

Judges 15:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

Analysis

And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

This verse belongs to the Samson cycle addressing Samson's exploits of vengeance. Samson represents both the heights of God-empowered strength and the depths of human weakness through moral compromise. His Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21) set him apart as holy to God, yet his persistent violations of this vow—contact with dead animals (14:8-9), seven-day feast (likely involving wine, 14:10), and finally revealing his hair's secret (16:17)—demonstrate progressive spiritual decline.

Theologically, Samson illustrates how spiritual gifts don't guarantee spiritual maturity. The Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson repeatedly, giving superhuman strength, yet this empowerment didn't produce corresponding moral transformation. His attraction to Philistine women (14:1-3, 16:1, 16:4) directly violated God's command against intermarriage with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). This demonstrates that God can use flawed instruments for His purposes, but this never excuses or endorses sin.

Samson's final prayer—"O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me" (16:28)—shows genuine repentance and renewed faith. His death accomplished more than his life (16:30), suggesting that even spectacular failure can be redeemed when we return to God. However, the tragedy is that Samson's

potential was largely wasted through moral compromise. His story warns believers that consistent holy living, not merely spectacular spiritual experiences, characterizes faithful discipleship.

Historical Context

Historical Setting: The Book of Judges spans approximately 350-400 years (c. 1375-1050 BCE) during the Late Bronze Age collapse and early Iron Age. This period saw the disintegration of major empires (Hittites, Mycenaeans) and weakening of Egyptian control over Canaan, creating a power vacuum filled by emerging peoples including Philistines (Sea Peoples), Aramaeans, and regional kingdoms. The decentralized tribal structure left Israel vulnerable to external oppression and internal chaos.

Cultural Context: This passage relates to Samson's exploits of vengeance. Canaanite religion dominated the region, centered on Baal (storm/fertility god), Asherah (mother goddess), and Anat (war goddess). Archaeological discoveries at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) have provided extensive information about Canaanite mythology and religious practices. Baal worship involved ritual prostitution, child sacrifice, and fertility rites tied to agricultural seasons. Israel's persistent attraction to these gods demonstrates the strong cultural pressure to conform to surrounding nations' religious practices.

The material culture of this period shows gradual Israelite settlement in the Canaanite hill country, with simpler pottery and architecture than coastal Canaanite cities. Iron technology was beginning to spread, giving military advantage to peoples who mastered it (note the Philistines' iron monopoly, 1 Samuel 13:19-22). The absence of centralized government during the judges period stands in stark contrast to the bureaucratic city-states of Canaan and the imperial administration of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This political structure reflected Israel's theocratic ideal—God as king—yet the repeated cycles of apostasy showed this ideal required more than political structures; it demanded heart transformation.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does this passage about Samson's exploits of vengeance reveal God's character in dealing with persistent human rebellion and incomplete obedience?
2. What patterns of spiritual compromise or incomplete obedience in your own life mirror Israel's failures during the judges period?
3. How does understanding the cyclical nature of sin and deliverance in Judges help you appreciate Christ's perfect and final deliverance from sin's power?

Interlinear Text

אָמַר	וַיֹּאמֶר	בִּלְחִי	הָחֵמ וֹר	הַמֶּכֶת יִם	הַמֶּכֶת יִם
said	And Samson	With the jawbone	of an ass	heaps	heaps
H559	H8123	H3895	H2543	H2565	H2565
בִּלְחִי	הָחֵמ וֹר	הֲיִי יִתִּי	אֶלָּף	אִישׁ:	
With the jawbone	of an ass	have I slain	a thousand	men	
H3895	H2543	H5221	H505	H376	

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