

# Samson's Exploits

In retaliation against the Philistines, Samson burns their crops with foxes, kills a thousand men with a donkey's jawbone, and demonstrates that God's strength flows through him despite his flaws.

Judges 15:1-20

CHARACTERS: Samson, Philistines, Men of Judah, Father-in-law

THEMES: Vengeance, God's power, Isolation, Divine provision, Leadership

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AFTER HIS ANGER cooled, Samson went back to visit his wife, bringing a young goat as a gift. But her father would not let him in. 'I was so sure you hated her that I gave her to your companion,' he said. 'Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead.'

Samson's rage ignited again. 'This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them.' He went out and caught three hundred foxes, tied them tail to tail in pairs, and fastened a torch to every pair of tails. He lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up not only the shocks and standing grain but also the vineyards and olive groves—destroying their food supply and economic livelihood.

When the Philistines asked who had done this, they were told, 'Samson, because his father-in-law gave his wife to his companion.' In twisted revenge, they burned Samson's wife and father-in-law to death—the very fate she had feared when she betrayed Samson's riddle.

Samson's response was immediate and devastating: 'Since you've acted like this, I swear that I won't stop until I get my revenge on you.' He attacked them viciously, slaughtering many, then went to live in a cave in the rock of Etam.

The Philistines went up, camped in Judah, and raided Lehi, seeking Samson. The men of Judah, living under Philistine oppression, were more afraid of their enemies than hopeful for deliverance. Three thousand of them went to Samson and said, 'Don't you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?'

Samson's own people saw him not as their deliverer but as a troublemaker endangering their fragile peace with their oppressors. This is the tragedy of a conquered people: they had accepted their chains.

'I merely did to them what they did to me,' Samson replied.

'We've come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines,' they said.

Samson made them promise: 'Swear to me that you won't kill me yourselves.'

'Agreed. We will only tie you up and hand you over. We will not kill you.' They bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock.

As Samson approached the Philistines at Lehi, they came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.

In that moment of triumph, Samson composed a poem: 'With a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men.'

But after the adrenaline of battle faded, Samson became very thirsty. He cried out to the Lord: 'You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?' This prayer reveals something important—despite all his compromises, Samson still recognized that his strength came from God, and in his moment of need, he turned to the Lord.

God split open the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. The spring was called En Hakkore, meaning 'caller's spring,' and it remains in Lehi to this day—a testimony to God's provision even for flawed servants.

Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines. He was both judge and enigma—a man of God who repeatedly violated his vows, a deliverer who acted mainly in personal vengeance, a leader isolated from his own people. Yet God continued to use him, demonstrating that divine strength flows not from human perfection but from divine grace. The same God who provided water in the desert would continue to work through this deeply flawed champion—until Samson's greatest weakness brought him to his lowest point, and ultimately, to his finest hour.

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