contest Samson held at his wedding feast (verses 10–20). However, the narrative also depicts Samson as being out of his league since he was bested in the contest when his wife was pressured to reveal the answer to the riddle (verse 17).

The chapter also reveals Samson to have been a tempestuous sort who, after being bested, lashed out in sarcasm and anger (verses 18–19).<sup>1</sup> The riddle itself and its answer are both predicated on the encounter narrated at verses 8–9 and also foreshadow Samson's later involvement with Delilah: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. . . . What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?" (verses 14, 18).<sup>2</sup> What, after all, is sweeter or more powerful than love? And love will later contribute to Samson's downfall.

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<sup>1</sup> The sexual inuendo in Samson's statement to the Philistine men in verse 18 ("If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle") is readily apparent, especially in light of the preceding verses.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the rendering of these verses given in the New Revised Standard Version: "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet. . . . What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?"

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