

Judges 15:1-20

Samson takes Revenge on the Philistines

Judges 15:1-2 - "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. 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."

Samson is not a good communicator. He still thinks his arrangement with the Philistine wife/concubine is still on. His father rightly thought Samson was done with her, but here he still doesn't want to rile up Samson, and so offers his younger daughter instead.

Judges 15:3 - "And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure."

Samson blames the Philistine companions, not her father, for ruining his wedding arrangement. In a rare moment of forethought, he notes that their behavior gives him a good excuse for revenge, although he's never needed one before. But he does not anticipate how the Philistines will react.

The 300 Foxes

Judges 15:4-5 - "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. 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."

What is this all about?

It's related to a harvest fertility ritual.

The *Cerealia* was a major Roman festival celebrated for the grain goddess Ceres.

See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerealia>

This nighttime ritual is described by Ovid. Blazing torches were tied to the tails of live foxes, who were released into the Circus Maximus. The origin and purpose of this ritual is unknown; it may have been intended to cleanse the growing crops and protect them from disease and vermin, or to add warmth and vitality to their growth. Ovid offers an explanation: long ago, at ancient Carleoli, a farm-boy caught a fox stealing chickens and tried to burn it alive. The fox escaped, ablaze; in its flight it set the fields and their crops, which were sacred to Ceres, on fire. Ever since, foxes are punished at her festival.

Some scholars say the festival points to origins in Syria-Palestine. There, the god of grain was Dagon, who was adopted by the Philistines when they settled on the coast. There and in Canaan, the etymology of his name alludes to his origins as a god of grain: Ugaritic *dgn*, Hebrew *dagan* ("grain").

[See Judges (1981): A Commentary By J. Alberto Soggin, and The Jewish Virtual Library: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/dagon>]

If this fox ritual was also a custom of the Philistines, then its happening "at the time of the wheat harvest" is significant.

- Samson is taking a ceremony meant to increase the fruitfulness of the harvest and transforming it into an act that *destroys* the harvest, demeaning the Philistine gods.
- The 300 incendiary foxes call to mind the 300 men of an earlier judge, Gideon, who lit torches in their rout of the Midianites.
- Pentecost marks the beginning of the wheat harvest. The fire on Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Law at Pentecost is now coming as judgment on the Philistines.
- In reference to the New Testament, the flames of fire over the disciples' heads in Acts 2, which signified burning up of the chaff of their old identity, now are burning up both the chaff and the seed of the Philistine's wheat harvest.

Judges 15:6 - "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."

We would normally expect the Philistines to retaliate against Samson himself. Instead they kill his concubine and her father, continuing a cycle of vendetta and revenge. This is another of the series of surprises in the story.

Judges 15:7-8 - "And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam. Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi."

Samson hides out in the territory of the tribe of Judah, on the rock Etam. *Etam* = "lair of wild beasts." Samson had pushed his vendetta to the point it is now an international incident - the whole Philistine army is now involved.

The Philistines were technologically advanced, working with iron weapons, chariots and tools. Originally they were from a similar culture as the Mycenaean or Minoan civilizations, as depicted in the Iliad of Homer. And they were firmly in charge and extracting tribute from the inland tribes of Dan and Judah.

The tribesmen of Judah realize they have to either help the Philistines capture this loose

cannon, Samson, or feel their wrath.

Judges 15:10 - "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."

Betrayal by his Countrymen

Judges 15:11 - "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.

Both the Philistines and Samson both redefine the Torah's legal mandate, "An eye for an eye..." to refer to their private quarrel - "to do to him as he hath done to us" and "As they did unto me, so have I done unto them." Left to our own devices, we all do this.

Jesus reversed it. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love your enemies, turn the other cheek. Bless those who curse you, do good to them who spitefully use you.

This is only possible if Jesus Christ is in you. We are in Him and He in us. The Spirit dwells in us, not just coming upon us for power, as with Samson.

The men of Judah have had just about enough of Samson provoking the dangerous Philistines:

Judges 15:12-13 - "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. 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."

"we are come down" because tradition says Samson was hiding in a cave on that rock.

We expect Samson to fight, but instead he offers himself up - another surprise.

Seen from the perspective of Samson as a type of Christ, however, recall that Jesus was also bound and betrayed by his brethren the men of Judah, and turned over to the Romans. In the same way, Joseph had been cast into a pit and sold by his brethren.

With the Jawbone of an Ass

Judges 15:14-15 - "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. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith."

The Targum has, "the Spirit of might from the Lord."

Samson was loosed from his ropes just as God raised Christ up, "having loosed the pains of death" (**Acts 2:24**). The instrument of a jawbone of an ass might represent the foolishness of preaching and the gospel - weak and contemptible in the eyes of the world.

It might also represent Samson himself.

- **1 Corinthians 1:27** - "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."

Even the ass depicts this.

- Zechariah 9:9 - "behold, thy king cometh unto thee ... lowly, and riding upon an ass." The Talmud says, if Israel is meritorious, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven; if not, lowly and riding upon an ass. Because none of us is worthy, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, to become an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Judges 15:16 - "And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men."

Not a great lyricist, Samson composes a two-line song. Nowhere near the quality of Deborah's, but the terms for "ass" and "heaps" do form a sort of play on words in the Hebrew.

Although he doesn't mention God in his song, it's possible Samson may have realized that killing 1,000 Philistines with such a weapon points to God's miraculous intervention.

But here, as elsewhere whenever he kills, Samson violates his Nazarite vow by touching a dead body.

Judges 15:17 - "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 Ramathlehi."

"speaking" could also be translated as "destroying"

Ramath-lehi = "height of a jawbone" or "The hill of Lehi"

Throughout the Bible, striking someone on the cheek (*lehi*) was sign of reproach, including the Messiah (**Isaiah 50:6** - "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks (*lehi*) to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting").

Here, Samson turns the metaphor around, using a jawbone (*lehi*) to inflict reproach on the Philistines.

God Quenches Samson's Thirst

With this incident we need to switch back to seeing Samson as a type of Christ again.

Judges 15:18 - "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?"

In one of the few times Samson calls on the Lord, God is faithful to answer.

Judges 15:19 - "But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw (Lehi), and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

i.e. God opened a place in the rock - now named Lehi (jawbone)

En-hakkore = "spring of one who cries out" From the root *qara* - often used for the cry of beasts.

On the cross, Jesus - taking our place as representative of the human race - said "I thirst."

Psalm 69:21: "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." He told Peter, "Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" Christ drank the cup of suffering so we might have the living waters of the Spirit and never thirst again.

- **Isaiah 41:17-18** - "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."

Judges 15:20 - "And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years."

The end? Nope, there's one more chapter - another surprise.