

# CHAPTER 15

Samson, when he courted an alliance with the Philistines, did but seek an occasion against them, <sup><0740></sup>Judges 14:4. Now here we have a further account of the occasions he took to weaken them, and to avenge, not his own, but Israel's quarrels, upon them. Everything here is surprising; if any thing be thought incredible, because impossible, it must be remembered that with God nothing is impossible, and it was by the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him that he was both directed to and strengthened for those unusual ways of making war.

- I.** From the perfidiousness of his wife and her father, he took occasion to burn their corn (v. 1-5).
- II.** From the Philistines' barbarous cruelty to his wife and her father, he took occasion to smite them with a great slaughter (v. 6-8).
- III.** From the treachery of his countrymen, who delivered him bound to the Philistines, he took occasion to kill 1000 of them with the jaw-bone of an ass (v. 9-17).
- IV.** From the distress he was then in for want of water, God took occasion to show him favour in a seasonable supply (v. 18-20).

## <sup><0750></sup>JUDGES 15:1-8

### SAMSON'S FIREBRANDS

Here is,

**I.** Samson's return to his wife, whom he had left in displeasure; not hearing perhaps that she was given to another, when time had a little cooled his resentments, he came back to her, *visited her with a kid*, v. 1. The value of the present was inconsiderable, but it was intended as a token of reconciliation, and perhaps was then so used, when those that had been at variance were brought together again; he sent this, that he might sup with her in her apartments, and she with him, on his provision, and so they might be friends again. It was generously done of Samson, though he was

the party offended and the superior relation, to whom therefore she was bound in duty to sue for peace and to make the first motion of reconciliation. When differences happen between near relations, let those be ever reckoned the wisest and the best that are most forward to forgive and forget injuries and most willing to stoop and yield for peace' sake.

**II.** The repulse he met with. Her father forbade him to come near her; for truly he had married her to another, v. 2. He endeavours,

**1.** To justify himself in this wrong: *I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her.* A very ill opinion he had of Samson, measuring that Nazarite by the common temper of the Philistines; could he think worse of him than to suspect that, because he was justly angry with his wife, he utterly hated her, and, because he had seen cause to return to his father's house for a while, therefore he had abandoned her for ever? Yet this is all he had to say in excuse of this injury. Thus he made the worst of jealousies to patronize the worst of robberies. But it will never bear us out in doing ill to say, "We thought others designed ill."

**2.** He endeavours to pacify Samson by offering him his younger daughter, whom, because the handsomer, he thought Samson might accept, in full recompence for the wrong. See what confusions those did admit and bring their families to that were not governed by the fear and law of God, marrying a daughter this week to one and next week to another, giving a man one daughter first and then another. Samson scorned his proposal; he knew better things than *to take a wife to her sister*, <sup>(RIS)</sup> Leviticus 18:18.

**III.** The revenge Samson took upon the Philistines for this abuse. Had he designed herein only to plead his own cause he would have challenged his rival, and would have chastised him and his father-in-law only. But he looks upon himself as a public person, and the affront as done to the whole nation of Israel, for probably they put this slight upon him because he was of that nation, and pleased themselves with it, that they had put such an abuse upon an Israelite; and therefore he resolves to do the Philistines a displeasure, and does not doubt but this treatment which he had met with among them would justify him in it (v. 3): *Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines.* He had done what became him in offering to be reconciled to his wife, but, she having rendered it impracticable, now they could not blame him if he showed his just resentment. Note, When differences arise we ought to do our duty in order to the ending of them,

and then, whatever the ill consequences of them may be, we shall be blameless. Now the way Samson took to be revenged on them was by setting their corn-fields on fire, which would be a great weakening and impoverishing to the country, v. 4, 5.

**1.** The method he took to do it was very strange. He sent 150 couple of foxes, tied tail to tail, into the corn-fields; every couple had a stick of fire between their tails, with which, being terrified, they ran into the corn for shelter, and so set fire to it; thus the fire would break out in many places at the same time, and therefore could not be conquered, especially if this was done, as it is probable it was, in the night. He might have employed men to do it, but perhaps he could not find Israelites enough that had courage to do it, and he himself could do it but in one place at a time, which would not effect his purpose. We never find Samson, in any of his exploits, making use of any person whatsoever, either servant or soldier, therefore, in this project, he chose to make use of foxes as his incendiaries. They had injured Samson by their subtlety and malice, and now Samson returns the injury by subtle foxes and mischievous fire-brands. By the meanness and weakness of the animals he employed, he designed to put contempt upon the enemies he fought against. This stratagem is often alluded to to show how the church's adversaries, that are of different interests and designs among themselves, that look and draw contrary ways in other things, yet have often united in a fire-brand, some cursed project or other, to waste the church of God, and particularly to kindle the fire of division in it.

**2.** The mischief he hereby did to the Philistines was very great. It was in the time of wheat harvest (v. 1), so that the straw being dry it soon burnt the shocks of corn that were cut, and *the standing corn, and the vineyards and olives*. This was a waste of the good creatures, but where other acts of hostility are lawful destroying the forage is justly reckoned to be so: if he might take away their lives, he might take away their livelihood. And God was righteous in it: the *corn, and the wine, and the oil*, which they had prepared for Dagon, to be a meat-offering to him, were thus, in the season thereof, made a burnt-offering to God's justice.

**IV.** The Philistines' outrage against Samson's treacherous wife and her father. Understanding that they had provoked Samson to do this mischief to the country, the rabble set upon them and burnt them with fire, perhaps in their own house, v. 6. Samson himself they durst not attack, and therefore, with more justice than perhaps they themselves designed in it,

they wreak their vengeance upon those who, they could not but own, had given him cause to be angry. Instead of taking vengeance upon Samson, they took vengeance for him, when he, out of respect to the relation he had stood in to them, was not willing to do it for himself. See his hand in it *to whom vengeance belongs*. Those that deal treacherously shall be spoiled and dealt treacherously with; and *the Lord is known by these judgments which he executes*, especially when, as here, he makes use of his people's enemies as instruments for revenging one upon another his people's quarrels. When a barbarous Philistine sets fire to a treacherous one, the *righteous may rejoice to see the vengeance*, <sup><15830></sup>Psalm 58:10, 11. Thus shall *the wrath of man praise God*, <sup><19760></sup>Psalm 76:10. The Philistines had threatened Samson's wife, that, if she would not get the riddle out of him, they would *burn her and her father's house with fire*, <sup><07445></sup>Judges 14:15. She, to save herself and oblige her countrymen, betrayed her husband; and what came of it? The very thing that she feared, and sought by sin to avoid, came upon her; she and her father's house were burnt with fire, and her countrymen, whom she sought to oblige by the wrong she did to her husband, brought this evil upon her. The mischief we seek to escape by any unlawful practices we often pull upon our own heads. *He that will thus save his life shall lose it*.

**V.** The occasion Samson took hence to do them a yet greater mischief, which touched their bone and their flesh, v. 7, 8. "*Though you have done this* to them, and thereby shown what you would do to me if you could, yet that shall not deter me from being further vexatious to you." Or, "Though you think, by doing this, you have made me satisfaction for the affront I received among you, yet I have Israel's cause to plead as a public person, and for the wrongs done to them *I will be avenged on you*, and, if you will then forbear your insults, I will cease, aiming at no more than the deliverance of Israel." So he *smote them hip and thigh with a great stroke*, so the word is. We suppose the wounds he gave them to have been mortal, as wounds in the hip or thigh often prove, and therefore translate it, *with a great slaughter*. Some think he only lamed them, disabled them for service, as horses were houghed or ham-strung. It seems to be a phrase used to express a desperate attack; he killed them pell-mell, or routed them horse and foot. He smote them with his hip upon thigh, that is, with the strength he had, not in his arms and hands, but in his hips and thighs, for he kicked and spurned at them, and so mortified them, *trod them in his anger*, and *trampled them in his fury*, <sup><263B></sup>Isaiah 63:3. And, when he had done, he

retired to a natural fortress in the top of the rock Etam, where he waited to see whether the Philistines would be tamed by the correction he had given them.

## ◀715▶ JUDGES 15:9-17

### SAMSON BOUND BY THE MEN OF JUDAH

Here is,

**I.** Samson violently pursued by the Philistine. They went up in a body, a more formidable force than they had together when Samson smote them hip and thigh; and they pitched in Judah, and spread themselves up and down the country, to find out Samson, who they heard had come this way, v. 9. When the men of Judah, who had tamely submitted to their yoke, pleaded that they had paid their tribute, and that none of their tribe had given them any offence, they freely own they designed nothing in this invasion but to seize Samson; they would fight *neither against small nor great*, but only that judge of Israel (v. 10), to *do to him as he has done to us*, that is, to smite his hip and thigh, as he did ours — *an eye for an eye*. Here was an army sent against one man, for indeed he was himself an army. Thus a whole band of men was sent to seize our Lord Jesus, that blessed Samson, though a tenth part would have served now that his hour had come, and ten times as many would have done nothing if he had not yielded.

**II.** Samson basely betrayed and delivered up by the men of Judah, v. 11. Of Judah were they? Degenerate branches of that valiant tribe! Utterly unworthy to carry in their standard *the lion of the tribe of Judah*. Perhaps they were disaffected to Samson because he was not of their tribe. Out of a foolish fondness for their forfeited precedency, they would rather be oppressed by Philistines than rescued by a Danite. Often has the church's deliverance been obstructed by such jealousies and pretended points of honour. Rather it was because they stood in awe of the Philistines, and were willing, at any rate, to get them out of their country. If their spirits had not been perfectly cowed and broken by their sins and troubles, and they had not been given up to a spirit of slumber, they would have taken this fair opportunity to shake off the Philistine's yoke. If they had had the

least spark of ingenuousness and courage remaining in them, having so brave a man as Samson was to head them, they would now have made one bold struggle for the recovery of their liberty; but no marvel if those that had debased themselves to hell in the worship of their dung-hill gods (<sup><2570></sup>Isaiah 57:9) thus debased themselves to the dust, in submission to their insulting oppressors. Sin dispirits men, nay, it infatuates them, and hides from their eyes the things that belong to their peace. Probably Samson went into the border of that country to offer his service, *supposing his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them*, as Moses did, <sup><4475></sup>Acts 7:25. But they thrust him from them, and very disingenuously,

**1.** Blamed him for what he had done against the Philistines, as if he had done them a great injury. Such ungrateful returns have those often received that have done the best service imaginable to their country. Thus our Lord Jesus did many good works, and for these they were ready to stone him.

**2.** They begged of him that he would suffer them to bind him, and deliver him up to the Philistines. Cowardly unthankful wretches! Fond of their fetters and in love with servitude! Thus the Jews delivered up our Saviour, under pretence of a fear lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation. With what a sordid servile spirit do they argue, *Knowest thou not that the Philistines rule over us? And whose fault was that? They knew they had no right to rule over them, nor would they have been sold into their hands if they had not first sold themselves to work wickedness.*

**III.** Samson tamely yielding to be bound by his countrymen, and delivered into the hands of his enraged enemies, v. 12, 13. Now easily could he have beaten them off, and kept the top of his rock against these 3000 men, and none of them all could, or durst, have laid hands on him; but he patiently submitted,

**1.** That he might give an example of great meekness, mixed with great strength and courage; as one that had rule over his own spirit, he knew how to yield as well as how to conquer.

**2.** That, by being delivered up to the Philistine, he might have an opportunity of making a slaughter among them.

**3.** That he might be a type of Christ, who, when he had shown what he could do, in striking those down that came to seize him, yielded to be

bound and led as a *lamb to the slaughter*. Samson justified himself in what he had done against the Philistines: “*As they did to me, so I did to them; it was a piece of necessary justice, and they ought not to retaliate it upon me, for they began.*” He covenants with the men of Judah that, if he put himself into their hands, they should not fall upon him themselves, because then he should be tempted to fall upon them, which he was very loth to do. This they promised him (v. 13), and then he surrendered. The men of Judah, being his betrayers, were in effect his murderers; they would not kill him themselves, but they did that which was worse, they delivered him into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, who they knew would do worse than kill him, would abuse and torment him to death. Perhaps they thought, as some think Judas did when he betrayed Christ, that he would by his great strength deliver himself out of their hands; but no thanks to them if he had delivered himself, and, if they thought he would do so, they might of themselves have thought this again, that he could and would deliver them too if they would adhere to him and make him their head. Justly is their misery prolonged who, to oblige their worst enemies, thus abuse their best friend. Never were men so infatuated except those who thus treated our blessed Saviour.

**IV.** Samson making his part good against the Philistines, even when he was delivered into their hands, fast pinioned with two new cords. The Philistines, when they had him among them, *shouted against him* (v. 14), so triumphing in their success, and insulting over him. If God had not tied their hands faster than the men of Judah had tied his, they would have shot at him (as their archers did at Saul) to dispatch him immediately, rather than have shouted at him, and given him time to help himself. But their security and joy were a presage of their ruin. When they shouted against him as a man run down, confident that all was their own, then the *Spirit of the Lord came upon him*, came mightily upon him, inspired him with more than ordinary strength and resolution. Thus fired,

**1.** He presently got clear of his bonds. The two new cords, upon the first struggle he gave, broke, and were *meltd* (as the original word is) from off his hands, no doubt to the great amazement and terror of those that shouted against him, whose shouts were hereby turned into shrieks. Observe, When the *Spirit of the Lord came upon him, his cords were loosed. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty*, and those are free indeed who are thus freed. This typified the resurrection of Christ by the power of the Spirit of holiness. In it he loosed the bands of death, and its

cords, the grave-clothes, fell from his hands without being loosed, as Lazarus's were, because it was impossible that the mighty Saviour should be holden of them; and thus he triumphed over the powers of darkness that shouted against him, as if they had him sure.

2. He made a great destruction among the Philistines, who all gathered about him to make sport with him, v. 15. See how poorly he was armed: he had no better weapon than the jaw-bone of an ass, and yet what execution he did with it! he never laid it out of his hand till he had with it laid 1000 Philistines dead upon the spot; and thus that promise was more than accomplished. *One of you shall chase a thousand*, <sup><06230></sup>Joshua 23:10. A jaw-bone was an inconvenient thing to grasp, and, one would think, might easily be wrested out of his hand, and a few such blows as he gave with it might have crushed and broken it, and yet it held good to the last. Had it been the jaw-bone of a lion, especially that which he himself had slain, it might have helped to heighten his fancy and to make him think himself the more formidable; but to take the bone of that despicable animal was to do wonders by *the foolish things of the world*, that the *excellency of the power might be of God and not of man*. One of David's worthies slew 300 Philistines at once, but it was *with a spear*, <sup><03111></sup>1 Chronicles 11:11. Another slew of them till his hand was weary and stuck to his sword, <sup><02310></sup>2 Samuel 23:10. But they all came short of Samson. What could be thought too hard, too much, for him to do, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came mightily! *Through God we shall do valiantly*. It was strange the men of Judah did not now come in to his aid: cowards can strike a falling enemy. But he was to be a type of him that *trod the wine-press alone*.

V. Samson celebrating his own victory, since the men of Judah would not do even that for him. He composed a short song, which he sang to himself, for the daughters of Israel did not meet him, as afterwards they did Saul, to sing, with more reason, *Samson hath slain his thousands*. The burden of this song was, *With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, have I slain a thousand men*, v. 16. The same word in Hebrew (*chamor*) signifies both an *ass* and a *heap*, so that this is an elegant paronomasia, and represents the Philistines falling as tamely as asses. He also gave a name to the place, to perpetuate the Philistines' disgrace, v. 17. *Ramath-lehi*, the *lifting up of the jaw-bone*. Yet he did not vain-gloriously carry the bone about with him for a show, but threw it away when he had done with it. So little were relics valued then.



## SAMSON'S THIRST RELIEVED

Here is,

**I.** The distress which Samson was in after this great performance (v. 18): *He was sore athirst*. It was a natural effect of the great heat he had been in, and the great pains he had taken; his zeal consumed him, ate him up, and made him forget himself, till, when he had time to pause a little, he found himself reduced to the last extremity for want of water and ready to faint. Perhaps there was a special hand of God in it, as there was in the whole transaction; and God would hereby keep him from being proud of his great strength and great achievements, and let him know that he was but a man, and liable to the calamities that are common to men. And Josephus says, It was designed to chastise him for not making mention of God and his hand in his memorial of the victory he had obtained, but taking all the praise to himself: *I have slain a thousand men*; now that he is ready to die for thirst he is under a sensible conviction that his own arm could not have saved him, without God's right hand and arm. Samson had drunk largely of the blood of the Philistines, but blood will never quench any man's thirst. Providence so ordered it that there was no water near him, and he was so fatigued that he could not go far to seek it; the men of Judah, one would think, should have met him, now that he had come off a conqueror, *with bread and wine*, as Melchizedek did Abram, to atone for the injury they had done him; but so little notice did they take of their deliverer that he was ready to perish for want of a draught of water. Thus are the greatest slights often put upon those that do the greatest services. Christ on the cross, said, *I thirst*.

**II.** His prayer to God in this distress. Those that forget to attend God with their praises may perhaps be compelled to attend him with their prayers. Afflictions are often sent to bring unthankful people to God. Two things he pleads with God in this prayer,

**1.** His having experienced the power and goodness of God in his late success: *Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant*. He owns himself God's servant in what he had been doing: "Lord, wilt thou not own a poor servant of thine, that has spent himself in thy

service? *I am thine, save me.*” He calls his victory a *deliverance*, a *great deliverance*; for, if God had not helped him, he had not only not conquered the Philistines, but had been swallowed up by them. He owns it to come from God, and now corrects his former error in assuming it too much to himself; and this he pleads in his present strait. Note, Past experiences of God's power and goodness are excellent pleas in prayer for further mercy. “Lord, thou hast delivered often, wilt thou not deliver still? <sup><4010></sup>2 Corinthians 1:10. Thou hast begun, wilt thou not finish? Thou hast done the greater, wilt thou not do the less?” <sup><4563></sup>Psalm 56:13.

**2.** His being now exposed to his enemies: “*Lest I fall into the hands of the uncircumcised, and then they will triumph, will tell it in Gath, and in the streets of Ashkelon; and will it not redound to God's dishonour of his champion become so easy a prey to the uncircumcised?*” The best pleas are those taken from God's glory.

**III.** The seasonable relief God sent him. God heard his prayer, and sent him water, either out of the bone or out of the earth through the bone, v. 19. That bone which he had made an instrument of God's service God, to recompense him, made an instrument of his supply. But I rather incline to our marginal reading: *God clave a hollow place that was in Lehi*: the place of this action was, from the jaw-bone, called *Lehi*; even before the action we find it so called, v. 9, 14. And there, in that field, or hill, or plain, or whatever it was, that was so called, God caused a fountain suddenly and seasonably to open just by him, and water to spring up out of it in abundance, which continued a well ever after. Of this fair water he drank, and his spirits revived. We should be more thankful for the mercy of water did we consider how ill we can spare it. And this instance of Samson's relief should encourage us to trust in God, and seek to him, for, when he pleases, he can *open rivers in high places*. See <sup><23417></sup>Isaiah 41:17, 18.

**IV.** The memorial of this, in the name Samson gave to this upstart fountain, *Enhakkore, the well of him that cried*, thereby keeping in remembrance both his own distress, which occasioned him to cry, and God's favour to him, in answer to his cry. Many a spring of comfort God opens to his people, which may fitly be called by this name; it is *the well of him that cried*. Samson had given a name to the place which denoted him great and triumphant — *Ramath-lehi, the lifting up of the jaw-bone*; but here he gives it another name, which denotes him needy and dependent.

**V.** The continuance of Samson's government after these achievements, v. 20. At length Israel submitted to him whom they had betrayed. Now it was past dispute that God was with him, so that henceforward they all owned him and were directed by him as their judge. *The stone which the builders refused became the head-stone.* It intimates the low condition of Israel that the government was dated by *the days of the Philistines*; yet it was a mercy to Israel that, though they were oppressed by a foreign enemy, yet they had a judge that preserved order and kept them from ruining one another. Twenty years his government continued, according to the usages of the judges' administration; but of the particulars we have no account, save of the beginning of his government in this chapter and the end of it in the next.