

Why did Samson wish to harm the Philistines?

Obviously he had a personal reason for doing so (15:1-3), as he did later in 16:28 as well. Yet, the Lord was working in the situation in order to use Samson to free Judah from the Philistines (14:4). So Samson's burning of the wheat fields, vineyards, and olive groves using the foxes / jackals was not just personal revenge.

Did Samson use foxes or jackals?

It could have been either, or perhaps he even caught and used both. Red foxes and golden jackals are both common in Israel, though the jackals were probably more abundant. Also since jackals form packs, it may have been easier to catch a large number of jackals at one time. On the other hand, foxes run faster, and their long tails are closer to the ground.

In either case, individual animals may or may not have been killed in the fires that they helped spread. The torches would have gone out after a while, and Samson did not directly set their tails on fire.

Why did Samson use so many animals?

The obvious reason was in order to multiply his ability to set the Philistines' fields on fire. The military term for this is *force multiplication*. In addition, it was probably because there were many foxes or jackets in the area to catch. Thus, he used what was available. Later he did so again with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15-16).

In addition, reducing the number of foxes and / or jackals may have been necessary because of overpopulation or disease.

Why did Samson act alone?

The men of Judah were afraid to stand against the much stronger Philistines (15:11-12). So God had raised up Samson to be a special deliverer who would be able to free his people even without the aid of an army. This was significantly different from the other judges. So the life of Samson shows positively that God uses individuals and negatively that teamwork is not the most important thing in the world. Earlier as well, with Gideon's 300, the Lord showed that the victory did not come because of the combined strength of an army (7:2). In Samson's one-man war against the Philistines, this is even more clear.

Why did Samson tie two foxes / jackals together?

We do not know, but perhaps it was in order to ensure that the pair of animals would run in an erratic pattern. An individual fox or jackal would have been more likely to run away in a straight line, but two tied together would to some extent have tried to go in different directions. From Samson's perspective, this chaos would have had a good effect.

What are the applications?

Two readily come to mind. First, even if you or I seem to be alone and totally without allies, we should not give up. Elijah who is in the next study also did much for the Lord despite often being alone. Second, we should use the various spiritual, physical, financial, and technological means that God has supplied to each of us as force multipliers rather than spending all our time looking for additional human help. Individual believers are not helpless!