

Samson - "Violence & Vengeance" JUDGES 15:1-8
7/18/18 - Jeff Lyle

When we last left Samson, he was in the midst of painfully reaping what he foolishly sowed. Having killed 30 men of the Philistines after being betrayed by his new wife and friends, he then went home to his parents house in burning anger. What follows in Samson's life is the revelation of what happens when a person does not intentionally humble himself or herself and continues to live in anger towards those who harmed him or her. Samson moves now into an all-out assault against the Philistines. God was using Samson, but not because Samson was operating in wisdom or holiness. Samson was burning in wrath and would now begin to act in vengeance. Let us examine our own hearts to ensure that we are cutting off unresolved anger at the root. Bitterness, revenge and wrath have no place in the lives of those who have been pardoned for all our crimes against God. Our commitment to forgiveness must rule the day. For Samson, this never happened.

I. Samson's Sting of Rejection (1-2)

A. He presumed upon a pathway (1a) – "After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. And he said, "I will go in to my wife in the chamber."

Samson had walked away from his brand new marriage in utter humiliation. We are not told how many days or weeks passed between that moment and the moment he decided to go back to her. He brought a young goat (food) as a peace-offering and humbled himself to go back to the place of his most recent defeat. His anger had cooled and perhaps he understood that it was time to begin a new start with his bride.

B. He was blindsided with a refusal (1b) – "But her father would not allow him to go in. 2a And her father said, "I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion."

Few things are more troubling in our souls than when our attempts of humility and reconciliation are met with further rejection. Samson arrives in town to learn that he no longer had a wife. The woman that he had been so attracted to that he married her outside of his faith was now the wife of another man. Not only was it another man, it was the man who served as the best man in Samson's wedding. It would be difficult to imagine the level of degradation

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that hit Samson's heart in that moment. He had dealt with his anger. He had humbled himself. He had chosen the pathway of

reconciliation. In the end, Samson experienced yet another moment of humiliating rejection.

C. He was insulted with an alternative (2b) – "Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead."

Samson's father-in-law grasped how delicate the situation had become. Within the customs of that day, the man offered Samson a replacement wife – one of his other daughters. While this may have seemed like an acceptable and practical solution to the problem, Samson's heart-needs would not be met by pragmatism. He was operating once again in the dangerous cocktail of hurt and anger. This would play out in a destructive way very shortly.

II. Samson's Desire for Revenge (3-5)

A. Premeditation in the mind (3) - "And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm."

And here we go... Samson chooses the road of revenge. While we understand that God was sovereignly harnessing Samson in order to begin to break the oppression of the Philistines off of Israel, we must also recognize that Samson was likely not seeking noble, spiritual victories. He, as is displayed throughout his life up to this point, was operating in the fleshly desire to establish himself. His pride was wounded. His wife had been given to another man. His plans were wrecked. Samson then makes the conscious decision to hurt those who had hurt him. This is the nature of bitterness and vengeance. Those who live with unresolved anger or hurt will invariably live lives that bring hurt to others.

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B. Diligent work with the hands (4) – “So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails.”

Samson begins to move in the spirit of angry vengeance. He is being driven by a desire to settle the score.

C. Carnal satisfaction in the heart (5) – “And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards.”

Mark it down: a bitter and angry spirit always ends up finding expression through our behavior. For Samson, he intentionally crafted a mischievous means to provoke his enemies. He used his physical prowess to catch an enormous amount of foxes (how does one singled handedly capture 300 foxes?), and then he took the time to complete the intricate process of tying them to one another. He intentionally lit the fires and set the poor foxes running in pain into the fields and orchards of those who had hurt him previously. While you and I may not act in such ways due to unresolved anger or bitterness, we all have the potential to do so. We have our own ways of sending fire into the lives of others. We may not burn fields, but we know how to burn bridges. Samson is experiencing that awful reality of anger moving from the heart into the behavioral life. What he did not know is that much more damage would flow from this one act of vengeance that he initiated.

III. Samson’s Reaping of the Repercussions (6-8)

A. His secret activities were exposed (6) – “Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?” And they said, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.” And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.”

Once Samson’s arsonist exploits had run their course, the Philistines sought to learn who was responsible for the fires that did

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so much damage. When it was learned that Samson was the culprit, they also discerned that it was his act of revenge for the loss

of his wife and the humiliation he endured. What was their response? They murdered his former wife and her father. Samson had no clue that his act of revenge would result in the horrific deaths of those two people. The principle is this: flesh births flesh. When we act in the flesh against others who respond in the flesh, mayhem ensues. Jesus taught that the Satan is a thief who comes

to steal, kill and destroy. Nobody was happy in this scene of violence and vengeance except Satan and his demons. Samson was now a known criminal and a bounty was going to be placed on his head by the enraged Philistines.

B. His internal outrage escalated (7) - "And Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit."

Not surprisingly, Samson declared an even fuller vengeance upon the Philistines when he learned about the murders they had committed. He took a solemn oath to bring destruction to them. At this point, Samson is blind with fury and being driven by a compulsion to bring hurt to others. This behavior is completely inconsistent with the heart of God. Yet, mysteriously, God continues to use Samson to bring eventual destruction to the Philistines. We must remember that God will use deeply flawed people to accomplish His purposes but that is never meant to indicate that God approves of anyone's sinful actions. Let's remember that God is both sovereign and gracious. He will choose whom He will choose, and He will use whom He will use. In the end, each of us will still give an account for how we lived out our lives before Him.

C. His unhinged response exploded (8) – "And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam."

The passage ends with Samson fulfilling his vow to bring fuller pain to those who hurt him. Single-handedly, Samson moves in violence and vengeance and destroys many of the wicked Philistines. We

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are not told how many, but the scriptures declare that it was a "great blow". This could not have been accomplished apart from the Spirit of God empowering Samson. Again, the principle is seen that God will graciously use people even when their hearts are not

centered and their actions are not approvable. We can likely look back in our own lives and note seasons wherein God used us while we were blind to things that were not properly in line with His heart at that time. While most of our actions will never arise to the extreme of Samson's, we humbly acknowledge that God has been gracious to use us in His plans for this generation. Samson's example reminds us to gauge our hearts regularly. We need to put

to death anger and any other lurking sin in us. We must forgive others and trust God with the pains done to us. In the end, it belongs to God to ensure that the scales of justice are balanced. We cannot give ourselves to revenge.