

Judges

Chapter 15

Samson Defeats the Philistines

After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. And he said, "I will go in to my wife in the chamber." But her father would not allow him to go in. 2 And her father said, "I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead." 3 And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm." 4 So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5 And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards. 6 Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. 7 And Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit." 8 And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam. 9 Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" They said, "We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us." 11 Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so have I done to them." 12 And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves." 13 They said to him, "No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. 14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. 15 And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men. 16 And Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men." 17 As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi. 18 And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said, "You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" 19 And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day. 20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

15:1 *time of wheat harvest.* Near the end of May or the beginning of June. (CSB)

End of May or beginning of June. (TLSB)

young goat. Such a gift was customary, as with Judah and Tamar (Ge 38:17). (CSB)

In the Near East to this day, there is a certain kind of marriage in which the wife continues to live with her parents with the husband visiting periodically, always bearing a gift. Samson assumed that the wedding, which he left in a rage, had been valid. (TLSB)

chamber. The woman's room. (TLSB)

15:2 *hated*. May have meant divorce. To the Philistine, Samson had abandoned his bride by leaving before the feast was over and the marriage was consummated. Samson never initiated a divorce under Mosaic Law. Confusion about whether the couple was married illustrates one of the problems of marriages that involve different marriage laws and customs. (CSB)

younger sister. Samson's father-in-law felt he had to make a counterproposal because he had received the bride-price from Samson. Similar marital transactions were made by Laban and Jacob (Ge 29:16–28) and Saul and David (1Sa 18:19–21). (CSB)

15:3 He felt he deserved revenge. His treatment at the hands of these Philistines was emblematic of how the whole nation mistreated the Israelites. (TLSB)

15:4 *foxes*. The Hebrew word may refer to foxes or jackals, both of which are still found in modern Israel. (CSB)

Or jackals, which travel in packs. The Romans would tie torches to the tails of foxes as part of their worship of Ceres, goddess of the harvest. Hannibal sent oxen with torches between their horns to attack the Romans. Samson, in effect, turned the animals into incendiary devices. (TLSB)

15:5 *burned up*. The wheat harvest (v. 1) comes at the end of a long dry season, thus making the fields extremely vulnerable to fire. (CSB)

15:6 *son-in-law*. Philistines blamed the father's efforts to save his family's honor. (TLSB)

burned her and her father. What the companions threatened to do if the woman did not come up with the answer to the riddle (14:15), making this an example of Philistine unfaithfulness and cruelty. Taking revenge against this helpless family was easier than fighting Samson. (TLSB)

15:7 *revenge*. A common feature of life in the ancient Near East. Six cities of refuge were designated by the Lord to prevent endless killings (Jos 20:1–9). (CSB)

15:8 *he struck them hip and thigh*. Expression for unsparing slaughter. Imagery may refer to limbs hewed off and piled up or to a wrestling move, which is pictured in an ancient Babylonian inscription of Gilgamesh. (TLSB)

rock of Etam. Location unclear. Caves in the cliffs of nearby Wadi Isma'in are accessible only by climbing through a fissure wide enough for only one person. (TLSB)

15:9 *Lehi*. Means "jawbone." This locality probably did not receive the name until after the events described here; the author uses the name in anticipation of those events—a common device in Hebrew narrative. The exact site of Lehi is not known. (CSB)

Lit, "jawbone." Probably named after Samson's exploit (vv 15, 18). Location uncertain. (TLSB)

15:11 *three thousand men from Judah*. The only time a force from Judah is explicitly mentioned in connection with any of the judges. The men of Judah were well aware of Samson's capabilities, and even with a large force they did not attempt to tie him up without his consent (vv. 12–13). (CSB)

Philistines are rulers over us. Much of Judah was under Philistine rule, and the tribe was apparently content to accept it. They mustered a force, not to support Samson, but to capture him for the Philistines. (CSB)

The Judeans feared the Philistines domination. (TLSB)

As they did to me. Echoes the Philistines (v 10). Motivation on each side was reprisal and an escalating counter-reprisal. (TLSB)

15:14 *shouting.* A battle cry (see 1Sa 17:52). They came shouting against Samson as the lion had come roaring against him (14:5). (CSB)

15:12 Illustrates degradation of the Israelites. Instead of seeing in Samson a God-sent deliverer and joining him in battle, they cooperated with their oppressors and sought to arrest him. Unlike other judges, Samson raised no army but fought the enemy hosts completely alone. (TLSB)

15:13 *new.* Not brittle or rotten. Anticipates 16:11. (TLSB)

15:15 *jawbone of a donkey.* Impromptu weapon. (TLSB)

struck down a thousand men. Cf. the exploits of Shamgar, who struck down 600 Philistines with an oxgoad (3:31). (CSB)

15:16 Hbr for “donkey” and “heaps” have the same consonantal spelling; wordplay. (TLSB)

15:18 *Must I now die of thirst ... ?* Mighty Samson was, after all, only a mortal man. (CSB)

15:19 *hollow place.* Lit, the “socket” of a tooth. Luther translated it to mean that water came out of the socket of the donkey’s jawbone, but the term more likely refers to a formation in the rock. (TLSB)

water came out of it. God provided for Samson as he had for Israel in the desert. See Ex 17:1–7 (Massah and Meribah); Nu 20:2–13 (Meribah). (CSB)

to this day. It still flowed when Jgs was written. (TLSB)

15:20 *twenty years.* Round numbers are frequently used in Judges (see Introduction: Background). (CSB)

Ch 15 Samson goes to claim his bride, only to find that her father has married her to someone else. Enraged, Samson begins a personal conflict with the Philistines. Despite Samson’s rage, the Holy Spirit works through Samson to accomplish “great salvation” for His people. Samson rightly confesses that this is God’s gift, for He is the true Judge and Savior. • O Lord, protect me from the impulse to take revenge. Forgive me for having sinned by conforming to the godless culture around me. Give me courage to resist the temptations of the world and to trust that I am never alone, thanks to Your Holy Spirit, who keeps me strong in faith. Amen. (TLSB)