



A Study of the Book of Judges

Lesson 12: Samson...Jawbone Hill Judges 15:1-20

Now the last time we were together we began to look into the life of Judge Samson. We noticed, right off, that his story was different, far different, than any of the other judges described in the Book of Judges. His birth, for example, was miraculous.

That is important, I think, especially in light of the fact that the births of the other judges are hardly discussed at all.

Oh, it is true that one of the judges (Abimelech) is mentioned briefly for being the son of a concubine and another of the judges (Jephthah) is mentioned briefly for being the son of a prostitute but their births were not foretold...not miraculous in the same sort of way that Samson's was. In fact, if anything, their births were common...perhaps too common. But in Samson's case, there is nothing common about his birth at all.¹ You see, Samson's mother had been unable to conceive. So when the Angel of the lord appeared to her to announce to her the good news...the news that not only would she have a baby but that the baby son she

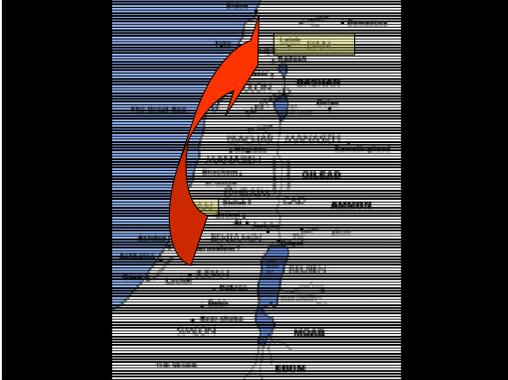
was to bear would begin to deliver his people from their bondage to the Philistines...it was viewed as a great miracle and a great act of kindness. But with God's kindness came a responsibility. Samson was different and he was to be treated differently. He was to be set apart unto the Lord in a special way...he was to be set apart as a Nazirite.² That meant that he was to be ceremonially set apart...he was to drink no wine or other strong drink. He was to touch nothing defiled or polluted...like dead a dead body. He was to never cut his hair. We talked in length about all this last week.

Now not only was Samson's birth different from that of the other judges but his giftedness was different from theirs as well.

The other judges were all brave, (I am giving Barak and Gideon the benefit of the doubt), and some of them were unusually clever (I am thinking of Ehud) but none of them were supernaturally strong. Samson was. In fact, Samson was, and I don't see any other way around concluding this, the strongest man who ever lived.³

But it wasn't just Samson's birth that set him apart...it wasn't just his miraculous strength that set him apart...there is a sense, in which, his isolation set him apart from all of the other judges.

You see Samson led no army...he was the army. Samson had no band or clan...he was the band. He was the clan. He was clearly the most gifted, the strongest and the most charismatic of all the judges mentioned in the Book of Judges and yet he lived alone...he delivered alone...and he died alone...isolated from his people.⁴



Apparently his tribe, the Tribe of Dan, had either relocated or was in the process of relocating from the Gaza strip along the coast up to northern Israel, up to the city of Laish.⁵ We talked about this last week.

But Samson and his family did not go. As a result, the tribe of Dan never comes up in Samson's story...oh, they're mentioned but they are never actually present. In Samson's story there are only the Philistines and the men of the Tribe of Judah. Samson lives, fights and dies apart from community.

Now I mentioned all these things last week but I wanted to remind those of you that were not here what we talked about. I wanted you to know these things so when they come up again you will understand why I am emphasizing them.

Now this morning, we are going to look at Samson's story in Judges chapter 15. In many ways, it is very similar to his story in chapter 14. In fact, the parallels between chapters 14 and 15 are striking.

Let me see if I can explain what I mean.

IN CH. 14... SAMSON GOES DOWN
TO TIMNAH TO TAKE A
WIFE...HIS PARENTS OBJECT.

IN CH. 15...SAMSON GOES DOWN
TO SEE HIS WIFE...HER PARENTS
OBJECT.

In chapter 14... Samson goes down to Timnah to take a wife...his parents object.

In chapter 15...Samson goes down to see his wife...her parents object.

IN CH. 14...SAMSON ENCOUNTERS
A WILD LION AND THAT
BECOMES A POINT OF
CONTENTION BETWEEN HIM
AND THE PHILISTINES.

IN CH. 15...SAMSON LOSES 300
FOXES ON THE WHEAT FIELDS OF
THE PHILISTINES AND THAT TOO
BECOMES A POINT OF
CONTENTION.

In chapter 14...Samson encounters a wild lion and that becomes a point of contention between him and the Philistines.

In chapter 15...Samson loses 300 foxes on the wheat fields of the Philistines and that too becomes a point of contention.

IN CH. 14, HIS WIFE BETRAYS HIM
TO THE PHILISTINES AND THE
LORD DELIVERS HIM.

IN CH. 15, THE MEN OF JUDAH
BETRAY HIM TO THE PHILISTINES
AND THE LORD DELIVERS HIM.

In chapter 14, his wife betrays him to the Philistines and the Lord delivers him.

In chapter 15, the men of Judah betray him to the Philistines and the Lord delivers him.

IN CH. 14, THE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS
ACT OF THE PHILISTINES
(FORCING HIS WIFE TO EXPLAIN
THE RIDDLE) LEADS TO A
SLAUGHTER OF THE PHILISTINES.

IN CH. 15, THE UNRIGHTEOUS
ACT OF THE PHILISTINES
(BURNING HIS WIFE AND HER
FATHER ALIVE) LEADS TO A
GREAT SLAUGHTER OF THE
PHILISTINES.

In chapter 14, the unrighteousness act of the Philistines (forcing his wife to explain the riddle) leads to a slaughter of the Philistines.

In chapter 15, the unrighteous act of the Philistines (burning his wife and her father alive) leads to a great slaughter of the Philistines.

Still there are differences between the stories.

Now I ought to comment about something a dear friend said to me last week after the lesson. They wondered about my use of the word **“story”**...whether or not I ought to use the word **“story”** in describing the stories of the Bible. I understood exactly what they meant. What they meant is that sometimes in English when we use the word story, it implies that what is being told is fictitious...that is, not true. That is not the way I am using the term. I believe that the stories of the Book of Judges and the Bible are true. I believe in the inerrancy of the Bible...so when I use the word **“story”** I mean **“account”** or **“history”** with one minor difference. They are not history in the sense of being written like modern history is written. When modern history is written almost all of the facts known are included. Bible stories purposely do not include everything. They are true...but they are not the whole truth. The parts that are told are told on purpose and the parts that are left out are left out on purpose to suit the design or intention of the author. That is why most Bible stories fail to mention the day of the week, or the time of day or even the weather. Those things are not conducive to what the author is trying to get across. Do you see what I mean? So if I use the word **“story”** and I like the word, I mean it in terms of **“true story”** and not in terms of **“a made up story”**.

Now that having been said let's look at chapter 15 and the story of Samson that unfolds there.

^{NIV} **Judges 15:1**...Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit⁶ his wife. He said, **"I'm going to my wife's room."** But her father would not let him go in. ² **"I was so sure you thoroughly hated her," he said, "that I gave her to your friend. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead."** ³ Samson said to them, **"This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them."** ⁴ So he went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to

every pair of tails, ⁵ lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves.

Now the first thing I want you to see in Judges 15 is that Samson did not think that his marriage to the Timnite woman was over.⁷ I think that is a bit surprising. But apparently the Lord had not yet used the marriage to provoke the sort of irreparable breach between Samson and the Philistines that He intended. You'll remember from our lesson last week that Samson's bride betrayed his secret riddle to her Philistine wedding guests and they in turn guessed Samson's riddle and that he in turn went out and killed 30 Philistines and took their garments in order to pay his debt. You would have thought that that would have created enough of a breach to permanently put an end to his marriage. But Samson didn't think it had.

He went back to his father in law's house with the intention of consummating their marriage. One commentator noted, and I thought this was pretty funny, that in those days taking a kid, a small goat, to one's wife was similar to taking her a box of chocolates today.⁸

But Samson's father would not let him go into her. What that means euphemistically is that he had no intention of allowing Samson a conjugal visit. In fact, he goes on to add that he thought Samson was so mad at her that he was done with her and as a result he gave her to another man, one of Samson's friends.

Now the father's response really fired Samson up. But before we look at that I ought to tell you that some scholars think that Samson had an unusual marriage

with the Philistine woman. They think it may have been what was called a *beena*⁹ or “**visit type**” marriage and that the marriage was never intended to be a marriage where the couple lived together. Such scholars note that sometimes when couples came from different religious backgrounds got married they resorted to this particular type of marriage because of all of the difficulties associated with the cohabitation of such couples. I think that may be a stretch...that is I think that may be trying to logically understand a relationship that was illogical in the first place. I think Samson felt betrayed by his wife, blew up...killed some Philistines...took their garments and then went back to her house later on thinking everything was going to get back to normal. But things were not going to get back to normal.

When Samson found out his wife had been given to another man, he decided not to take it out on her and her father but on the Philistine nation as a whole. He decided and these are his words that now he “**would really harm them.**”

Now I think his father in law feared what that might have meant and he in fairness offered his younger and more attractive daughter to Samson in his wife’s place.¹⁰ But as we have already seen, Samson was not much for having people tell him which woman he should or should not have.

Anyway, Samson decided he would hurt the Philistines where they really lived and the way he did that was by tying the tails of 150 pair of foxes together and tying a firebrand between them and letting them go in the Philistines standing wheat.

Now I have to tell you that many commentators laugh out loud when they read this particular portion of the Samson story. They absolutely refuse to believe that such an event ever occurred. In fact, they believe that Samson's story here becomes hopelessly mired in legend. Listen to what one commentator says:

As far as I know, there are no records of foxes being used for such purposes, for the simple reason that it is impossible (impossible is a big word) to induce two foxes tied tail to tail with a firebrand to run in a given direction: each would simply associate the other fox with the burning pain, and trying to get at each other's throat they would revolve in a circle. It is most unlikely that 150 such pairs would all run in one direction set by the instigator...it is most unlikely that the story is a historical record or meant to be one;¹¹

Now I have to tell you I could not disagree more. It seems to me that the text presents the story as historical. As far as I am concerned, I think it is much better to take the story as historical when than sit in judgment on the text and think I am in a position 3,000 years after an event to determine whether something was meant to be historical. Besides, I think this particular writer goes on to make the very point that the author of Judges is trying to make. You see, he says that tying a couple of foxes together with a firebrand between would have led to complete and total chaos. But I think that is what the text says happened. You see, Samson intended to have the foxes burn up the wheat fields of the Philistines but instead they burned up not only their wheat fields but also their vineyards and even their olive groves. In other words, the destruction that Samson intended was overruled by the hand of God and maximized to create an irreparable breach between Samson and the Philistines.

Now, let me just point out one other thing.

Commentators make a big deal out of the fact that foxes are solitary animals and that it would have been impossible to catch 300 of them at any one time. But the word that is used here in the text is really the word to describe “**jackals.**”



Jackals are indeed pack animals...they are members the dog family and are much easier to catch and are in much greater abundance than foxes. Still, even if it had said “**foxes**” as in American red foxes...I see no reason to think that God could have not miraculously supplied Samson the animals he sought.

I think that kind of thinking betrays an underlying uneasiness with the whole concept of the miraculous. In fact, it is not the least bit uncommon to have a person say “**Well that story with the foxes wasn’t really true...it wasn’t ever intended to be true but, of course, neither was the story of Samson. It wasn’t true; it was simply a religious myth to bolster people’s faith in terrible times.**”

When I hear that sort of thing, it makes me think of those commentators that deny the resurrection but still affirm its importance theologically. I am talking

about commentators that say something like this, **“Well the resurrection was internal not external. It was an issue of the heart not of history. It accomplished what God wanted it to accomplish even though it never really happened.”**

And that of course makes me glad for the Apostle Paul who said, **“If Christ is not risen from the dead we are still in our sins of all men most miserable.”** You see the reality of the historical events of the bible do matter...they are not simply mythic tales told to make us better people. They are an expression of our sovereign God’s eternal purpose and design to redeem a people unto Himself.

But it sounds like I am preaching. Look at verse 6.

^{NIV} **Judges 15:6**...When the Philistines asked, **“Who did this?”** they were told, **“Samson, the Timnite's son-in-law, because his wife was given to his friend.”** So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death.

Now you will remember in chapter 14, the Philistines threatened to burn up the Timnite woman and her family unless she helped solve Samson’s riddle. She acted against Samson out of fear and yet her fears were indeed finally realized on account of Samson’s actions.

Verse 7 tells us that Samson in spite of all that had happened really loved the Timnite woman. It tells us that he lashed out in revenge against what the Philistines had done.

^{NIV} **Judges 15:7**...Samson said to them, "**Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you.**" ⁸ He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

Now it is hard to know exactly where the cave in the rock of Etam was out. Some think it was away from the Judean hill country because the text says Samson went down to it. But it is hard to know. What is clear is that Samson's retaliation only served to ratchet up the conflict between him and the Philistines. The phrase in verse 9 in the NIV "he viciously slaughtered many of them" is not quite as poetic as the Hebrew which has it, "**He smote them hip and thigh**". Only the KJV keeps the sense of the Hebrew. The idea is that he tore them to pieces.

^{KJV} **Judges 15:8**...And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

Verse 9 tells us that the Philistines wanted revenge. In fact, they mustered an army and went down to attack Judah on account of Samson. The verse contains a dialogue between the men of Judah and the Philistines.

^{NIV} **Judges 15:9**...The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi. ¹⁰ The men of Judah asked, "**Why have you come to fight us?**" "**We have come to take Samson prisoner,**" they answered, "**to do to him as he did to us.**"

Now the scene described in verses 11-13 is extraordinary. It is extraordinary because the men of Judah go down to take Samson into custody in order to pacify the Philistines. That is, they go down to take Samson into custody in order to prevent the Philistines from waging war against them. It is an extraordinary act of cowardice and moral failure. They had covenanted early on to protect their

brothers but now they are betraying their brother. In verse 11, they try to justify to Samson what they are doing.

NIV Judges 15:11...Then three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "**Don't you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?**" He answered, "**I merely did to them what they did to me.**"

You see the men of Judah had submitted themselves to the rule of the Philistines. They no longer viewed God as their ruler. No, they viewed the Philistines as their rulers and they were willing, perfectly willing, to throw Samson under the bus in order to get the Philistines off their back. It is either a wonderful or a terrible example (depending on how you look at it) of how pragmatism often affects men in leadership.

But amazingly Samson apparently did not take it personally. I think that perhaps by this particular point in time he had begun to see something of the larger picture. The only concern he expressed to the men of Judah was that they promise not to kill him. You can see what he said to them in verse 12 and following.

NIV Judges 15:12...They said to him, "**We've come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines.**" Samson said, "**Swear to me that you won't kill me yourselves.**" ¹³ "**Agreed,**" they answered. "**We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you.**" So they bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock.

Now we don't know the exact distance from Etam down to Lehi but it must have been an extraordinary scene...Samson bound and accompanied by 3,000 men of Judah. Anyway, as they approached Lehi...the text says that the Philistines

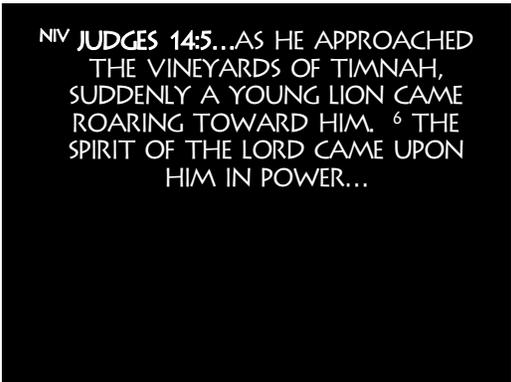
approached him shouting. Now I have to tell you that literarily their approaching him shouting is exactly parallel to the lion approaching him roaring in chapter 14. Now the author of Judges intended that parallelism to be obvious to the reader. In a sense the use of that phrase “they came shouting” is intended as a foreshadowing of what is about to happen.

Verse 14 picks up the action.

^{NIV} **Judges 15:14**...As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands.

Now let me just press that point a bit further. I want you to see how the two events are literarily parallel. Here’s how the author described the scene with the lion in chapter 14.

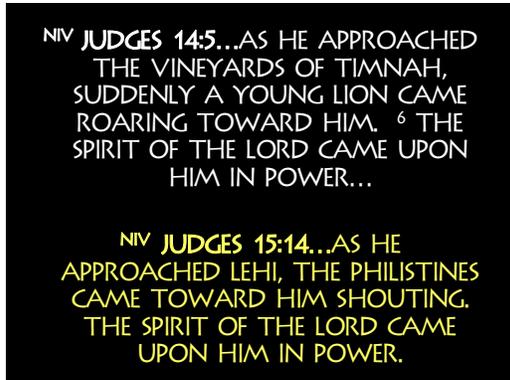
^{NIV} **Judges 14:5**...Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. ⁶ The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power...



^{NIV} **JUDGES 14:5**...AS HE APPROACHED
THE VINEYARDS OF TIMNAH,
SUDDENLY A YOUNG LION CAME
ROARING TOWARD HIM. ⁶ THE
SPIRIT OF THE LORD CAME UPON
HIM IN POWER...

And here's how the scene is described in chapter 15 when the Philistines approach him.

NIV Judges 15:14...As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power.



Do you see what I mean about them being parallel?

Anyway the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson in the exact same way it came upon him when he was previously attacked by the roaring lion and he responded in superhuman strength just as he had before. Look at verse 15.

NIV Judges 15:15...Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.

Now what the text means by fresh is that it was not completely dried out. I don't think the text is trying to make the point that he was in violation of his Naziritic vow for touching a dead thing (although that probably was true) as much as it is that this particular jawbone was not some old desiccated bone. It had substance and weight. If you have ever found an old cow bone or skull that has been out in the weather for any length of time, you know that they tend to dry out and

become almost like balsa wood. But this jawbone was fresh and still heavy and strong.

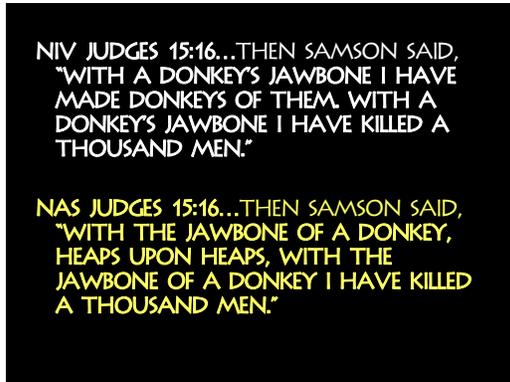
Now I didn't want to mention this before now but the word "**Lehi**" means "**jawbone**". It is one of those wonderfully strange etymological events that sometimes occur in Scripture where a place is named because of something that happened there. This particular instance goes one better than that. It was already named "**Jawbone**" and then when Samson was approached by the Philistines he just happened to find a "**jawbone**" there and ever he reaped havoc upon the Philistines the place was renamed something a bit different still keeping the overall idea.

Verse 16 is very hard to translate and the reason it is so hard is difficult to explain. You see in Hebrew...originally words did not have the vowels supplied and the word for donkey without the vowels is spelled hmr חמור while the word for "heaps" is also spelled hmr חמר.



NIV Judges 15:16...Then Samson said, "With a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men."

^{NAS} **Judges 15:16**...Then Samson said, **"With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men."**



But it doesn't make much difference really. The point is the same. Anyway getting back to the etymology¹² of the place verse 17 tells us...

^{NIV} **Judges 15:17**...When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi.

Now I love that name Ramath Lehi and if I ever have enough money to have a country estate that is what I am going to name it. It means **"Jawbone Hill."** You see Samson went to Lehi...Jawbone... and found a jawbone there and turned the place into a perpetual memorial by naming it Jawbone Hill.¹³

Now in verse 18, Samson cries out to the Lord for deliverance not from the Philistines but from his unquenchable thirst.

^{NIV} **Judges 15:18**... Because he was 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?"** ¹⁹ Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and

he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi. ²⁰
Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

The word for **“hollow place”** is a word that means a mortar...that is, it means a place where people pounded out grain to separate the husk from the kernel. When I was in Africa I saw the women in Niger using long posts, something almost like a fence post, to pound the millet that they ate.



They often did so using rocks with hollow depressions in them. That is the force of the word used here. In fact the word that is used is sometimes used to indicate a tooth socket which caused some older translators (Luther for example) to conjecture that God caused water to flow from a tooth socket in the jawbone that Samson had used to kill the Philistines.



But the fact that Samson threw the jawbone away after he had killed the Philistines with it and the fact that the fountain was still there at the time the author wrote this account tells us that the socket or mortar was part of the rocky terrain.¹⁴ Probably, it was not a separate mortar like this one but a natural one that was part of the rocky outcrop.

Now the last verse of the chapter, verse 20, sums up Samson's ministry as a judge. It says he was a judge for twenty years and there is a sense in which that summary is very sad aspect of Samson's life. That is because the Samson story is not over yet. There is one more chapter and yet the author sums up his life here in verse 20 as if whatever occurs after this point doesn't matter very much. I think what the author is trying to say is that this is the highpoint of Samson's deliverance of his people. After verse 30 everything goes down hill pretty quickly. You can see that from the first verse in chapter 16.

^{NIV} **Judges 16:1**...One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her.

Now the questions become at this point, what are we to make of this portion of Samson's life.

I think we are to see to see the beauty of God's providence in arranging the events of Samson's life to achieve the greater glory of God. I think we are to see the presence of the Holy Spirit both guiding and directing events in Samson's life. I think that tells us that even in difficult times, times of isolation and suffering, the Lord is there accomplishing his purpose and that while we may not always see purpose...it is there.¹⁵

I think there is sense in Samson's life in which evening the midst of the most awful isolation, Samson is confident of the Lord's provision and mercy. Now that kind of mercy will be seen even more fully developed in the life of David and there it will be developed without the same sinful dispositions that we see in Samson. And, of course, it will be fully demonstrated much later in the life of our Lord...who Himself was often alone and isolated but never wavered...never faltered at all.

And we possess that same Spirit...the Spirit of the living God...to sustain us in times of isolation and loneliness.

Are there any questions or comments? Let's pray.

¹ Richard G Bowman and Richard W. Swanson, "Samson and the Son of God or Dead Heroes and Dead Goats: Ethical Readings of Narrative Violence in Judges and Matthew" in *Semeia* no 77 1997, p 59-73. They write, "Unlike the stories of the other judges. God is actively involved in the birth of Samson. The infertile mother of Samson is instructed by an "angel of the Lord" that she will not only bear a son but that her son shall be a "Nazirite to God from birth" (Judges 13:5). He is further described as the one "who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5). The birth narrative then concludes with the narrator's report of continued divine activity: as the boy grew, "the Lord blessed him" and "the spirit of the Lord began to stir in him" (Judges 13:14-25) The birth narrative thus suggests significant divine involvement in both the conception and direction of Samson's life, a life which will clearly involve violence as he attempts to reestablish the authority of the *Israelites* visa-via their Philistine oppressors.

Explicit and repeated references to divine involvement in the person and the process by which this task shall be accomplished suggests divine endorsement of these activities. Yet, the limitations of such endeavors are Ironically signaled in the divine messenger's initial speech where God tells Samson's mother that he will only "begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5) This speech foreshadows that Samson's "delivering," unlike that of his predecessors, will not be successful. The task will be left unfinished at his death."

² V. H. Matthews, M. W. Chavalas, & J. H Walton,.. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* electronic ed. (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 2000), Number 6:1-21.

"**The Nazirite Vow...6:3. abstinence from drinks.** There are a number of different words used to describe fermented drinks made from grapes used here. While some of the terms could at times

refer to intoxicants made from other ingredients (e.g., grain), only those that can refer to grape products are used here. That suggests that only grape intoxicants are prohibited to the Nazirite. It is not drunkenness that is the issue here, but grape drinks of any sort.

6:3–4. abstinence from grape products. Prohibition of grape products has suggested to some interpreters that a nomadic lifestyle is being elevated, but it is very difficult to see that as a biblical or priestly agenda. Alternatively one must notice that the grape is one of the principal, one could say characteristic, staples of Canaan and therefore symbolically connected to the issue of fertility (note that the spies bring back a huge cluster of grapes [13:24] as evidence of the fertility of the land). The use of raisins in raisin cakes for the fertility cult can be seen in Hosea 3:1.

6:5. significance of hair. There is a Phoenician inscription from the ninth century B.C. reporting the dedication of shaven hair by an individual in fulfillment of a vow made to the goddess Astarte . It is of importance that in the biblical text there is no discussion of what should be done with the hair that is cut. It is neither dedicated as in the above inscription, nor is it deposited in the temple as in some cultures. The dedicated hair is uncut (v. 9), not cut. For men hair has symbolic value as a sign of manhood or virility (see 2 Sam 10:4). Women decorate their hair and groom it carefully as a sign of beauty. The prohibition against trimming the “sides of your head” or the “edges of your beard” uses the same terminology as in Leviticus 19:9–10 , which deals with the harvesting of fields. In both cases an offering is involved—one to the poor and the other to God. Hammurabi ’s code penalizes false witnesses by having half the person’s hair cut off. The Middle Assyrian code allows a debt-slave’s master to pull out his or her hair as punishment (see Neh 13:25). Both laws suggest that shame is attached to the loss of hair. In ancient thinking hair (along with blood) was one of the main representatives of a person’s life essence. As such it was often an ingredient in sympathetic magic. This is evident, for instance, in the practice of sending along a lock of a presumed prophet’s hair when his prophecies were sent to the king of Mari . The hair would be used in divination to determine whether the prophet’s message would be accepted as valid. (See Lev 19:27 .) Studies have shown that hair cutting was used in the ancient world as an act of distinguishing oneself from those around (as in mourning), or of reentering society (as seems to be the case with the Nazirites).

6:6–7. corpse prohibition. Corpse contamination was one of the most common and unavoidable causes of ritual uncleanness (see comment on 19:11). Some have further speculated that ritual uncleanness from corpse contamination may also represent a statement against the always prevalent cult of the dead (see comment on 3:1, Levites in the place of the first-born).

6:8. Nazirite background. It may be no coincidence that the three prohibited areas for the Nazirite represent fertility (grape products), sympathetic magic (hair) and the cult of the dead (corpse contamination). These are the three principal popular religious practices that Yahweh worship sought to eliminate. It is difficult to reconstruct, however, why these elements were chosen, or what the original thinking behind the vow was.

6:9–12. ritual procedure in case of violation. Ritual violation of the vow required the purging of the altar but only included the least expensive offerings (pigeons). It was also necessary to offer a lamb for a reparation offering because the violation involved a breach of faith (see comment on Lev 5:14–16).

6:13–20. conclusion of the vow. A whole series of offerings (see the comments on the early chapters of Leviticus for more information on each) concludes the vow, followed by the cutting and burning of the hair. Most vows in the ancient Near East were conditional vows attached to

some past or present entreaty (see comment on Lev 27), and there is no reason to assume that the Nazirite vow is any different. It is not surprising, then, that the vow culminates in offertory gifts. What is unusual, against the background of ancient Near Eastern vows, is the ritualized period of abstinence that precedes the offerings.”

³ J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* Translated by J.S. Bowden. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1981), 236. He writes: “However, in the present form of the story the image which we get of Samson is no longer that of the attractive, albeit somewhat coarse popular hero, but rather that* of a feckless and easy-going character: the only virtue which the spirit seems to have given Samson is physical strength pure and simple — certainly not wisdom or ethical consistency (cf. § 3[vii] above).”

⁴ George P. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* in the ICC Series, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1966), 313. He writes, “The adventures of Samson differ markedly from the exploits of the judges in the preceding chapters of the book. Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah were leaders, who, at the head of their tribesmen, “turned to flight the armies of the aliens,” and delivered their countrymen. Samson is a solitary hero, endowed with prodigious strength, who in his own quarrel, single-handed, makes havoc among the Philistines, but in no way appears as the champion or deliverer of Israel. It is easy to see why he should have been a favorite figure of Israelite folk-story, the drastic humor of which is strongly impressed upon the narrative of his adventures; but not so easy to see what place he has in the religious pragmatism of the Deuteronomic Book of Judges, or, indeed, in what sense he can be called a judge at all.”

⁵ Soggin, 22.

⁶ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Electronic Version), Judges 15:1-2. “Because the word “visit” is used, many scholars feel that Samson’s marriage was of the *beena* (an Akkadian word) or “visit” type, in which the wife would stay in her father’s house and be visited periodically by her husband (cf. 8:31 and de Vaux, AIs, pp. 28-29). By this arrangement the Philistine bride would avoid the in-law problems her presence in an Israelite household would cause.”

⁷ Robert Boling, *Judges* in the Anchor Bible Commentary Series, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 234. “Samson suddenly shows up in Timnah thinking nothing has changed.”

⁸ Robert G. Boling, 234. “Perhaps the ancient counterpart of a box of chocolates.” See also Dr. Thomas Constable’s notes on Judges chapter 15 and following (p.p. 89-91) at <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf>. He writes: “Instead of flowers or candy he took a young goat as a gift for his fiancée.” See also George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* in the ICC Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895...reprinted in 1976), 340. Moore writes, “...it is not impossible that such a gift was expected at every visit of the husband.” He cites Genesis 38.

^{NIV} **Genesis 38:17**...“I’ll send you a young goat from my flock,” he said. “Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?” she asked. ¹⁸ He said, “What pledge should I give you?” “Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand,” she answered. So he gave them to her and

slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. ¹⁹ After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again. ²⁰ Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her."

⁹ See endnote 6.

¹⁰ Arthur E. Cundall, and Leon. Morris, *Judges & Ruth* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 168. Cundall believes that the father's offer indicated the obvious belief that he had acted too quickly in giving his daughter to another.

¹¹ Othniel Margalith, "Samson's Foxes" in *Vetus Testamentum* 35 No 2 April 1985, pp. 225.

¹² Stanislav Segert, "Paronomasia in the Samson Narrative in Judges 13-16" *Vetus testamentum* 34 no 4 O 1984, p 454-461. He writes: "The etymology of the geographical name *lehi* (Judges xv 9, 14, 19) is explained by the jawbone of an ass which Samson used as his weapon, in Judges xv 16. While it can be supposed that this name was older than the story of Samson, it may possibly be related to the physical shape of a locality, which was similar to a jawbone. In such a manner the geographical name *sela* (Josh. xviii 28) originated from the word for "rib" (Koehler, p. 805ab)."

¹³ Leon Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), 317.

¹⁴ Wood, 338. Footnote 29.

¹⁵ J Cheryl Exum, "The Theological Dimension Of The Samson Saga" in *Vetus testamentum* 33 no 1 Ja 1983, p 37. She writes: "At numerous places in Judges xiii-xvi, the narrator reveals to the audience information of which the characters are not aware. In particular, narrator and listener share the insight that Yahweh is working behind the scenes to achieve a purpose. It is first and foremost the notices about Yahweh's role in the events which permit the listeners to participate in this secret."

This points stand in contrast to the view generally held by commentators that focus on Samson's failure.

Exum writes at the beginning of the paper, "Theological interpretation of the Samson Saga, Judges xiii-xvi, has posed a thorny problem for many exegetes. The strange combination of rowdy adventure stories and theological considerations which we meet in these chapters may be accounted for, at least in part, by recourse to theories about the growth of the tradition. Indeed, one may speak of a consensus among both the early source critics and later form critics that the theological dimension represents a later reflection upon the worldly exploits of the folk hero Samson. But serious inquiry into the theology of the saga can-not content itself with investigation of its tradition history, and the question must be posed of the present form of the saga: what theological message does it seek to convey?"

The message of the saga is frequently characterized in negative terms: Samson squanders his God-given powers and thus provides an example of how a charismatic should not behave."

Exum then goes on to show that the narrative is as much about God's faithfulness as it is Samson's unfaithfulness.