

**SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT**

**JUDG. 15:9** Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah and spread themselves in Lehi.

**10 And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us.** 11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

**12 And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.**

13 And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

**14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily**

**upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.** 15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

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

17 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

**18 And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?**

19 But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

**20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.**

# Samson Against the Philistines

Lesson Text: Judges 15:9-20

Related Scriptures: Judges 14:1-15:8; Psalm 118:10-14;  
Judges 3:31; Isaiah 41:17-20

TIME: around 1068 B.C

PLACE: Timnah; near Lehi

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—“The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation” (Psalm 118:14).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

Most people are familiar with Samson, the strong man of the Bible. In spite of some serious character flaws, Samson was nevertheless used by God. Since five chapters of Judges are devoted to Samson, we know more about him than the other judges. His is, in fact, a “cradle to the grave” story. That being so, we know about his failures as well as his successes.

### **SAMSON’S PLEA FOR LIFE—Judg. 15:9-13**

**Attack (Judg. 15:9).** At the beginning of the account in Judges concerning Samson, we learn that the Lord delivered Israel into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. Just as before, this was because “Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord” (13:1); but God had not forgotten His people. The Angel of the Lord appeared to a barren woman and told her she would bear a son (vs. 3). Moreover, this child was to be a Nazarite from birth. He would “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (vs. 5). That deliverance would not be complete until the time of David. The child was given

the name “Samson” (13:24), which perhaps means “sun” or “sunshine,” and God’s Spirit began to work in his life. In Judges, we see the Spirit coming upon select individuals to enable them to deliver Israel. For the most part, the judges were military leaders; in Samson’s case, he was more of a one-man army. By the time we get to this week’s lesson text, Samson had already married a Philistine woman, who was coerced into revealing the answer to a riddle Samson told at their wedding feast. This resulted in Samson seemingly abandoning his new bride, who was then given to his best man (Judg. 14). Because Samson burned the standing grain of the Philistines, they murdered Samson’s wife and father-in-law (15:1-8). Because of this, Samson brought about “great slaughter” upon the Philistines. It was sometime after this that the Philistines invaded the territory of Judah and raided Lehi (15:9), which means “jawbone” and was so named because of events that were yet to occur in the narrative. One commentator referred to this incident as a “punitive raid upon the

Judahite city of Lehi in order to force the extradition of Samson from the subjugated Israelites” (Allen, ed., *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Broadman).

**Approach (Judg. 15:10-11).**

Apparently, Judah had accepted the fact that the Philistines were their overlords. When they asked the Philistines why they had invaded their territory, the Philistines said it was because of the recent activities of Samson. Hence, they wanted to capture Samson and punish him for destroying their crops. That three thousand men of Judah approached Samson indicates that they both feared and respected him. Their goal was to hand him over to the Philistines so they could avoid any consequences that might come upon them for harboring him. The “top of the rock Etam” (Judg. 15:8) was not far from Samson’s birthplace and may have been chosen by Samson because of its strategic location. From there Samson could not only view potential attackers but also defend himself against them. The Hebrew word for “top” can also be translated “cleft,” or “cave.” Realizing that they were going to bear the brunt of the Philistines’ wrath if he was not captured, the men of Judah came to Samson, asking him why he had put them in this situation. Samson answered by pointing out that he only did to the Philistines what they had done to him.

**Assurance (Judg. 15:12-13).** Making clear their intentions, the men of Judah stated that they had come to Samson

for the purpose of binding him and delivering him to the Philistines. No wonder they brought three thousand men with them! Samson did not want to fight his fellow Israelites or cause them further trouble. He did, however, make his countrymen assure him that if he allowed them to take him, they would not kill him. This he made them swear to, binding them under a divine oath to keep their word. The men of Judah bound Samson with two new, obviously strong, ropes, and brought him to where the Philistines were encamped.

**SAMSON’S POWER ON DISPLAY—  
Judg. 15:14-17**

**Spirit-empowered (Judg. 15:14-15).**

When the Philistines saw that Samson was delivered into their hands, they raised a great shout because they had now captured their archenemy. Their victory cry, however, was premature. That they had Samson in their clutches did not mean they were out of danger. The shouts of the Philistines were met with God’s answer: “The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon [Samson]” (Judg. 15:14). In this case, the Spirit gave Samson supernatural strength, enabling him to break the new ropes as if they were burned flax. The bonds holding him just melted away, which is what the Hebrew term for “loosed” literally means. With his hands free, Samson quickly seized the fresh jawbone of a donkey. An old jawbone would likely have been quite brittle and not as effective. Wielding this unusual weapon, Samson was able to slay a thousand of his adversaries in short order. Under normal circumstances, no man with such a weapon could ever

hope to kill a thousand men. Enabled by divine power, Samson was able to accomplish this feat.

**Success enabled (Judg. 15:16-17).**

Being something of a poet, Samson affirmed his victory in poetic language in verse 16. The reference to “heaps upon heaps” refers to the dead bodies of the slain piled up after Samson’s victory. Interestingly, though, the Hebrew word “heaps” is almost identical to the word for “donkeys.” Samson may have been making a play on words, saying that he had made donkeys of the Philistines. After making his victory speech, Samson cast aside his makeshift weapon of mass destruction. Because of the momentous events that occurred in this place, he named it “Ramath-lehi,” which could be rendered “jawbone hill.”

**SAMSON’S PRAYER FOR WATER—  
Judg. 15:18-20**

**Request (Judg. 15:18).** One can imagine that after such a battle Samson would be extremely thirsty. There was apparently no well or stream nearby, so Samson called upon the Lord to meet his immediate need. To be sure, calling upon God to meet our needs, physical or otherwise, is the proper thing to do, and He has promised to take care of us (Matt. 6:33). In the case of Samson, though, he seems to have been inordinately consumed with his own needs. To his credit, Samson acknowledged that the victory given him was from the Lord. It was indeed a “great deliverance” (Judg. 15:18). Also to his credit is the fact that he referred to himself as God’s servant. It is unlikely

that Samson actually was at the point of death because of thirst. Rather, he wanted the Lord to take pity on him, which He did.

**Response (Judg. 15:19-20).** As He had done for His people on other occasions, God miraculously provided water for Samson. That He “clave an hollow place” simply means that God opened up a place from which water flowed. Since “jaw” was also the name of the place (Lehi), this could just mean that this miracle occurred there. Others, however, believe that the water came forth from the very place Samson had cast aside the jawbone. Having received the life-giving water, Samson’s “spirit came again, and he revived” (Judg. 15:19). While we can all identify with the value of water reviving our physical strength, the reference to his “spirit” is not quite as clear, as this Hebrew word can also be translated “wind” or “breath.” Such a battle would have rendered Samson out of breath. As something of a summary statement, Samson is said to have “judged Israel ... twenty years” (vs. 20). Since the word “judged” is used in this book differently than we use it today, we should not read into it any kind of court scene, although Deborah, for one, did function in this manner (4:4-5). If anything, the judges were the agents of God’s judgment. While some suggest the word “led” might be better than “judged,” there is probably no contemporary word that can completely describe the role of the judge at this time in Israel’s history.

## QUESTIONS

1. What do we know about Samson prior to Judges 15:9?
2. Why did the Philistines invade Judah at this time?
3. What did the men of Judah want to do with Samson?
4. What did Samson make his fellow Israelites promise?
5. How did the Philistines respond when they saw Samson being brought to them?
6. What happened when God's Spirit came upon Samson?
7. What weapon did Samson use to battle the Philistines?
8. How might "heaps upon heaps" (Judg. 15:16) be a play on words?
9. What did Samson pray for after the battle?
10. How long did Samson judge Israel?

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The righteous should never submit to the world's evil desires (Judg. 15:9-10).
2. It is important to do everything you can to keep peace within the body of Christ (Judg. 15:11-12; cf. Rom. 12:18).
3. The blood of Jesus has broken the chains of sin Satan used to control our lives (Judg. 15:13-14).
4. We should give the Lord credit for everything He strengthens us to do (vss. 15-16).
5. The Lord will meet the needs of those He has called for His purpose (vss. 17-18).

6. Jesus provides believers with living water (vss. 19-20).

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How is the strength of Christ realized in a believer's time of testing (Judg. 15:14)?
2. How is it possible for one believer empowered by God to be able to do battle against dark forces and not be defeated (vss. 15-16)?
3. Why should the righteous desire the power of the Spirit above superhuman strength (cf. Zech. 4:6)?
4. Why would God empower Samson to be a judge, knowing that he was going to have a problem living in holiness (Judg. 15:20)?
5. What happens to believers who willfully disobey God's Word? How does God use weak human vessels for His glory?

## *Golden Text Illuminated*

**“The Lord is my strength and song,  
and is become my salvation” (Psalm  
118:14).**

Our golden text for this week is not taken from the lesson text, but it is relevant. Samson was the epitome of one whose strength literally came from the Spirit of God, although he came up on the short end when we look at strength of character, especially in terms of self-control. But let us turn from Samson and his dubious character to our actual golden text and its context. Although it mentions strength from the Lord, physical strength and prowess are the least relevant kinds of strength referred to here. The strength being extolled by the psalmist is that of

spiritual courage and faithfulness to the service of Almighty God. The song referred to has nothing to do with riddles about lions and honeycombs designed to trick one’s enemies out of their riches, as in Samson’s case. Rather, it is a spiritual song that extols the Lord and His divine attributes: His perfect love and goodness, His gracious generosity and forgiveness, and His incomparable grace and salvation, especially in the sacrifice of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, for our sins. For Christians, this is the rightful application of our golden text for this week. The Lord is our strength when we are at our weakest and most helpless, and we reach out to Him with fervent prayers. Why can we sing to the Lord? Because He alone has become our salvation!

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