

God Uses Samson to Reduce the Power of the Philistines

Judges 15

Judges 15 - *"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. ² Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead." ³ And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!" ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. 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. ⁷ Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease." 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. ⁹ Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ 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." ¹² But they said to him, "We 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." ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ When 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. ¹⁵ He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. 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!" ¹⁷ And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi. ¹⁸ 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?" ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines."*

Background Notes

The time period of Samson's life is near the end of the period of the Judges. In fact, Samson's life overlapped with the prophet Samuel, who anointed King Saul, the first king of Israel. Samson judged Israel for 20 years (v20). These years were not peaceful years, because the Philistines were a very powerful enemy over Israel at that time. In fact, the Philistines were so strong that most of Israel was content to live with the status quo. They weren't interested in rising up to fight.

Even with the strongest man in the Bible as their leader, the people were reluctant to resist. *"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?" (v11).* The tribe of Judah was willing to turn Samson over to the enemy rather than join him in fighting the enemy! So Samson, for the most part, had to go it alone against the Philistines.

Unfortunately, Samson's exploits against the Philistines were not always done with high motives. We see revenge, pride and self-glory in the life of Samson. Nevertheless, God used Samson to break down the overwhelming power of the Philistines. It could be said that Samson's victories over the Philistines helped to pave the way for King David's later complete conquest of the Philistines.

Doctrinal Points

1. Ungodly anger and revenge bring about great destruction.

In Judges 14, Samson disobeyed God's Law and married an unbelieving, pagan Philistine woman. In Judges 15, we see that this disobedience resulted in further wrongdoing: uncontrolled anger and revenge. Samson came down to the land of the Philistines to visit his wife. Remember, he had left her and gone home because she had betrayed him. He brought a young goat with him as a let's-make-up gift -- like bringing a dozen roses today, or something like that. Samson then found out that his wife had been given to the best man!

You can imagine how angry Samson was. But who got him into this mess in the first place? Samson got himself into this predicament, because he disobeyed the clear Law of God. There is **always** bad fallout from disobedience.

In his uncontrolled anger, Samson took revenge by catching 300 foxes (or jackals), tied their tails together, and fastened torches to their tails. Quite a feat! How long would it take you, on your own, to catch 300 foxes, 150 pairs, and knot the tails together with torches? Then Samson lit the torches and released these poor animals into the fields.

The result was great destruction. The grain, vineyards and olive groves were destroyed. What devastation! This was the food of the land! The land the Philistines occupied was land that God had given to Israel, and they were told to drive out the pagan occupants, but God's method of removing the enemy from the Promised Land never included destroying the food supply. So God did not approve Samson's destruction of the food of the land.

After the Philistines reacted and burned Samson's wife and father-in-law to death, Samson took further revenge and viciously slaughtered many of the Philistines. We might think that this was a good thing, but notice that we never read in this section that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson. Samson did these things while he was in the grip of uncontrolled rage, and he took ungodly revenge. This destruction was done in the name of Samson - not in the name of the Lord! Romans 12:19 says *"Do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."* We must do God's work in God's way. Ungodly anger and revenge are not the way to fight the enemy.

During the summer I conduct Holy Land study tours. Our study tours to Israel and other Bible Lands are a great learning experience, and they can be a great testimony to the unbelieving people that we meet - especially the guides, the bus drivers, and the hotel personnel. Unfortunately, sometimes one of our tour members will become upset and angry about something - angry with the airlines, or the bus driver, or the hotel managers – and they make it very unpleasant for everyone. Not only are they a terrible testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ, but they are sometimes very destructive as they try to get personal satisfaction, and even revenge, with their tongue or their pen. This is certainly not the way to be a good witness to unbelievers, who know we're a Christian tour group.

Samson was not a good witness to the unbelieving Philistines because his ungodly anger and revenge led to destruction. Many Christians today are not very good witnesses to Jesus Christ. Their attitudes and lifestyles are not good testimonies, nor do they honor the Lord. Ungodly anger and revenge bring about great destruction.

2. Godly faith and courage bring about great victory.

I see a change in Samson's attitude as we move into the second half of the chapter. After creating all the death and destruction, Samson was hiding out in the hills (v8). The men of Judah came to him, and Samson agreed to give himself up to the Philistines. The men of Judah should have been ashamed of themselves for not joining Samson and fighting the Philistines with him, but Samson's reaction was certainly an act of courage and faith.

Samson allowed himself to be bound with ropes and delivered to the Philistines. Why? Samson knew, by faith, that God could deliver him. Hebrews 11:32 tells us that Samson was a man of faith.

And God did deliver Samson!

The Spirit of the Lord didn't come upon Samson when he was reacting with ungodly anger and revenge, but when Samson began to act with faith and courage, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him once again. And there was a great victory. What a difference! What about us? Is our Christian lifestyle characterized by ungodly anger and revenge, or by godly faith and courage?

Practical Application

If you have a physical need, pray about it.

At the end of this chapter, Samson was extremely thirsty after his battle with the Philistines. What did he do? He asked God to meet that specific physical need. And God met Samson's need in a most miraculous way: *"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"* (v19).

But God didn't meet that need until Samson prayed about it. Some Christians talk to everyone else about their physical needs and problems, but they forget to talk to the Lord about it!

It's wrong to **demand** that God meet our physical needs, and it's wrong to pray only about our physical needs and not about our spiritual needs. And it's wrong to confuse our physical **wants** with our physical **needs**. For example, I would like my body to be strong enough to ski well when I'm 80 years old - but that's a physical **want**, and it's not high on my prayer list (not right now, anyway!) But I do pray that God would grant me the physical health and the physical strength that I need to carry on the ministries that He has given me. That's biblical praying.

It's proper and biblical to pray for physical needs. If our basic physical needs are not met, we may be more vulnerable to spiritual depression and even to spiritual attack. Elijah is an example of this. When Elijah ran away from Queen Jezebel's threats, he was afraid and depressed, and he became physically exhausted. What did God do first? Before God began to restore Elijah spiritually, He took care of his physical needs. He gave him food - and water - and rest!

So if you have a physical need right now, pray about it. Bring your needs before the Lord!

If you have a physical need, pray about it!