

February 19, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Judges 15.

1. List the various ways God used Samson to punish the Philistines.
2. How do we explain God being the ultimate force behind death and destruction?
3. How do we explain God using an instrument of judgment like Samson?
4. What would you think if God were to use a nation like Iran or North Korea (who we consider to be wicked) to bring judgment on America?
5. Comparing modern America with OT Israel, would you place us on par with Israel during the judges, Israel during Samuel's leadership, Israel under Josiah, or the Philistines?

GOD WORKS EVEN WHEN HUMANS TRY TO GET EVEN Judges 15

Most of my life I have been interested in "THE WAR" also known as the War between the States. When you took American history classes in highschool, chances are you learned that the "Civil War" began when those warmongering students at the Citadel decided to have a bombing party—Fort Sumter in the Charleston Harbor being the target.

The real explanation isn't quite that simple. The short version of the story goes something like this. For about twenty years tensions between Northern legislators and Southern legislators in Washington grew to the breaking point. The conflict was centered first on tariffs the Northern states were charging for agricultural items shipped from the South, which Southern legislators considered to be unfair. Second, there was the issue of individual states having the right to decide for themselves on volatile issues like slavery. Northern legislators preferred a large centralized federal government in Washington that would determine all the laws for all the states. The Southern legislators believed it was best for each individual state to make those decisions based on their citizens' desires.

The conflict reached the breaking point when Lincoln, the presidential candidate in favor of centralized federal government, won the election. Almost immediately, the leaders of South Carolina retaliated by petitioning for secession. That decision being made, they kindly invited the president to remove his troops from Fort Sumter which they deemed to be South Carolina's property. Much debate ensued until an agreement was reached that as soon as the supplies in the fort were gone, Captain Anderson would remove the soldiers from the fort. Mr. Lincoln retaliated by sending ships with more supplies. On the agreed deadline, April 12, 1861, General P.T. Beauregard retaliated and ordered the cadets from the Citadel to open fire on the fort. And the rest is history as they say. History or not, the debate continues to rage with some people about who started the retaliation and the war.

It sounds a lot like Israel today. There is ongoing heated international debate about who really owns the land in that section of the Middle East. Jews who claim to be Abraham's children argue that Father Abraham gave them the land through Jacob and his sons. Palestinians argue just as strongly that Father Abraham gave the land to them through Ishmael. And for thousands of years the retaliation has raged. Who started it?

The story of the judges is just a small slice out of the ongoing saga of God's people trying to live in the so-called Promised Land. Where was the United Nations in those days? Couldn't they have agreed about who should rule over whom in that land? In light of the

fact that they still can't make that decision, it is doubtful they would have been any help three thousand years ago.

When the real truth is finally stated, we have to conclude that the much disputed property is God's land. His Word, the Bible, is the final authority on the matter. One day it will be abundantly clear that God the Creator owns every inch of matter in the entire universe. Therefore, He has the prerogative to govern it according to His will. To that end, much of the conflict, the vengeance, and the retaliation of humans is simply evidence of God using human weaknesses to bring about His will.

In our story, Samson made the Philistines angry and they retaliated. That made Samson angry, so he retaliated. That in turn made the Philistines angry again, and so on and so on. Actually, this kind of cycle is obvious throughout the entire three chapters (14-16) of the Samson story. In all that mess, God was working to bring about His deliverance of His people. And God is continuing to work out His will even though we are virtually dumbfounded by the foolishness that is raging about us. Instead of getting worked up about who is retaliating against whom, we must praise the Lord for controlling all things to bring about His will for His glory.

A Miracle Of Vengeance (vv.1-8).

God used Samson to burn the Philistine harvest (vv.1-5). This judgment against the Philistine oppressors all came about because Samson sought opportunity for vengeance. He sought vengeance because when he went to visit his wife things didn't turn out well. *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." But her father would not allow him to go in (v.1).*

Wheat harvest would have been the end of April through the end of May. Maybe that is a time of year when young men's hearts turn to love. Maybe. But there is no indication in this story how much time elapsed between Samson's angry departure from the wedding feast until this point. Probably it was only a few days until Samson's anger subsided and he decided he really did love the heifer who betrayed him. So one day, his father-in-law hears a knock on the

door, opens the door to see Samson standing there with a young goat in his hands. Apparently a young goat would have been equivalent to flowers or a box of chocolates today. At any rate, the father-in-law knew right away that he had a problem on his hands.

Arriving in Timnah to visit his wife, Samson learned that he had no wife. *And her father said, "I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead" (v.2).* The Philistines might have been pagan and godless, but even they had more morals than to let Samson have relations with another man's wife. But at the same time, notice that dear, old Dad had no problem offering his younger daughter to Samson for marriage.

What kind of culture values daughters as pieces of property that fathers and husbands can dispose of according to their whims? It is a culture like Sodom where Lot who tortured his righteous soul every day offered his two virgin daughters to sexual perverts (Genesis 19:8). It is a culture like the people of Benjamin, a tribe of God's people, in which a man offered his young daughter to worthless sexual perverts (Judges 19:22). In most ancient cultures, daughters were treated as the father's property and he arranged their marriages. It is the kind of culture where every man does that which is right in his own eyes. We live in that kind of culture now.

The history of the United States is rich with the practices and customs that are rooted in Christian, Bible teaching. Some of those practices include the treatment of women. The ancient practices of our forefathers up to about three generations ago, held that the man/husband was responsible for the wife's/family's well being. He went out and labored to provide for the home, while the wife managed and kept the home as a safe haven for husband and family. This was considered an exalted position, a position of honor.

But in time, the culture rejected the Bible and with it threw out the one standard of absolute truth. For three generations our institutions of higher learning have taught our young people that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Therefore, truth is whatever the individual decides it is to them. In other words, everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. In that kind of world, woman is knocked down from her pedestal of honor, thrust into the fray and competition with worthless fellows of all kinds. The amazing thing

is that this wicked condition so blinds the eyes of women that they keep thinking they are making progress as they sink lower and lower into the cesspool of human wickedness. It is as if Lot's daughters and the Benjamite's daughter think it is okay to go out and take on the worthless fellows because they can handle whatever they dish out.

God preformed a miracle for Samson to punish the oppressors of God's people. Samson planned on a very practical revenge, but it would require a miracle to pull it off. As he hatched this wonderfully terrible plan, Samson justified his vengeance. *And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm" (v.3).* Maybe even in Samson's thinking, the killing of thirty men in Ashkelon to provide thirty suits of clothes for the wedding companions might have been hard to justify. But not this time. Whatever vengeance he was about to wreak, it was justifiable retaliation in his mind.

Samson's actions were either legend or a miracle. *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 (v.4).* It really does seem humanly impossible to catch 300 foxes and tie torches between them. But maybe he had help from men of Israel who supported the deliverer who was leading Israel for twenty years. Also, we need to consider that the Hebrew word translated "foxes" is also the word for jackal. The jackal was similar to a fox but would have been much easier to catch. Even by making those concessions, this was an unusual feat.

The deliverer's practical revenge caused a lot of damage. *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 (v.5).* Philistia was the bread basket of that region. Grain was a major part of their economy. Samson's actions destroyed the grain that had been harvested but not yet stored, destroyed the standing grain that was not yet harvested, and ruined the olive orchards as well. It was gorilla warfare much like the clandestine bombings non-Muslim societies have to deal with today. Because it was an agrarian society, destruction of their harvest would be equivalent to terrorists blowing up the twin towers, a major center of finance and commerce in New York City.

The Philistines lost their harvest and in response to the loss, Samson's in-laws harvested what they sowed (vv.6-8). The Philistines destroyed the family. *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 (v.6).* At Samson's wedding party, his Philistine companions (guards), threatened to destroy his wife and her father. *On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" (Judges 14:15).* Not surprisingly, the woman crumbled under the pressure and deceived her new husband in order to escape promised destruction.

In the end, the same kind of people as those who threatened destruction leveled the same kind of destruction precisely on the woman and her father. It was all part of God's plan for judgment. This was a bit like Israel's accusation against Moses that he brought them to the wilderness to die. It is as if God said, "Okay, if that's what they wanted to do!" They all died in the wilderness (just what they feared) but their children inherited the Promised Land. But don't blame God or His servant for your stubbornness unto death. It is always better to do right by obeying what you know is God's will and let Him take care of the consequences.

Time for more retaliation. Samson destroyed Philistines. He decided that he would wreak havoc and then quit. *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" (v.7).* He planned to retaliate because the Philistines retaliated, because he retaliated, and so on. But after this act of retaliation, he would go into retirement. Really? This was an expression of a proud man who thought he was in control of the situation. He was not. Neither were the Philistines. God was in control.

Nevertheless, Samson went out and struck them with a great blow. *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 (v.8).* Was such an attack going to pass without retaliation? Up to this point Samson's relationship with the Philistines has been a ceaseless cycle of action and reaction, attack and retaliation. He gave a riddle, the Philistines

cheated to get the answer. Samson retaliated by killing thirty Philistines. His father-in-law retaliated by giving Samson's wife to another. Samson retaliated by destroying the Philistine harvest. They retaliated by destroying his wife and father-in-law. Samson retaliated by striking the Philistines with a great blow. When and where will it end? Actually, they are still going at it in Israel today.

When people reject God's truth and attempt to do what is right in their own eyes, it creates an unbearable society. The result is refugees fleeing their homes and countries only to discover that it is impossible for other cultures to absorb their huge numbers. It appears that two facts are being worked out before our eyes at this time. One is God's law of sowing and reaping. The middle eastern cultures are reaping a horrible harvest of sowing rebellion against God's truth. Two, God is working out all the details to bring humanity's reign to His desired culmination.

Having struck what he considered to be the final blow, Samson went to live in a cave somewhere in Judah, which would now bring more people into the cycle of retaliation.

A Miracle of Deliverance (vv.9-17).

How odd that the very people who God was delivering went about to betray the deliverer (vv.9-13). When the pressure came, God's people crumbled just like his wife had. *Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" They said, "We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us" (v.9-10).* This was a case of the Philistines declaring war against the people of Judah. Samson had killed many of their people and wrecked much of their economy. Now it was not retaliation against a person, but against the people of God who harbored that offending person.

When the pressure mounted, God's people desired to eliminate the source of their pressure—the deliverer God had provided for them. It sounds a lot like what God's chosen people did with the ultimate deliverer Jesus. Foolish men tried to reason with the

deliverer. *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 have I done to them" (v.11).* A large representation went to point out to the deliverer who God raised up that he was making life difficult for them. Samson explained that this was a personal thing for him. But it was no longer personal. Now the whole tribe was caught up in this cycle of retaliation. Notice the conversation: "We have come to do to him as he did to us" (v.10). "As they did to me, so have I done to them" (v.11).

The large group tried to help the deliverer understand that his actions had offended the oppressors who ruled over them. They sounded much like the Sadducees who were greatly concerned that Jesus' teaching and miracles would cause the hated Romans who ruled over them to take away their positions of authority. Or maybe they sounded like the disciples who rebuked Jesus for offending the wicked Pharisees who placed unbearable burdens on their backs. The foolish conclusion of religious leaders in Jesus' day was to get rid of the Deliverer who came to deliver them from sin.

The foolish men in Samson's day promised not to kill the deliverer who God sent them. However, they would gladly turn him over to those who would kill him. *And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves" (v.12).* Did Samson really think that these men had the power to kill him? After the foregoing evidence of his supernatural strength when God's Spirit rushed upon him? Maybe he understood that his unusual strength was up to God's timing.

The foolish men promised not to kill Samson but did say they would deliver the deliverer to the people who would kill him. *They said to him, "No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock (v.13).* On one hand, Samson seemed to fear the Jews; but on the other hand, it appears that he had faith that God would deliver him from the Philistines. So he virtually surrendered himself to be delivered to the Philistines likely believing that God would deliver him.

“What great faith” we might say. Yes, but this same man blindly walked into multiple relationships with evil women who would virtually destroy him. It is as though Samson willingly trusted God to deliver him from Philistine soldiers who could kill him but did not want to trust God to deliver him from powerful women who did destroy him. Maybe this weak faith is what God commended in Hebrews 11.

God took control of the problem (vv.14-17). We can call this incident “The Battle of Jawbone Hill.” The men of Judah turned Samson over to the Philistines who would kill him, but the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him. *When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men (vv.14-15).*

God intervened to rescue His servant and to bring more judgment on the oppressors. These kinds of situations always cause questions. One issue unbelievers struggle with is why God ordained all the killing in the Old Testament? Actually, the “killing” is not just an Old Testament thing. Consider the massive devastation that will take place at Armageddon. Consider the horrendous eternal devastation at the Great White Throne. These things are so because the wages of sin is death. Sinful people reap what they sow. It’s God’s law. God prefers that His created beings would humble themselves and bow in obedience and submission to Him. But, when they reject Him, He allows them to reap consequences of their sins—often the ultimate consequences which is death. Also, regarding the Promised Land, God made it very clear from the beginning that His will was that all vestiges of paganism should be eradicated from the land when His people inherited it. That was a long process that never was completed.

Another question might be why God used the kinds of people He used. Samson was definitely not a saint. He broke the Nazarite vow in every way imaginable. Was it not breaking his vow for him to even pick up the jawbone of a dead donkey? Nevertheless, God granted supernatural Spirit-filled strength and allowed him to kill 1,000 rebellious pagans.

That Samson was a bit arrogant is also a strike against his sainthood. Having whipped a thousand Philistines, Samson seemed to give himself too much credit for the deliverance. *And Samson said, “With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men.” As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi (vv.16-17).* He wrote a song about how “I” had won the battle. But, “I” didn’t strike down 1,000 pagans through his own strength. He named the spot, Ramath-lehi which means “Hill of a jawbone” or Jawbone Hill. We know that Samson won the battle of Jawbone Hill only because God was in control of him.

A Miracle of Provision (vv.18-20).

It is good to read that Samson called upon the LORD. It is good for us to see that the deliverer had come to the end of his rope. *And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the LORD and said, “You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” (v.18).* From superhuman strength to human weakness. It is a great reminder that God was the author of deliverance. At least it is refreshing to hear Samson call on the LORD. The special name for God *Yahweh* is found 21 times in the Samson story, which is given more space (4 chapters) than any other judge. But we find Samson calling on *Yahweh* only twice: here and at his death when he prayed for strength in order to once again gain revenge (16:28).

God’s infinite wisdom eclipses our understanding. We do not always understand why God does what He does. We do not always understand why God uses who He uses. But we can and must trust God to accomplish His will. He did as He sustained and used Samson. God provided much needed water. *And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day (v.19).* God’s provision impressed Samson so much he renamed “Jawbone Hill”

calling it “Prayer’s Spring” (Literally *spring of the one calling*). This too was a small reminder that he trusted God.

God used Samson to lead His people for twenty years. *And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years (v.20)*. Though it looks like much of Samson’s activity was self-centered, God was using it. We need to realize that we have only a very small amount of information about Samson’s work as judge.

Human nature often desires to stop the process of retaliation. How would you do that? Maybe we could break the cycle of retaliation if we worked our way back to the point when this conflict started. Okay, where did it start? Go back to the point where God’s people rejected Him to serve pagan gods again. God raised up the Philistines to oppress His people because of their sin. God birthed and raised up Samson to punish the Philistines for oppressing His people. Oh, even in the hard to understand retaliation between Samson and the Philistines, God was actually doing His will. And the endless conflicts in Israel today are still matters of God working His will, bringing all things to culmination in His time, in His chosen places, according to His plan for His glory.