
JUDGES 15:1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat; and he said, "I will go in to my wife into the room." But her father wouldn't allow him to go in.

Samson, going to visit his wife, finds her bestowed on another, Jdg 15:1, Jdg 15:2. He is incensed, vows revenge, and burns the corn of the Philistines, Jdg 15:3-5. They burn Samson's wife and her father, Jdg 15:6. He is still incensed, makes a great slaughter among them, Jdg 15:7, Jdg 15:8. The Philistines gather together against Israel, and to appease them the men of Judah bind Samson, and deliver him into their hands, Jdg 15:9-13. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him; he breaks his bonds, finds the jaw-bone of an ass, and therewith kills a thousand men, Jdg 15:14-16. He is sorely fatigued; and, being thirsty, God miraculously produces water from an opening of the ground in Lehi, and he is refreshed, Jdg 15:17-19. He judges Israel in the time of the Philistines twenty years, Jdg 15:20.

Verse 1

Visited his wife with a kid - On her betraying him, he had, no doubt, left her in great disgust. After some time his affection appears to have returned; and, taking a kid, or perhaps a fawn, as a present, he goes to make reconciliation, and finds her given to his brideman; probably, the person to whom she betrayed his riddle.

JUDGES 15:2 Her father said, "I most certainly thought that you had utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Isn't her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her, instead."

Verse 2

Thou hadst utterly hated her - As he was conscious she had given him great cause so to do.

Her younger sister - The father appears to have been perfectly sincere in this offer.

JUDGES 15:3 Samson said to them, "This time I will be blameless in regard of the Philistines, when I harm them."

JUDGES 15:4 Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned tail to tail, and put a torch in the midst between every two tails.

Verse 4

Went and caught three hundred foxes - There has been much controversy concerning the meaning of the term שועלים shualim, some supposing it to mean foxes or jackals, and others handfals or sheaves of corn. Much of the force of the objections against the common version will be diminished by the following considerations: -

1. Foxes, or jackals, are common and gregarious in that country.

2. It is not hinted that Samson collected them alone; he might have employed several hands in this work.

3. It is not said he collected them all in one day; he might have employed several days, as well as many persons, to furnish him with these means of vengeance.

4. In other countries, where ferocious beasts were less numerous, great multitudes have been exhibited at once.

Sylla, in a public show to the Roman citizens, exhibited one hundred lions; Caesar, four hundred, and Pompey, nearly six hundred. The Emperor Probus let loose in the theater, at one time, one thousand ostriches, one thousand stags, one thousand wild boars, one thousand does, and a countless multitude of other wild animals; at another time he exhibited one hundred leopards from Libya, one hundred from Syria, and three hundred bears. - See Flavius Vopiscus in the Life of Probus, cap. xix., beginning with *Dedit Romanis etiam voluptates*, etc.

That foxes, or the creature called shual, abounded in Judea, is evident from their frequent mention in Scripture, and from several places bearing their name. It appears they were so numerous that even their cubs ruined the vineyards; see Sol 2:15 : Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil our vines. Jeremiah complains that the foxes had occupied the mountains of Judea, Lam 5:18. They are mentioned as making incursions into enclosures, etc., Neh 4:3. Ezekiel compares the numerous false prophets to these animals, Eze 13:4. In Jos 15:28 we find a place called Hazar Shual, "the court of the foxes:" and in Jos 19:42 a place called Shaal-abbin, "the foxes;" no doubt from the number of those animals in that district. And mention is made of the land of Shual, or of the fox, 1Sam 13:17.

The creature called shual is represented by travelers and naturalists who have been in Judea as an animal between a wolf and a fox. Hasselquist, who was on the spot, and saw many of them, calls it the little Eastern fox. They are frequent in the East, and often destroy infirm persons and children.

Dr. Kennicott, however, objects to the common interpretation; and gives reasons, some of which are far from being destitute of weight. "The three hundred foxes," says he, "caught by Samson, have been so frequently the subject of banter and ridicule, that we should consider whether the words may not admit a more rational interpretation: for, besides the improbability arising here from the number of these foxes, the use made of them is also very strange. If these animals were tied tail to tail, they would probably pull contrary ways, and consequently stand still; whereas a firebrand tied to the tail of each fox singly would have been far more likely to answer the purpose here intended. To obviate these difficulties it has been well remarked, that the word שועלים shualim, here translated foxes, signifies also handfuls, Eze 13:19, handfuls of barley; if we leave out that one letter I *vau*, which has been inserted or omitted elsewhere, almost at pleasure. No less than seven Hebrew MSS. want that letter here, and read שעלים shealim. Admitting this version, we see that Samson took three hundred handfuls or sheaves of corn, and one hundred and fifty firebrands; that he turned the sheaves end to end, and put a firebrand between the two ends in the midst; and then, setting the brands on fire, sent the fire into the standing corn of the Philistines. The same word is now used twice in one chapter, (Eze 13:4, Eze 13:19); in the former verse signifying foxes, in the latter handfuls: and in 1Kgs 20:10, where we render it handfuls, it is αλωπεξι, foxes, in the Greek version." - Remarks on Select Passages.

The reasoning of Dr. Kennicott in the first part of this criticism has already been answered; other parts shall be considered below. Though there are seven MSS., which agree in the reading contended for by Dr. Kennicott, yet all the versions are on the other side. I see no improbability in the common version.

Turned tail to tail - Had he put a firebrand to each, which Dr. Kennicott thinks more reasonable, the creature, naturally terrified at fire, would have instantly taken to cover, and thus the design of Samson would have been frustrated. But, tying two of them together by their tails, they would frequently thwart each other in running, pull hither and thither, and thus make the greater devastation. Had he tied them all together, the confusion would have been so great that no execution could have been done.

JUDGES 15:5 When he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks and the standing grain, and also the olive groves.

JUDGES 15:6 Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" They said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife, and given her to his companion." The Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

Verse 6

Burnt her and her father - This was probably done to appease Samson: as they saw he had been unjustly treated both by his wife and her father; therefore they destroyed them both, that they might cause his wrath to cease from them. And this indeed seems intimated in the following verse: And Samson said - Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you; that is, I am not yet satisfied: ye have done me great wrongs, I must have proportionate redress; then I shall rest satisfied.

JUDGES 15:7 Samson said to them, "If you behave like this, surely I will be avenged of you, and after that I will cease."

JUDGES 15:8 He struck them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

Verse 8

He smote them hip and thigh - This also is variously understood; but the general meaning seems plain; he appears to have had no kind of defensive weapon, therefore he was obliged to grapple with them, and, according to the custom of wrestlers, trip up their feet, and then bruise them to death. Some translate heaps upon heaps; others, he smote horsemen and footmen; others, he wounded them from their legs to their thighs, etc., etc. See the different versions. Some think in their running away from him he kicked them down, and then trod them to death: thus his leg or thigh was against their hip; hence the expression.

The top of the rock Etam - It is very likely that this is the same place as that mentioned 1Chr 4:32; it was in the tribe of Simeon, and on the borders of Dan, and probably a fortified place.

JUDGES 15:9 Then the Philistines went up, and encamped in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

JUDGES 15:10 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 has done to us."

Verse 10

To bind Samson are we come up - It seems they did not wish to come to an open rupture with the Israelites, provided they would deliver up him who was the cause of their disasters.

JUDGES 15:11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" He said to them, "As they did to me, so have I done to them."

Verse 11

Three thousand men of Judah went - It appears evidently from this that Samson was strongly posted, and they thought that no less than three thousand men were necessary to reduce him.

JUDGES 15:12 They said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not fall on me yourselves."

Verse 12

That ye will not fall upon me yourselves - He could not bear the thought of contending with and slaying his own countrymen; for there is no doubt that he could have as easily rescued himself from their hands as from those of the Philistines.

JUDGES 15:13 They spoke to him, saying, "No; but we will bind you fast, and deliver you into their hand; but surely we will not kill you." They bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock.

Verse 13

They bound him with two new cords - Probably his hands with one and his legs with the other.

JUDGES 15:14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily on him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands dropped from off his hands.

Verse 14

When he came unto Lehi - This was the name of the place to which they brought him, either to put him to death, or keep him in perpetual confinement.

Shouted against him - His capture was a matter of public rejoicing.

JUDGES 15:15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand, and took it, and struck a thousand men with it.

Verse 15

He found a new jaw-bone of an ass - I rather think that the word טרייה teriyah, which we translate new, and the margin moist, should be understood as signifying the tabia or putrid state of the ass from which this jawbone was taken. He found there a dead ass in a state of putrefaction; on which account he could the more easily separate the jaw from its integuments; this was a circumstance proper to be recorded by the historian, and a mark of the providence of God. But were we to understand it of a fresh jaw-bone, very lately separated from the head of an ass, the circumstance does not seem worthy of being recorded.

With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps - I cannot see the propriety of this rendering of the Hebrew words חמור חמורתים בלחי החמור bilchi hachamor, chemor chamorathayim; I believe they should be translated thus: - "With the jaw-bone of this ass, an ass (the foal) of two asses; "With the jaw-bone of this ass I have slain a thousand men."

This appears to have been a triumphal song on the occasion; and the words are variously rendered both by the versions, and by expositors.

JUDGES 15:16 Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps on heaps; with the jawbone of a donkey I have struck a thousand men."

JUDGES 15:17 When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone out of his hand; and that place was called Ramath Lehi.

Verse 17

Ramath-lehi - The lifting up or casting away of the jaw-bone. Lehi was the name of the place before, Ramath was now added to it here; he lifted up the jaw-bone against his enemies, and slew them.

JUDGES 15:18 He was very thirsty, and called on the LORD, and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of your servant; and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?"

Verse 18

I die for thirst - The natural consequence of the excessive fatigue he had gone through in this encounter.

JUDGES 15:19 But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out of it. When he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: therefore its name was called En Hakkore, which is in Lehi, to this day.

Verse 19

God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw - אשר בלחי - *asher ballechi*, that was in Lehi; that is, there was a hollow place in this Lehi, and God caused a fountain to spring up in it. Because the place was hollow it was capable of containing the water that rose up in it, and thus of becoming a well.

En-hakkore - The well of the implorer; this name he gave to the spot where the water rose, in order to perpetuate the bounty of God in affording him this miraculous supply.

Which is in Lehi unto this day - Consequently not In the jaw-bone of the ass, a most unfortunate rendering.

JUDGES 15:20 He judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Verse 20

He judged Israel - twenty years - In the margin it is said, He seems to have judged southwest Israel during twenty years of their servitude of the Philistines, Jdg 13:1. Instead of עשרים שנה *esrim shanah*, twenty years, the Jerusalem Talmud has ארבעים שנה *arbaim shanah*, forty years; but this reading is not acknowledged by any MS. or version. According to Calmet, the twenty years of the judicature of Samson began the eighteenth year of the subjection of Israel to the Philistines; and these twenty years are included in the judicature of the high priest Eli.

The burning of the Philistines' corn by the means of foxes and firebrands is a very remarkable circumstance; and there is a story told by Ovid, in the 4th book of his *Fasti*, that bears a striking similitude to this; and is supposed by some learned men to allude to Samson and his foxes. The poet is at a loss to account for this custom, but brings in an old man of Carseoli, with what must have appeared to himself a very unsatisfactory solution. The passage begins as follows: -

Tertia post Hyadas cum luxerit orta, remotas,

Carcere partitos Circus habebit equos

Cur igitur missae vinctis ardentia taedis

Terga ferant vulpes, causa docenda mihi?

Vid. Ovid, Fastor. lib. iv., ver. 679.

The substance of the whole account, which is too long to be transcribed, is this: It was a custom in Rome, celebrated in the month of April to let loose a number of foxes in the circus, with lighted

flambeaux on their backs; and the Roman people took pleasure in seeing these animals run about till roasted to death by the flames with which they were enveloped. The poet wishes to know what the origin of this custom was, and is thus informed by an old man of the city of Carseoli: "A frolicksome young lad, about ten years of age, found, near a thicket, a fox that had stolen away many fowls from the neighboring roosts. Having enveloped his body with hay and straw, he set it on fire, and let the fox loose. The animal, in order to avoid the flames, took to the standing corn which was then ready for the sickle; and the wind, driving the flames with double violence, the crops were everywhere consumed. Though this transaction is long since gone by, the commemoration of it still remains; for, by a law of this city, every fox that is taken is burnt to death. Thus the nation awards to the foxes the punishment of being burnt alive, for the destruction of the ripe corn formerly occasioned by one of these animals."

Both Serrarius and Bochart reject this origin of the custom given by Ovid; and insist that the custom took its rise from the burning of the Philistines' corn by Samson's foxes. The origin ascribed to the custom by the Carseolian they consider as too frivolous and unimportant to be commemorated by a national festival. The time of the observation does not accord with the time of harvest about Rome and in Italy, but it perfectly accords with the time of harvest in Palestine, which was at least as early as April. Nor does the circumstance of the fox wrapped in hay and let loose, the hay being set on fire, bear any proper resemblance to the foxes let loose in the circus with burning brands on their backs.

These learned men therefore conclude that it is much more natural to suppose that the Romans derived the custom from Judea, where probably the burning of the Philistines' corn might, for some time, have been annually commemorated.

The whole account is certainly very singular, and has not a very satisfactory solution in the old man's tale, as related by the Roman poet.

All public institutions have had their origin in facts; and if, through the lapse of time or loss of records, the original facts be lost, we may legitimately look for them in cases where there is so near a resemblance as in that above.