

Judges 15 - Samson Burns the Philistine Harvest; Battle of Lehi; Samson Kills 1,000 Philistines with a Jawbone

II. Failure in rescue of Israel through the seven cycles (Judges 3:7—16:31)

(13) Samson defeats the Philistines (Judges 13:1—16:31)

(C) Salvation (13:2—16:31)

(d) Samson's conflict with the Philistines (Judges 14:1—16:31)

(iii) Samson's vengeance on the Philistines (15:1-20)

(a) Burning a field because one of them married his wife (15:1-6)

(b) Killed many of them when he took vengeance upon them (15:7-8)

(c) Killed 1000 of them with the donkey's jaw bone at Lehi (15:9-20)

Finishing Well

The Scriptures are full of disappointing examples:

- Lot had the privilege of walking with Abraham and yet ended in a cave, drunk and committing incest with his daughters
- King Saul began as a humble man but ended up a suicide, destroyed by his stubborn pride
- King Uzziah was a godly man until he became strong. When he tried to usurp the place of the priests, God judged him by giving him leprosy.
- Ahithophel was David's most trusted advisor, but he ended up hanging himself (he was Bathsheba's Grandfather!)
- Paul's helper Demas abandoned the ministry because he "loved this present world" (2 Tim 4:10)

Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending. — Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Judges 15

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(iii) Samson's vengeance on the Philistines (15:1-20)

(a) Burning a field because one of them married his wife (15:1-6)

1 But after a while, in the time of **wheatharvest**, Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, "I will go in to my wife in *her* room." But her father did not let him enter.

1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, "I will go in to my wife in *her* room." But her father did not let him enter.

1 A while later during the wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife, bringing along a young goat, and told his father-in-law, "I'm going into my wife's room." But her father wouldn't give permission for him to go.

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.

- Not sure how long after Samson stormed off (14:19) that he returned to his wife

- "...wheat harvest" - May or June; the dry season

2 Her father said, "I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is her younger sister not more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead."

2 Her father said, "I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead."

2 Her father said, "Because I honestly thought that you hated her deeply, I gave her in marriage to your best man. Isn't her younger sister better than she? Please then, let her be yours instead."

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.

- Although he had never consummated the marriage, Samson thought he was legally married to the woman of Timnah. Therefore, he took a gift and went to visit her in her father's house.

— How shocked he must have been to learn that not only was he not married, but also the woman he loved was now married to his best-man!

- There are several surprised bridegrooms in the Bible:

— Adam went to sleep a single man and woke up to learn (happily) that he was married (Gen 2:21-25)

— Jacob woke up and discovered he was married to the wrong woman (Gen 29:21-30)

— Boaz woke up to find his prospective wife lying at his feet on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1-13)

Samson had paid the legal "bride price" for his wife, and now he had neither the money nor the wife. He was angry, and even the offer of a younger and prettier bride didn't appease him (it was also prohibited, Lev 18:18).

If anybody should have been punished, it was his father-in-law. After all, he took the money and gave the bride away—to the wrong man! But Samson decided to take out his anger on the Philistines by burning up the grain in their fields.

3 Samson then said to them, "This time I will have been blameless regarding the Philistines when I do them harm."

3 Samson then said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm."

3 Samson replied to them, "This time I'll be blameless when I do something evil to the Philistines."

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

4 And Samson went and caught three hundred **jackals**, and took **torches**, and turned *the jackals* tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails.

4 Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned *the foxes* tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails.

4 So Samson went out, caught 300 foxes, grabbed some torches, tied the foxes together in pairs at their tails, and fastened a torch between each pair of tails.

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.

- "...jackals" - *shuw`al*, jackals prowl in large packs.

— Had he tied the firebrands to individual animals, they each would have immediately run to their dens. But by putting two animals together and turning them loose, he could be fairly sure that their fear of the fire and their inability to maneuver easily would make them panic. Thus they would run around frantically into the fields and ignite the grain. The fire then would spread into the vineyards and olive groves.

- "...torches" - pieces of wood wrapped in absorbent material and soaked in oil before being lit

5 When he had set fire to the torches, he released *the jackals* into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to both the bundled heaps and the standing grain, along with the vineyards *and* olive groves.

5 When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the

vineyards *and* groves.

5 Then he ignited the torches, set the foxes loose into the Philistines' unharvested grain, and burned up both the harvested shocks and the standing grain, along with their vineyards and olive groves.

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.

- This was a deliberate attempt to decimate the Philistine economy; at about the time these fields could be harvested, they were destroyed

6 Then the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And *some* said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father *to death* with fire.

6 Then the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

6 Then the Philistines demanded, "Who did this?"

Someone said, "Samson, son-in-law of the Timnite, because his father-in-law took Samson's wife and gave her to the best man at Samson's wedding." In retaliation, the Philistines came up and burned her and her father to death.

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.

- Since they couldn't hope to overcome Samson, they did the next best thing and vented their wrath on his wife and father-in-law

— In the long run, her betrayal of Samson didn't save her life after all (14:15)

— Her plan to protect her father by betraying her husband "backfired" completely!

(b) Killed many of them when he took vengeance upon them (15:7-8)

7 Then Samson said to them, "If this is how you act, I will certainly take revenge on you, and *only* after *that* will I stop."

7 Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit."

7 Samson replied to them, "Because you did this, I'm not going to stop until I get my revenge against you!"

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

- Such an act of cruelty against their own kind will now justify Samson's war against them
- Samson assumed that once he killed the ones directly responsible for killing his wife, he would remove himself from the conflict. However, neither God nor the Philistines would allow this to happen.

— At this point, however, Samson will not limit himself to destroying property only, he will now begin to attack their lives

8 So he struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and *afterward* he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

8 He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of **Etam**.

8 So he attacked them ruthlessly in a massive slaughter, then left to live in the caves of Etam.

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.

- Samson then withdrew from the conflict and intended to leave the Philistines alone; but such was not the purpose of his birth

- "...Etam" - this is not the Etam mentioned in 1 Chr 4:32 (too far away) or 2 Chr 11:6 (hadn't been built yet)

— It was some elevated place in Judah, near Lehi, from which Samson could safely and conveniently watch the enemy

(c) Killed 1000 of them with the donkey's jaw bone at Lehi (15:9-20)

9 Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi.

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9 In response, the Philistines went up, encamped in the territory of Judah, and raided Lehi.

9 Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

- Both Etam and Lehi are in Judah, which is why the Philistines went to Judah instead of Dan

10 So the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" And they said, "We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us."

10 The men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" And they said, "We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us."

10 The leading men of Judah asked, "Why have you invaded us?"

They replied, "We're here to arrest Samson. Then we're going to do to him what he did to us."

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.

- The intention of the Philistines in Judah was to capture and kill Samson in revenge
- The invasion of Judah didn't help Samson's popularity with his own people, who sadly were content to submit to their neighbors and make the best of a bad situation
- Instead of seeing Samson as their deliverer, the men of Judah simply considered him a troublemaker
- It was Samson's own fault: he was a champion, but not a leader. He didn't challenge the people, organize them, and trust God to give them victory.

11 Then three thousand 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, "Just as they did to me, so I have done to them."

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 I have done to them."

11 In response, 3,000 soldiers from the tribe of Judah went down to the caves of the rock of Etam and asked Samson, "Don't you know that the Philistines have us in their control? What have you done to us?"

"I did to them what they did to me," he answered.

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.

- The fact that Judah came with such a large contingent shows their respect for Samson's strength
- This is the only time during Samson's judgeship that the Jews mustered an army, and it was for the purpose of capturing one of their own. The killing of the Philistines was a threat to Judah.
- A nation is in a sad state indeed when the citizens cooperate with the enemy and hand over their own God-appointed leader!

12 Then they said to him, "We have come down to bind you so that we may hand you over to the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me."

12 They said to him, "We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me."

12 They responded, "We've come here to arrest you and transfer you to the custody of the Philistines."

Samson told them, "Promise me that you won't kill me."

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.

13 So they said to him, "No, but we will bind you tightly and give you into their hands; but we certainly will not kill you." Then they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock.

13 So they said to him, "No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill you." Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

13 So they said, "No, we won't. But we're going to tie you up securely and transfer you to their custody. But we won't kill you." Then they bound him with two ropes and brought him up from the caves.

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.

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD **rushed upon him** so that the ropes that were on his arms were like flax that has burned with fire, and his restraints **dropped** from his hands.

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

14 When Samson arrived at Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, so that the ropes that bound him were like flax that's been burned by fire, and his bonds dissolved.

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 Philistines shouted in elation, as Samson was being delivered into their hands, by his own people

— The Philistines now expected to be able to put Samson to death

- "...rushed upon him" - fourth (and last) time the Holy Spirit "came upon" Samson (13:24-25; 14:6,19; 15:14)

- "...dropped" - melted

15 Then he found a **fresh** jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out with his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it.

15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it.

15 He happened upon a jawbone from a putrefying donkey, reached out to grab it, and killed 1,000 men with it.

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

- "...fresh" - moist, new; this made it heavy and tough; an old one would have been too brittle

— However, it was part of a corpse, so handling it was another violation of Samson's Nazirite Vow

- It's ironic that the Philistines had the most advanced weapons technology of their day: iron, iron spears, iron chariots, etc. With this technology, they had subjugated the Israelites.

— Here, the Spirit of God defeated 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a jackass!

16 And Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, **Heaps upon heaps**, With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men."

16 Then Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men."

16 Then Samson declared, "With a jawbone from the donkey— here a heap, there a pair of heaps— with the jawbone of the donkey I've killed 1,000 men."

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.

- Samson had a way with words. At his wedding feast, he devised a clever riddle (14:14); and after this great victory, he wrote a poem. It's elegant paronomasia, based on the similarity between the sounds of the Hebrew words *chamor* ("donkey") and *chomer* ("heap").

- In the Hebrew it reads: "With a donkey's jawbone, I made a donkey of them; with a donkey's jawbone I killed a thousand men."

- "...Heaps upon heaps" - this indicates the manner in which he slew the Philistines. It appears that Samson pursued a number of Philistines and piled their bodies in a heap, then pursued and killed another group and piled their bodies in a heap.

17 When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place **Ramath-lehi**.

17 When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi.

17 When he finally finished bragging, he discarded the jawbone and named that place "Jawbone Heights."

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.

- "...Ramath-Lehi" - "lifting of the jawbone" or "Jawbone Heights"

18 Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the LORD and said, "You have handed this great victory over to **Yourservant**, and now am I to die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"

18 Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the LORD and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"

18 Aferward, he became thirsty, called out to the LORD, and told him, "So, you provided this great deliverance at the hands of your servant, but now I'm to die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"

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?

- "...Your servant" - shows Samson understood his calling; his problem was a lack of faithfulness to that calling

- The point is that, as a consequence of his thirst, he will become weak and not be able to withstand the Philistines, will be captured by them, and killed. In the end, this is exactly what will happen, but not just yet.

- So often in Scripture, testing follows triumph:

— No sooner had the Israelites crossed the Red Sea than they became thirsty (Ex 15:22-27) and hungry (Ex 16)

— Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel was followed by his humiliating flight to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 18-19)

If triumphs aren't balanced with trials, there's a danger that we'll become proud and self-confident. Samson's prayer indicates that he considered himself God's servant and that he didn't want to end his life falling into the hands of the godless Philistines. Unfortunately, that's just what ultimately happened.

19 But God split **the hollow place** that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it **En-hakkore**, which is in Lehi to this day.

19 But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

19 So God split a hollow place that's in Lehi, and water sprang out of it. After he had taken a drink, his strength returned, and he revived. That's why it was named "En-hakkore," which is in Lehi to this day.

19 But God clave an 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.

- "...the hollow place" - *maktesh*, refers to a round and deep basin

— It refers to a seam in the rock, which when struck open released the water, which was trapped between the layers of limestone

- "...En-hakkore" - "spring of the caller" or "the well of him who cried"

20 So he judged Israel for twenty years **in the days of** the Philistines.

20 So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

20 Samson governed Israel for twenty years during the Philistine domination.

20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

- "...in the days of" - refers to "during" the days of, not "after"

— Samson's judgeship was during the time of Philistine oppression; he was probably a contemporary with both Abimelech and Jephthah

- Samson's judgeship covered the period from 1080-1060 BC