

Judges Chapter 15 Part 1

On the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He (Jesus) explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Last week, I said to follow the vocabulary. This week, we will follow some vocabulary words that seem to link the narratives of Gideon and Samson. Indeed, some of these words are found only in those two narratives, as far as the book of Judges is concerned. In some cases, words are used other places in the book of Judges, but they are concentrated in these two narratives. A question that must be asked is why would the author want to link these two narratives? How does our understanding of the Gideon narrative help us better understand the Samson narrative?

1. The Angel of the Lord interacts with Gideon and Samson's parents.

In the book of Judges, no other judges interacted with the Angel of the Lord, only Gideon and Samson's parents. The only other mentions of the Angel of the Lord are in chapter 2 and chapter 5. Those provide information as detailed by the author, but no interaction.

Chapter 2 includes the pronouncement from the Angel of the Lord that He will not break His covenant with Israel but that He will not drive out all the indigenous inhabitants of the land. There is no extended narrative of any interaction with people.

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Chapter 5 is the Song of Deborah which alludes to a curse by the Angel of the Lord on the inhabitants of Meroz for not helping the Israelites in their battles. This description is just part of the Song of Deborah. There is no extended narrative of any interaction with people.

On the other hand, look at the mentions of the Angel of the Lord in chapters 6 and 13:

Gideon - Judges 6:11, 12, 20, 21 (x2), 22(x2)

Samson - Judges 13: 3, 6, 9, 13, 15, 16 (x2), 17, 18, 20, 21 (x2)

If we follow those mentions (follow the vocabulary), there are some strong links apparent between Gideon and Samson's parents which impact Samson.

Dr. Rene Lopez, who has taught at several seminaries including DTS, said "The construction "angel of the Lord" appears more times in Judges than any other book in the Hebrew Scripture..." (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26423961>). The Angel of the Lord is the pre-Incarnate Christ. He is visible and appears as a man, interacting with people in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, He becomes the Incarnate Jesus Christ, our Savior. And we see here that those mentions of the Angel of the Lord are concentrated in two chapters. An obvious question arises in our observation: Are these mentions indicative of some links between these two narratives? The answer is yes. Another question naturally arises from this answer: Why? Look at these links first. Then we will attempt an answer based upon what we observe.

2. The Angel of the Lord tasks both Gideon and Samson with a mission to deliver Israel.

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Gideon: Judges 6:14 The Lord looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midianites. Have I not sent you?”

Samson: Judges 13:5 “For behold you shall conceive and give birth to a son and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”

Here is perhaps the most important aspect of the Angel of the Lord’s appearances. He came to personally task two people with delivering Israel. In one case, this leads to a military expedition to defeat the enemy. In the other case, the individual uses unconventional warfare to kill the enemy, even if he was not actually on board with the Lord’s plan. He didn’t lead an army. He was not a mighty warrior skilled in the use of a sword. If Samson’s encounter with a lion is any indication, he may not have even traveled with a sword.

The more I read about Samson, there are two things that strike me as important to consider:

First, Samson had to know that he had a mission from God (reminds me of the Blues Brother on “a mission from God”). Except, this one actually is from God. Remember, as a “Nazirite” Samson was not supposed to eat grapes in any form. This would have led Samson as a child to ask “Why can’t I have any grapes with my breakfast?” His parents would have to explain that he was dedicated to God for a specific mission.

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Second, another thought crossed my mind. It often appears that Samson is going in the opposite direction that God wants Samson to go. Samson violated the Nazirite restrictions if not by being by a dead lion, then certainly after killing Philistines and stripping them of their clothes and other belongings. Perhaps he was a “forerunner” to Jonah, running away from God’s plan for his life.

Jonah 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,

Jonah 1:2 “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

In both cases, Samson and Jonah, God put them into a situation where He can use them to accomplish His work on earth, whether they want to cooperate or not.

Other judges obviously had tasking from God. In the case of Barak, it came through Deborah. Others are never said to receive this tasking directly from the Angel of the Lord. Yet, some how they knew what needed to be done.

And there is a link even if it is a contrast between Gideon and Samson. Gideon was obviously ignorant of key portions of the Torah. He was not very familiar with Yahweh, the God of the covenant under which he was supposed to live. Samson, on the other hand, seemed to disregard the Torah and live like any other Israelite of his time, “doing what was right in his own eyes.” If we were to go back and look at each judge and his relationship with Torah, we might find that each one had a unique perspective.

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Each believer has a mission from God. We have our tasking from God, as a Christian. Each one of us has a specialized tailored mission based upon our spiritual gifts received at the point of salvation.

3. Goat Offering

The word for young goat in the book of Judges is found only in the Gideon and Samson narratives. Follow the vocabulary.

Gideon offered his visitor, the Angel of the Lord, a meal of a young goat. The Angel of the Lord put fire on it as if it was a burnt offering.

Manoah, Samson's father, offered his visitor, the Angel of the Lord, a meal of a young goat. The Angel of the Lord said He wouldn't eat it but to offer it as a burnt offering.

Samson tore the lion apart as one might tear a young goat (kid). This was a comment by the author. He had a choice of words he could use. But he chose this word. He emphasized this word. He also uses a word employed to explain how to prepare a bird for the burnt offering (tear).

Leviticus 1:14 'But if his offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering from the turtledoves or from young pigeons.

Leviticus 1:15 The priest shall bring it to the altar, and wring off its head and offer it up in smoke on the altar; and its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar.

Leviticus 1:16 He shall also take away its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar eastward, to the place of the ashes.

Leviticus 1:17 Then he shall tear it by its wings, but shall not sever it. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the wood which is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord.

Gideon would later take a young goat to his wife. The assumption is that it would be prepared for a meal. Like the encounters with the Angel of the Lord, it was not eaten as a meal. Subsequently, his wife and her father are set on fire. The goats are never eaten. Two of them are burned as offerings to God, burnt offerings. The mention of tearing the lion in pieces like a young goat is language similar to preparing it for a burnt offering.

4. Judges Deliver Based Upon Strength

The Angel of the Lords tasks Gideon to deliver Israel. But He chose His words carefully to include the word for strength.

Judges 6:14 The Lord looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midianites. Have I not sent you.”

It was the Angel of the Lord that chose those words. At first glance, this word seems out of place. This appears to refer to Gideon’s understanding that God brought Israel out of Egypt with miracles but now the Lord “abandoned” Israel. In reality, it was Israel that

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abandoned God. (Judges 6:13) So the Angel of the Lord was not referring to Gideon's physical strength but his thoughts that pointed God as in charge of history.

But when we come to Samson, strength is referring to his physical strength. This word is all through chapter 16: 16:5, 6, 9, 15, 17, 19 30. Repetition is one way to emphasize something. Samson comes to realize that his strength truly comes from God. God is in charge of history. But he doesn't fully understand this until moments before his death. Yet, in his death, he accomplishes his God-given task.

In chapter 6 this word gets our attention because it seems out of place. In chapter 16 it is repeated so many times that we equate strength to Samson's hair. But if we are reading this narrative carefully, we know it is God the Holy Spirit that empowers Samson.

5. Destroy Pagan Worship Site

Gideon destroyed the Pagan worship site located at his father's estate.

Judges 6:25 Now on the same night the Lord said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it;

Judges 6:26 and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down."

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Judges 6:27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

Judges 6:28 When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built.

Judges 6:29 They said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing."

Judges 6:30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it."

At the very end of Samson's life, he pulled down the temple of Dagon, one of the Philistine gods.

Judges 16:29 Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left.

Judges 16:30 And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it.

6. Who Did This Question

As we saw in the quotes from the last point, when Gideon tore down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah, the men of the city asked “Who did this thing?” The men of the city wanted Gideon to die for what he did.

When Samson destroyed the Philistine crops, vineyards and olive groves with fire, the Philistines asked, “Who did this?”

Judges 15:5 When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves.

Judges 15:6 Then the Philistines said, “Who did this?” And they said, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion.” So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

The Philistines wanted to kill Samson. Eventually he does die.

7. Torches Used to Destroy the Enemy

Gideon used 300 torches to trick the enemy into believing there was a vast Israelite army ready to descend upon them. It is likely that at

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some point, the 300 men descended upon the enemy camp and struck it with fire, fire from their torches.

Samson used 150 torches tied to the tails of 300 foxes to burn up the agricultural land of the Philistines.

In some military campaigns, it is a goal to destroy the economy of the opposing force. Some say that is what NATO is doing now against Russia. Here is a perspective on this from the Brookings Institute. It was published March 2, 2022.

“Although the war just began last week, this much is clear: It is being fought on parallel military and economic battlefields. Russia is far stronger militarily than economically — hence President Vladimir Putin’s decision to rely on traditional military measures that plays to his nation’s strength. The West’s decision to respond economically follows the strategy of attacking your opponent’s weakness while acknowledging that political and military reality makes a kinetic war between NATO or some of its members and Russia impossible now. The result is a sometimes bewildering volley of military and economic attacks taking place on the streets of Ukraine and in Russian and global markets.” Economic warfare is hurting Russia. But it’s risky for the US, too.” (<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/economic-warfare-is-hurting-russia-but-its-risky-for-the-us-too/>)

This quote provides an illustration of economic warfare from current events.

The point is that Samson was involved in a warfare against the Philistines whether he was in full agreement with God or not. The impact of his warfare was not just in killing Philistine men but also destroying the economy of at least one area of Philistia.

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It was this word for “torch” which got me to comparing words between the Gideon and Samson narratives. Once I started following the vocabulary, there appeared to be several links.

8. The Number “300” is repeated in both narratives.

Gideon was forced by God to use only 300 men as a diversionary tactic to fool the enemy into thinking there were 300 military units.

Samson used 300 foxes as a force multiplier to do his dirty work in attacking the Philistine agriculture.

9. Judges’ families involved in narrative

This point eluded me initially. But these are the only two narratives in which the family of the judge is actively involved in the narrative. I did not include Abimelech in my considerations since he was not a judge.

10. Judges faced opposition from the sons of Israel

Gideon faced opposition from two cities. They refused to support his military campaign.

Judges 8:4 Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, weary yet pursuing.

Judges 8:5 He said to the men of Succoth, “Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.”

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Judges 8:6 The leaders of Succoth said, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army?”

Samson faced opposition of a more active kind. They “colluded” with the enemy to capture him and then turn him over to them.

Judges 15:11 Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?” And he said to them, “As they did to me, so I have done to them.”

Judges 15:12 They said to him, “We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.” And Samson said to them, “Swear to me that you will not kill me.”

Judges 15:13 So they said to him, “No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill you.” Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

So what is the point of these links between the Gideon and Samson narratives? Although the Samson narrative does not overtly say that Samson was involved in a military conflict, he was. When I talked about the three women in Samson’s life, I suggested three attacks by Samson:

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1) Economic Attack, 2) Troop Attack, against men who could potentially be in the army and 3) Religious Attack. By linking these we see that Samson was a judge like Gideon but under different circumstances. As a result God used Samson to “adapt and overcome.” Like Gideon, Samson began to deliver Israel. He set the stage for Samuel, Saul and David who would deliver Israel from the Philistines.

There are perhaps another type of link we might consider. These judges were “deliverers” from enemies of Israel. The word for “deliverer” can also be translated as “savior.” So do these links between two judges suggest some perspectives we might check out in Jesus’ life?

Jesus was the incarnate Christ. As such, instead of visiting his mother, an angel was sent to announce her unique pregnancy. This angel identified the mission of Jesus. Although there was no goat offering by Jesus’ family, it is understood that Jesus’ work on the cross was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrifices including the burnt offering. Although Jesus was not a “strong man” like Samson, He obviously was strong through empowerment of the Holy Spirit. He performed many healings and miracles. And, in the Mount of Olives garden, he just responded to the question of the Roman guard that came to arrest Him and they all fell down (John 18:6). Although Jesus did not physically destroy a pagan temple, in John chapter 5, he heals a man who had been waiting to be healed at a pagan “healing site.” In John chapter 5 again, the lame man that was healed was asked who had told him to pick up his pallet/bed and walk. All through the book of John, the Jews were asking, who is this man, who is He? So in John 5:18, “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him...” Again in the Gospel of John, when Jesus was in the Garden prior to His arrest, the arresting soldiers had “lanterns and torches and weapons.” So, Jesus was not using torches against them, they were using them against Him. He did attack them economically by overturning the money changers tables. Commercial

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activity that should have been conducted outside the temple had been brought inside. Jesus drove them out. There is no “300” in the Jesus narratives. Gideon had been limited to 300 men. Jesus was limited to “the 12”. Early on we saw Joseph and Mary involved in the narrative. And finally, there was definitely Israelite opposition to Jesus. There is another link I have not mentioned: the Holy Spirit. Both Gideon and Samson received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. They were two of four judges to receive the Holy Spirit. Of course, we know that Jesus had the Holy Spirit. There are many instances in which Jesus was led, guided or “impelled” by the Holy Spirit per the text.

OK, let’s see if we can at least review the first two verses of chapter 15 this week.

Judges 15:1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, “I will go in to my wife in her room.” But her father did not let him enter.

In the time of the wheat harvest. Interesting that the author gives us the time of the year in agricultural terms. This gives us a reference when Samson destroys the crops. It was harvest time. The fields are ready to be harvested. Without the harvest, the economy will be impacted. Per Thomas Constable, “Wheat harvest took place in late May or early June in this part of Palestine.”

I will go in to my wife. Here Samson is going to consummate the wedding. After all it is his wife. Or so he thought.

Her father did not let him enter. Could be translated would not permit (as the Young’s Literal translation). But this word is our friend, *natan*, to give. It can also mean to permit. Maybe I’ll have to go back and look at all the uses of this word in this narrative. By my count it is used once in

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chapter 13, four times in chapter 14, six times in chapter 15 and three times in chapter 16.

Here is a helpful comment from Robby Dean concerning Samson's marriage to the Philistine woman:

“Apparently Samson had the idea that this was more of a concubine marriage. The difference between a regular marriage and a concubine marriage was that a regular marriage you moved in together and set up a home and began a family. In a concubine marriage it had a legal status, it was not like a prostitute or a mistress, but not on the same level of a wife. The man didn't live with the concubine, we saw that with Gideon, but she was legally the man's.”

We are dealing with a culture that was very different from ours. As a result, there are some nuances we will miss.

A young goat. Is he offering her family a gift or was this something different. No clarification is given. The original audience would probably have had a better insight. But do take note that within the Samson narrative a goat has already been mentioned.

Judges 15:2 Her father said, “I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead.”

The Philistine father interpreted Samson's actions as tantamount to abandonment. The text suggests that Samson has not consummated the marriage.

Her father said I really thought. Here we have the start of another infinitive absolute double whammy. “Said” is from the root that means to

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say. It is a very common word used throughout narratives. But then the same root word is used in the infinitive absolute followed by the verb from the same root. In common speech today, he might have used some profanity to emphasize he really really thought this.

You hated her intensely. The second half of the infinitive absolute double whammy. This is the infinitive absolute of hate followed by the verb to hate, same root. The father broke the marriage contract single-handedly without consulting Samson. He has to point his finger at someone other than himself. “It wasn’t my fault. The way you acted, you obviously had abandoned your wife. To prevent her from being embarrassed I had to do something.” So he is the one who is talking intensely.

Samson walked away in anger having been tricked by his wife. From his perspective she had been unfaithful. From her father’s perspective, Samson had been unfaithful. He should have taken his wife back to his house, taking note however of the possibility that she was a concubine. Except he didn’t seem to have a house, only his father’s house. Now Samson thinks he has been cheated. Again!

Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead. The father has to make things right. He is no doubt familiar with what happened when Philistines cheated Samson on the riddle. Now he is trying to talk himself out of Samson’s destructive wrath. That he does. But he didn’t bargain on the Philistine wrath.

Bad things will happen again. When Samson has been cheated, he destroys things. And so do the Philistines!