

Judges Chapter 15

Judges 15:1 "But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in."

“Wheat harvest”: Samson tactfully made his move when wheat harvest kept men busy. This was probably around May. A token of reconciliation was offered as he brought a young goat, showing the father and the daughter that they had nothing to fear.

The kid of the goats was probably a peace offering. She has already been given to his friend, so her father would not let him go in unto his wife. Whether this again is the will of God, or just Samson wanting to see his wife is hard to tell. Everything he does works to further the will of God with the Philistines.

Judges 15:2 "And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: [is] not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her."

“I ... thought”: This flimsy excuse by the father was an effort to escape the trap he was in. He feared the Philistines if he turned on the new husband, yet feared Samson, so he offered his second daughter as a way out. This was insulting and unlawful (compare Lev. 18:18).

Samson had every right to hate her, because she tricked him into telling her the riddle and then told those he had challenged. That was an act of treachery. Her dad knew that Samson should be angry with her, and he thought Samson would want no more to do with her so he gave her to Samson's Philistine friend. Samson did not want her sister.

Judges 15:3 "And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure."

His wife's father, and other relations, and the citizens of Timnath. This, which is what follows, he said either within himself respecting them, or he said it to them openly and publicly before them all.

"Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure": Signifying, that if he did them an ill thing, or what might be reckoned an injury to their persons or properties, and which would be disagreeable and displeasing to them. They could not justly blame him for it, since they had given him such a provocation as to dispose of his wife to another man. Though Samson did not mean to act, nor did he act in the following instances as a private person taking private revenge, but as a public person, and judge of Israel. And took occasion, from the private injuries done him, to avenge the public ones of the children of Israel upon the Philistines. And they might thank themselves for giving the opportunity, which they could not justly condemn him for taking.

The cycle of retaliation began, and it ends (in 16:30-31).

They will have nothing to blame Samson with about his unfaithful wife. He does not directly do any harm to his wife or her family. He will get even with the Philistines though. We must remember all through this, that God called him to destroy the Philistines.

Judges 15:4 "And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails."

“Caught three hundred foxes”: Samson, insulted and provoked to fleshly resentment, took vengeance on the Philistines. It must have taken a while to catch so many foxes or jackals and to keep them penned and fed until the number reached 300. Apparently he tied them in pairs with a slow-burning torch, sending the pairs down the hills into fields thrashing with fire, igniting all the standing grain so dry at harvest. This was a loss of great proportion to the Philistine farmers.

Samson caught them in nets, or snares. For this many to be in one place had to be a miracle of God. This just means that Samson tied a fire to their tails, and sent them towards the crops of the Philistines.

Judges 15:5 "And when he had set the brands on fire, he let [them] go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards [and] olives."

"He let them go": To wit, successively at several times, and in different places. With great care and discretion, so as they might not hinder one another, nor all run into the same field. But being dispersed in all parts, might spread the plague further. And withal might be kept at a distance from the fields and vineyards of the Israelites. It is not worthy of our inquiry what became of these foxes afterward. Whether they were burnt by the firebrands, or run into holes, or were taken and killed by the Philistines. The truth of this history is notably attested by a custom of the Romans, which it is very probable they had from the Phoenicians, upon this occasion. For every year they had a solemnity in April, the very time of Canaan's wheat harvest, wherein foxes were let loose with burning torches fastened to their backsides, etc.

This means they ran through the corn and set it on fire. It even burned the stalks. The fire spread, and burned the vineyards and the olive trees.

Judges 15:6 "Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire."

Based on the father-in-law's admission (in 15:2), it is clear to whom the pronouns in the following statement refer: "he" (father-in-law), "had taken his (Samson's), "wife and given her to his (Samson's), "companion". Ironically, although Samson's wife had tricked him in order to what was threaten: "burn thee" (14:15), she ended up suffering this fate anyway. The promises of evil people cannot be trusted.

“The Philistines ... burnt her and her father”: The general principle of reaping what is sown is apropos here (compare Gal. 6:7).

This is the very thing they told her they would do, if she did not find out about the riddle for them. You see it did her no good at all to be treacherous, and tell the riddle to the Philistines. She came to the same fate anyway. Burning with fire was judicial punishment with the Hebrews, but these were Philistines that did this. They were afraid to attack Samson personally.

Verses 7-11: Samson’s actions were motivated by revenge: “As they did unto me, so have I done unto them”. As a result, he used the strength God gave him for selfish purposes, when God expects His people to use their gifts for His purposes.

Judges 15:7 "And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease."

After they had burnt his wife and her father in their dwelling house, by which they thought to appease him, being afraid of him.

"Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you": Not for burning his wife and father-in-law; his sense is, that though they had done this, in order to ingratiate themselves with him. Yet he should not stop on this account, but be avenged on them. Not for private injuries done to him, or any that had been in connection with him, but for public injuries done to Israel, and their oppression of them.

"And after that I will cease": When he had taken full vengeance on them, and not before.

It is really not known whether the burning of Samson's wife and her father was to get even with her for starting this, or whether they were trying to get even with Samson. It really does not matter. Samson is going to avenge them anyway.

Judges 15:8 "And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam."

Either smote them on their hips and thighs with his hands (for it does not appear he had any weapon of war), so that they were badly bruised, and maimed, and lamed, that they could not stir, and of which blows and bruises multitudes died. Or he smote them with his legs on their thighs, kicked them about at pleasure, which kicks numbers of them never got over. Or the meaning of the proverbial expression is, he laid on them at a great rate, and smote them here and there, and anywhere, which issued in the death of many of them. The Targum is, “he smote them horse and foot,” their cavalry and infantry, destroyed them both. But it does not appear that they came out in a hostile manner unto him, and much less in the form of a regular army.

"And he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam": Josephus says, that Samson having slain many in the fields of the Philistines, went and dwelt at Etam, a strong rock in the tribe of

Judah. And which agrees with (2 Chron. 11:6), where mention is made of the city Etam, along with Bethlehem and Tekoah, cities in that tribe. Which had its name either from this rock, or the rock from that. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions read, "in a cave of the rock of Etam;" and the Syriac and Arabic versions, in Sahaph, which is on the rock of Etam, as if Sahaph was the name of a city there. Hither Samson went, not through fear, or for safety, but to wait for another opportunity of further avenging the injuries of Israel on the Philistines.

This just means that he slaughtered them. We are not told how many, but the word "great" indicates it was a large number of people. The top of the rock here, is probably speaking of a cleft in the rock. It was probably up the side of the hill.

Judges 15:9 "Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi."

From Palestine, which lay low on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

"And pitched in Judah": In the land of Judea, which lay higher, particularly in the tribe of Judah, whither they came with an army, and encamped there.

"And spread themselves in Lehi": Their forces were so many, that they extended a considerable way. And particularly reached to Lehi, that is, which was afterwards so called. For it has its name by anticipation from the jaw bone, which it signifies, with which Samson slew many in this place, as after related.

He had said if they would leave it alone, that would have been the end of the killing, but they did not. Here they have pitched against him.

Judges 15:10 "And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us."

To the Philistines, very probably by a deputation, which they sent unto them, to know the reason of this formidable appearance.

"Why are ye come up against us?" In this hostile manner, with such a number of forces, since they were not conscious to themselves that they had done anything to offend them. They had not attempted to cast off their yoke, they quietly submitted to their government, and had paid their whole tribute, as Josephus represents them saying. They could not imagine what should be the meaning of all this.

"And they answered, to bind Samson are we come up": that is, to oblige them to bind him, and deliver him into their hands.

"To do to him as he hath done to us": To put him to death, as he had slain many of their people in the last encounter with them.

Judah thinks the Philistines have come against them, but they have really come to get Samson, and bind him up for punishment. They plan to destroy Samson.

Judges 15:11 "Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines [are] rulers over us? what [is] this [that] thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them."

Or "went down"; that is, into the cave of the rock of Etam, as the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions. And so it is taken by David de Pomis for a cave dug in the rock. This was a large number that went to take one man. The reason is, they knew his great strength.

"And said to Samson, knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us?" And therefore it must be a very unwise thing to disoblige and provoke them. When it lay in their power to oppress them yet more and more, to increase their tribute. And make their burdens heavier, and even take away their lives.

"What is this that thou hast done unto us?" They ask not what he had done to them, but unto us. Though they mean that, but express themselves thus, because what he had done to the Philistines was the occasion of their coming up against them, and so eventually it was doing them ill.

"And he said unto them, as they did unto me, so have I done to them": They had done him ill, and therefore he did ill to them. They had burnt his wife and her father with fire, and he had slain many of them. At least this was what he thought fit to say in his own vindication. Otherwise what he did was not in a way of private revenge, but on account of the injury done to the people of Israel. He taking what was done to them as done to himself, the chief magistrate and judge of Israel.

Samson had chosen a high place on the side of the mountain, because it was safer and he could see them coming. Samson is fully aware that the Philistines are after him. He also knows that what he had done was in retaliation for what they had done to him. We must continue to remember that, God wanted Samson to destroy the Philistines and free the children of Israel. It is interesting that so many men come against one man.

Judges 15:12 "And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves."

That is, they were come down into the cave where he was. Otherwise more properly they were come up to the top of the rock.

"That we may deliver thee into the hands of the Philistines": They own up to as what was their intention in binding him, and what put them upon it was not ill will to him, but fear of the Philistines.

"And Samson said unto them, swear unto me that ye will not fall upon me yourselves": Which shows he did not fear them, though they were 3000. And that if they attempted to take away his life, he should defend himself, but he chose not to shed the blood of any of them. And rather than they should come into any distress through the Philistines, consented to be bound by them, and delivered into their hands. Which he was a type of Christ, who was betrayed by the Jews, and delivered by them into the hands of the Romans. And though he could have delivered himself by his great strength, would not, but suffered himself to be taken and bound, and given into the hands of his enemies, that his own people might go free (see John 18:4).

Samson has no fight with them. He will let them bind him and carry him down if they first promise that they will not attack him themselves. These are Hebrews, and he has no quarrel with them.

Judges 15:13 And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

They declared they would not fall upon him themselves and slay him. Nor would the Jews put Christ to death themselves. Though they were virtually his betrayers and murderers (John 18:31).

"But we will bind thee fast and deliver thee into their hands": As the Jews did Christ, and not only delivered him bound to the high priest, but also to the Roman governor (Matt. 27:2).

"But surely we will not kill thee": Not with their own hands, but then they proposed to deliver him into the hands of the Philistines, from whence nothing but death could be expected. So that had they put him to death, they would have been accessory to it. As the Jews were to the death of Christ by delivering him to the Gentiles, and are charged with it (Acts 2:23).

"And they bound him with two new cords": Not with one only, lest it should not be sufficient to hold him, knowing his strength, but with two. And these not old worn out ones, but new ones just made, and very strong. And, as Joseph Kimchi, noted by Ben Melech, were trebled, or made of three cords or thongs, for greater security. And of flax, as the following verse intimates, and such are most firm and strongest to hold anything. Hence nets were made of flax to hold creatures in, fish, fowl, or beasts.

"And brought him up from the rock": The place, as Kimchi says, where the men of Judah dwelt, being higher than the rock. Though rather the true sense is, they brought him up out of the cave in the rock.

They have bound him to take him to the Philistines. They have used two new ropes to bind him with. The Hebrews would not kill him, but they were doing almost the same thing by carrying him down to the Philistines. It is interesting to me, that 3,000 men had to ask to bind Samson.

Judges 15:14 "[And] when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that [were] upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands."

The place which was afterwards so called, from what happened there at this time, and where the Philistines were spread (Judges 15:9). This, according to Bunting, was six miles from Etam.

"The Philistines shouted against him": For joy that they had got him into their hands, and in the circumstances he was, being bound, so that they had nothing to fear from him.

"And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him": As it at times did, and had done before. The Targum is, "the Spirit of might from the Lord", which gave him courage and resolution of mind, and great strength of body. Even while he was speaking, as a token of the wonders God more than he had at other times.

"And the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire": As easily parted as the flax when fire takes it, which is consumed at once.

"And his bonds loosed off from his hands": By which it appears that both arms and hands were bound with the cords. His arms were pinioned close to his body, as well as his hands were tied together. And these, as in the original, "melted away". Like wax before the fire, or snow before the sun, so easily were these bands separated from him. This may be an emblem of Christ's loosing himself from the cords of death (Acts 2:24).

The Philistines were shouting, because they thought they would surely be able to kill Samson. They were many, and he was just one man. They had overlooked the power of God within Samson. Look at "the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him". God and Samson are a majority, regardless of how many they are. The ropes were nothing to him with the power of God within him. They broke easily and fell from his arms.

Judges 15:15 "And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith."

"Slew a thousand men" (compare 3:31). God gave miraculous power to Samson for destruction, but also to show fearful Israelites (verse 11), that He was with them, despite their lack of trust.

A new jawbone would not be dried out from the sun. It would be pliable. Before the Philistines could recover from the two ropes falling off of Samson, he had killed a thousand of them with the jawbone of an ass. One can put a thousand to flight, when he is operating in the power of God.

Judges 15:16 "And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men."

No victory in the Christian life is ever won apart from the grace of God's strength working through that individual. Samson failed to give credit for his strength to God, declaring instead, "Have I slain a thousand men"! It was a pride that would eventually be his undoing.

This again seems cruel, but we must continue to remember that God had brought Samson into the world to destroy the Philistines.

Judges 15:17 "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi."

Of delivering out the above song, which very probably consisted of much more than what is here expressed.

"That he cast away the jawbone out of his hand": Which he held in his hand had wrought by him through the means of it, and so served to animate him to praise and thankfulness. But having no further use for it, he threw it away.

"And called the place Ramath-lehi": That is, the casting away the jawbone, so Kimchi. But Ben Gersom thinks it was a high place where it was thrown, and so signifies the elevation or lifting up of the "jawbone", as the Septuagint version renders it.

"Ramath-lehi" means height of Lechi, or of the jawbone.

Verses 18-19: This is the only time in Samson's life where we have a record of a prayer, except for the one he prayed when he died. Samson recognized that his victory was really God's victory, and in turn, God answered Samson's prayer for "water" and then confirmed Samson as a judge of Israel for 20 years.

Judges 15:18 "And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?"

Which Josephus thinks came upon him as a rebuke unto him, for ascribing the victory he had obtained to his own strength, and not to the Lord. Whereby he was shown his own weakness, and how easily his strength could be reduced. But for this there seems to be no foundation. It is not to be wondered at, in a natural way, that he should be thirsty after he had been bound with cords. After he had so exerted himself, and slain 1000 men with his own hand, and after he had celebrated this victory with a triumphant song. And it may also be observed, that it was so ordered in Providence, that he might in this be a type of the Messiah, who on the cross, as he was spoiling principalities and powers, and triumphing over them in it, said, "I thirst" (John 19:28).

"And called on the Lord, and said": In prayer to him.

"Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant": He owns the deliverance to be great, as indeed, it was. And that it was of the Lord, and he only his servant and instrument in it.

"And now shall I die for thirst": When my life has been saved in so wonderful a manner, and so great a salvation has been wrought by my hands, as an instrument.

"And fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" Which would be matter of joy and triumph to them, and mar the glory of the deliverance wrought.

This seemed to be a place where there was no water and Samson was thirsty. He thought he might have to go to the Philistines to get water.

Judges 15:19 "But God clave a hollow place that [was] in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which [is] in Lehi unto this day."

"Came water thereout": God worked a miracle of supplying a spring in response to Samson's prayerful cry in thirst. He called the place "the spring of him that called" (compare Jer. 33:3).

From a circular depression in Lehi "God" caused a spring to gush out of the ground to assuage Samson's thirst. Samson called it "En-hakkore", "The Spring of the Caller". God's tender care of a weary Samson is reminiscent of His loving provision for Elijah (compare 1 Kings 17:2-6; 19:4-8).

God miraculously furnished him water to drink. God clave a place, and a spring of water came out. Samson drank, and was refreshed. I believe it is saying, it was at the place of the jawbone. It would not matter though. God could make water come from the jawbone, if He desired. He is God, and He can do with His creation whatever He wants to. "En-hakkore" means spring of him that calleth.

Judges 15:20 "And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years."

While they had the power over the Israelites, who were not entirely delivered out of their hands by Samson, he only began to deliver them, but did not completely do it. Though he got many advantages over them, and wrought many salvations and deliverances, yet was not the author of perfect salvation (see Judges 13:5). However, he was a check upon the Philistines, and protected the Israelites from heavier oppressions, which otherwise they would have come under. And no doubt administered justice and judgment among them, and was an instrument of their reformation, and of preserving them from idolatry. For in such things the work of a judge chiefly lay. Some from hence observe, that this shows the years of servitude and bondage are included in the years of the judges.

This shows that his strength from this spring of water revived him, and he judged 20 years.

Chapter 15 Questions

1. What did Samson take, when he went to see his wife?
2. Who stopped him?
3. Why was he not allowed to see his wife?

4. Why had the father given her to his friend?
5. Who did the father offer Samson, instead of his wife?
6. Who will Samson take vengeance on?
7. How many foxes did Samson catch?
8. What did he do with them?
9. What did the foxes burn up?
10. What answer did the Philistines get, when they asked who had done this?
11. What did the Philistines do to Samson's wife?
12. What does the statement "He smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter" mean?
13. What is the top of the rock, probably, speaking of?
14. What did the Philistines do?
15. Who thinks the Philistines have come to attack them?
16. How many of them go to get Samson for the Philistines?
17. What did they say to Samson?
18. Why does Samson not kill them?
19. What does Samson agree, they can do to him?
20. What must we continue to remember in all of this killing?
21. What did Samson make the men of Judah swear to him?
22. How did they tie him up?
23. It is interesting, that it took _____ men to bind Samson?
24. What caused the cords to break on his arms?
25. What weapon did he use against the Philistines?
26. How many did Samson kill with this unusual weapon?
27. What did Samson name this place?
28. What does the name mean?

29. Samson was _____, after the killing of the Philistines?

30. What did God do to give him water to drink?

31. How long did Samson judge?