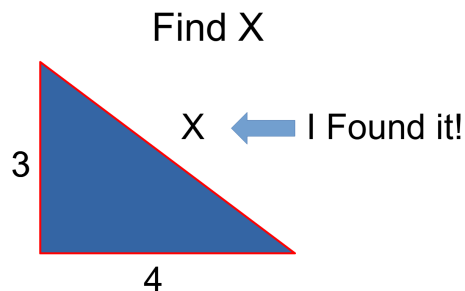


Judges Chapter 14 Part 3

How many times have I said, “You must ask the right questions.” Last week I didn’t want to delve into Samson’s riddle because there were some unanswered questions in my mind. I had not asked the right questions. Not yet. All I could give you is what others had already said. There seemed to be something missing. You have perhaps had that same feeling about something you read. There is something missing. I don’t have the whole story.

Have you seen that challenge of “find x?” The obvious simple answer for someone who knows nothing of the Pythagorean Theorem is shown below. But if you know just a little bit about math, you know this answer is wrong.



That is the situation we find in Judges chapter 14. You know that just reading through the chapter something is missing.

This week I have a new perspective on the riddles (plural). This new perspective is the result of prayers that God would give me understanding concerning this passage. He answered my prayers.

And yes, there is not a single riddle, but three. And, they are connected.

#1 (Original riddle) Judges 14:14 ...“Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet.” ...

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#2 (Philistine solution to the original riddle)
Judges 14:18 ...“What is sweeter than honey?
And what is stronger than a lion?” ...

#3 Judges 14:18 ...“If you had not plowed with
my heifer, You would not have found out my
riddle.” ...

If you start with the original riddle, the answer doesn't seem to flow naturally. In my experience, once the solution to a riddle is discovered, the response should be, “Of course!”

You have perhaps heard the riddle in English which I learned when I was a child, “What is black and white and read(red) all over?” This is spoken and not read. When you hear black and white, these are colors. So naturally when you hear “read all over,” you immediately think of the color red. You were predisposed to think in terms of color. But the answer is a “newspaper.” And then you say “Of course, but you tricked me. You meant R-E-A-D and not R-E-D.” But you see the logic behind the answer.

Another aspect of this narrative that we must keep in mind is that there are at least two levels to this narrative:

- 1) The author is writing the narrative to the person reading it (you and me) and
- 2) The narrative itself describes the actions of Samson towards the Philistines including his authorship of the riddles.

It is like a two-ringed circus (for those who may have seen a two- and even three-ringed circus). The author of the narrative, perhaps Samuel, is doing to the reader the same thing that Samson is doing to the Philistines.

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He is tricking us. We will never be able to understand the meaning unless God the Holy Spirit illuminates the Word and enlightens us.

The author is putting us on notice by his quote of Samson as he hurls his challenge at the Philistines.

Judges 14:12 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.”

Propound a riddle. Literally, let me riddle you a riddle. Repetition. Emphasis. The rest of the narrative is about the riddle and its meaning.

If you will indeed tell it to me. I have mentioned before, that sometimes when you see the word “indeed” in the English translation, behind it is an *infinitive absolute* which is another means of emphasis. In this case, it is emphasizing the conditionality, “if.” As we will see, Samson does not expect them to be able to solve the riddle. In his mind, “if and you won’t be able to reveal it.”

That is because the answer to Samson’s riddle is based upon a private event. It was nothing that the Philistines would have known. How could they possibly have been able to solve the riddle?

Let me emphasize that thought by quoting Gary Kukis’ complaint which got me to thinking about this in the first place.

“My only problem with this passage is the riddle itself. One would expect a riddle which others would actually know, given the time and the intelligence to think of it. These men here would have no way of knowing. The only thing that makes some sense is that the lion would

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have to be nearby (within a few miles) in order for Samson to support the explanation to the riddle. This would also, presumably, give some possible chance to the thirty men that one of them might have stumbled across this very unusual sight. In any case, this is obviously not the kind of riddle that we think of that any intelligent person can, apart from seeing the lion, come up with a solution for.

Exactly!

It is a valid complaint. But it should have caused him to ask the right question. That would be something like, “If Samson is propounding a riddle that can’t be solved without it being revealed by Samson, is he playing by the rules?” The answer becomes obvious.

He never plays by the rules. But God plays by His rules: grace and in the Old Testament, “loving kindness.” And when Samson plays by his rules ignoring God’s rules...well, we will just have to wait and see what happens.

Everyone assumes that Samson is some dumb jock who is honest. But he isn’t. He is a smart guy who cheated! And we think that the Philistines are some dumb people. But they aren’t. This was a setup.

Have you seen the movie “The Accountant.” The main character is a really smart guy who has a form of autism known as Asperger’s Syndrome. In that case, the accountant was very smart with numbers and had a fantastic memory. And generally speaking, autistic people do not have very good people skills. Samson, from my perspective, is very smart with words. He is so smart that he is arrogant. He does not have very good people skills. And like the accountant, Samson kills a lot of people.

One more caveat given to us by the author via the word “to tell or to explain.”

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Pharaoh told Joseph his dream which no one “could explain.” The word explain is our word for “tell it” or here “explain it.” It means reveal. When I use that word, you might think, God is the one who reveals and conceals. And He is.

**Genesis 41:25b “...God has told to Pharaoh
what He is about to do.”**

In Genesis 41:25 Joseph tells Pharaoh that God has told to Pharaoh the future. This word can mean “reveal.” That is what God does. He reveals. He can also conceal. The question here in Judges chapter 14, will God reveal Himself? How do we approach this?

In order to understand these riddles, you must start backwards by looking first at the last riddle. In school, you look at the back of the book to find the answers. But in order to do that, you must first realize that there are in reality three riddles, not one. In other words, you must find the back of the book.

So, last riddle first:

**#3 Judges 14:18 ...“If you had not plowed with
my heifer, You would not have found out my
riddle.” ...**

Riddle #3. In order to connect the dots, we have to start with the last of the riddles, not the first. “If you had not plowed with my heifer you would not have found out my riddle.” No one seems to realize that he just admitted to cheating. He accuses the Philistines of cheating because they “plowed with his heifer.” They used his wife to reveal the answer. But at the same time he admits that apart from their cheating, his cheat would have won the day. No one would have guessed the answer without getting it from Samson. But the Philistines probably took the second riddle which was an answer to the first riddle as a rhetorical question

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(which is what most readers do) and thought Samson was accusing them of being stupid. But, the first riddle and its answer were based upon an event that only Samson experienced. No one without knowledge of that event would have been able to know the answer. And the text makes that abundantly clear. Samson told no one, not even his parents. But then he told his wife after she nagged him for seven days. Yet, he told it to her in such a way that he would know if the Philistines had cheated. How did he do that? He worded the answer he told his wife as a second riddle. The Philistines used the exact wording that he told his wife which she communicated to the Philistines. They wanted to say it exactly right, not changing any word for fear that they would get it wrong. They didn't understand the background to the riddle. But normally, you don't answer a riddle with another riddle, a question in this case. So of course, the answer to the riddle is considered a rhetorical question. But...it is not. Samson says, "You cheated. But then, so did I."

#2 (Proposed solution to the original riddle)
Judges 14:18 ...“What is sweeter than honey?
And what is stronger than a lion?” ...

Riddle #2. This second riddle is not a statement or declaration of the answer but a question that seems like a rhetorical question. After all, what is stronger than a lion? We all think of the lion as the king of the beasts, so we take it rhetorically rather than an actual question. There is nothing stronger than a lion. That is what the Philistines thought. But it is another riddle! Like a riddle within a riddle. What is stronger than a lion??? SAMSON!!! He killed the lion with his bare hands. **The text of the narrative tells us that (verse 6).**

Judges 14:6 The Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, so that he tore him (the lion) as one tears a young goat though he had nothing

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in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.

Samson was not just a little stronger than the lion, but much stronger based upon what the text tells us. There is no doubt here as to who is stronger: **Samson!**

And now you know this is a real answer to the riddle because when you have the answer you say, “Of course!” But they didn’t get it and just repeated the words that Samson’s wife gave them which Samson gave her in order to trap the Philistines. And Samson will be fiercer than a lion when he kills thousands of Philistines. He is stronger than they are because he used words to trip them up. Shortly, he will start to actually kill Philistines in his effort “to begin delivering Israel.”

Samson knows that he is a delivering judge. His parents enforced the Nazirite vow on him and explained that he was dedicated to God for the purpose of beginning to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He knows he is in a battle against the enemy.

Take note that the author of Judges has just tricked you as well. Samson forgot that it was God the Holy Spirit that has been and will continue to empower him. So the author is smiling. Don’t they know that it is actually the Holy Spirit that is stronger than a lion? That is also in the text of verse 6. That is a lesson that Samson will learn just before he dies. A lesson that he uses in a difficult situation which will put him into the Faith Hall of Fame (Hebrews chapter 11).

And that was sweet...sweeter than honey.

But, where does honey come from and what ambiguity does Samson use?

Honey comes from bees, of course. Interesting to note that the word bee is the same word that is the prophetess’ name, “Deborah.” That is the

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Hebrew word for bee. Even more interesting is that it may be based upon a tri-literal root DBR (?Arabic?). There is another tri-literal root DBR from which comes, speak, talk, word, etc. And, some thought the Word of God was as sweet as honey or maybe even sweeter.

Psalm 19:9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

Psalm 19:10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Ezekiel 3:1 Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.”

Ezekiel 3:2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll.

Ezekiel 3:3 He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.

Revelation 10:9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he *said to me, “Take it and eat it; it will make your

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stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”

Revelation 10:10 I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

Revelation 10:11 And they *said to me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

And I said last week that the promised land was a land flowing with milk and honey. It is Samson’s life task as given by the Angel of the Lord to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. They are to take back their land.

Exodus 3:8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

Joshua 5:6 For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the voice of the Lord, to whom the Lord had

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sworn that He would not let them see the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Joshua 5:7 Their children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them along the way.

Let me suggest that a land flowing with milk and honey (honey that does not require work to acquire, in other words grace given by God) is sweeter than honey. Free honey.

When I was a young boy of perhaps 6 or 7 years of age I started attending Sunday school at a Catholic church. One of the lessons we learned was about the 10 commandments and that it is a sin to steal. Well, my father would sometimes drive us into the farmland where there was corn growing in a farmer's field. My dad would park the car next to the field and get out. Several minutes later he would come back with an armload of freshly cut ears of corn. After the third trip to the farmer's field, I applied the lesson I had learned at Sunday School. I said, "Isn't that stealing?" We never went back to the farmer's field. My mom attempted to explain later. When you can go into the field and cut exactly the ears you want, it is better than store bought. Besides snatched corn just tastes better.

The honey that Samson got was free honey, given by God.

Now let us round this up by dealing with the original riddle.

#1 (Original riddle) Judges 14:14 ...“Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet.” ...

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Riddle #1

Note that the answer to the riddle in verse 18 only links to the second half of the original riddle: What is stronger than a lion and what is sweeter than honey.

The first part of the riddle is based upon the word “to eat.” The first word is “eater.” Strange description for a lion. Except this word has a variety of meanings. It can mean “devour” as a sword devours flesh.

In Numbers chapter 23, Balaam gave a blessing to the sons of Israel instead of a curse that Balak, king of Moab, wanted on them. Here are two quotes that use our word to eat as “devour” from those blessings.

Numbers 23:24 “Behold, a people rises like a lioness, And as a lion it lifts itself; It will not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain.”

Numbers 24:8 “God brings him out of Egypt, He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, And will crush their bones in pieces, And shatter them with his arrows.

Numbers 24:9 “He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, And cursed is everyone who curses you.”

At some point, the nation Israel will “devour” their enemies.

So now I have led you down the primrose path, let me double back like I did with “stronger than a lion.”

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Who is the eater in chapter 14. Not the lion. He didn't eat anything. The eater is SAMSON! Again. It is almost like Samson wove his name into the riddle to say, "Look at me! Aren't I great!" Uh Oh Samson, be careful. Where did your power come from? Not your hair. Not from your muscles. Pride comes before a fall!

Judges 14:8 When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion.

Judges 14:9 So he scraped the honey 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 scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.

In case you read over that in the Hebrew, you would have to stop because there are two infinitive absolutes back to back here. It is saying LOOK! Something important I told you. I purposely worded that strangely to get your attention.

The word for walking is an *infinitive absolute*. Usually, but not all the time, an *infinitive absolute* is followed by a verb from the same root. And that is what we have here except the verb comes before the infinitive absolute. Different but not unusual. He is WALKING.

The word for eating, which comes immediately after the infinitive absolute for walking, is also an *infinitive absolute*. Again, usually, but not all the time, an infinitive absolute is followed by a verb from the same root. But not here. There is no eating verb following this infinitive absolute. He is EATING. Emphasis. Except there may be a peculiarity

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here. The infinitive absolute of eating is followed by the verb for walking again. So in four words there are three words for walking. Whether these are linked together or not, there is a very great emphasis here. It points to Samson as being the “eater.” Not the lion.

These two infinitive absolutes are back to back.

LOOK! (not behold).

It draws attention that Samson is eating the honey. He is the eater! But this immediately leads us to his parents and what Samson gave them.

The preposition translated “out from” in the riddle can be translated just “from.” In this case it identifies the source. In the original event, the honey came out from the lion. But if the eater is not the lion but is Samson, then the “something to eat” could just be from him. So then, ask the question, “Did Samson provide something to eat to someone?” Yes, his parents (verse 9). “From Samson, the eater, came or gave something to eat, honey, to his parents.” That is documented in Judges 14:9. So again, Samson is pointing to himself. I am the answer. I am the deliverer. Oh Samson, you will learn that God is the deliverer. He is the answer. You will learn this lesson. But it will be a very expensive one.

So let me summarize.

1. Samson decides to marry a Philistine woman based upon looks against the wishes of his parents and against the Law. But as we read, it was of the Lord.
2. He kills an attacking lion empowered by the Holy Spirit.
3. Subsequently, bees made a beehive with honey in the dead lion’s carcass.
4. Samson eats some of the honey and then gives some to his parents without telling them where it came from.

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5. At his wedding celebration, Samson composes a riddle based upon his encounters with the lion and honey. It is worded such that it reflects the encounter based upon what he did. He ate honey and gave some to his parents. But the answer he gave his wife which the Philistines parroted back to him was a picture of the dead lion and honey. It was based upon what someone would have seen. Yet, as another riddle, it again reflects what Samson did.
6. Since the heart of the riddle is based upon what Samson did and there were not witnesses to that, the riddle should have been unsolvable. Yet, the Philistines cheated by getting the answer from Samson's wife. They cheated, but Samson cheated first.
7. But the author of the book of Judges uses this narrative to emphasize the real answer which is the Holy Spirit.
 - A. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that empowered Samson.
 - B. It was God that provided the honey. The bees constructing a beehive inside the dead carcass of a lion was pretty unique.
 - C. The Holy Spirit empowered Samson to kill the lion. In like manner, the Holy Spirit will empower Samson to kill Philistines in fulfilling his Nazirite mission to begin the deliverance of the nation of Israel. This leads to the establishment of a line of Kings. But that is the book of Samuel.