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## **Judges 15**

(2020)

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## Judges 15

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### Topics.

- Samson finds out his wife was given to his best man.
- Samson sends flaming foxes into the Philistine's grain.
- The Philistines burn Samson wife and her father.
- Samson strikes the Philistines down.
- Philistines come up to Etam to bind Samson.
- Samson strikes down 1000 Philistines.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

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### THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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Samson father went to Timnath to get a Philistine woman for Samson to wife. Samson killed a lion and scrapes honey out of its carcass. He took the woman for his wife, prepared a seven-day feast, challenged thirty companions to solve a riddle. His wife told them the riddle, so he went to Ashkelon, slayed thirty men, took their garments, went back to his father's house and finds out his wife had been given to his best friend.

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### SAMSON FINDS OUT HIS WIFE WAS GIVEN TO HIS BEST MAN

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#### JUDGES 15:1-2

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- **Judges 15:1-2:** After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. And he said, "I will go in to my wife in the chamber." But her father would not allow him to go in. <sup>2</sup> And her father said, "I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead."

The previous chapter ended with Samson going to Ashkelon (30 kilometres from Timnath, his wife's home town) to slay thirty Philistine men, so he could strip them of their garments and give them to the thirty men who had told him his riddle, and then returning to his father's house

and finding out that his wife had been given to his best friend. Now we are given further detail of the events that took place upon Samson arriving at his father's house.

**At the time of wheat harvest:** (v1) about the end of our April, or the beginning of our May, during this season it was very dry and the grain in a most combustible state would have been gathered and lying-in heaps on the field or threshing-floors.

**Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat:** (v1), by this time his hot anger (Judges 14:19) would have subsided, for he now desires to reunite with his wife. He takes a goat for a present and as a token of reconciliation to his wife. It is very likely he had hoped to eat a meal alone with her in her chamber with wine and other delicacies, much like a husband and wife today would spend a romantic date night.

**I will go in to my wife in the chamber:** (v1), better, I will go in to my wife in her chamber, for the chamber refers to the female apartment separated from the men, and the expression, "I will go in to my wife," means he will be intimate with her.

**Her father would not allow him to go in:** (v1), it is likely, had the father thought Samson would return for his wife he would have waited for his return and encouraged a reconciliation, rather than marry her to another man without his consent. Following are two common thoughts concerning why the woman's father allowed Samson's wife to be married to another man:

1. Samson had left his wife in anger immediately after the wedding feast, because of her betrayal of him in telling the thirty men his riddle (Judges 14:17-18), and therefore supposed that he hated her and had intended to abandon her.
2. Her father may have thought he had no intention of returning or had been killed since he had been away for longer than was expected.

Being far superior in strength Samson could have easily pushed him aside, broken open the door and taken the woman by force, but he chose rather to patiently hear what her father had to say and accepted the situation.

**Please take her younger sister:** (v2) Samson's father (Manoah) would have paid a dowry price for the older sister, so her father offers his younger daughter to him, it's also very likely that he was influenced at some level by a fear of Samson. By offering an equivalent for the dowry price Samson's father paid for the older daughter, the father no doubt hoped to repair the wrong he had inflicted upon Samson. Incestuous marriages were common with the Canaanites, but Israel was not do as the people in the land of Canaan did (Lev. 18:3), and marrying a sister while the other sister was alive was strictly forbidden by the law of God:

- You shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive. (Lev. 18:18).

Even though it is almost certain Manoah and Samson's mother had taught him these laws, it is unlikely they would have been a reason for him not to take the younger daughter, since he had taken a Philistine woman for his wife, which God's law also strictly forbids, and during these days, everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. (Judges 21:25). It is also possible he may have gone back and taken her for his wife (had she not been burned with fire) (v6), once he had sought revenge on the Philistines, and his anger had dissipated, especially since she was younger and more beautiful than the older sister.

- **Judges 15:3-5:** And Samson said to them, “This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.”<sup>4</sup> So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails.<sup>5</sup> And when he had set fire to the torches (a firebrand in KJV), he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards.

The statement, “this time I shall be innocent,” carries the following idea, he will be more justified and less blameless than the Philistines to take this second act of vengeance upon the Philistines than he did when he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their garments and gave them to those who had told the riddle. (Judges 14:19). This is because they have done him a far greater harm than the first time, for the first time they enticed his wife to discover the riddle and tell it to them, whereas this time they took his wife.

**Samson went and caught 300 foxes:** (v4) though foxes were numerous in Canaan, it does not necessarily mean that the 300 are limited to foxes only, for it may embrace jackals’ and perhaps other small animals of a similar shape and size.

- Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.” (Song of Songs 2:15).
- Mount Zion which lies desolate; jackals (foxes in KJV) prowl over it. (Lam. 5:18).
- They shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals (foxes in KJV). (Psalm 63:10).
- Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” (Neh. 4:3).

Foxes and jackals were so common, prophets were likened to them.

- Your prophets have been like jackals (foxes in KJV) among ruins, O Israel. (Ezek. 13:4).

It should be mentioned that we don’t need to think that Samson caught all 300 foxes at one time, or with own hands, for it is more likely that he caught them over a week, or even a month. If he did catch them far sooner, it is likely he had others helping him. Added to this, it is very likely they used nets and snares to catch them up and help them in a fenced pen until they had the full three hundred.

**He put a torch (a firebrand in KJV) between each pair of tails:** (v4) these torches would have been made of materials and oil that would quickly catch fire, was not easily extinguished and would burn slowly for a long time.

**He put a torch between each pair of tails:** (v4) Samson took two foxes and with a cord loosely tied their tails together so that they were still able to run about. This was a clever ploy for it means their motion would be greatly impeded for when one of the foxes ran forward, the other would very likely pull in a different direction, which means they would not be able to quickly dart away, for darting in different directions would greatly lessen their speed, and keep them longer dashing to and fro amongst the fields standing grain, the stacked grain and the olive orchards. Added to this, having two tied together would stop them from being able to escape into their dens

Due to the heat of a tropical country making everything so dry Samson plan was certain to succeed. To burn the crops of an Arab is the deadliest of all damages that can be inflicted upon them, even today Hezbollah sends hundreds of balloons with fire baskets attached to them over the walls of Gaza to land in Israel’s vast fields of crops and vineyards.

**He let the foxes go:** (v5), a few at a time, in different places so that they would set fire to as many different spots amongst the standing grain, the stacked grain and the olive orchards and as much as possible would be burned. Some might ask, “why didn’t Samson simply use some fellow men to set fire to these

fields,” the most likely answers would be that he did not want to put their lives in danger and possibly to humble the pride of the Philistines by having small powerless creatures such as foxes and Jackals bringing such a massive life-threatening calamity upon them, for with their food supply destroyed, many would face starvation.

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## PHILISTINES BURN SAMSON WIFE AND HER FATHER

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### JUDGES 15:6

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- **Judges 15:6:** Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?” And they said, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.” And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

Seeing their fields of golden corn and vineyards blackened and burned to ashes the Philistines were naturally filled with enormous despair and great fury. The leaders inquired amongst the people and discovered that the reason Samson had burned their fields was because the father of his wife had given his wife to another man and she married him, which was the sole reason Samson burned their fields with fire.

To insult and cause Samson great grief and at the same time, vent their fury and fierce anger on the man whose family had led to their crops and vineyards being burned, they in turn set fire to her father's house, where she was, and burnt them both in it.

In the previous chapter the Philistines threatened to burn Samson's wife and her father's house with fire. (Judges 14:15-17). To avoid this, she betrayed her husband and now the very thing she feared has come upon her. It is interesting to note, burning was the punishment for adultery and kindred crimes among the Israelites:

- About three months later Judah was told, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality.” And Judah said, “Bring her out, and let her be burned.” (Gen. 38:24).
- If a man takes a woman and her mother also, it is depravity; he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no depravity among you. (Leviticus 20:14).
- And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by whoring, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire. (Lev. 21:9).

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## SAMSON STRIKES THE PHILISTINES DOWN

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### JUDGES 15:7-8

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- **Judges 15:7-8:** And Samson said to them, “If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.”<sup>8</sup> And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft (top in KJV) of the rock of Etam.

Though Samson was filled with anger when he discovered his wife had married another man, he clearly did not think that her and her father should have been burned alive, which is why he basically says, “if this is what you do,” meaning if you are capable of committing such cruel and brutal acts, I will take vengeance on you, after which I will leave you alone.

**He struck them hip and thigh with a great blow:** (v8) this seems to be a common expression that signifies the following two ideas:

1. He struck the toughest parts of the body bringing even the strongest of them to their knees.
2. He did not intend to kill them by make them lame so they would be incapable of future military service and useless for war.

**He struck them with a great blow: meaning he** bruised, maimed and lamed many perhaps by powerful kicks to their hips and thighs during which many died. The primary idea is that he had a great victory over the Philistines.

**He went down and stayed in the cleft (top in KJV) of the rock of Etam:** (v8) this could read, he went down or, he went and dwelt, for it is an idiom of the Hebrew language, to speak of going up, or going down, to a place without having any reference to the direction (i.e., north, south, east and west) or whether it lay high or low.

The following verses show that Etam was in Judah:

- Their villages were Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Tochen, and Ashan, five cities. (1 Chron. 4:32).
- Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem, and he built cities for defense in Judah. <sup>6</sup> He built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa. (2 Chron. 11:5-6).

The exact location of Etam is uncertain, the cleft of the rock of Etam, could refer to a ravine, cavern or cave in the soft limestone or chalky rock or cliff of Etam. These types of caves often had natural springs, that supplied drinking water, making them a natural refuge, hiding place and fortress for the oppressed and those fleeing an enemy as the following verses show:

- The hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. (Judges 6:2).
- When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes (thickets in KJV) and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, (1 Samuel 13:6).
- Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water? (1 Kings 18:13).
- To enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. (Isaiah 2:21).

These types of caves made it easy to defend oneself should they be attacked by an enemy. There is no doubt Samson to refuge in the cleft of the rock of Etam for all the above reasons, and to see what actions the Philistines would take. Samson had no direct calling from God to raise an army and go to war for the deliverance of Israel like Gideon, Jephthah, and others had, for all the Philistines he slew was by his own hand. Nevertheless, at certain times the Spirit of the LORD was mightily upon him, for he not only greatly weakened the Philistines, but also kept them in awe and dread of him.

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## PHILISTINES COME UP TO ETAM TO BIND SAMSON

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### JUDGES 15:9-13

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- **Judges 15:9-13:** Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi. <sup>10</sup> And 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 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 have I done to them." <sup>12</sup> And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves." <sup>13</sup> They said to him, "No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you."

**Lehi:** the following verse show that the full name of Lehi was Ramath-Lehi.

- As soon as he (Samson) had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi. (Judges 15:17).

Today it is called El-Lekieh, and has many caves in its limestone cliffs.

**The Philistines came up and camped in Judah:** (v9) in hostile array the Philistines went from Palestine, which lay low on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea up to the hill-country of Judea to take vengeance upon Samson because of the enormous destruction, ruin and deaths he had inflicted upon them.

**We have come up to bind Samson:** (v10), the men of Judah new they had not done anything to offend the Philistines, so they naturally as them why they are coming up against them with such a vast and hostile force. The Philistines tell them that they haven't come to make war, but have only come to take Samson from their midst and do to him as he did to them, referring to the following three events:

1. Firstly, he slew thirty Philistines, because they cheated him by threatening to burn his wife and her father if she didn't entice him to tell her his riddle and then tell them. (Judges 14:15) (Judges 14:18-19).
2. Secondly, he tied torches to the tails of 300 foxes and set fire to the torches, and let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, because they had given his wife to another man. (Judges 15:4-5).
3. Thirdly he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, because they burned his wife and her father (Judges 15:1-2) (Judges 15:8).

It appears the people of Judah new nothing of Samson exploits against the Philistines, prior to their confrontation with the Philistines. It is certain that the Philistines would have told the men of Judah of Samsons exploits against them, which was why they went to his cave in the rock with three thousand men, and why they rebuked him, saying (paraphrased), "why are you so foolish that you would provoke the Philistines who rule over us when it's in their power to increase our oppression, taxes and burden."

Samson in an attempt to defend himself tells them that he only did to them as they had done to him, even though he felt he was justified in his actions, he would have realised that if he did not give himself up, the powerful hostile forces of the Philistines would attack and slaughter the men of Judah and take him by force. To prevent such a war, he offered to give himself up to the men of Judah, rather than defend himself, if they promised not to kill him themselves.

The fact they so willingly gave Samson, a man of such extraordinary strength and courage up shows how much the tribe of Judah feared the Philistines. At this time, they would not have considered Samson as a judge appointed by God and deliverer of Israel, but simply as a strong man acting from his own will who had stirred up the anger of the Philistines. Judah would have known that by delivering Samson into the hands of the Philistines they would put him to death. But it is also very likely Samson convinced them to hand him over, to save their lives and with the intention of seeking an opportunity to escape, which the following verses show he did.

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## SAMSON STRIKES DOWN A 1000 PHILISTINES

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### JUDGES 15:14-17

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- **Judges 15:14-17:** So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. <sup>14</sup> When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that

has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. <sup>15</sup> And he found a fresh (new in KJV) jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men. <sup>16</sup> And Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men." <sup>17</sup> As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi.

When the Philistines see Samson bound, they shout with joy that they had caught their great enemy, no doubt thinking that they no longer needed to fear him, until, the Spirit of the LORD came upon him as it had at various times to give his body extraordinary strength and the ropes became weak and dissolved off his hands. Ponder for a moment, the sudden fear that would have come upon the Philistines when they saw the supernatural strength of Samson and the ropes that bound him being loosed from his hands.

**He found a fresh (new in KJV) jawbone of a donkey:** (v15), this was the jawbone of a donkey recently slain, which means it would be strong and may have had some blood and flesh on it. Samsons supernatural strength was so extraordinary that every blow of the jawbone in all probability killed a man. To defeat one-thousand Philistines with only the common jaw-bone of a donkey outwardly manifested that God's power and Spirit was upon Samson and that the victory was not by the might of any weapon or by the power of man, but by the Spirit of God, which moved Samson with extraordinary strength to wield the jaw-bone and slay such a vast number of Philistines.

**Heaps upon heaps:** (v16) carries the idea that Samson had slain heaps of men, who lay dead in heaps upon one another

**I struck down a thousand men:** (v16) this is not a said in a prideful manner or a claim that he achieved this victory himself, we know this, because later Samson states, "You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant (v18)," showing that he was fully aware that his extraordinary strength and burst of energy was not of his own power, but that it was the supernatural power of God, that enabled him to achieve such an amazing triumph.

**That place was called Ramath-lehi:** (v17), meaning, "the hill of the jawbone," or "the lifting up of the jawbone" or "the casting away of the jawbone," with allusion to Samson casting it out of his hand when he had slayed the last man. Its almost certain Samson gave this place this name to perpetuate the memory of this supernatural and miraculous victory.

**NOTE:** the inadequacy of the weapon, and Samsons extraordinary and miraculous strength was unquestionably from the Spirit of the LORD, in the same way that prophecy and gifts of healing were of the Spirit of the LORD.

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## SAMSON JUDGED ISRAEL TWENTY YEARS

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### JUDGES 15:18-20

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- **Judges 15:18-20:** And he (Samson) was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said, "You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" <sup>19</sup> And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day. <sup>20</sup> And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

It should not surprise anyone that Samson was thirsty and faint, for he had just fought one thousand men in the heat of the day with the Spirit and power of the LORD being upon him, and now the supernatural Spirit of the LORD that gave him extraordinary strength and energy would be lifted.

**God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi:** (v19) in his near-death experience Samson prays to God and God answered his prayer by splitting open a rock and causing a spring of water to rise up. The word translated hollow place in Hebrew signifies a rock, which means the verse could be translated: "Then God split the rock in Lehi, and when Samson drank the water that came from it, his spirit revived, therefore he called the fountain, En-hakkore, which carries the following ideas:

- The fountain or spring of him that cried and begged earnestly for deliverance from thirst and was heard.
- The fountain or spring that was given in answer to prayer.

It is a name that records the faithfulness, godliness and reverence of Samsons supernatural deed and given in memory of him.

**It was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day:** (v19) meaning to the day of the author who is writing this record of Samsons life. The name Lehi is the name of a place, it signifies a jawbone and was the place where the fountain or spring broke forth

**Samson judged Israel twenty years:** (v20) why this verse is place here as though it's the end of the story, is unknown, for it is again stated, "he judged Israel twenty years," (Judges 16:31), which is the end of the story for it states, "Samsons family buried him in the tomb of Manoah his father and that he judged Israel twenty years." The focus of the next chapter is upon samsons relationship with Delilah, his destruction of over 3000 Philistines.

Judges judged Israel in the following way:

- They pleaded their cause, before the LORD, and avenged and protected them from their enemies.
- They administered justice and judgment among the Israelites.
- They established God's laws and kept them from idolatry.

Samson judged Israel twenty years during the days the Philistines had the power over Israel. Samson did not fully deliver Israel from the power and dominion of the Philistines, but rather began to deliver them, as it had been foretold.

- For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:5).

**NOTE:** in the totalling of the years of the judges, the years of Israel's servitude and oppression are included in the total number of years the Judge judged Israel.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*