

Judges 14:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

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:

This verse belongs to the Samson cycle addressing Samson's marriage and riddle at Timnath. Samson represents both the heights of God-empowered strength and the depths of human weakness through moral compromise. His Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21) set him apart as holy to God, yet his persistent violations of this vow—contact with dead animals (14:8-9), seven-day feast (likely involving wine, 14:10), and finally revealing his hair's secret (16:17)—demonstrate progressive spiritual decline.

Theologically, Samson illustrates how spiritual gifts don't guarantee spiritual maturity. The Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson repeatedly, giving superhuman strength, yet this empowerment didn't produce corresponding moral transformation. His attraction to Philistine women (14:1-3, 16:1, 16:4) directly violated God's command against intermarriage with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). This demonstrates that God can use flawed instruments for His purposes, but this never excuses or endorses sin.

Samson's final prayer—"O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen

me" (16:28)—shows genuine repentance and renewed faith. His death accomplished more than his life (16:30), suggesting that even spectacular failure can be redeemed when we return to God. However, the tragedy is that Samson's potential was largely wasted through moral compromise. His story warns believers that consistent holy living, not merely spectacular spiritual experiences, characterizes faithful discipleship.

Historical Context

Historical Setting: The Book of Judges spans approximately 350-400 years (c. 1375-1050 BCE) during the Late Bronze Age collapse and early Iron Age. This period saw the disintegration of major empires (Hittites, Mycenaeans) and weakening of Egyptian control over Canaan, creating a power vacuum filled by emerging peoples including Philistines (Sea Peoples), Aramaeans, and regional kingdoms. The decentralized tribal structure left Israel vulnerable to external oppression and internal chaos.

Cultural Context: This passage relates to Samson's marriage and riddle at Timnath. Canaanite religion dominated the region, centered on Baal (storm/fertility god), Asherah (mother goddess), and Anat (war goddess). Archaeological discoveries at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) have provided extensive information about Canaanite mythology and religious practices. Baal worship involved ritual prostitution, child sacrifice, and fertility rites tied to agricultural seasons. Israel's persistent attraction to these gods demonstrates the strong cultural pressure to conform to surrounding nations' religious practices.

The material culture of this period shows gradual Israelite settlement in the Canaanite hill country with simpler pottery and architecture than coastal Canaanite cities. Iron technology was beginning to spread, giving military advantage to peoples who mastered it (note the Philistines' iron monopoly, 1 Samuel 13:19-22). The absence of centralized government during the judges period stands in stark contrast to the bureaucratic city-states of Canaan and the imperial administration of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This political structure reflected Israel's theocratic ideal—God as king—yet the repeated cycles of

apostasy showed this ideal required more than political structures; it demanded heart transformation.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does this passage about Samson's marriage and riddle at Timnath reveal God's character in dealing with persistent human rebellion and incomplete obedience?
2. What patterns of spiritual compromise or incomplete obedience in your own life mirror Israel's failures during the judges period?
3. How does understanding the cyclical nature of sin and deliverance in Judges help you appreciate Christ's perfect and final deliverance from sin's power?

Interlinear Text

לֹאמֶר יְהֹוָה אֲחִזְדָּה שְׁמַשׁ וְלִפְנֵם שְׁמַשׁ וְלִפְנֵם
said H0 And Samson unto them I will now put forth H4994 H0
H559 H8123 H2330

יְמִים שְׁבָעַת תְּלִי אֶזְרָח תְּגִידָה אֶתְכָּל אֶתְכָּל
days seven I declare declare within it it H0 H0
H3117 H7651 H853 H5046 H5046 H2420

סְדִינִים יְמִים וְשְׁלָשׁ יְמִים לְכָם מִמְשְׁטָה מִמְצָאָת מִבְּנֵת
sheets days three to you from the feast and find it out then I will give H0 H7970 H5466
H4960 H4672 H5414

בְּגִילִים: מְלָפֵת וְשְׁלָשׁ יְמִים
and thirty change of garments H2487 H899 H7970

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 45:22 (Parallel theme): To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment.

Ezekiel 17:2 (Parallel theme): Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel;

1 Kings 10:1 (Parallel theme): And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.

2 Kings 5:22 (Parallel theme): And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.

2 Kings 5:5 (Parallel theme): And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.

Proverbs 1:6 (Parallel theme): To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.