

OpenTheo

Trouble at Timnah (Samson and Judah)

April 24, 2019



Alastair Roberts

A discussion of parallels between Judah's story in Genesis 38 and the story of Samson in Judges 14-16. Thanks to Scott Fairbanks for highlighting some of these and James Bejon for highlighting others. I got the connection between the three failed attempts of Delilah to bind Samson and the earlier failures of the Philistines against him from John Barach's Theopolis series on the book: https://theopolisinstitute.com/downloads/joshua-judges-and-ruth_29291.

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>. You can see transcripts of my videos here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/list-of-videos-and-podcasts/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these talks, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>. You can also support me using my PayPal account: <https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>.

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Welcome back. The following is a tangential discussion of some themes that have been raised in my series on the story of the family of Abraham, most specifically in relationship to Genesis chapter 38 and the story of Judah and Tamar. This chapter, as I've suggested as I went through it, is a complex chapter with all sorts of different themes and connections throughout the biblical narrative.

I don't know what to make of many of these, but some of my listeners have raised some

suggestions and I wanted to engage with those and also focus upon one specific set of parallels that I find very interesting and suggestive, but I still don't know exactly what to make of. So, I'm going to share them with you and if you have any thoughts, please raise them in the comments. The chapter has a number of significant names that are mentioned at various points.

Things like, we're told about Hira the Adalamite or Shewa and Shelah and Ur, Onan, these sorts of characters. And the meaning of those names is not entirely clear, as is the name of Timnah. Why mention Timnah or Kezib that Shelah is born at Kezib? Is it a particular time? Is it a particular place? What do these terms mean? Why even bother mentioning these things? I've still not got satisfactory answers to these questions, but here are a few thoughts.

One thing that we can see in the name of the wife of Judah, she's the daughter of Shewa, Bathshewa. And we do have a Bathshewa elsewhere in scripture. And that other Bathshewa is better known as Bathsheba in chapter 3 of 1 Chronicles, verse 5. And these were talking about children of David.

And these were born to him in Jerusalem. So Bathsheba is also known as Bathshewa, the daughter of Shewa. And that name connects her with the daughter of Shewa who's the wife of Judah.

That particular connection strengthens some of the claims that the names of the characters in that chapter have some connection with the David story. Hira being Hiram, that sort of thing. Possibly.

What it does do also is it highlights a further connection between characters within the Judah story and characters in the Davidic line. Female characters. So I mentioned Tamar as one of the daughters of David and the significant story of her in 2 Samuel chapter 13.

Then the connections with the story of Ruth and the story with Rahab and then the story, if there's a further connection here, Bathsheba. Then we've got those four key figures who later on, three of those are mentioned in the genealogy of Matthew 1. And the fourth being Tamar herself. Those connections, I suggest, are worth exploring a bit further.

The fact that we have so many of the women in the Messianic line mentioned or alluded to or somehow referenced within this chapter. What else is going on in this chapter? Well, there's a further parallel that I hadn't noticed but which was brought to my attention by Scott Fairbanks and which I believe is really worthy of attention. I still don't know what to make of it, but I'm going to give you some of the details and see what you think and comment upon the themes more generally within the chapters that have a connection.

The connections are in Judges chapter 14 following and the story of Samson. The beginning of the story of Samson is chapter 13, but that's very much the announcement of his birth and his birth. But his actual coming of age and the start of his actual work begins in the very end of chapter 13, chapter 14.

It's the story of him going down to Timnah and seeing a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. So the story begins with him going down and then seeing a woman that he wants to marry. And that going down might be connected to a leaving of his proper state, maybe.

It's connected though, I'd suggest, with the beginning of chapter 38 of Genesis which begins the Judah narrative. It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers and visited a certain Adolamite whose name was Hira. And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua and he married her and went into her.

So the similarity here is between Judah and Samson both going down somewhere, both seeing the daughter of a foreigner and wanting to marry that person. In Judah's case it's Shua, the daughter of Shua. And in the case of Samson it's the daughter of the Philistine of Timnah.

The place Timnah is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture except for a few odd references in the book of Joshua in the context of the conquest and one time in 1 Chronicles, I think. The only time where it has any prominence in a story is in chapter 38 of Genesis and in chapters 14 and 15 of Judges. And those two connections suggest maybe the reference to Timnah is something that we should be seeing as a connection between these two stories.

The fact that there are other connections besides that, other connections including the fact that there is going down to a place, seeing a woman, wanting to marry this woman at the beginning of the story. Now in Judah's case that does not take place in Timnah but Timnah appears later on in the story and he does see a woman there and he does go into her. Those would seem to be further parallels that flesh out that initial parallel.

There are also further connections to draw. In both cases the protagonist turns aside at Timnah, Judah to see the prostitute and Samson to see the lion's carcass. Both Judah and Samson fall in their lust and they pursue prostitutes.

We don't see that many references to people going into prostitutes in scripture but we do see them here. We see a reference to a prostitute in the story of Rahab and we see a reference to a prostitute also in the story of Samson. So maybe there is a further connection there.

I've already mentioned some of the connections between the story of Rahab and the

story of Tamar. Further connections. Both Judah and Samson carelessly give their strength and authority to women, compromising their identity.

Judah gives over these very powerful symbols of his identity. It's like giving his credit card and his passport except it's something more than that. These are signs of his rule and authority, signet and cord and his staff.

These are very significant items to give and he's obviously acting in his lust and not really considering just how significant a compromise he's making here. Samson does something similar. He gives knowledge concerning his identity.

First he gives knowledge concerning the riddle and then later he gives knowledge concerning those things by which he can be overcome in the story of Delilah. In both of these cases I think we're seeing something about a man led by his lust giving up knowledge or strength and compromising his identity as a result. Then there's a strange connection.

In the beginning of chapter 15, after a while in the time of wheat harvest it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat and he said let me go into my wife, into her room, but her father would not permit him to go in. In the story of Genesis chapter 38 you have a visit to Timnah, a second visit, a return visit to go to the woman with a goat. And to get the woman back as it were or to finish the transaction.

In the second one there is sexual congress with a woman in Genesis chapter 38 with Timnah and then the sending of the goat to close the transaction. And yet it cannot be closed. In the same way the marriage of Samson cannot be consummated because she has been given to another man because the marriage ceremony, the wedding ceremony ended in shambles.

Garments are prominent in both stories. What other things? The woman of Timnah is burned with fire. It's a further connection.

That's the judgement that was threatened to Tamar in chapter 38 of Genesis. And Judah has a part to play in the story of Timnah and the woman there too. Because shortly after this in chapter 15 he goes down and the Judahites, he's in Judahite territory and they bind him up to give him over to the Philistines.

And he breaks free and here we see the Judahites serving under the rule of the Philistines and actually helping the Philistines to try and bind Samson. That story, the story of the Philistines trying to get Samson as he's being bound by the Judahites has a very close resemblance to the earlier story of Samson being attacked by the lion. If you read the passage it says, When he came to Lehi the Philistines came shouting against him, came roaring against him.

Then the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and the ropes that were on his arms

became like flax that is burned with fire and his bonds broke loose from his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it and then killed a thousand men with it. So you have this group of people come roaring at him.

He defeats them and as the spirit of the Lord comes upon him his hands are mighty and he breaks them apart and kills the creature or kills the people that are coming after him. The story of the lion in the previous chapter has a similar statement. Now to his surprise a young lion came roaring against him and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat.

Though he had nothing in his hand and he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. So there is a close parallel here between the lion comes roaring at him and he tears the lion apart as the spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon him and he tears the lion apart. The second occasion the Philistines come roaring upon him, the spirit of the Lord comes upon him and then he tears his ropes apart and then he kills them.

This I think helps us to see some of the parallels and some of the significance of what's taking place. Samson later relates the story of the lion in a second encounter as he seeds honey in the carcass of the lion. He relates that in the form of a riddle to the 30 men of the Philistines in his wedding ceremony.

In the wedding feast over seven days and they're trying to work it out and they do not work it out until they find that his wife or to get his wife to get him to disclose it to them. Now there's a foreshadowing here. First of all there is an encounter with these mighty men and there's a great defeat and then there's the second time where they use a woman to compromise him to get that information from him.

And as we read the retelling of the riddle, out of the eater came something to eat, out of the strong came forth sweetness, and then their response to that, I think there's a riddle to the reader as well. And the riddle to the reader is to think about this a bit deeper. What is stronger than the lion? Well if you read the earlier narrative, Samson is stronger than the lion.

He overcomes the lion. And what is sweeter than honey? Well you could have a number of things that are sweeter than honey. You could think of a number of things that are sweeter than honey.

Maybe it's the word of God. We could think about the word of God as sort of playing upon the name for bees and the word. Debar and Deborah play upon that word maybe.

I'm not sure. I don't think the scripture makes much of that pun if it is one. But what we do see I think is God's judgments and God's words and God's commands being described as sweeter than honey elsewhere in the Psalms.

So that might be one connection. Another thing is the way that in Proverbs and

elsewhere, women and the love of women is compared to honey. And the honey of the adulterous woman, her lips drip with honey.

Maybe there's something there. And maybe that helps us to understand what's going on. The answer in both cases, what's stronger than the lion, what's sweeter than honey, maybe it refers to love, some have suggested.

And there may be a truth there, that there is a riddle here even in their response, that the lion is strong. Samson is stronger than the lion. But what will ultimately overcome the lion is that honey that is his appetite for honey.

So Samson is like a lion with a great mane. And he's someone who's like the sun. He's like the lion.

His name is connected to the sun. And he is drawn to this honey within the lion. And that, some have suggested, causes him to compromise his Nazirite vow, whether or not it does.

I think there is a telling pattern to the life of Samson. Where the first time, where he's challenged by strength, he can overcome people with strength. But he cannot resist the honey.

And the honey is ultimately his downfall. It's ultimately the love of women that brings him down. The love of the prostitutes, the love of Delilah, the love of the woman of Timnah.

And in each of these cases, there are ways in which he has compromised or loses out as a result of that. And that again recalls the story of Judah and Tamar. Judah is compromised as a result of his love of women.

Whether that's the woman of the Canaanites, Bathsheba. Or whether it's the case of Tamar, the prostitute. Both of these lead to negative results for Judah.

And are a matter of him going down in status in some way. The story of Samson likewise. And so there are two paralleled events.

There's the first, threatening with the power of the Philistines and the lion. Those two things combined. And then the second one, where there is the use of the honey to coax the truth out of him.

First of all, by the woman of Timnah. And then the second time by Delilah. So maybe there's something going on there.

Even in the way that he ultimately reveals the truth to Delilah, there is a riddle playing out in that story. So there are four suggestions that he gives for ways to bind him. The first is with seven cords.

And so the seven bow strings or the seven fresh cords, not yet dried. What could those be connected with? Well, leave those in mind for the time being. The second one is binding securely with new ropes that have never been used.

Now we've heard that before. That happens in the story of the Judahites. The Judahites try to bind him up with these fresh cords to deliver him over to the Philistines.

And that fails. The next one, he's told that if you weave the seven locks of my head into the weave of the loom, she binds it tightly with the baton of the loom and says to him, the Philistines are upon you. And he wakes from his sleep, pulled out the baton and the web from the loom.

Again, that's an interesting, I mean, all sorts of interesting details in there. And then there's the final one, which is when he actually gives over the true secret of his strength. Go back through that.

And the first one, the seven bow strings, the seven things, the seven bonds or the seven cords, maybe that could be connected with the seven days of his wedding. And that was an attempt to overcome him. And the result of that was burning the fields of the Philistines with 300 foxes having tied together in two with fire between them.

Now, I wonder what's going on there. There's 150 pairs of foxes. And that's, he's later on complained that, he's earlier on complained that they would not have known the riddle had they not plowed with his heifer, his wife being the heifer.

And a suggestion of sexual impropriety there. In Exodus, the consequence for stealing an ox is fivefold restitution. So maybe there's the suggestion there, fivefold restitution.

And what you have is fivefold restitution for 30 men. Maybe that's what's taking place. 30 men of the Philistines that were assigned to him in the wedding.

And then they each have to pay fivefold for what they did to his heifer. And that was accompanied with a threat to burn the woman. And it was a threat to burn his wife, the source of his fruitfulness.

And he never actually is able to consummate the wedding as a result. So what does he do? He burns their fields with foxes. Maybe there's something about the foxes being connected with Philistines.

Elsewhere we have foxes in vineyards. The lion is in a vineyard earlier on in the chapter. Maybe the vineyard symbolises Israel, the lion being the Philistine, the Philistines.

The lion is associated with the Philistines in the next episode in chapter 15. Where the Philistines rushing upon him is similar to the lion roaring and coming upon him. In Song of Songs there are ways in which we hear about the foxes causing trouble in the

vineyard and catch the little foxes.

Maybe foxes could be connected with Philistines, people causing trouble in the land. I don't know. One way or another we see a connection between the foxes, I think, or a way of paying back the Philistines.

There's 30 times 5 and then they burn the fields. So then there's a parallel there. This is the failure of the first plot.

The second plot is binding him up by the men of Judah. Again maybe there's a lion connection. Judah like a lion, but a lion that's brought very low and is now serving the lion of the Philistines.

But that fails as well and that's with the fresh ropes. The third attempt fails too. And the third attempt is when he sees a harlot in Gaza.

And the Gazaites are told Samson has come in here and they surround the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. Similar situation, lying in wait as they lay in wait in the store of Delilah. And they're quiet all night in the morning.

When he wakes up, daylight will kill him. So he lies low, he's sleeping in the next story. And then he arises, takes hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gate posts, pulls them up bar and oar, puts them on his shoulders and carries them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

And so you hear in the previous one, or the later account, he takes the batten of the loom and the web out from the loom. So he takes the pin out and he takes the batten out. And that might be connected with the door and the bars.

And then finally he reveals the truth, which is the fact that he has a Nazirite vow. So there are similarities here, I think, with the story of Judah. How exactly these themes play out, I'm really not sure.

It's complicated. I think we can see within it that there are all sorts of symmetries and riddles within the Samson story itself. And the background in the story of Judah, where Judah is brought low, where he gives away his compromises, his identity, revealing his identity to this unknown person, to the supposed prostitute.

Then later on with the threat of this woman being burned by fire, which will ultimately be a destruction of his fruitfulness. In Samson's case, it is his fruitfulness that is destroyed as the woman does end up being burned. I think in these cases there is supposed to be some sort of parallel.

We're supposed to see some connection. Samson is brought low in a way that parallels the way that Judah is brought low. But Samson is not raised up in quite the same way as

Judah.

There's not the same confession and recovery. There is a degree of recovery as he brings down Philistines. But he ends up without any children.

He ends up as one who's lost his eyes, as one who dies with the Philistines. There's something tragic about this. And if he is the stronger than the lion, ultimately he is brought down nonetheless.

There is something that is even stronger than the lion, which is the appeal of the honey. Maybe that's what's going on. I really don't know.

It's a very interesting passage. Let me know what you think. If you have any further reflections, please share them in the comments.

Thanks again to Scott Fairbanks for the thoughts on this. Also to James Bajon who had some very interesting thoughts as well. Thank you very much for listening.

I'll probably post another video later today on Genesis chapter 40. If you have any questions on this or anything else, please leave them in the comments or in my Curious Cat account. And if you would like to support this and other videos like it, please do so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts.

God bless and thank you for listening.