

Samson And The Christian (Part 4)

Judges 15: Consequences and Conversion

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In many stories of the Bible it is immediately apparent that the cultures we read about there are very different from what we are used to in this day and age. The customs and traditions, and many of the laws and practices that we see in the Bible are strange. They can even be confusing and illogical to our way of thinking.

We saw a few of these in the last sermon when we went through Judges 14 where the parents arranged the marriage between Samson and the woman of Timnah. The weeklong wedding feast is something that we are not used to. Nor are we familiar with the bridegroom's thirty companions that were just offered to him when he showed up with none. The riddle contest, and the heavy-handed threats that the thirty companions used to get the riddle out of Samson's wife also seem strange to us.

One cultural practice, though, that I did not go into was the strange marriage that Samson entered into. Evidently, from what some scholars tell us, this was called a *sadiqa* marriage. Actually, I believe this is an Arabic term because there are some of those societies that still use this. The word means "honesty," or "sincerity." I believe you will understand how it got that name a bit later.

There is another example of *sadiqa* marriage, besides Samson's, in the book of Judges. Gideon was involved in one of these marriages.

Judges 8:29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

Then the text continues to tell you that Gideon had 70 sons, and many wives, and then:

Judges 8:31 And his concubine who *was* in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

Evidently, Gideon had wives that he had at his own house. But, one dwelt at Shechem. She lived apart from them. She was his concubine, which is Bible-speak for a "lesser wife"—not a first wife. Oftentimes, it was not a matter of fornication, or adultery in any way, but a wife who was legally married, but a lesser wife, so she was called a

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concubine. Solomon had 700 wives, and 300 lesser wives called concubines.

Anyway, Gideon's concubine continued to live in her father's house, or a separate house of her own. The husband would pay occasional visits to her—whenever he was in the area, or whenever he got around to it, or whatever, he would come by for a visit.

Now, the western world does not sanction this arrangement anymore. But, it is, perhaps (and I will be saying that a lot this afternoon) because we really do not know a lot about these things. Perhaps it is an ancient solution to the problem of polygamists of having too many wives under one roof. They found that it was much easier—you know, the "too many cooks spoil the broth" kind of thing—to put wives in their own separate houses. It helped to keep the peace somewhat.

That is the kind of thing Samson entered into. The I.V.P. Bible Background Commentary of the Old Testament provides another reason for *sadiqa* marriages:

"The marriage was usually consummated the first night of the feast..." [I have heard differently that it was the last night, but this commentary says that it is the first. Going on:]

"...the bride often did not go to live with the bridegroom at the end of the seven day feast. For several months, the husband would regularly bring a gift and visit the bride at her father's house until all was ready for the move.

"In Babylon, this was typically a four month period, perhaps intended to be a probationary period to see if the bride could become pregnant."

In this explanation, unlike the long-term arrangement that Gideon had, Samson's *sadiqa* marriage was set up with a built in trial period. Perhaps this was to give either side an opportunity to annul the marriage if it did not work out.

Now, one thing you have to remember in this particular arrangement is that Samson's marriage was inter-racial, inter-cultural, and inter-religious. This marriage involved a woman of the oppressing people wedding a man who was of the oppressed people. It was also, perhaps, inter-political.

Now, it could be that the Philistines received and practiced a great deal of cultural assimilation in the centuries that they were coming into power. Perhaps they developed this type of marriage form, and made it part of their legal code in order to smooth over

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the rocky transitional period. I am not speaking about the typical rocky transitional period most folks experience, but also that expected rocky transitional period of assimilation among ethnic groups.

It was a way that the Philistines found they could bring the two ethnic groups together. If there was a problem, there was a way to annul these marriages quickly, without much fuss.

This introduction, then, provides the way into chapter 15 of Judges, which continues the story of Samson's dealing with the Philistine family in Timnah, particularly the father-in-law.

One thing to keep in mind as we go through this is that the entire fifteenth chapter of Judges is a consequence of what happened in chapter fourteen. They really should be read as one long chapter. However, it has been broken up in our modern Bibles—and maybe that is good, because then it helps us to see what the initial situation was, and what came of it. Then we see the bad results in chapter 15. Well, bad for the Philistines at least.

By the time we get to the end of the chapter, we actually hit the highlight of Samson's life. It is the high water mark of Samson. Finally something good happens to Samson. It does not look all that good on the outside, but it is the best thing that could have happened to him.

Judges 15:1 After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into *her* room." But her father would not permit him to go in.

The first thing we should notice here is that some time had elapsed between the end of chapter 14, and the beginning of chapter 15. It was not a very long time. It says that it was in the time of the wheat harvest. If you know about the seasons in Israel, you will remember that the wave-sheaf offering, which was done either inside of or just after the Days of Unleavened Bread, was in early spring at the beginning of the barley harvest. The wheat harvest follows on its heels, and is usually over near or by the time of Pentecost.

Pentecost is a spring harvest festival, when the bulk of the grain harvests were done. This means that the period in Judges 15 takes place in either late May, or early June. The weather would have turned warm and dry, and would be getting warmer still.

Another thing that shows the timing is that in chapter 14 Samson had come back to see the lion carcass, and found the honeybee hive inside.

Normally, honey is ready to be harvested in the fall when the bee's stores were finished. They store honey for the winter, and early spring when the hive would have no ability to make any. Then, they begin harvesting the nectar, expanding the hive, and storing honey all year long, while using some. Their stores of honey are again largest at the end of the year.

This may be showing us that the wedding took place in the fall, just about the time that he went down that final time to Timnah. Chapter 15 is about six or so months later. We can see how long Samson had stewed on the offenses at the wedding feast. He had now cooled down a little bit.

He returns to Timnah, just a few miles, if you remember. Apparently, he was ready to reconcile with his wife, and father-in-law. He brought with him a young goat. This was a kind of peace offering to them.

In the ancient Near East, a kid of the goats was considered a delicacy. It is one associated with the Feast—or with a feast. They would bring their offering to God, like a kid of the goats. The priest would get his part, and the remainder would be returned to the offerers for their feasting. It was something—at least among Israelites—associated with good times, happiness, and reconciliation.

Perhaps this is part of what Samson was trying to do in a symbolic way—to give her and her family a peace offering, and say, "Okay, let bygones be bygones. The riddle contest was maybe just too much to test our marriage so early, so let us begin again."

Other commentators have speculated that the goat was the price—remember we saw that in the I. V. P. Bible Background Commentary. The price for visiting one of these *sadiqa* wives was a young goat, or other acceptable animal.

This was the husband paying the father-in-law for her room and board. Even though, she was his wife, she was living with her father. He, as the responsible husband, had to pay her father for her to stay at home. This is just another possibility.

There is a third idea. Turn to Genesis 38. I do not think this one is quite the one Samson had in mind, but it is quite interesting to think about. Here is the story of Judah, and Tamar. Remember that Judah had lost his wife and first two sons. He then went to wherever Tamar was living. He saw Tamar playing the harlot, and did not know it was

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her, and went in to her and committed fornication with her.

Genesis 38:15-17 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, because she had covered her face. Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" And he said, "I will send a young goat from the flock...."

Now, if this is what Samson was thinking of, which I do not think it was—could he have been making a statement about what he thought of his wife. Remember in my last sermon, I said there are some commentators who think there was some sexual immorality between at least one of the companions and his wife in Timnah during the wedding feast and riddle contest. Could Samson had been saying, "I am going to give her the price of a harlot because she played the harlot against me"?

I do not think that is necessarily it. I am going to give Samson the benefit of the doubt, that he was coming to reconcile with her, and that he had brought the young goat as gift or peace offering. It says that he wanted to go in unto her. Then, the father says, "No." He had his reasons.

Judges 15:2 Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. /s not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead."

He is awfully glib, is he not? "I have got another daughter! Go ahead and take her! She's prettier anyway!" Samson did not like this idea, as we will see.

Samson's wife was still living with her father. What that means is that he probably had entered into the same arrangement with the companion that Samson had. She was still going to be a *sadiqa* wife.

Her father had done this because he had seen Samson's wrath at her, and at him, and the companions. He figured that Samson's actions spoke louder than words. He figured Samson was finished with this family. He was not going to come back; that this was just a terrible thing and a stupid mistake. Samson should not have done it.

What was missing? Even primitive Israel had what was called a certificate of divorce. All societies have something like this where there has to be a formal dissolution of the

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marriage. Samson had never done that. He had never said, "I divorce thee, I divorce thee, I divorce thee..." or any such thing. He had never written it down, "I Samson, of sound mind, and body, proclaim this marriage null and void." There was never anything like that recorded.

What we see here is that the father acted very precipitously, and illegally, in giving her to another man. He had not acted honorably at all. What comes through the words here is that the father saw his chance to get another dowry.

I am supposing here, that he got the companion to give the bride price. He wanted another bride price from Samson for the younger sister. He was going to milk this situation for all it was worth. This comes into play later in the chapter.

He probably thought that giving the younger sister was more than a fair exchange—better looking, younger, a virgin. Samson would be just like any Philistine man and gobble her up. Perhaps Samson understood the law a bit better than we know because he became enraged at the offer.

One reason may be what is written in Leviticus 18. If he knew these laws—if his folks had taught him these things—it is perhaps one of the reasons for his rage. This passage is right in the midst of the laws of sexual morality, which Samson seemed to have failed in most other accounts, but it says:

Leviticus 18:18 Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive.

In a way, he was being insulted, offended, and railroaded into breaking God's law. Samson took offense at this. Therefore, his reaction was:

Judges 15:3 And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!"

I do not think that it is quite as conditional as it is written in the New King James Version. I think it is more like, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines **when** I harm them," because he had already made up his mind that he was going to take revenge for this. This was an offense that he was not going to allow to sit. He was going to react as he saw fit, and he felt entirely justified in it.

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"Look. You guys have done me wrong way beyond the wrong that I ever did. Here I came back to reconcile with her, and now you offend me, you will not let me see my wife; you are going to get it," is what he said in effect. "And, I will not be able to be blamed." In a sense, he says, "You, not I, will bear responsibility for my actions this time." He was not going to take any of the blame.

There is a tacit admission that his slaying of the 30 men for their clothes had not been entirely justified, because he said, "...this time I will be blameless." He understood that killing 30 men in order to pay up on his debt was not necessarily a good thing. He had taken 30 lives. He felt that this time the offense was real against him, and legally justifiable.

We can see here, and last time, that Samson was quite touchy about his honor. We can also see that he had a tremendous temper. He had a penchant for swatting flies with a hammer. Remember in the first sermon I told you that one of the things that seems to be a part of his character was that he overdid things. He always seemed to use disproportionate force.

Nevertheless, it was effective. Samson went off in a huff.

Judges 15:4-5 Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned *the foxes* tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let *the foxes* go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards *and* olive groves.

What he decided to do, as we might see in today's newspapers, was to go on a multimillion-dollar arson spree.

The word, "foxes," would be better-translated "jackals." The Hebrews used the same word for both animals. If you know the difference between a fox, and a jackal, you can understand why most commentators feel that jackals is the better translation. Foxes are solitary animals. They avoid human habitations, usually. We know them as sneaky, and hard to catch, and cunning.

Do you remember seeing at one time or another an old movie with an English foxhunt? Typically, they might have 30 dogs, and 30 men on horseback chasing one little fox. And foxes often get away.

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Jackals, on the other hand, are pack running dog-like animals. They run in packs, they tend to be braver around human habitations—safer in numbers, I suppose. Since they are in groups nearer to human habitation, they would be easier to catch in greater numbers than foxes.

Even so, how could one man catch 300 of them? There must have been lots of packs of them running around southwest Palestine at this time!

The Bible does not say, if you look at it closely, that he was alone when he did this. It does say that back in chapter 13, verse 25, that he was at a place called Mahaneh Dan—The Camp of Dan. There is some thought that it was a bunch of local brigands, young rebels, maybe they were outlaws or maybe they were underground saboteurs against the Philistines. It could have been that he recruited some friends and accomplices from whomever it was at Mahaneh Dan to help him with this. If they were of the same mind as Samson, they would have had a great deal of fun doing this, too.

He needed help. There was no way for one man to handle 300 jackals even with prodigious strength. Surely, he had some few helpers to keep these jackals penned up or tethered. Who knows how he caught them. Somehow, he came up with 300 jackals in short order. Now, what did he do with them once he got them all together?

He had 150 pairs of jackals. I think he constrained them in pairs somehow. He maybe blindfolded them, and took them to the places he want them to be. He tied a rope around each of their tails—each animal separately. He took an unlit torch and tied it to the other ends of the ropes between two of them.

Then, he lit the torches, and drew off the blindfolds. The jackals went crazy trying to get away from the fire at their tails! The fire was between him and the other tied to him. And they went against the other. Some may have gone around in circles long enough that the torch would light whatever dry stuff might be right there—including drying grain shocks, or standing uncut grain.

Sometimes they might run together taking their fire off in some direction for a time, lighting fires behind them as they went. Samson did this 150 times in various places, probably near Timnah, probably the whole lower end of the Valley of Sorek out toward Ekron.

He was probably sitting there laughing the whole time, "Wow! Look at them go!" It was better than fireworks!

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Notice that it says that he burned shocks, standing grain, vineyards, and olive trees. Do you understand what he did? What this all means?

Shocks are cut grain stems and heads bundled upright to finish drying or curing before the grain is beaten or threshed out of it. The grain must be quite dry to thresh; and it must be dry to not begin spontaneous combustion. This has been the procedure for millennia. Nowadays, they let it dry standing in the fields and use combines which cut and thresh all in one operation.

There were some fields already harvested. Some fields had not yet been cut and shocked. Samson was indiscriminate. Not only did he get their annual crop of wheat, he also damaged or destroyed two of their perennial crops: grapes, and olives. If the fires killed their vines and trees, it would take many years for these things to become reestablished.

Samson destroyed that year's crops, plunging the area into depression and famine, causing them to buy grain and other foodstuffs from elsewhere. Who knows if they could get food because those fires might have been quite widespread. There may have been 150 separate fires.

Samson destroyed much of their luxury items for the next several years—wine and oil. The people of that area really subsisted on grain, wine, and oil. Those are the three big crops of Palestine, and he wiped them out. In our own day and age, this would amount to millions or billions of lost revenue and foodstuffs.

The implication from scripture is that this occurred in one night. If it had been a succession of nights, they would have begun guarding their fields and orchards, and would have caught them. There is no indication of that. They seem to have been taken totally by surprise.

They knew that he was going to do something, but then never expected him to do this or in the way that he did it. Samson got his jollies and his revenge all at the same time. This all sets us up to understand the Philistine reaction to this. This was not just a field or two apparently. He took out their entire economy in this region.

Notice that this happened again at another time, to Joab in II Samuel. I go here only to show you how that this sort of thing gets people's attention. Here, Absalom is trying to get Joab's attention because he wants Joab to get David to allow him to see him.

II Samuel 14:28-31 And Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did

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not see the king's face. Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but he would not come to him. And when he sent again the second time, he would not come. So he said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is near mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose and came to Absalom's house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?"

It was an effective way to get somebody's attention. That is exactly what Samson did. He got the Philistine's attention.

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

How ironic. This is exactly the thing that she avoided by getting Samson to tell her the answer to the riddle. What you greatly fear will surely come to pass. And it did, regarding Judges 14:15.

So obviously, the Philistines wanted to know who the culprit was who had committed this heinous act of vandalism. It was not hard to discover, as Samson seems to have done nothing to cover his tracks. As a matter of fact, it is similar to what happened between Absalom and Joab. He wanted it to be known. He wanted to get their attention.

We can possibly read between the lines here, as far as how it was known. There were three ways it could become known.

One was that several people might have overheard his argument with his father-in-law, and his vow of vengeance. People lived close together in those little towns and villages.

A second is that the locals, knowing that the father-in-law had given his daughter to one of the companions precipitously, had figured that Samson would erupt into destruction when he found out.

A third way it might have become known is that Samson bragged about it.

We have seen that he tends to do something, and then say, "I am going to compose a poem about this!" then shouts it for everyone to hear. He did not seem to be shy about

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shouting from the rooftops about his exploits. I would not put it past him to say, "I did it! I am responsible! Come and get me!"

Now, the interesting thing is the Philistine reaction. They did burn the father-in-law, and his daughter, their house and everything in it, because they had instigated this destruction. They, in effect, agreed with Samson that they were to blame, and the father-in-law especially.

Now, they did not agree that Samson was blameless. That becomes apparent very quickly here. However, the Philistines did agree that the Timnite, and his daughter were essentially responsible. They should not have goaded him—they had done something illegal—they had it coming to them. This was old time justice. The Philistines burned the father, and daughter. That is the end of a very sad situation. And it goes on.

Judges 15:7 Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this [burn my wife and father-in-law], I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease."

Samson probably said this very soon on the heels of their burning. Maybe very soon. Maybe he saw the smoke, ran down to see what was the matter, found out, and shouted it out right at the Philistines. Who knows? The impression is that he had thought his destructive prank would end the matter. It really shows his naiveté, if anything.

The Philistines had killed his relatives (by marriage), and he now felt that he was duty bound to avenge them. This is now another thing that he had to avenge. Does this ever end? "Look! I am going to do my revenge, and then it will be over. Okay?"

Now, remember how old Samson is here? A couple of sermons ago, we figured that he was in his early twenties—a young man. He really did not understand the ways of the world like he would later on.

If nothing else, the story of Samson is a good lesson in the futility of revenge because it just keeps on going. The feud never stops. It only stops when the feuding parties are dead—all of them.

Judges 15:8 So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

This is recorded in such a matter of fact way. "I am going to avenge them. Okay, here I go, I am avenging them! Swish! Hack! Bang! Okay! I am done now. I will go and hide."

That is what he did—very concise and succinct. It has almost become a matter of course, by now. How else can you describe all these things that Samson does—several hundred here, 300 jackals there, 30 changes of clothing here, 1000 dead there? He had just become a killing, revenging machine.

Now, this expression, "hip and thigh," is puzzling to most commentators. Literally it is "hip on thigh." It is an expression that most think comes from wrestling. The two men would be grappling together, one man's hip close to the other man's thigh. He would pull him over his leg, and pin him to the ground. Maybe it was a Greek expression, because the Greeks are known for their wrestling in ancient times. Maybe it was something that came through the Philistines themselves. This expression is not Hebrew, but maybe Philistine. I do not know. It denotes close, man-to-man fighting.

Notice, also, that it does not say he picked up the jawbone of a jackal, or something like that. He did not have a weapon. It seems like he took them on—all comers. It was the biggest barroom brawl of all time. Well, maybe not a barroom, but, hey, with the Philistines it could have been—remember, they were pretty good drinkers.

They came at him singly, twos, bunches, groups, and he grappled with them all—hip to thigh, they were that close. He just slaughtered them. No one could touch him! He left hundreds of them dead. Because this was part of his revenge, he pursued them with great slaughter! Anyone he caught of the Philistines he killed—broke their neck, ripped them apart—we know what he did to the lion. He just killed. That was his revenge.

Perhaps, he killed as many of those he could find who actually torched the house. I do not know. That would have been just in his eyes—anybody who was remotely involved in that sentence brought upon his in-laws. He just killed.

It seems that after he was done, he just turned around and walked away to Etam. He just got out of there. There was no one around who would dare touch him.

Now, here is an interesting point about Samson's place of refuge—Etam. It was an excellent place of refuge. He knew something about defensive fighting. We will see this as we go on. Evidently this place was a cave in the cliffs above one of the nearby waddies. Most people seem to think that it was only about two and a half miles from his home in Zorah. This cave could be reached only from the top of the cliff, and one had to descend through a narrow one-person-wide fissure in the cliff face. Then one had to go

along, turn a corner, walk along a ledge, and then enter the cave.

There was no way an army could come against him. Only one man could come at him at a time, and that is where he decided to hole up. This was a very good place to defend himself if he needed to. A man of his strength could hold off divisions for days. Who knows? They could never reach him.

One thing I want to mention here before we go on any further is that there has been not one mention of God's Spirit coming upon Samson in this chapter so far. As I said in the previous chapter, God wanted to use these events for His purpose. It does not say either of these. It seems to be entirely Samson's doing. He had the strength. God gave it to him, and he had this strength all the time. When God's Spirit came upon him, though, it was really incredible.

There is no indication here that God's Spirit was helping him in any of these activities. This is really something to think about—the super-human abilities that he had. Now, obviously, God was responsible for them, but there is no indication that God was involved in any of these revenge attacks. Samson obviously used them, but it is an interesting thing to think about, the perspective here.

Perhaps we could say that all this destruction and slaughter in chapter 15 are the results of Samson's marriage to a Philistine girl. You should read it, then, as one long narrative from the beginning of Judges 14 to the end of chapter 15.

We can say then, that Judges 14:4, where God said he would use this for His own ends can apply to the whole series of events. However, the jackals event, and the hip-and-thigh event are Samson's own. They are things that he did out of revenge. We know that God says revenge is His to do, not our own.

One thing that does come out of this is that these events do lead to a time when God infuses Samson with His Spirit, which we are coming up to now.

Judges 15:9-10 Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us."

"We are going to smite him hip-and-thigh!" (Hrmp! So they thought.)

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So, now what we have here is that the Philistine Army getting involved in the situation.

Not just local Philistines had gotten angry. In fact, it may have been that the ones that he slaughtered around Timnah—who burned down the house—were the local farmers and their sons. They had lost family, and possessions in the fires and the aftermath. They were looking for blood. They were the ones who executed the sentence against the girl, and her father.

However, this time, it looks like a planned military expedition into Judah to come up against Samson. Perhaps, this was a garrison in nearby Ekron, and/or Ashdod. Who knows how many were there. We find out in a verse or two that the men of Judah met them with 3000 just to arrest Samson. How many did the Philistines bring to kill him? We could probably assume that it was at least equal to what the men of Judah brought out. Perhaps the Philistine army in this part of the story was maybe 2500, or 3000 men. That is just a guess, but I think it is a good one.

Whatever the case, the Philistines organized a military incursion into Israelite territory. It had been "fine" that they were the over-lords, but they had not necessarily garrisoned the place, as far as we know. They organized a military expedition into Israelite territory, and they marched as far as Lehi, in Judah. They crossed the border between Dan and Judah. They came into Judah's territory, which they took to be quite an offense. That is why they came out and asked, "Why are you here? We have not done anything against you?"

It looks like they had probably come as far as the eastern end of the Sorek Valley, probably fairly close to Beth Shemesh. What really offended the men of Judah was that they deployed to attack. If they could not find Samson, they were going to kill any and all of the nearest Israelites, and return the favor. The nearest ones just happened to be the Jews. Some think that perhaps this is what got the Jews out there—that the Philistines had not just deployed, but maybe had done a raid or two. That would have gotten them angry.

Now, of course, the men of Judah wanted to know why they were being attacked, and the answer came soon enough. Samson was a renegade. He was a wanted man. The Philistines really wanted to get their hands on him.

Judges 15:11-13 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What *is* this you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." But they said to him, "We

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have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves." So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

The Jews gathered a force of 3000 men just to take Samson themselves. Notice as I have pointed out, the text said they went down. Of course, it means that they had to descend to where they were going, but it often gives us a clue about the general atmosphere of what is going to be said next. In this case it does. The Jews were doing something that was wrong, and bad. They should not have done it.

Now, they did it out of self-interest, obviously. They did not want a war. It just so happens that the course of action that they decided to take perhaps marks Israel's spiritual low point during the period of the judges. They had just admitted in verse 10 that they had no quarrel with the Philistine's overlord-ship.

Can you imagine that? "Oh, we do not mind that the Philistines are our lord and master." They pleaded with Samson to recognize that the Philistines were sovereign over them. "Oh, Samson! C'mon. You do not want to make any waves! They will just come in with force, they will kill our women and children, and we will have to go to war. We do not want that! We just want peace."

This tribe of Judah was the most deliberate, and strongest of the tribes when the book of the Judges opened (Judges 1:1-2, 18-19). They had now come down to the point where they were willing to surrender to Israel's enemies without even a flicker of a fight. They just wanted to give in—roll over and play dead—be apathetic. "Oh well, they are too strong. We will have to give in. Let us go get Samson, and give him to them because we do not want any trouble."

This certainly was not the spirit that Joshua had fused into Israel. "Who shall we have go up? Which one tribe will be able to take care of all the enemies of Israel?" God says, "Judah shall go up!" They did, and the enemies cleared out.

But not now. There was no Joshua in the land. If we look at it more spiritually, this would be like a Christian admitting that Satan, and the world had beaten us. We should conform to the world's ways, just like that. There is no reason to be different. There is no reason to fight. Just give in.

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Now Samson's response to their pleading and whining...They had to have 3000 men. They could have probably gone out and at least fought the Philistines to a standstill. What did Samson do?

Here he had the opportunity to call out an army, and he just shrugged. He said, "I only did what they did to me. It was just tit-for-tat. It is my fight. This has nothing to do with you. I will go along."

This was another example of naiveté on Samson's part. He saw this whole deal as a personal struggle of revenge against the Philistines. He did not see it as a national thing. He had no national pride. He had no patriotism. He had no big picture of what God was doing at this time. He did not see beyond his own self-absorbed little episode of revenge. He did not see how it could be turned to national redemption, or deliverance for his people. He had an army right there. He said, "Okay. Put the ropes on." He went meekly with them.

This is why God said of him that He could only begin to deliver Israel. He could only light a fire. He could not win. He could not completely conquer with this man. He was too self-absorbed. He could not see what God was doing in a big enough way.

He was no David. David could see what God was doing, and did it. He understood that God was making a dynasty. He understood that Israel had to be its own unified nation. He had to bring the tabernacle to Jerusalem, and then build the temple. He had done something to make Israel great. He had started a line that would end in the Messiah.

Samson had no thoughts like this. It was all, "Look what they did to me! I am going to get them for this!" Yet, it was a spark that God could use later on.

Now, why do I say that what Judah did was so bad? It prefigures something that happened 1000 years later. In a way, this is how Samson pre-figures Jesus Christ. What Judah did to Samson is about the same that the Jews did to Jesus Christ.

John 11:45-50 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans [Philistines] will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us

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that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."

This is exactly the same thought that the men of Judah had with Samson. "It is expedient that one man should be given over to the Philistines, and ripped limb from limb, so that the rest of us can live in peace, and not worry about being run over by these uncircumcised Philistines." They were ready, and very willing to betray Samson into the hands of their enemies. This is why I say it was a spiritual low point in the period of the Judges.

Samson went with them, meekly. All he asked was that they would not kill him themselves. They promised him that they would not do that. They bound him with two new ropes, and according to the detail here in scripture; these were newly made and not dried out, or frayed. They were as strong as they would ever be. They were making sure with the technology of the time that they had him completely bound, that he would not be able to get away.

Then, they led him to the summit of the cliff. Now remember, they had to go only one man at a time along the ledge and up the fissure to the top of the cliff. Then there below them in the valley, were the encamped and deployed Philistines. The Philistines could look up and see Samson bound at the top of the cliff in the custody of these 3000 Jews. So then, they began to march him down to the Philistines.

Judges 15:14 Then he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him; and the ropes that *were* on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands.

They began marching Samson down into the valley. The Philistines immediately reacted by clamoring a victory shout. I am sure that there were curses, and epithets thrown at him; and they told him exactly what they were going to do to him. Who knows? Maybe among them there were some who chanted, "Dagon rules! Dagon rules!" Others may have said, "Yahweh is nothing! Yahweh is nothing!" " He cannot save you!"

God chose that moment to react. I am just supposing that religion and politics, and all these things were mightily mixed up at the time. Why, other than God wanted Samson to do a great slaughter, would God react like this? I say this because we are still in the revenge cycle.

Maybe God's honor was at stake at this point, and said, "Samson! Go to work!" And Samson did.

The chords, which were supposed to be so strong, just flew off him as if mere cobwebs bound him. They were as nothing to him. He popped them like old rubber bands. These might have been thick well made ropes. But when God infused Samson with the Holy Spirit, it did not matter what they were. They could have been manacles of steel. They would have come off.

Judges 15:15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it.

This sounds exactly like verse 8. "So he attacked them hip-to-thigh with a great slaughter."

It is so matter of fact. I mean, here we have been building up to this huge climax, "Well, he found this fresh jawbone of an ass, and to reached out his hand, took it, and killed a thousand men with it."

It is so very sparsely described, yet it tells us all that we need to know. The bonds fell off his hands. He began rushing down to meet them. Seeing nearby a recently dead donkey, he ripped off the lower mandible; this was a fresh carcass—the flesh was still moist. It had not desiccated. It was not a dry skeleton. It was hard enough to use, but not dry enough to break.

He grabbed this out of the head. It probably still had all the teeth too. The jawbone of a donkey, depending on its age, and sex, could be seven to twelve inches long. I suspect that he probably gripped the hinge end of the bone, and flayed about him with the teeth. That would have brought out the most damage and blood, since the front teeth are incisors. They cut. To grab it the other way would have only been a bludgeoning tool. The following scripture says that he made them bloody. Probably he ripped them with the teeth of the jawbone.

A weapon that might have some similarities would be a spiked or studded mace. Using it that way would do the most damage. In Samson's hands, it might as well have been a sword.

He killed 1000 men. I figure it is a rounded number. Probably nobody was there ticking them off as they fell. Obviously, there was a great mass of dead men.

Now, I get the impression that as he was running down, and grabbing up the jawbone, he saw a place he could defend, maybe a low mound of some sort; a place where one man with his back up against something he could defend quite easily.

He went to that place and started to play king of the mountain. Everybody who came up and tried to throw him off died. As he killed, I suspect that with the clamor and everything, Samson throwing off his bonds and running down to meet them, the first instinct of the Philistine soldiers was to charge right at him. The officers got their squads together, and they sent them at him first one squad, and then another. Next they sent a whole company at him all at once, and then they brought in their brigade. Suddenly the whole army tried to get him. He was just flaying about killing one right after another, until they got the idea that this man was not going to die. By that time, they were in heaps all around him. What he said was true when he described it, that he had put them heap upon heap.

Who knows? Once they started fleeing, he might have started to pursue them for miles. It was a terrible, one-sided, absolutely bloody slaughter that you can find only in the book of Judges.

Judges 15:16 Then Samson said: "With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men!"

You can just see him clicking his heels, saying, "Ah Ha Ha Ha! Look what I did to you!" He danced a little jig up there; being so happy that he had done this thing.

Judges 15:17 And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi. [Or, "Jawbone Heights."]

What he says, here, in this ridiculing ditty, which he seems to have made up on the spot, is hard to translate into English because it is a play on words.

Moffatt, who has his own translation of the Bible, has it as: "With the jawbone of an ass, I have piled them up in a mass."

Another man, C. F. Burnie, understood the word for "ass" which is "chamor," literally means a reddish colored animal. Now "ass" and "heap" have the same spelling in

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Hebrew. He translated it this way: "With a red ass' jawbone I have reddened them bright red."

I do not think that Samson quite knew when to stop rubbing it in. He just jeered at them and goaded them to no end, it seems.

Judges 15:18-19 Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the LORD and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" So God split the hollow place that *is* in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

When God's spirit ceased to surge in him, and the adrenalin began to dissipate, he suddenly realized that he was absolutely dehydrated, and needed water. He realized that if he did not get water soon, he would die. He had pushed his human body to its ultimate endurance. There was no water nearby. This was the dry season and there was no spring here. He was going to die unless God intervened.

Maybe for the first time in his life, he felt both real fear, and real helplessness. Here he was, the Old Testament's "Incredible Hulk," and there was nothing that he could do. He could not pound to crack the ground to get a spring; he could not run to water because he was already exhausted; he had no strength left. He was on his last leg, literally. There was only One to whom he could turn to—God.

So, he prayed. Perhaps this was his first, real, sincere, fervent, humble prayer in his entire life. "God, I am dying. Can you not do something? Do you want me to be given into the hands of these Philistines after all I have done for you now as your servant?"

Notice what he had missed earlier in the story. Maybe he just right now realizes that he was indeed God's servant. He had not realized that God had been working with him through all these events. His mind began to broaden to understand what was going on. God had been working with him all along.

He is the one who had been called from before his birth to begin to deliver Israel, and God had been with him throughout the whole time. He had thought he had done it on his own. Here he admits that God did the work of deliverance. Samson, as strong and as handsome, and as all the things that he was, had been merely a tool. He was humbled down to his toenails by all this.

And prayed to God in the form of a question, "Is this it? Is this all the work that I am supposed to do for you? Am I supposed to fail in the end? Would you please save me so that I can continue your work, rather than falling futilely into the hands of my enemies?"

God heard, and responded immediately by making a spring of water appear in a nearby hollow place.

The word is not the, "Hollow of the Jawbone," but it is actually, "The Hollow at Lehi." This means a small depression that looks like the mortar of a mortar and pestle. God caused a spring to come up right in the middle of it, and this hollow place, then would hold the water. Samson could now drink to his heart's content.

Now, is it not interesting—of course, Samson needed water—God answered his prayer by providing water from a spring. Water is a symbol for the Holy Spirit, but water from a spring is the form that Jesus later said would spring from Him. You will find that in John 4:10 where He tells the woman at the well, "If you had asked Me, I would have given you living water..." In a sense, that is what He gave Samson. He gave him living water.

Now Samson drank, and notice that his spirit returned. It is not capitalized in most Bibles. I do not know that I saw it capitalized in any Bible version. It is just ambiguous enough for one to question, whose spirit returned? Was it God's Spirit? Or was it Samson's spirit?

Now, most folks say that it was Samson's spirit. But do you know what? He was not dead. The human spirit, or his breath, was still in him—ruach—he had not died. God had not taken his spirit. So, how did his spirit return? Perhaps it just simply means that his attitude changed, which would also be interesting to think about. It says not only his spirit returned, but also that he revived. In the English at least, that means to live again. I looked it up in Hebrew, and it can mean that he lived anew. It can mean that his life changed. He was given a new life.

This is why I think that this little episode is God's way of telling us that Samson was finally converted, and this is why he appears in Hebrews 11 as one of the Heroes of Faith. He was, indeed, a converted man. He had God's Spirit from this point onward. Not just the infusion of God's Spirit, which made him strong so that he could take out his enemies, but that he had God's Spirit as any converted Christian does.

God had to bring him very low. This was at the high point in the work that he had done for God so far. It was all forgotten because he was brought to the point of death. He had

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to admit that God was sovereign in his life and that only God could save him. Finally at this point, three-quarters of the way through his story, he finally accepts God's salvation.

It says that he commemorated the occasion of his conversion by naming the spring in the hollow that God provided, "Caller's Spring." It means the spring of the One who called out, or cried out. It means that he sought God, and God responded.

Therefore, he named the place Caller's Spring as a reminder that if you call upon God, He will answer. It is very appropriate that he did so, for he had learned at a very great price that even he, as strong as he was, could not save himself. His great strength was nothing without God.

Let us conclude in the Psalms. We will read a bit of what David said.

Psalm 18:1-2 I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Psalm 18:17-18 He delivered me from my strong enemy, From those who hated me, For they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, But the LORD was my support.

Once Samson realized that he was nothing without God's support, he could then faithfully judge Israel. Verse 20 says that he did so for twenty years.