



## Judges - Chapter Fifteen

- II [Judges 3:7-16:31 - The Downward Spiral of Israel's Apostasy \(continues\)](#)
- II.m [Judges 13:1-16:31 - Samson \(continues\)](#)
- II.m.ii [Judges 14:1-15:20 - Samson and the Philistines, Part 1 \(continues/concludes\)](#)

### Summary of Chapter Fifteen

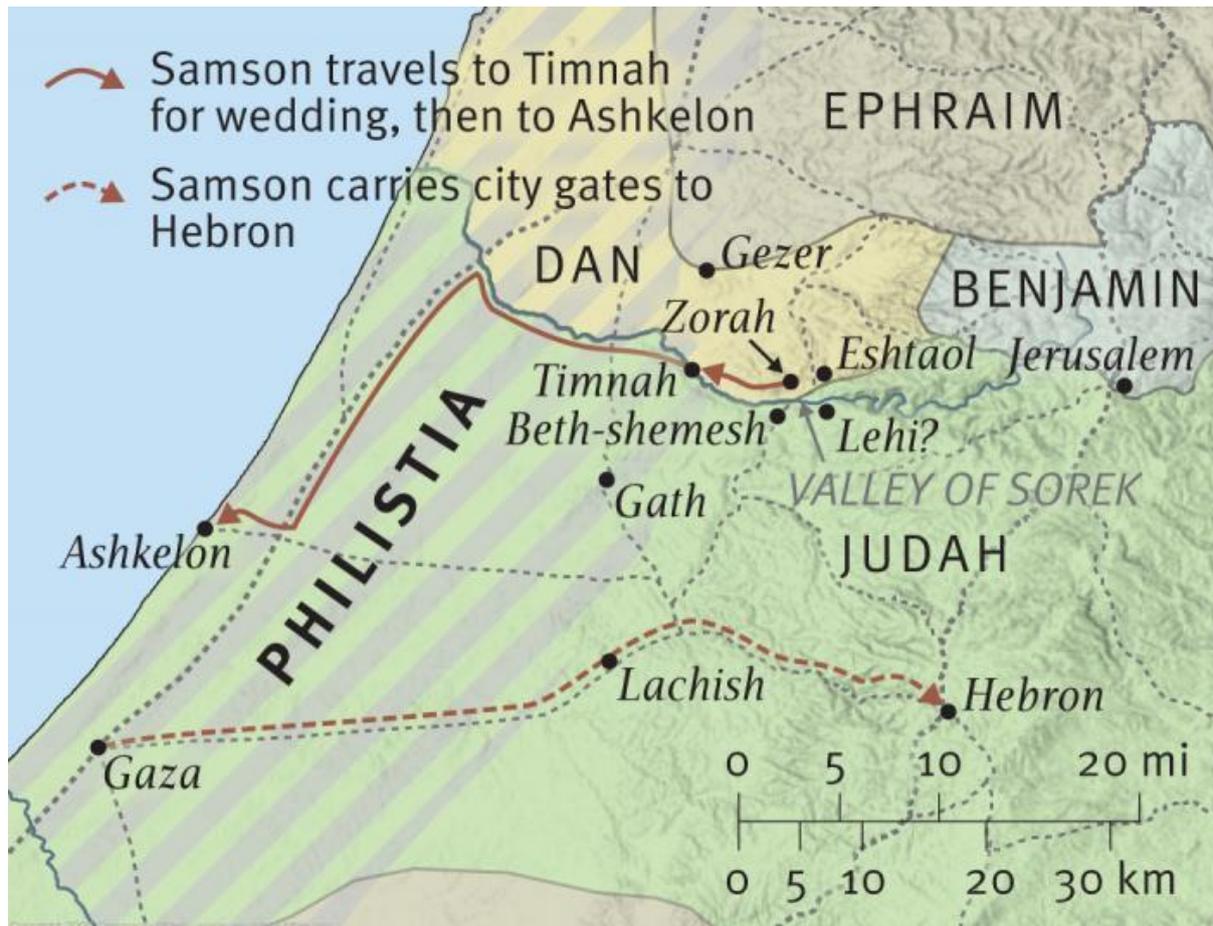
When Samson went to Timnah to visit his wife, his father in law would not allow him to see her saying that he thought Samson had rejected her and that she had now been given to another man. In response, Samson caught three hundred foxes, tied them in pairs by their tails, set fire to them and released them so that they destroyed all the crops, vineyards and olive groves. In response to this the Philistines killed Samson's wife and her father.

The Philistines then went up against Judah looking for Samson. Feeling threatened by the Philistines, to whom they were subjugated, the Judæans went to Samson and, agreeing not to harm him themselves, they bound him and took him to the Philistines.

When they had delivered him, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, he broke the ropes binding him and killed one thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone. This was thirsty work and there was no water in that place, so God miraculously supplied Samson with water to drink.

### II.m.ii.2 [Judges 15:1-20 - Samson Defeats the Philistines](#)

Refer to the chapter summary above.



### Samson's Exploits

The Philistines ruled over Israel during Samson's lifetime, and Samson was raised up by God to begin to deliver Israel from them. Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman in Timnah led to a number of encounters with the Philistines, often resulting in their harm at Samson's hand.

<sup>1</sup> After a while, at the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, bringing along a kid. He said, 'I want to go into my wife's room.' But her father would not allow him to go in. <sup>2</sup> Her father said, 'I was sure that you had rejected her; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister prettier than she? Why not take her instead?' <sup>3</sup> Samson said to them, 'This time, when I do mischief to the Philistines, I will be without blame.'

#### Judges 15:1-3

A kid is a young goat. Tamar required the same gift of Judah, her father in law, before she would consent to sexual relations with him, for he believed her to be a shrine prostitute: <<He answered, 'I will send you a kid from the flock.' And she said, 'Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it'>> (Genesis 38:17).

I was sure that you had rejected her. It is hard to know why Samson's father-in-law thought that Samson had rejected, literally hated, his wife. Perhaps this was just an excuse to explain why he did what he did; or perhaps Samson's Philistine wife poisoned her father's opinion of Samson: <<*So Samson's wife wept before him, saying, 'You hate me; you do not really love me. You have asked a riddle of my people, but you have not explained it to me.'* He said to her, 'Look, I have not told my father or my mother. Why should I tell you?'>> (Judges 14:16).

Samson said to them. Even though Samson was angry with his wife's father, the real root of the problem was the bad choices Samson made in love. He had no business allowing himself to fall in love with an ungodly, pagan woman. Again, it is no wonder Proverbs 4:23 states: <<*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life*>>. Failure to guard the heart can result in great tribulation.

This time, when I do mischief to the Philistines, I will be without blame. God used Samson's ungodly anger for his purposes. As it is written: <<*Human wrath serves only to praise you*>> (Psalm 76:10a). This does not justify Samson's anger, but it shows the glory and power of God to use all things to his purposes: <<*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*>> (Romans 8:28).

<sup>4</sup> So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took some torches; and he turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. <sup>5</sup> When he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

#### Judges 15:4-5

So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes. Samson seemed to act like a juvenile delinquent. Yet God used it all for his purpose of fighting against the Philistines. It is possible that the animals were not foxes but jackals, which were more common in Palestine. The two animals look similar, and the same Hebrew word *shu'al* is used for both. Whereas foxes are solitary, jackals travel in packs, and thus three hundred of them could be caught more easily, although it does not say that Samson caught them by himself or that he did so in a short period of time. Both animals have long tails that could be tied together. However, foxes have bushy tails that would burn more easily and for longer.

<sup>6</sup> Then the Philistines asked, 'Who has done this?' And they said, 'Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken Samson's

wife and given her to his companion.’ So the Philistines came up, and burned her and her father. <sup>7</sup> Samson said to them, ‘If this is what you do, I swear I will not stop until I have taken revenge on you.’

#### Judges 15:6-7

So the Philistines came up, and burned her and her father. The Philistines retaliated by killing Samson’s wife and her father by burning them alive. Ironically, this was the very fate she was attempting to avoid by extracting from Samson the answer to his riddle.

God used all this to advance his plan for Israel and redemption. Yet, because of Samson’s disobedience, it all happened at great personal cost to Samson. It is fair to suppose that if Samson had been truly obedient, God would have furthered his plan in a way that blessed Samson.

I swear I will not stop until I have taken revenge on you. This is a bitter story of retaliation, of trying to personally avenge wrongs done. Retaliation is a never-ending story, and one that never wins in the end. Those who trust in God must be able to say, “Retaliation belongs to God. I’ll let him settle the score.” After all, God has commanded this: <<*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’*>> (Romans 12:19), and: <<*For we know the one who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people’*>> (Hebrews 10:30), where both writers are quoting Deuteronomy 32:35.

Much of the war, disaster, deep-seated hatred, and pain in the world come from this instinct to retaliate. But Jesus taught not retaliate an eye for an eye, but to take control of the situation by giving even more; refer to Matthew 5:38-42. When people do this, they act like God, who did not retaliate against man for his sin and rebellion, but instead gave his only Son to die for humankind.

<sup>8</sup> He struck them down hip and thigh with great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

#### Judges 15:8

He struck them down hip and thigh. This is an expression for a cruel, unsparing slaughter. Samson was a one-man army against the Philistines. The exact meaning of this idiom is obscure. Perhaps Samson left his enemies in a tangled jumble of legs and thighs. The expression may have originated in the art of wrestling, where brute strength like Samson’s would obviously have been an advantage.

He went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam. Samson could not return to his parent’s and could trust virtually no one. He lived like a fugitive, alone in a cave.

<sup>9</sup> Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah, and made a raid on Lehi. <sup>10</sup> 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.’ <sup>11</sup> Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and they said to Samson, ‘Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then have you done to us?’ He replied, ‘As they did to me, so I have done to them.’ <sup>12</sup> They said to him, ‘We have come down to bind you, so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.’ Samson answered them, ‘Swear to me that you yourselves will not attack me.’ <sup>13</sup> They said to him, ‘No, we will only bind you and give you into their hands; we will not kill you.’ So they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock.

### Judges 15:9-13

We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us. The fact that soldiers from the tribe of Judah gave up Samson to the Philistines shows just how much they were under the oppression of the Philistines. They would rather please their oppressors than support their deliverer. This is a strangely common phenomenon. Often, when someone stands up to evil, people are angrier at the one who stood up to the evil than they are angry at the evil itself.

Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? Samson did not want to hear this or recognise it. As far as he was concerned, the Philistines should not rule over the people of God. It was his sole mission in life to liberate his people from the yoke of the Philistines.

Swear to me that you yourselves will not attack me. Samson was a leader in Israel and he did not want to find himself in a situation where he would have to attack and kill his own countrymen in order to escape. However, he was content to accept their word and for them to bind and take him to the Philistines for he had faith that God would allow him to deal with that situation.

So they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock. It seems that Samson submitted to this. Assuming this was true; it showed great faith on Samson’s part. He was willing to put himself in a difficult position and to trust God to take care of him.

<sup>14</sup> When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him; and the spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. <sup>15</sup> Then he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached

down and took it, and with it he killed a thousand men. <sup>16</sup> And Samson said,

‘With the jawbone of a donkey,  
heaps upon heaps,  
with the jawbone of a donkey  
I have slain a thousand men.’

<sup>17</sup> When he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and that place was called Ramath-lehi.

### Judges 15:14-17

The spirit of the Lord rushed on him. The OT speaks many times of God’s Spirit acting upon individuals, usually to empower them for some service for the whole people of God. In Judges this is described by the Spirit being upon (Othniel, 3:10; Jephthah, 11:29), clothing (Gideon, 6:34), stirring (Samson, 13:25), or rushing upon someone (Samson, 14:6 and 14:19; and Saul, 1 Samuel 10:6, 10:10 and 11:6; and David, 1 Samuel 16:13).

Then he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached down and took it, and with it he killed a thousand men. Samson was unique among the judges because he was a one-man army against the Philistines. Other Judges of Israel led armies against their enemies, but Samson fought alone. One can only wonder how much more successful Samson could have been had he only fought by the will of God rather than because of his own passions!

A fresh jawbone of a donkey. Presumably the advantage of this weapon was that it would not have been dry and brittle; hence there was no danger of it breaking.

With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps. Samson’s bold declaration of victory has a poetic touch that is difficult to render in translation. One effort goes like this: ‘With the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass!’

Ramath-lehi means the hill of the jawbone.

<sup>18</sup> By then he was very thirsty, and he called on the Lord, saying, ‘You have granted this great victory by the hand of your servant. Am I now to die of thirst, and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?’ <sup>19</sup> So God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came from it. When he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore it was named En-hakkore, which is at Lehi to this day. <sup>20</sup> And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines for twenty years.

## Judges 15:18-20

By then he was very thirsty. Samson needed this thirst to be reminded of his own weakness and need right after such a great victory. After a great victory Christians need to remember their own mortality.

It is common for God's people, when they have had some great deliverance, to have some little trouble that is too much for them. Samson slays a thousand Philistines, and piles them up in heaps, and then he fears he might die for want of a little water! Matthew Poole comments on Samson's great thirst: "it was partly sent by God, that by the experience of his own impotency he might be forced to ascribe the victory to God only, and not to himself."

Fall into the hands of the uncircumcised. This was a title of derision to show the cultural difference between the people of the covenant, who were circumcised by command of God, and the Philistines, who were not circumcised. Refer also to the comments made on Judges 14:3.

So God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came from it. When he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. This is an example of the principle that God's work, when done God's way, will always be provided for by God. Here, the Lord showed his faithfulness to Samson by supplying the needs of his servant.

In his sermon *The Fainting Hero*, Charles Spurgeon pointed out that the believer can look at heaps upon heaps of defeated enemies: "Heaps of your sins, heaps of your doubts and fears, heaps of our temptations, heaps of many of your sorrows. Yet, despite all these victories, fresh challenges will come, even as a deadly thirst and fatigue overcame Samson. Through this all, Samson could count on the fact that the past victory was a promise of future deliverance. With that simple minded faith which was so characteristic of Samson, who was nothing but a big child, he turned his eye to his heavenly Father, and cried, O Jehovah, thou hast given me this great deliverance, and now shall I die for thirst? After all that thou hast done for me, shall the uncircumcised rejoice over me because I die for want of a drink of water? Such confidence had he, that God would interpose on his behalf."

Therefore it was named En-hakkore, which is at Lehi to this day. This is an indication that the narrator recorded these events many years later. Jewish tradition has the author of Judges as Samuel, which is possible, but the authorship is unconfirmed.

Both sections of the Samson stories (14:1-15:20 and 16:1-31) end with a notice of Samson's judging Israel for twenty years.