

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 15

This chapter relates, that Samson being denied his wife, did by a strange stratagem burn the corn fields, vineyards, and olives of the Philistines, (^{<0715>}Judges 15:1-5), and that because of their burning her and her father, he made a great slaughter of them, (^{<0716>}Judges 15:6-8), which brought the Philistines against the men of Judah, who took Samson and bound him, to deliver him to the Philistines, when he, loosing himself, slew a thousand of them with the jaw bone of an ass, (^{<0719>}Judges 15:9-17) and being athirst, God in a wonderful manner supplied him with water, (^{<0718>}Judges 15:18-20).

Ver. 1. *But it came to pass within a while after*, etc.] Or “after days”, a year after, the same phrase as in (^{<0714>}Judges 14:8) in the time of wheat harvest; which began at Pentecost, as barley harvest did at the passover; this circumstance is mentioned for the sake of the following piece of history:

that Samson visited his wife with a kid; by this time his passion of anger subsided, and he “remembered” his wife, as the Targum expresses it, and thought proper to return to her, and attempt a reconciliation with her; and for that purpose took a kid with him to eat a meal with her in her own apartment, which in those days was reckoned an elegant entertainment, and was a present to a king, (^{<0717>}1 Samuel 16:20). Isidore ^{f298} derives the Latin word for a kid, “ab edendo”, from eating, as if it was food by way of eminency, as it is both savoury and wholesome:

and he said, I will go with my wife into the chamber; where she was, as women had their chambers and apartments by themselves; this he said within himself, or resolved in his own mind, and perhaps expressed it in her father’s hearing, or however moved that way, which plainly indicated his design:

but her father would not suffer him to go in; placed himself perhaps between him and the door, and parleyed with him, and declared he should not go into his daughter’s chamber; Samson, through his superior strength,

could easily have pushed him away, and broke open the door, but he did not choose to use such violent methods, and patiently heard what he had to say, and submitted.

Ver. 2. *And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her*, etc.] Not only thought so, but said so, and had said it over and over again; for the words are, “saying I said”^{f299}, affirmed it confidently and constantly, that “in hating thou hast hated her”^{f300}, with an implacable hatred, that there was no hope of any reconciliation:

therefore I gave her to thy companion; this he said to excuse his daughter, and soften his resentment, that it was not his daughter’s doing, but his, and that he had disposed of her not to anybody, but to a companion of Samson’s; and what follows seems to be said with the same view, for he might be in some fear of Samson, knowing him to be a man of spirit and strength:

is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her; that is, to wife; and two things he observes to recommend her, her youth and beauty, in which she was preferable to her sister. Such incestuous marriages were common with the old Canaanites, and it seems still continued; but were condemned by the law of God, and not allowed an Israelite, which Samson knew full well, and therefore listened not to the proposal; (see ^{CRIBB}Leviticus 18:3,18).

Ver. 3. *And Samson said concerning them*, etc.] His wife’s father, and other relations, and the citizens of Timnath; this, which is what follows, he said either within himself respecting them, or he said it to them openly and publicly before them all:

now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure; signifying, that if he did them an ill thing, or what might be reckoned an injury to their persons or properties, and which would be disagreeable and displeasing to them, they could not justly blame him for it, since they had given him such a provocation as to dispose of his wife to another man; though Samson did not mean to act, nor did he act in the following instances as a private person taking private revenge, but as a public person, and judge of Israel; and took occasion, from the private injuries done him, to avenge the public ones of the children of Israel upon the Philistines; and they might thank themselves for giving the opportunity, which they could not justly condemn him for taking.

Ver. 4. *And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes,* etc.] Nor should this be thought at all incredible, since Canaan and Palestine abounded with foxes; hence several places therein had their names of Shual, which signifies a fox, (^{<0653>}Joshua 15:28 19:3,42 ^{<0937>}1 Samuel 13:17). A traveller ^{f301} in those parts says that foxes swarm there, and that there are very great numbers of them in the hedges, and ruins of buildings: and these creatures were very pernicious to vines, and so may reasonably be thought to be about Timnath in great numbers, because of the vineyards there, (^{<0745>}Judges 14:5 ^{<2125>}Song of Solomon 2:15), besides, there is no necessity of supposing that Samson took all these himself, he might employ others in catching them for him, nor that he took them at the same time, on one and the same day; he might be many days and weeks about it, and keep them up until he had got his number: to which may be added, there was a creature in those parts very much like a fox, called Thoes, which, as Bellonius ^{f302} says, were about Caesarea and Palestina, and go two hundred in company; and so making use of proper means, which Samson was not unacquainted with, great numbers might be taken together; but, above all, it may be observed, that as this was under the direction of the divine Providence, God could easily cause such a number of creatures to be gathered together, and taken, as he ordered all the living creatures, as by an instinct, to come into the ark to Noah:

and he took fire brands; or rather torches, made of oily and resinous matter, which were not easily extinguished:

and turned tail to tail; took two foxes, and tied their tails together with a cord, giving them room enough to run about, as such creatures do, not forward, but in a crooked, flexuous manner, here and there:

and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails: which torch seems to have been fastened to the cord with which the tails were tied; he did not put a firebrand or torch to the tail of every single fox, which then would have made its way to its own den, but between two, which could not enter into one hole, and would draw different ways, and stop each other, and so do greater damage to the fields and vineyards into which they came.

Ver. 5. *And when he had set the brands on fire,* etc.] Disposed as before related; and foxes being naturally fearful of, and frightened with fire, and especially so near them as at their tails, would run into the first place they could for shelter:

he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines; which being ripe, as it was now wheat harvest, would soon take fire; and taking fire, this would in course cause the foxes to run still further to other parts of standing corn, and set fire to them also; besides, it is reasonable to suppose that Samson did not let them go all at once on one spot, but disposed of them, some here, and some there, to do the greater and more speedy execution:

and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives; for as it was in the time of harvest, in some places the corn was standing, and in other places it was cut down, and put into shocks or heaps; and to these the foxes would naturally run to shelter themselves, and so set fire to them, as well as they would make their way to the vineyards or oliveyards, either for shelter also, or for the sake of the grapes and olives, to satisfy their hunger, after having been detained long for this purpose; and thus by one means or another they destroyed the corn, the vines, and olives of the Philistines in those parts. Some would have it, in order to shun the difficulties objected by the enemies of revelation, that the word for “foxes” should be rendered “sheaves” or shocks of corn, set end to end^{f303}, which the word for “tail” is said to signify; and firebrands or torches being set on fire, communicated it to standing corn, shocks of corn, vineyards, and oliveyards; but there is no need to put such a sense upon the words, as already observed; nor is the word translated “foxes” ever used in Scripture in any form for “sheaves” or shocks of corn, but always others; nor in any Jewish writings, nor in the sister dialects, Arabic, Chaldee, or Ethiopic; and in any place of Scripture where it is translated “fox” or “foxes”, should the word “sheaves” or “shocks” be put, the sense would appear most ridiculous; nor is the word for “tail” ever used in Scripture, in a literal sense, but for the tail of a living creature; nor is the word for “took” or “caught” ever used of taking anything in common, but either of taking men or cities by force, or of creatures in nets, traps, and snares: and the sense which such a version of the words would give is not only contrary to the Hebrew text, and to the Chaldee paraphrase, but to all the ancient versions, Arabic, Syriac, Septuagint, and Vulgate Latin, and to Josephus. The memory of this great event was kept up, or a custom borrowed from it, as some learned men have observed in the Vulpinaria of the Romans, mentioned by Ovid^{f304}, and others, which bore a great resemblance to this, and which was observed at the same time of the year, about the middle of April, or calends of May;

which exactly agrees with the time of wheat harvest in Palestine; when in the Circus they used to send out foxes with burning torches fixed to their backs. Nor need this affair of Samson's seem more strange or incredible than the great number of creatures brought into the Circus at Rome, to be seen there together. Sylla first introduced one hundred lions, after him Pompey the great three hundred, and Julius Caesar, when he was dictator, four hundred, as Pliny ^{f305} relates. Probus ^{f306} sent into the amphitheatre at one time, which he made like a wood full of trees, 1000 ostriches, a like number of harts, does, boars, and other creatures each; and at another time one hundred lions, as many lionesses and leopards each, and three hundred bears; Heliogabalus ^{f307} got together 1000 weasels, 10,000 mice, 10,000 weight of spiders and flies.

Ver. 6. *Then the Philistines said, who hath done this?* etc.] They asked and inquired one of another, who they thought could be the author of such mischief:

and they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite; this they said either by conjecture, which might be the case of some; and others more confidently asserted it, having heard what he said, (^{<0713B>}Judges 15:3) and they assign a very good reason for it,

because he had already taken away his wife, and given her to his companion, which had provoked him to do such an action as this; and perhaps the very same persons that were very well pleased before that Samson was so served, yet now were full of wrath and indignation at the Timnite, having suffered so much in their property on his account:

and the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire; Josephus ^{f308} says, her and her relations; they set fire to her father's house, where she was, and burnt them both in it, whereby that evil came upon her she thought to avoid by getting the secret of the riddle out of Samson, and telling it to his companion, (^{<07145>}Judges 14:15) and suffered the proper punishment for her adultery; the people that did this were those that lived in the towns adjacent, from whence they came up to Timnath, whose fields, vineyards, and oliveyards, had been destroyed by the foxes with their firebrands.

Ver. 7. *And Samson said unto them,* etc.] After they had burnt his wife and her father in their dwelling house, by which they thought to appease him, being afraid of him:

though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you; not for burning his wife and father-in-law; his sense is, that though they had done this, in order to ingratiate themselves with him, yet he should not stop on this account, but be avenged on them, not for private injuries done to him, or any that had been in connection with him, but for public injuries done to Israel, and their oppression of them:

and after that I will cease; when he had taken full vengeance on them, and not before.

Ver. 8. *And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter*, etc.] Either smote them on their hips and thighs with his hands (for it does not appear he had any weapon of war), so that they were sadly bruised, and maimed, and lamed, that they could not stir, and of which blows and bruises multitudes died: or he smote them with his legs on their thighs, kicked them about at pleasure, which kicks numbers of them never got over; or the meaning of the proverbial expression is, he laid on them at a great rate, and smote them here and there, and any where, which issued in the death of many of them: the Targum is,

“he smote them horse and foot,”

their cavalry and infantry, destroyed them both; but it does not appear that they came out in an hostile manner unto him, and much less in the form of a regular army:

and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam. Josephus says ^{f309}, that Samson having slain many in the fields of the Philistines, went and dwelt at Etam, a strong rock in the tribe of Judah; and which agrees with (⁴¹⁰⁶2 Chronicles 11:6), where mention is made of the city Etam, along with Bethlehem and Tekoah, cities in that tribe, which had its name either from this rock, or the rock from that. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions read,

“in a cave of the rock of Etam;”

and the Syriac and Arabic versions, in Sahaph, which is on the rock of Etam, as if Sahaph was the name of a city there; hither Samson went, not through fear, or for safety, but to wait for another opportunity of further avenging the injuries of Israel on the Philistines.

Ver. 9. *Then the Philistines went up*, etc.] From Palestine, which lay low on the shore of the Mediterranean sea:

and pitched in Judah; in the land of Judea, which lay higher, particularly in the tribe of Judah, whither they came with an army, and encamped there:

and spread themselves in Lehi; their forces were so many, that they extended a considerable way, and particularly reached to Lehi, that is, which was afterwards so called; for it has its name by anticipation from the jaw bone, which it signifies, with which Samson slew many in this place, as after related.

Ver. 10. *And the men of Judah said*, etc.] To the Philistines, very probably by a deputation, which they sent unto them, to know the reason of this formidable appearance:

why are ye come up against us? in this hostile manner, with such a number of forces, since they were not conscious to themselves that they had done anything to offend them; they had not attempted to cast off their yoke, they quietly submitted to their government, and had paid their whole tribute, as Josephus^{f310} represents them saying; they could not imagine what should be the meaning of all this:

and they answered, to bind Samson are we come up; that is, to oblige them to bind him, and deliver him into their hands:

to do to him as he hath done to us: to put him to death, as he had slain many of their people in the last rencounter with them.

Ver. 11. *Then three thousand of Judah went up to the top of the rock of Etam*, etc.] Or “went down”^{f311}; that is, into the cave of the rock of Etam, as the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions; and so it is taken by David de Pomis^{f312} for a cave dug in the rock: this was a large number that went to take one man; the reason is, they knew his great strength:

and said to Samson, knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? and therefore it must be a very unwise thing to disoblige and provoke them, when it lay in their power to oppress them yet more and more, to increase their tribute, and make their burdens heavier, and even take away their lives:

what is this that thou hast done unto us? they ask not what he had done to them, but unto us; though they mean that, but express themselves thus,

because what he had done to the Philistines was the occasion of their coming up against them, and so eventually it was doing them ill:

and he said unto them, as they did unto me, so have I done to them; they had done him ill, and therefore he did ill to them; they had burnt his wife and her father with fire, and he had slain many of them; at least this was what he thought fit to say in his own vindication; otherwise what he did was not in a way of private revenge, but on account of the injury done to the people of Israel, he taking what was done to them as done to himself, the chief magistrate and judge of Israel.

Ver. 12. *And they said unto him, we are come down to bind thee,* etc.] That is, they were come down into the cave where he was; otherwise more properly they were come up to the top of the rock:

that we may deliver thee into the hands of the Philistines; they own what was their intention in binding him, and what put them upon it was not ill will to him, but fear of the Philistines:

and Samson said unto them, swear unto me that ye will not fall upon me yourselves; which shows he did not fear them, though they were 3000; and that if they attempted to take away his life, he should defend himself, but he chose not to shed the blood of any of them; and rather than they should come into any distress through the Philistines, consented to be bound by them, and delivered into their hands; which he was a type of Christ, who was betrayed by the Jews, and delivered by them into the hands of the Romans; and though he could have delivered himself by his great strength, would not, but suffered himself to be taken and bound, and given into the hands of his enemies, that his own people might go free; (see ^{<BIB04>}John 18:4-12).

Ver. 13. *And they spake unto him, saying, no,* etc.] They declared they would not fall upon him themselves and slay him; nor would the Jews put Christ to death themselves, though they were virtually his betrayers and murderers, (^{<BIB31>}John 18:31)

but we will bind thee fast and deliver thee into their hands; as the Jews did Christ, and not only delivered him bound to the high priest, but also to the Roman governor, (^{<BIB2D>}Matthew 27:2)

but surely we will not kill thee: not with their own hands, but then they proposed to deliver him into the hands of the Philistines, from whence

nothing but death could be expected; so that had they put him to death, they would have been accessory to it, as the Jews were to the death of Christ by delivering him to the Gentiles, and are charged with it, (~~4023~~ Acts 2:23,36).

and they bound him with two new cords; not with one only, lest it should not be sufficient to hold him, knowing his strength, but with two, and these not old worn out ones, but new ones just made, and very strong; and, as Joseph Kimchi, noted by Ben Melech, were trebled, or made of three cords or thongs, for greater security; and of flax, as the following verse intimates, and such are most firm and strongest to hold anything; hence nets were made of flax to hold creatures in, fish, fowl, or beasts ^{f313}:

and brought him up from the rock; the place, as Kimchi says, where the men of Judah dwelt, being higher than the rock; though rather the true sense is, they brought him up out of the cave in the rock.

Ver. 14. *And when he came unto Lehi*, etc.] The place which was afterwards so called, from what happened there at this time, and where the Philistines were spread, (~~0759~~ Judges 15:9) this, according to Bunting ^{f314}, was six miles from Etam:

the Philistines shouted against him: for joy that they had got him into their hands, and in the circumstances he was, being bound, so that they had nothing to fear from him:

and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him: as it at times did, and had done before; the Targum is,

“the Spirit of might from the Lord,”

which gave him courage and resolution of mind, and great strength of body, even while he was speaking, as a token of the wonders God more than he had at other times:

and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire; as easily parted as the flax when fire takes it, which is consumed at once:

and his bonds loosed off from his hands; by which it appears that both arms and hands were bound with the cords; his arms were pinioned close to his body, as well as his hands were tied together; and these, as in the original, “melted away” ^{f315}, like wax before the fire, or snow before the

sun, so easily were these bands separated from him; this may be an emblem of Christ's loosing himself from the cords of death, (^{<412>}Acts 2:24).

Ver. 15. *And he found a new jawbone of an ass*, etc.] That is, the jawbone of an ass lately killed, which perhaps had some of the flesh upon it, the blood or purulent matter on it; for Jarchi says, he had read in the books of physicians, that the word here used signifies the sanies or purulent matter of a wound; however, it was moist, and fresh, and so tough and strong, and would bear to strike with, and give hard blows with, when an old jawbone would have been dry and brittle; and perhaps the asses of those countries were larger than ours, and so their jawbones bigger and stronger:

and put forth his hand and took it; it lay near him, being so disposed by the providence of God at the time and place where his cords were loosed from him, and he reached and took it up:

and slew one thousand men therewith, such was his great strength, that every blow he gave in all probability killed a man; there have been wonderful things done by mighty warriors, but none like this; they have by the use of warlike weapons destroyed many, as with the sword or spear, but not with such an instrument. One of David's worthies slew three hundred men at one time with his spear, (^{<43111>}1 Chronicles 11:11) and Scanderbeg with his sword slew great numbers of the Turks with his own hand at different times; what comes nearest to this is Shamgar's killing six hundred Philistines with an ox goad, (^{<40031>}Judges 3:31), this may be an emblem of the weak and contemptible means of the Gospel, the foolishness of preaching, by which Christ has conquered and subdued multitudes to himself.

Ver. 16. *And Samson said*, etc.] In a kind of triumphant song:

with the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps; that is, with such an instrument he had slain heaps of men, who lay dead in heaps upon one another; in the words for an "ass", and for an "heap", is an elegant "paronomasia", not easy to be expressed in our language:

with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men: this he said not in a proud and haughty manner, ascribing it to himself, as Josephus suggests ^{f316}, since he takes notice of the mean instrument he used; which showed that he was sensible it was not done by his own power, but by the power of God, which enabled him by such weak means to do such wonderful things.

Ver. 17. *And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking,* etc.] Of delivering out the above song, which very probably consisted of much more than what is here expressed:

that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand; which he held in his hand had wrought by him through the means of it, and so served to animate him to praise and thankfulness; but having no further use for it, he threw it away:

and called the place Ramathlehi; that is, the casting away the jawbone, so Kimchi; but Ben Gersom thinks it was an high place where it was thrown, and so signifies the elevation or lifting up of the “jawbone”, as the Septuagint version renders it.

Ver. 18. *And he was sore athirst,* etc.] Which Josephus^{f317} thinks came upon him as a rebuke unto him, for ascribing the victory he had obtained to his own strength, and not to the Lord, whereby he was shown his own weakness, and how easily his strength could be reduced; but for this there seems to be no foundation; it is not to wondered at, in a natural way, that he should be athirst after he had been bound with cords, after he had so exerted himself, and slain 1000 men with his own hand, and after he had celebrated this victory with a triumphant song; and it may also be observed, that it was so ordered in Providence, that he might in this be a type of the Messiah, who on the cross, as he was spoiling principalities and powers, and triumphing over them in it, said, “I thirst”, (~~Gen~~ John 19:28)

and called on the Lord, and said; in prayer to him:

thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant; he owns the deliverance to be great, as indeed, it was, and that it was of the Lord, and he only his servant and instrument in it:

and now shall I die for thirst; when my life has been saved in so wonderful a manner, and so great a salvation has been wrought by my hands, as an instrument:

and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised? which would be matter of joy and triumph to them, and mar the glory of the deliverance wrought.

Ver. 19. *And God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout,* etc.] A socket in which was fastened one of the teeth, and was in the form of a mortar; so Jarchi and Ben Melech, as the word for

an hollow place signifies; one of the grinders was knocked out, and so the place where it had been was left hollow, and out of that sprung a stream or flow of water; which was very wonderful, since out of such a place rather blood, or purulent matter, would naturally have issued; the Targum is,

“the Lord clave the rock which was in the jaw;”

which Kimchi interprets thus, the rock was under the jaw and the rock was made as a hollow place, and therefore they call it “mactes”, a mortar: the sense seems to be this, that the place on which Samson cast the jawbone was a rock, and there God clave an hollow place, out of which water sprung, and which perhaps was under the jawbone, and sprung under it, and through it; and so Josephus says ^{f318}, that God at his prayer brought a sweet and large fountain out of a certain rock; and the words of the text will bear to be rendered, “and God clave, an hollow place, which is in Lehi”; that is, in the place called Lehi, (^{<0715>}Judges 15:9,14) and not in the jawbone itself:

and when he had drank, his spirit came again, and he revived; his spirit was sunk and gone, as it were, but upon drinking a draught of this water he was refreshed and cheered, recovered his spirits, and became brisk and lively:

wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore; that is,

“the fountain of him that was calling;”

of Samson that called upon God in prayer, and was heard, in memory of which he gave it this name; so the Targum,

“therefore its name was called the fountain that was given through the prayer of Samson:”

which is in Lehi unto this day; or in the jawbone: not that the jawbone continued unto the time of the writer of this book, but the name of the place where this miracle was wrought, which was in Lehi, continued to be called Enhakkore unto that time, and it may be the fountain itself continued also; nay, Giycas ^{f319} says, who lived but about six hundred years ago, that the fountain continued unto his time, and was to be seen in the suburbs of Eleutheropolis, and was called the fountain of the jawbone.

Ver. 20. *And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.*] While they had the power over the Israelites, who were not entirely

delivered out of their hands by Samson, he only began to deliver them, but did not completely do it; though he got many advantages over them, and wrought many salvations and deliverances, yet was not the author of perfect salvation, (see ~~07135~~Judges 13:5) however, he was a check upon the Philistines, and protected the Israelites from heavier oppressions, which otherwise they would have come under; and no doubt administered justice and judgment among them, and was an instrument of their reformation, and of preserving them from idolatry; for in such things the work of a judge chiefly lay: some from hence observe, that this shows the years of servitude and bondage are included in the years of the judges.