

## Samson Burns the Philistines' Crops Which Escalates Into War

### Judges 15

Samson retruns to Timnah to get his wife only to find out that she had been given to another, presumably his best man in his wedding. In his anger, Samson burned the crops with torches tied to the tails of foxes and killed a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey when the Philistines came to fight the Israelites.

### *There and Then*

#### Outline:

A complete outline for Judges is available on the [Downloads](#) page in the *Outlines & Word Lists* folder.

Group <sup>1</sup>	C	V	Description
Samson burns Philistine Crops	15	1-8	Samson tries to retrieve his wife who was given to another man, he is offered her younger sister but burns the Philistine crops instead
		9-13	Philistines invaded Judah to find Samson; Judah seeks out Samson to give him to the Philistines
		14-20	Philistines rejoiced thinking they had won but Samson escapes and kills 1000 men with the jawbone of a donkey; God causes water to come from a rock to refresh Samson after he prays for water—Samson judges 20 years

#### People:

Samson, Samson's wife, her father, her younger sister, Philistines, men of Judah, Spirit of the LORD, LORD, God, Israel

#### Location:

Timnah, cleft of the rock of Etam, Lehi in Judah, Ramath-lehi (the high place of the jawbone<sup>2</sup>), En-hakkore (the spring of him who called<sup>3</sup>)

#### Context:

In chapter 14, Samson made his parents arrange a marriage with a Philistine woman whom he was attracted to. During the wedding feast, the Philistines threaten Samson's new wife with death if she couldn't coax the answer to a riddle out of him. When Samson realized what they had done, he made good on the wager by killing 30 Philistines and giving their clothes in payment and then he left his new wife there and returned home.

#### Key Words:

Old Testament, History, Judges, Bible Studies, Samson, Philistines

#### Key Verse:

**Judges 15:11 NASB** Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and

1 (NASB) "Group" column from the headings in the NASB text.

2 ((NASB) *Topical Reference Bible*) note in the references.

3 ((NASB) *Topical Reference Bible*) note in the references.

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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."

**Judges 15:14 NASB** 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.

### Cross References<sup>4</sup>:

**Genesis 38:17 NASB** He said, therefore, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." She said, moreover, "Will you give a pledge until you send *it?*" (make sure to look at the context of this verse to see the connection.)

**Judges 14:4 NASB** However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

**Judges 3:10 NASB** The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

**Judges 14:6 NASB** The Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.

**Judges 14:19 NASB** Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes *of clothes* to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house.

**Zechariah 4:6 NASB** Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.

**Psalms 3:7-8 NASB** Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God! For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek; You have shattered the teeth of the wicked. **8** Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing *be* upon Your people! Selah.

**Psalms 18:37-40 NASB** I pursued my enemies and overtook them, And I did not turn back until they were consumed. **38** I shattered them, so that they were not able to rise; They fell under my feet. **39** For You have girded me with strength for battle; You have subdued under me those who rose up against me. **40** You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me, And I destroyed those who hated me.

**Isaiah 44:3 NASB** 'For I will pour out water on the thirsty *land* And streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring And My blessing on your descendants;

**Genesis 45:27 NASB** When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

**1 Samuel 30:12 NASB** They gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.

### Difficulties:

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<sup>4</sup> (Smith)

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See the discussion in the Notes and Commentaries regarding the vengeful nature of the conflicts and the attitude of the men of Judah.

### Questions:

1. How does Samson's response to finding out that his wife, whom he had abandoned, was given to another and then is killed by the Philistines fit into God's plan?
  - a) The key to this is found in 14:4.
  - b) [Judges 14:4 NASB](#) However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.
  - c) His father and mother initially tried to get Samson to marry an Israelite girl, but God was going to use this as an opportunity to smite the Philistines through the hands of Samson.
  - d) The key verse of 15:11 also holds a key to Samson's reactions: "As they did to me, so I have done to them." Samson's responses seem to be driven by emotions and his desire to get even rather than good decision making but then who am I to question God's plan.
2. How does Jesus teaching about the treatment of enemies match up with what we see Samson doing by responding in vengeance?
  - a) See Wiersbe's note below regarding Christian anger.
3. How often do we call out to God like Samson does in verse 18 and find God providing for our needs?
  - a) All Christians could learn to do this as a first response rather than as a last ditch cry of despair, myself included.

### Notes & Commentaries:

#### IVP Bible Background Commentary<sup>5</sup>

Wheat harvest time was in the end of May.

It was common for a period of a few months to pass between the seven-day marriage feast and the bride moving in with her husband, during which time the husband would bring her gifts, presumably to see if the bride could become pregnant.

The Hebrew word used for foxes could be translated as jackals. Foxes hunt alone while jackals hunt in packs and it would be easier to catch 300 of them in a shorter period of time

Lehi seems to be the pronoun use of the Hebrew word for jaw<sup>6</sup> and might be referring to the border region between Judah and the Philistines or a place in the wilderness to the southwest of Jerusalem and near Samson's hometown. The connection to Samson's use of a donkey's jawbone is to be noted as well.

#### Wiersbe<sup>7</sup>

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5 (Walton et al.) summaries of the notes on Judges 15.

6 (Strong) H3895 - לֶחַי - lēchîy, *lekh-ee'*: From an unused root meaning to be soft; the cheek (from its fleshiness); hence the jaw bone: - cheek (bone), jaw (bone).

7 (Wiersbe 149-151) on Judges 15.

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“What some people think is godly zeal many actually be ungodly anger, fed by pride and motivated by selfishness. There is a godly anger that we should experience when we see wickedness prosper and defenseless people hurt (Eph. 4:26), but there's a very fine line between righteous indignation and a 'religious temper tantrum'.”

“Instead of seeing Samson as their deliverer, the men of Judah considered him a troublemaker.”

“This was 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 men!*”

“So often in Scripture, testing follows triumph. ... 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 happened. But God was merciful and performed a miracle by opening up a spring of water in a hollow place.”

### Barnes<sup>8</sup>

15:2 - “Samson's father had paid the dowry for the older sister; her father therefore offers her sister in her room.”

15:6 - The Philistines respond out of revenge of Samson's act by killing his “bride” and her father. Burning was a common punishment for adultery (Gen 38:24; Lev 20:14; 21:9).

15:8 - “These clefts of the rock were the natural fortresses and hiding places in the land.”

15:11 - The dispirited men of Judah were prepared to give up their champion, in order to conciliate their masters. This shows how hard was the task of the Judge, whose office it was to restore his countrymen to freedom and independence.

### Believer's Bible Commentary<sup>9</sup>

15:7-13 - “But violence triggers more violence.”

15:7-13 - Referring to the men of Judah, “To save their own skin they agreed to **tie** Samson **securely** and turn him over to the enemy. Samson agreed to this as long as his own countrymen did **not** attempt to **kill** him. They had sunk to a vassal mentality, and chose to betray their own countryman and remain loyal to their oppressors rather than to befriend Samson and rid themselves of their chains.”

15:14-17 - “One wonders why the Lord gave such a great victory through such an unlikely weapon. Samson was forbidden to touch anything that was unclean, and the jawbone was certainly that, being part of a dead animal. But this unusual weapon made it all the more evident that the victory was a supernatural one, given by God through base means. This is an example of the Lord allowing irregularities during a time of extreme crisis which ordinarily would not be permitted.”

### Henry<sup>10</sup>

15:1-8 (1) - “It was generously done of Samson, though he was the party offended and the

8 (Barnes) on Judges 15.

9 (MacDonald and Farstad) on Judges 15.

10 (Henry) on Judges 15.

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superior relation, to whom therefore she was bound in duty to sue for peace and to make the first motion of reconciliation. When differences happen between near relations, let those be ever reckoned the wisest and the best that are most forward to forgive and forget injuries and most willing to stoop and yield for peace' sake."

15:1-8 (4) - "We never find Samson, in any of his exploits, making use of any person whatsoever, either servant or soldier, therefore, in this project, he chose to make use of foxes as his incendiaries."

15:1-8 (6) - referring back to Samson's wife wanting to save herself in 14:15; "She, to save herself and oblige her countrymen, betrayed her husband; and what came of it? The very thing that she feared, and sought by sin to avoid, came upon her; she and her father's house were burnt with fire, and her countrymen, whom she sought to oblige by the wrong she did to her husband, brought this evil upon her. The mischief we seek to escape by any unlawful practices we often pull upon our own heads. *He that will thus save his life shall lose it.*"

15:9-17 (9) - in describing the Philistine army, comparing it to the temple guards who came for Jesus: "Here was an army sent against one man, for indeed he was himself an army. Thus a whole band of men was sent to seize our Lord Jesus, that blessed Samson, though a tenth part would have served now that his hour had come, and ten times as many would have done nothing if he had not yielded."

15:9=17 (11) - "They begged of him that he would suffer them to bind him, and deliver him up to the Philistines. Cowardly unthankful wretches! Fond of their fetters and in love with servitude! Thus the Jews delivered up our Saviour, under pretence of a fear lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation. With what a sordid servile spirit do they argue, *Knowest thou not that the Philistines rule over us?* And whose fault was that? They knew they had no right to rule over them, nor would they have been sold into their hands if they had not first *sold themselves to work wickedness.*"

15:9-17 (13) - "That he might be a type of Christ, who, when he had shown what he could do, in striking those down that came to seize him, yielded to be bound and led as a *lamb to the slaughter.*"

15:9-17 (14) - "Observe, When the *Spirit of the Lord came upon him, his cords were loosed. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty*, and those are free indeed who are thus freed. This typified the resurrection of Christ by the power of the Spirit of holiness. In it he loosed the bands of death, and its cords, the grave-clothes, fell from his hands without being loosed, as Lazarus's were, because it was impossible that the mighty Saviour should be holden of them; and thus he triumphed over the powers of darkness that shouted against him, as if they had him sure."

15:9-17 (15) - "See how poorly he was armed: he had no better weapon than the jaw-bone of an ass, and yet what execution he did with it! he never laid it out of his hand till he had with it laid 1000 Philistines dead upon the spot; and thus that promise was more than accomplished. *One of you shall chase a thousand, Jos 23:10.*"

15:18-20 (18) - "Perhaps there was a special hand of God in it, as there was in the whole transaction; and God would hereby keep him from being proud of his great strength and great achievements, and let him know that he was but a man, and liable to the calamities that are common to men."

15:18-20 (18) - "Those that forget to attend God with their praises may perhaps be compelled to attend him with their prayers. Afflictions are often sent to bring unthankful people to God."

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15:18-20 (18) - "Note, Past experiences of God's power and goodness are excellent pleas in prayer for further mercy. "Lord, thou hast delivered often, wilt thou not deliver still? [2Co 1:10](#). Thou hast begun, wilt thou not finish? Thou hast done the greater, wilt thou not do the less?" [Psa 56:13](#)."

15:18-20 (18) - "The best pleas are those taken from God's glory."

15:18-20 (19) - "And there, in that field, or hill, or plain, or whatever it was, that was so called, God caused a fountain suddenly and seasonably to open just by him, and water to spring up out of it in abundance, which continued a well ever after. Of this fair water he drank, and his spirits revived. We should be more thankful for the mercy of water did we consider how ill we can spare it. And this instance of Samson's relief should encourage us to trust in God, and seek to him, for, when he pleases, he can *open rivers in high places*. See [Isa 41:17-18](#)."

15:18-20 (19) - "The memorial of this, in the name Samson gave to this upstart fountain, *Enhakkore, the well of him that cried*, thereby keeping in remembrance both his own distress, which occasioned him to cry, and God's favour to him, in answer to his cry."

### The Preacher's Commentary<sup>11</sup>

Introduction - On Samson's judgeship and Israel's willing acceptance of Philistine rule: "During that time he made a few dents in the Philistines, but, by and large, their oppression of Israel continued and, as this chapter shows us, Israel was only too happy to accept that state of affairs. Samson is both the most powerful of the judges physically and the weakest morally. He does more singlehandedly than the others, but less for the nation as a whole. He is an individualist, but hardly a leader."

15:9-17 - on the men of Judah agreeing with the Philistines to hand over Samson: "Apparently they do not feel the slightest embarrassment that their land is occupied by the enemies of the Lord. All they want is a quiet life. ... Their consuming desire for peace and quiet means that the nation which affirms that their god is the king of the whole earth is quite content to live in the land God has given them as insecure tenants of a foreign power, devoted to the worship of pagan idols."

A comment on the church today being similar to Judah: "How is it that pulpits and presbyteries, bishoprics and synods can be occupied by those who deny by word and behavior some of the most fundamental doctrines of the faith and basic moral tenets of the Christian revelation, and all in the name of Christ, without so much as a protest by large sections of the believing orthodox church? It's the same motivation. Don't rock the boat! Don't challenge the status quo! We are ruled over by these people. They may deny the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His substitutionary atoning death, His bodily Resurrection, Ascension into glory, and His coming again. They may bless adulterous and homosexual "marriages," sanction abortion and euthanasia, and support radical subversive elements in society. But we are ruled over by them. They occupy university chairs of theology or the places around our denominational and seminary committee tables. We give them titles of honor and esteem them as great men. Why? Is it because the alternative would be too uncomfortable for us? We might find our own secure positions under threat. So there is an uneasy alliance in many church associations, an unwritten agreement not to challenge error or expose heresy. Where that is the case, we are not in a position to lift a finger in condemnation of the men of Judah."

15:18-20 - on Samson's prayer for water: "The power of the Spirit does not make us immune from the ordinary needs and weakness of our humanity. With the task complete, Samson is

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11 (Jackman) on Judges 15.

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ready to collapse. But here we see another perspective. The man who until now has appeared to be motivated only by revenge and spite recognizes that this great victory is not his but God's, and that he is as dependent on God after it as he was during it. This is surely why Samson appears among the great heroes of faith recorded in Hebrews 11. He casts himself on God's mercy, recognizing himself as Yahweh's servant and calling on God to defend him against dying of thirst and his body being mutilated by his enemies. That would be no way for God to celebrate His victory."

Notes: The author notes the difference in the functioning of the Spirit in the Old Testament in a temporary, specific manner and the permanent indwelling of the Spirit of those who believe in Jesus but is far too long to quote here. A good summary of this subject can be found in an article at [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)<sup>12</sup>.

### Lessons from the Chapter

1. "...we are all products of our times." Noting the various forces at work at the time and their influence on Samson and the Israelites willing acceptance of Philistine rule.
2. "...that we are the prisoners of our feelings." Noting the tendency of Samson and the men of his day to be driven by the "passions" and noting that the Spirit can change us so that we are not driven by our emotions.
3. "...God always remains committed to His covenant promises." Noting the way in which he empowered Samson and provided for him and how God was using the circumstances to call the people to faithfulness by showing Samson as an illustration of what can happen if you let God work in your life.
4. "...God remains constantly accessible and available to all who pray, whatever their background or situation, according to their need."

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## Here and Now

Answer the questions below as you reflect on your own life and this study<sup>13</sup>: *my LOG vs others SPECK*

**S** – Are there *sins* to avoid or confess?

- Anger rooted in rage or selfish motives.

**P** – Are there *promises* from God to claim?

- God answers prayer.

**E** – Are there *examples* to follow?

Positive

- Samson's prayer

Negative

- attitude of the men of Judah
- escalation of revenge as a result of emotional responses

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<sup>12</sup> ("What Was the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament?")

<sup>13</sup> (*The Navigators*) [with additions] & Matthew 7:1-5.

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**C** – Are there *commands* to obey?

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**K** – How can this passage increase my *knowledge* about God / Jesus Christ / Holy Spirit?

- God keeps His covenants, we might not always understand how or why, but He does
- God Spirit can enable us to do amazing things!

### *Other Application Questions*

Are there principles to guide?

Are there warnings to heed?

Are there attitudes to adopt?

Are there actions to take?

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### ***Word List for Judges 15<sup>14</sup>***

ACT	1	AFTER	2	AGAINST	1	ALONG	1	ARMS	1
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14 Swanson, James. "Common Words Excluded in Bible Software Searches." 2 July 2014. Web.



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BEAUTIFUL	1	FAST	1	KNOW	1	RULERS	1	THUS	1
BECAME	1	FATHER	3	LEHI	4	RUTHLESSLY	1	TIME	2
BECAUSE	1	FINISHED	1	LET	2	SAID	15	TIMNITE	1
BETWEEN	1	FIRE	3	LIKE	1	SAMSON	9	TOOK	3
BIND	3	FLAX	1	LIVED	1	SERVANT	1	TORCH	1
BLAMELESS	1	FOUND	1	LORD	2	SET	1	TORCHES	2
BONDS	1	FOXES	3	MAY	1	SHALL	2	TURNED	1
BOTH	1	FRESH	1	MEN	4	SHOCKS	1	TWENTY	1
BOUND	1	GAVE	2	MET	1	SHOUTED	1	TWO	2
BROUGHT	1	GIVE	2	MIDDLE	1	SINCE	1	UNCIRCUMCISED	1
BURNED	2	GIVEN	1	MIGHTILY	1	SISTER	1	VERY	1
BURNING	1	GO	1	MORE	1	SLAUGHTER	1	VINEYARDS	1
CALLED	1	GOAT	1	NAMED	2	SON-IN-LAW	1	VISITED	1
CAME	4	GOD	1	NEW	1	SPEAKING	1	WATER	1
CAMPED	1	GRAIN	2	NOW	1	SPIRIT	1	WENT	4
CAUGHT	1	GREAT	2	ONE	1	SPLIT	1	WHAT	1
CLEFT	2	GROVES	1	ORDER	1	SPREAD	1	WHEAT	1
COME	3	HAND	2	PHILISTINES	9	STANDING	2	WHEN	5
COMPANION	2	HANDS	4	PLACE	2	STRENGTH	1	WHICH	1
DAY	1	HARM	1	PLEASE	1	STRUCK	1	WHILE	1
DAYS	1	HARVEST	1	PUT	1	SURELY	2	WHO	1
DELIVERANCE	1	HATED	1	QUIT	1	SWEAR	1	WHY	1
DIE	1	HEAPS	2	RAMATH-LEHI	1	TAIL	2	WIFE	3
DO	3	HOLLOW	1	REACHED	1	TAILS	1	WILL	6
DONE	2	HUNDRED	1	REALLY	1	TAKE	1	YEARS	1
DONKEY	3	INSTEAD	1	REGARD	1	THEN	8	YET	1
DOWN	3	INTENSELY	1	RELEASED	1	THEREFORE	1	YOUNG	1
DRANK	1	ISRAEL	1	RETURNED	1	THIRST	1	YOUNGER	1
DROPPED	1	JAWBONE	4	REVENGE	1	THIRSTY	1	YOURS	1
EN-HAKKORE	1	JUDAH	3	REVIVED	1	THOUGHT	1		
ENTER	1	JUDGED	1	ROCK	3	THOUSAND	2		
ETAM	2	KILL	2	ROOM	1	THREE	1		
FALL	1	KILLED	2	ROPES	2	THREW	1		