

**15** After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a <sup>a</sup>young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into *her* room." But her father would not permit him to go in.

<sup>2</sup> Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly <sup>b</sup>hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. *Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead.*"

<sup>3</sup> And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!" <sup>4</sup> Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned *the foxes* tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. <sup>5</sup> When he had set the torches on fire, he let *the foxes* go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards *and* olive groves.

<sup>6</sup> Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?"

And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." <sup>c</sup>So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

<sup>7</sup> Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease." <sup>8</sup> So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of <sup>d</sup>Etam.

<sup>9</sup> Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves <sup>e</sup>against Lehi. <sup>10</sup> And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?"

So they answered, "We have come up to <sup>f</sup>arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us."

<sup>11</sup> 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 <sup>f</sup>rule over us? What *is* this you have done to us?"

And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them."

<sup>12</sup> But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines."

Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves."

<sup>13</sup> So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two <sup>g</sup>new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

<sup>14</sup> When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then <sup>h</sup>the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him; and the ropes that *were* on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds <sup>2</sup>broke loose from his hands. <sup>15</sup> He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and <sup>i</sup>killed a thousand men with it. <sup>16</sup> Then 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> And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place <sup>3</sup>Ramath Lehi.

<sup>18</sup> Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the LORD and said, <sup>4</sup>"You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" <sup>19</sup> So God split the hollow place that *is* in <sup>4</sup>Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and <sup>4</sup>his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name <sup>5</sup>En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. <sup>20</sup> And <sup>4</sup>he judged Israel <sup>m</sup>twenty years <sup>n</sup>in the days of the Philistines.

#### Key Verses:

- Exodus 17:6-7 - per the command of the LORD, the rock is struck twice and water came out of it for the people to drink. The place was called Massah and Meribah because there the people tempted the Lord saying "Is the LORD among us or not?" and because it was a place of contention.
- Numbers 20:7-13 - against the command to speak to the rock Moses strikes the rock twice and monologues about the rebellion of the people and the onerous work of providing for their needs. (Striking twice was the direction given the last time this situation occurred.)
- Judges 15:18-20 - We are witness to a turn in the story: Samson's supplication. In the strong man's praying we are able to discern his perspective on the meaning of this event (**great deliverance**), his recognition of his role in God's work (**servant**), his primary concern (**I die of thirst**), and fear (**fall into the hand of the uncircumcised**).

Samson Syndrome causes a man to see the world as an extension of himself. Family, friends, and even foes are nothing more than foils in theatre in which he is the main character. He says through his words and actions, "It is all about me!" And, until you are needed or wanted, you are to wait on him (Judges 15:1).

In a world that operates in full cooperation with the self-centeredness of Samson Syndrome no one has the right to move on with their own life. He is gifted and entitled to your devotion. Regarding his giftedness, that too is for him. That is, the giftedness of a man with Samson Syndrome, is not willingly given to God for His glory or for the good of others; it is used, if at all, for the man himself. Although his gifts and talents could be leveraged to set a liberty those who are oppressed, the man won't engage. To use him to help others God has to factor in his narcissism. The community's access and benefits from the special abilities in the man with Samson Syndrome will only happen when he is doing it for himself.

#### **Burn, Baby, Burn (Judges 15:1-5)**

When Samson was last in Timnah at his own wedding feast there was much drama. Believing himself to be more clever than anyone else, he posed a riddle to the guests (Judges 14:12-14). If

they were able to figure out his riddle he would give them 30 changes of clothing. If not, they would give him 30 changes of clothing. The men of the wedding feast cheated in order to get the answer; they threatened his wife and her family with death if she did not get them the answer (Judges 14:15).

Samson left with sharp words for the cheaters, a word of aspersion for his wife (he referred to her as heifer), and fulfilled the bargain by killing 30 Philistines and taking their clothes. The clothes of the dead men were given to the wedding guests who had answered his riddle. Now he shows up after a while expecting to enjoy conjugal relations with his wife. Because, from his point of view, what else would she do but what for her angry husband to return?

But reality does not match his expectations. His wife's father, surprised to see him, will not permit Samson to enter his daughters quarters. His wife's father then explains why:

I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead. (Judges 15:2, NKJV)

Oh snap! Samson did not see this coming. And he is not happy about what has been done. No man would be. And God was counting on it. The subjugation of his people, the moral relativism that corrupted everyone's thinking, and the idol worship needed to be stopped. Although Samson had no real interest in leading the people or liberating them from Philistine rule, he could be counted on to satisfy his own desires and protect his own interests. God was leveraging the covenant-breaking inclinations and jealous husband tendencies of Samson to start strife. The Lord factored in the faults of this judge in order to start a fight that would help His people.

<sup>1</sup> Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." <sup>3</sup> Then his father and mother said to him, "*Is there* no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well." <sup>4</sup> But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. (Judges 14:1-4, NKJV)

Samson is planning to hurt the people on account of this latest offense. And, in his view, no one came blame him (Judges 15:3). What he does next was aimed at inflicting deep injuries on the Philistine oppressors. How? Economically. He burned up their crops - wheat, grapes, and olives.

Using foxes or jackals (the word is the same in Hebrew) he burned their harvest, their vineyards, and their olive groves. The effects of his destructive activities will negatively affect the oppressors for a few harvesting seasons.

Note: Everyone knows that Samson is strong. However, implied in this passage are two other supernatural abilities of Samson. Foxes are solitary animals. Jackals live in packs. Catching three hundred of either would not be trivial. The foxes of that region have a top speed of just over 20 miles per hours. Jackals can move at over 35 miles per hour. If he caught them without snares Samson is fast! If snares were used it must be conceded that preparing enough traps to catch 300 foxes or jackals before the grain could be harvested required Samson to be expeditious. And then there is the matter of how he kept the animals until it was time to use them. If snares and pens were used we must see that Samson is *fast* and *smart*! His strength is legendary. But, at least to this reader, something more is clearly suggested about his abilities. He seems to be a man of supernatural strength, speed, and intelligence. Unfortunately, with all of that giftedness, he is unmotivated to do anything except gratify himself. To get his help in liberating the people God has to leverage his faults (narcissism) and human tendencies (a husband's jealousy).

<sup>34</sup> For jealousy *is* a husband's fury; Therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. <sup>35</sup> He will accept no recompense, Nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts. (Proverbs 6:34–35, NKJV)

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. What does it take to get Samson to use his abilities to help others? (Judges 14:1-4; 15:6-8)
2. Are you blessed with special abilities? (Judges 13:24-25; 14:5-6) What does it take to get you to use your abilities to help the oppressed?

#### Who Did This? (Judges 15:6-8)

The burning fields, vineyards, and olive groves caught the attention of the oppressors. It was obvious that what they were seeing was not the consequence of a natural occurrence. Therefore they did not ask **What did this?** The question was **Who has done this?** The answer comes without delay - **Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite**. The reason is also given: **because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion**. When it was heard *who* had done it and *why* the Philistines did unto Samson's Timnite wife and her father what they threatened to do earlier (Judges 14:15) - they **burned her and her father with fire**. The irony is that Samson's wife is at last killed in the way that she sought to avoid by betraying her husband.

It is interesting that the Philistines seem to agree with Samson's earlier statement. That is, they also regard the actions of the Timnite father-in-law as being wrong. Samson had said he would be blameless in light of those actions.

This latest action by the Philistines comes to Samson's attention. In response He promises to take revenge on those who murdered his wife. Only then, he says, will his streak of harming them cease. But it is an outworking of Samson Syndrome that he believes himself to be the last word on every matter. He consistently underestimates his enemies and then does not anticipate that they will retaliate. Samson is lacking in empathy and concerns himself only with his own feelings; consequently he does not take time to consider the escalation that will follow. This shortsightedness will be used by God. In the meantime the son of Manoah is going to make the Philistines pay for what they did to his wife.

<sup>8</sup> So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam. (Judges 15:8, NKJV)

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. Why does Samson think things will end with his actions of revenge?
2. Are you ever shortsighted in the way that you handle your anger? Do you work with God to help others or does he have to factor in your faults to get access to your abilities?

#### **Who Asked You to Help Us? (Judges 15:9-13)**

Samson forget to talk with the leadership of Israel about his plans. They are in the dark about why the Philistines encamped in Judah. And it was clear that the Philistines were not just camping out; they were deployed *against* Lehi. The men of Judah, unable to come with a reason as to why their oppressors are preparing to fight them, asked, "Why have you come up against us?"

Samson had killed their men hip and thigh because of what they did to his wife. (Hip and thigh is a wrestling term indicating a sound defeat.) Now they intend to defeat him soundly. It is likely, especially in light of how the story ends, that they have torture and humiliation in mind (Judges 16:21). Three thousand men go to get the gadfly. They do not want to approach him without enough men to arrest him; word on the street is that he is quite the fighter.

When they arrive at the rock of Etam they verbally accost Samson with rhetorical questions:

1. Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us?
2. What is this you have done to us?

What you and I should notice is that (1) they are acclimated and accepting of oppression and (2) do not see any sense in Samson's actions, and (3) they are ready to hand over their brother to the enemy. After all, they did not ask to be liberated? And, to be fair, he did not offer to liberate them. They did not want help and Samson is not offering. God is unilaterally causing all of this commotion in an attempt to deliver His people (Judges 14:1-4).

Samson, while not trying to lead his people into a better day, is not against them. He does not want to fight them and asks them to not attempt to kill him themselves. They consent to this. Was it because they cared for their brother? It was likely because they knew that their adversaries wanted to inflict the injuries on Samson themselves.

And with that word he surrenders to his brethren. They bind him with new ropes and bring him up from the rock.

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. Why are the men of Judah angry with Samson? (Judges 15:11; John 5:1-16)
2. Why is Judah ready to hand over her judge?
3. Are you characterized by deep commitment, care, and courage for the people of God?

#### **Out Like a Lion (Judges 15:14-17)**

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines could not contain themselves and came shouting against Samson. Mistake! The last time we see anything come against Samson with a raised voice it does not go well for the one yelling (Judges 14:5). The writer fully intends to create in the mind of his reader a reminder of the lion that came roaring against Samson. Then and now the Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon him (Judges 14:6; 15:14). Earlier in the story we are told that the effect of the Spirit through him was brutal - he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. This part of the story is no less brutal.

A thousand men die at Samson's hands. The Spirit was at work through him dispatching the adversaries of God's people. At last the judge is engaged. Notice, though, that he reaches out and grabs the jawbone of a donkey to use as a weapon. It was **a fresh jawbone**. That means it came from a dead animal and thus is off limits for him as a Nazirite. He is not concerned about this violation and will even brag about how it was used:

With the jawbone of a donkey,  
Heaps upon heaps,  
With the jawbone of a donkey  
I have slain a thousand men!" (Judges 15:16, NKJV)

Picture him standing there with the bloodied mandible in his hand delivering his impromptu poem. After his speech he tosses the implement and names the spot **Ramath Lehi** - Jawbone Height or Jawbone Hill. No mention of God. No giving of thanks. Just braggadocio and a clever use of the words heap and donkey - they are very similar in Hebrew.

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. Do you think Samson anticipated the outcome? (Judges 14:5,19; 15:8, 13)
2. Some people say that the end justified the means. Was Samson wrong for using the fresh jawbone? (See Judges 21:25.)
3. What are you inclined to say immediately after a victory?

#### **This Is How You Remind Me (Judges 15:18-20)**

After this great show of strength and military might **he became thirsty** (Judges 15:18). In this moment, after just bragging about what he had done, he is reminded of the truths that were omitted in his soliloquy. Spent and vulnerable he acknowledges each truth in what he says next:

What are the truths? First, it was God who had given the victory: You have given. Second, it was not a personal victory but a great deliverance. Third, it was not about his own deliverance but was accomplished through God's servant for God's people. Fourth, he is actually frail and can die. Fifth, the glory of God should be chief among his concerns; falling into the hand of the uncircumcised would give the false impression that Yahweh had been defeated. The usually self-absorbed Samson has mustered more than a modicum of good perspective and theology to put together a respectable prayer. Of course, God allowed his distress in order to remind him of these truths.

With this earnest request out of a temporarily humbled heart God is satisfied:

So God split the hollow place that *is* in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. (Judges 15:19, NKJV)

The man is helped by God in a way that is reminiscent of God's help for his wayward people in the wilderness. On a physical level he is given what he needs to revive and stay alive. But before this in the crucible of his crisis he is helped to see the truth about who he is and what God has done. Even now he is God's man and heaven cares for him. Unfortunately much more humbling will be required to get Samson (1) embrace his calling and (2) to utter a supplication like this.

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. Why was Samson allowed to become so thirsty?
  2. Did the prayer of Samson have anything good in it?
  3. Does crisis cause you to see the truth. Does it cause you to cry out to God?
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