

Judges

Chapter 15

Samson's Vengeance on the Philistines

Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife. He said, "I'm going to my wife's room." But her father would not let him go in. ² "I was so sure you thoroughly hated her," he said, "that I gave her to your friend. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead." ³ Samson said to them, "This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them." ⁴ So he went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to every pair of tails, ⁵ lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves. ⁶ When the Philistines asked, "Who did this?" they were told, "Samson, the Timnite's son-in-law, because his wife was given to his friend." So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. ⁷ Samson said to them, "Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you." ⁸ He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam. ⁹ The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi. ¹⁰ The men of Judah asked, "Why have you come to fight us?" "We have come to take Samson prisoner," they answered, "to do to him as he did to us." ¹¹ Then three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Don't you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?" He answered, "I merely did to them what they did to me." ¹² They said to him, "We've come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines." Samson said, "Swear to me that you won't kill me yourselves." ¹³ "Agreed," they answered. "We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock. ¹⁴ As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. ¹⁵ Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men. ¹⁶ Then Samson said, "With a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men." ¹⁷ When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi. ¹⁸ Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" ¹⁹ Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi. ²⁰ Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

15:1 *time of wheat harvest.* Near the end of May or the beginning of June (see note on Ru 1:22). (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.

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 (but see note on 1:2). 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)

Spirit of the LORD. See notes on 3:10; 11:29; 14:19. (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 *led Israel ... years*. See note on 12:7. (TLSB)

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)