



WHEN REVENGE STARTS SWEET & TURNS SOUR

JUDGES 15

Judges 15:3-9: Samson said to them, "This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them." 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, 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. 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. Samson said to them, "Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you." He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

In college, I lived with three of my close friends. I think we pretty much fit into the four personality types so it kept things interesting. It was a blessing to always have someone push me to be sporadic, lighten up and have fun. But fun can be dangerous sometimes, at least with my friend Janna around. It turns out that sliding down the stairs on a banana chair can put holes in the wall and practical jokes can

easily get out of hand. For example, someone once put an ice cream cone on our friend's car and our friend thought it was us. So he and his friends retaliated by putting mustard on our cars! Not knowing about the ice cream cone we thought they just started a practical joke so we stringed their house, put crumbs in their beds, and cat food in their bathtub and then filled it with water. Who knew it would get really disgusting and smell really bad? Whoops. Well, the retaliation continued until things got so out of hand the cops were called. But Samson and the Philistines take retaliation to a whole other level, destroying their livelihood of grain. Wow. Samson seems like an impulsive jerk. Can I say that about a dead guy who God used to shape history? Well, I guess He uses a lot of people, like Pharaoh, so that doesn't mean we have to agree with them and think they're the greatest person ever to live. I am totally for defending the oppressed and doing what's right, no matter the cost, but Samson seems to care only about his own pleasure and what he's feeling at the moment. It doesn't seem to me that he is defending his wife or the fact that he was treated unjustly. He's just emotionally impulsive. (Not that I can understand that at all.)

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On another note, isn't it ironic that the very thing Samson's wife was trying to avoid—her family being killed—was the thing that actually ended up happening? Not only to her dad but also to her. She tried to navigate her problem independently without communicating with Samson or her family. Likewise, when we do things by our own independent effort it's the very thing we try to avoid that we end up doing. It's like trying to give up something for a fast or a diet in our own strength. **The Law is there to show us we need Jesus. It's there to point us to the fact that we can't do what we want to do apart from the Spirit of Christ.** When we try to live the Christian life independently it's bad news. We aren't created to live in isolation. We are created to be dependent on God and dependent on others, which is a beautiful thing. So rather than pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and trying harder next time, **we need to cling to Jesus, depend on the Holy Spirit and**

seek out other believers who will walk through it with us.

So what's our glimpse of glory? That we will one day see Jesus reveal Himself as the Lord of Hosts. He won't stand for injustice any longer and will come with a sword to take possession of the earth as the Kinsman Redeemer.

In Israel's greatest hour of need the Lord of Sabaoth will return and wage war and rescue His covenant people Israel for all eternity (see Zechariah 13:8,9). Believers today must remember that this is the same Name that all in covenant with Him can run to, crying out in their hour of need, when all hope seems to be lost and defeat appears inevitable. May we all learn to cry out to our Warrior, the Lord of hosts, for the battle is His.¹

Open it?

1. When have you done something without thinking through the ramifications of your actions? Looking back was this pursuit worth the cost that was paid?



2. What emotion has a way of getting away from you? What is it about this emotion that has this effect on you? What happens when this takes place?

READ IT: JUDGES 15 - Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

EXPLORE IT

1. According to Judges 14:19-20 what events transpire that cause Samson problems in chapter 15?
2. What does Samson's father in law do when Samson comes to take his daughter? Why does he do this?
3. In what odd way does Samson pursue revenge in verses 4-5?
4. What was the response of Samson's fellow Israelites to the actions of Samson in verses 10-13?
5. During the battle what was Samson's weapon of choice and what were the results?
6. According to verse 20 what came as a result of this amazing victory?

GET IT

In Shakespeare's Hamlet the lead character says "Give me that man who is not passion's slave." Samson was a man designed for great exploits but with a legacy of uncontrollable lust and savage fits of temper. (Jas 1:20) What paradox - great physical strength but just as great inner weakness. The paradoxes culminate at the end of his life: the deliverer is delivered to his enemies, God's chosen scourge is beaten and blinded, the practical joker becomes a joke for reveling Philistines and finally the dying Samson kills more Philistines than the living one!²

1. Chapter 15 opens by continuing the story of the preceding chapter. Samson has just sought revenge against the 30 men who cheated and beat Samson at his riddle only to find out his wife whom he left at the altar had been given to the best man. What causes anger? When might our anger honor God and what things cause us to sin when we are angry?



2. Why is revenge such a fitting companion to the emotion of anger? Why do we think that revenge or retribution is the cure for the anger that ails us? Does revenge deal properly with our issue of anger?

The passion to get even seemed to govern Samson's life. His motto was, "As they did unto me, so have I done unto them" (15:11). Certainly as the defender of Israel, Samson's calling was to defeat the enemy; but you long to see him fighting "the battles of the Lord" and not just his own private wars. When David faced the Philistines he saw them as the enemies of the Lord and sought to honor the name of the Lord in his victory (1 Sa 17). Samson's attitude was different.

As Christians, we need to beware of hiding selfish motives under the cloak of religious zeal and calling it righteous indignation. Personal vengeance and private gain rather than the glory of the Lord has motivated more than one "crusader" in the church. What some people think is godly zeal may actually be ungodly anger, fed by pride and motivated by selfishness. There is a godly anger that we should experience when we see wickedness prosper and defenseless people hurt (Ep 4:26) but there's a very fine line between righteous indignation and a religious temper tantrum.³

3. We have three options when it comes to times of anger. We can express it, suppress it or confess it. Which is your default response? How can you move to be one who confesses anger when it comes?

Anger is not always sin. There is a type of anger of which the Bible approves, often called righteous indignation. God is angry (Psalm 7:11; Mark 3:5), and believers are commanded to be angry (Ephesians 4:26). Two Greek words in the New Testament are translated as "anger." One means "passion, energy" and the other means "agitated, boiling." Biblically, anger is God-given energy intended to help us solve problems. Examples of biblical anger include David's being

upset over hearing Nathan the prophet sharing an injustice (2 Samuel 12) and Jesus' anger over how some of the Jews had defiled worship at God's temple in Jerusalem (John 2:13-18). Notice that neither of these examples of anger involved self-defense but a defense of others or of a principle.⁴

4. When have you experienced righteous anger? What must we be careful not to allow even when our anger comes from the right place?

5. Why is it easier to become angry over personal offenses and not the things that anger God?

6. What does James 1:19-27 tell us to do no matter the offense or frustrations? What does living out this portion of scripture look like for you? Be specific.

Despite Samson's capacity to defeat the Philistines, the people did not rally around him. On the contrary, they protested his behavior and reminded him that the Philistines were their rulers. When the men of Judah learned that the Philistines wanted only to capture and bind Samson, they offered to help. Apparently they were content to be subjugated to the Philistines which is consistent with the introduction where we see no reference to Israel crying to the Lord for deliverance. A nation is in a sad state indeed when the citizens cooperate with the enemy and hand over their own God-appointed leader! This is the only time during Samson's judgeship that the Jews mustered an army, and it was for the purpose of capturing one of their own men! Their actions seem to demonstrate that the Israelites had accepted the domination of the Philistines and lived in constant fear of being overrun and destroyed by this dreaded enemy. Clearly the Israelites did not want to fight the Philistines but preferred a policy of "peaceful coexistence" and were greatly agitated by Samson's disturbing the peace.⁵

7. In this chapter of Judges we are given a great contrast: the blood thirsty Samson and the fearful compromising Israelites. How is the Christian to know when to fight for what they believe in and when they are to allow love to cover a multitude of sins?

Instead of this time of captivity whetting the appetite for God's deliverance, the Israelites had come to endure and even enjoy their captors' way of life and they were unwilling to upset the status quo. For many Christians the strategy of the Israelites works just as well today as it did then.

8. What things should the Christian be on guard against so as to not let the culture conform us into becoming something we are called to stand against?

9. While God may not be calling you to be a great warrior on the battlefield, what things is He calling you to do for His kingdom? Why must we keep our personal motivations and emotions out of such a calling?

Samson gloried too much in his own strength. It was in the moment of exultation that this great thirst came, from which his right arm could not save him. He was driven to plead that he might be delivered for God's glory lest the uncircumcised should rejoice. So when flushed with success we are often reminded that it is not ours but God's good gift.⁶

10. What should our response be when God allows us to be used in mighty ways? How does Samson's response to his victory start off well but end badly?

11. In what area in your life do you desire God to revive you? Seek Him humbly and ask for His provision knowing that He knows what is best for us.

¹ Krokos, Laura, A Devotional Journey through Judges

² www.preceptaustin.org

³ www.preceptaustin.org

⁴ www.gotquestions.org/anger.html

⁵ www.preceptaustin.org

⁶ Meyer, F. B., Choice Notes on Joshua Through 2 Kings