

A Thousand to One, And He Won

Judges 15:9-20

Slide 1

Last week we saw that Samson wasn't the only person capable of revenge. The Philistines got their revenge by killing his bride and her father; whether anyone else in the family met the same fate isn't stated.

That bit of revenge led to another. Samson avenged his wife and father-in-law by slaying an unspecified number of Philistines after which he left to dwell in a cave atop the rock of Etam.

Even though we don't know its specific location, others did, and that's the beginning point for today's message.

Slide 2

Judges 15:9-10, *"The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi. The people of Judah asked, "Why have you come to fight us?" "We have come to take Samson prisoner," they answered, "to do to him as he did to us."*

The Philistines, furious with Samson for all those he had killed and all the property he had destroyed, decided enough was enough. The text says, *"The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi."*

Where Lehi was located isn't certain, but it was probably somewhere near the border of Judah and Philistia.

Some wonder why he didn't return to his home. Although it's not stated anywhere, I believe that Samson had seen what the Philistines did to family members who ran afoul of their laws, and he probably wanted to protect his parents and relatives.

So now the Philistines show up on Judah's doorstep, unspecified in number, and they're not happy. They've ruled Israel for over 40 years, and Israel was basically helpless to stop them if they invaded.

Seeing this multitude of Philistines, the people of Lehi didn't know what to do. Apparently, they didn't know what had happened, why the Philistines were so upset, or why they were in the land of Judah itself.

They hadn't heard what Samson had done, so they asked, "*Why have you come to fight us?*" The Philistines reply was very specific, "*We have come to take Samson prisoner.*"

I can just see the sigh of relief on their faces. The Philistines just wanted one person, Samson. But that was small comfort as the people of Judah who knew that an invasion could come any time.

They were so afraid of the Philistines that they immediately "caved" into their demand. The men of Judah were prepared to deliver Samson to the Philistines—anything, just to keep the enemy happy.

But did you catch why they wanted Samson? "*To do to him as he did to us.*" They wanted to take their revenge on him; to make an example of him.

This is a vivid illustration of what we learned last week. Revenge rarely leads to justice but merely traps the recipients in a never-ending cycle of violence.

What I find interesting is that the people of Judah didn't bat an eye at this request. They immediately set off in search of Samson.

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Judges 15:11a, "*Then three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam...*"

After the Philistines made their demand, a group of men went directly to the “*cave in the rock of Etam*” to find Samson.

They knew exactly where he was. How? Did Samson stop in every town and tell the people I killed a bunch of Philistines so I’m going to hid at Etam?

I believe all Israel knew who Samson was and recognized him as he passed through their area. This may be how the Philistines tracked him.

Also, I believe his exploits with the Philistines had filtered through the entire country. That’s why “*three thousand men from Judah*” went to find him.

Even though the location of the rock Etam is unknown today, these men of Judah knew exactly where it was. And when they found Samson, they scolded him like a little child.

Judges 15:11b, “*Don’t you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?*”

Like I mention earlier, I believe they knew exactly what Samson had done. These were just rhetorical questions to get Samson to think about his reckless actions and how they affected others.

But, like a petulant child, Samson replied, “*I merely did to them what they did to me.*” A kind of a reverse Golden Rule. He might have gone into more detail but there’s no record.

Then the men of Judah told Samson why they had come. They were there to bind him and give him to the Philistines.

Judges 15:12-13, *They said to him, "We've come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines." Samson said, "Swear to me that you won't kill me yourselves." "Agreed," they answered. "We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock.*

Samson was probably still depressed over losing his wife that he only asked that they not kill him themselves, to which they agreed.

They told him, *"We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you."*

Then the men of Judah bound Samson with two new cords and brought him down from the rock.

There's no record of how long this journey took, but this was one of the few times in Scripture when the Israelites handed one of their own over to an enemy.

So, now that Samson was almost in their possession, the Philistines were probably thinking of different ways to take revenge on him, but something unexpected happened.

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Judges 15:14a, *"As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting.*

The distance between the rock of Etam and Lehi is unknown. What is known is that the Philistines began shouting and taunting Samson when he arrived.

We're not told what they said. It could have been a mixture of taunts, insults, mock challenges, or anything else they could think of, but whatever they said seemed to upset him.

Because, in the midst of all their shouting, the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon Samson and the first thing he did was break the cords on his arms.

Judges 15:14b-15, *The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.*

The men of Judah had bound Samson with new two cords which, apparently, they thought were very strong, but Samson broke them like they were made of ash.

And when he became free, he looked around to find something, anything, to use as a weapon. And guess what he spied... a jawbone of a dead donkey. Again, God provided.

He picked it up and started a one-man fight against the Philistines. Yet, note that again Samson touched something dead which violated his Nazarite vow.

Yet, this didn't bother him, since if he had been killed by the Philistines, his Nazarite vow would have become null and void anyway.

Then, once Samson grabbed that donkey's jawbone, he started swinging! And with the strength the LORD gave him and the bone he found, he killed 1000 Philistines.

Yet there's something important missing. Where does Samson give credit to the LORD for providing a weapon, and then for providing victory?

Judges 15:16, *"Then Samson said, "With a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men."*

Samson could've had the best weapons available at the time but without God's help, he wouldn't have been able to defeat the enemy.

Yet, even though there was no way Samson could have defeated the Philistines by himself, he still took all the credit!

Slide 5

Judges 15:17, *“When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi.*

Now, this is an important verse. Why? It tells of the only positive thing Samson did after his deliverance from the Philistines: he got rid of the donkey's jawbone!

Granted, it was probably disgusting with all the blood and gore from the battle, but he didn't do as Gideon had by making the object of victory an object of worship.

Remember, in Judges 8, after Gideon had defeated the Midianites, he asked for earrings from the Israelites and made an “ephod” and set it up in his hometown, paving the way for another of Israel's lapses into idolatry.

Yet, even though the Lord provided Samson the strength and a weapon, Samson still displayed his self-centered nature.

Now, think about the battle for a moment. Allowing two seconds to swing the jawbone, hit an enemy, and swing it again, he easily could've been fighting for 30 minutes or more (2000 seconds divided by 60 seconds per minute)!

Anyone who has worked at any kind of labor, especially in the dry season, would know that thirst is a constant companion, let alone in prolonged conflict such as what Samson had endured.

And, if God hadn't helped him, Samson would probably be dead and wouldn't be making his thankless prayer!

Judges 15:18, *"Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"*

His prayer, such as it was, had two parts. First, finally acknowledged God for giving Him "great deliverance" from his enemies.

The second part shows his lack of gratitude, maybe his frustration, *"Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"*

Apparently he lost sight of the fact that the God Who provided the strength to snap the cords, and the God Who provided a donkey's jawbone, was the same God Who could provide relief.

Remember, Samson had thrown the donkey's jawbone away, maybe just off to the side someplace where he figured he'd never see it again, but God had other ideas.

Judges 15:19, *Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi (other translations say "But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw"), and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi.*

Compare this with the story of Hagar, Abraham and Sarah's maid servant, who was banished from their home.

Wandering in the desert, she and Ishmael ran out of water, but weeping, she prayed and God "opened her eyes" so she could see a well of water.

God provided Samson a fountain out of the ground and bubbling through the donkey's jawbone!

That water must have been truly refreshing because the writer says when he drank, "*his strength returned and he revived.*"

Nothing tastes better than good, cold, clear water. Samson probably drank all he could hold after his battle.

God knew Samson would need water and God provided. He always will, in His time and in His ways.

Slide 6

Conclusion

Besides keeping Samson safe from the Philistines, God was not finished with him. Judges 15:20, "*Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.*"

Samson judged Israel for 20 years during the time the Philistine ruled over Israel. He was God's man and God's choice as a "judge."

In a way, many of us are like Samson. We fight all kinds of spiritual battles, but at the end of it all, there's no water to drink, or food to eat, spiritually and physically.

But this self-centered, prideful, womanizer still remembered to beseech God. And what did his God do? The Lord caused water to come out from an underground basin.

You know some interesting things come out of this story. First, God is able to destroy any barrier between you and your outpouring.

Secondly, when you ask God for something He can cause that which you need to overflow in abundance.

I mean, Samson just needed a few gulps of water, but instead God caused a whole aquifer, a whole underground lake of water to open up for him.

Do you understand what the name of that fountain of water, which was opened to Samson means, En-hakkor, it translates "*the spring of him who prayed.*"

Anyone who can pray is entitled to this kind of spring. Pray when faced with trials and tribulations and God will give you your own spring, too.