

Judges 15

- Our brooding, impulsive hero, Samson, has run away from his own wedding after this bride betrayed him
 - After drinking wine (probably for the very first time), Samson let the drink go to his head and he made a foolish bet
 - He bet his wedding guests they couldn't guess the riddle he posed
 - But his guests didn't play fair
 - They pressured Samson's wife to get the answer, which she did
 - And the result was a humiliation for Samson
 - In his anger, he killed 30 Philistines, taking their clothes to repay his debt and then he storms away in anger leaving his bride at the altar
 - We understand from the text that the Lord was working behind the scenes to prevent this marriage
 - Or at the very least, the Lord wanted to prompt Samson to return to his appointed task of defeating the Philistines
 - And so Samson has begun to move in that direction
 - Still, Samson is betrothed, and since he stormed off without completing the wedding, he still feels an obligation to return
 - He probably still has feelings for the woman
 - And then there is the matter of following through on the covenant
 - In that culture, personal commitments, especially in covenants, were not to be broken
 - So Samson still has an obligation to go through with his covenant despite running away
 - Therefore, as we enter chapter 15, Samson travels back to claim the bride he abandoned

[Judg. 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.

[Judg. 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."

[Judg. 15:3](#) Samson then said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm."

- Samuel writes that Samson returned to Timnah after a while
 - We don't know how long "a while" was exactly but we have a couple of clues
 - This return happens at the time of the wheat harvest
 - Wheat is harvested in late Spring after a Winter planting
 - So this is late May or early June
 - And if we assume that Samson entered the vineyard earlier to eat grapes against his vows
 - Then that would have been in Fall since grapes are ready to eat in early Fall
 - So perhaps this is 6-8 months later
 - Samson goes to visit his wife carrying a goat
 - Every husband or boyfriend can identify with Samson's actions
 - Samson's bringing the ancient equivalent of chocolate and flowers
 - Because nothing says "I'm sorry" like a goat
 - Samson thinks to himself that he will go to his wife in her room
 - He means literally he will consummate his marriage as he was supposed to do six months or so earlier
 - Obviously, he's assuming his wife has continued to honor her commitment to the covenant just as he is now attempting to do

- Remember, the only way this woman could have exited the marriage covenant was through a divorce
- But when Samuel arrives in Timnah and tries to gain access to the woman's room, her father stops Samson from entering
 - Samson is confused for why he couldn't go into his wife, as he should have been allowed to do
 - The father begins to explain by first apologizing
 - He says I really thought you hated my daughter intensely
 - The Hebrew sentence is interesting in that there are no words for "really" and for "intensely"
 - Instead, Hebrew simply repeats the words "thought" and "hate"
 - So literally, "I thought thought you hate hate my daughter"
 - The point being the man is trying to emphasize to Samson is how surprising and convincing Samson's departure had been
 - Samson showed great disrespect to his future wife dishonoring her in probably the greatest way possible
 - So no one expected him to make good on his covenant
 - So the family did the next best thing, or so they thought
 - The father said he gave his daughter to Samson's companion
 - In a sense, it seems like dad was trying to employ some version of the levirate marriage principle
 - But in the process, he caused his daughter to commit an act of infidelity
 - She broke her covenant by marrying another
 - And she has now brought an even dishonor against Samson
 - Even the father's offer of his other (prettier) daughter doesn't change the fact that Samson's bride was stolen and his covenant broken
- Once again, Samson is angry and moved to taking revenge
 - Interestingly, he remarks that when he takes revenge against the Philistines this time, he will be justified in his actions

- He is acknowledging that his earlier actions were the result of his own mistake in proposing the bet in the first place
- This time, Samson is truly the innocent party
- The Philistine family has broken a solemn covenant and dishonored their word
- So Samson is justified in seeking justice
- And the justice required in the breaking of a marriage covenant was two fold
 - First, Samson himself is no longer obligated to marry this woman
 - As Jesus explains in the Gospels, if a woman engages in sex during the betrothal period, she is committing infidelity
 - And the husband is permitted to end the betrothal because of he has not yet consummated the marriage
 - His wife is no longer available to him
- Secondly, Samson could expect to exact a price from the father's family
 - Covenants were life-long commitments that could only be ended by the death of the one who made it
 - As Paul says in Romans 7

Rom. 7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

Rom. 7:3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

- You may remember in the story of Mary and Joseph that when Joseph found Mary pregnant before they married, he determined to divorce her quietly
- He was saving Mary from potentially being stoned to death for breaking her covenant
- Samson isn't so generous, as his words indicate he's preparing to take his revenge, justifiably this time

[Judg. 15:4](#) Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails.

[Judg. 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.

- As usual Samson's story has unexpected details
 - He decides to destroy the Philistines' wheat fields just as they are ready to be harvested
 - This represents a serious loss
 - The food supply and financial security of this village was dependent on this harvest
 - So Samson decides to destroy it
 - But since he's only one person, he devises a creative way to get help with his plan
 - The text says he catches 300 foxes, but this seems very unlikely
 - Not because Samson couldn't capture a wild animal, but because foxes are solitary animals
 - It would highly improbably that 300 foxes would have been in the same vicinity
 - But the Hebrew word for fox can be translated as jackal, which is a small wild dog
 - Like all canines, jackals run in packs, and are much easier to catch than a fox
 - Still, we must assume that Samson's ability to capture 300 jackals was still a reflection of the Lord's special anointing of Samson
 - As he caught the jackals, he lit their bushy tails on fire and set them loose in the stranding grain fields
 - If Samson had simply walked through the field lighting fires, the Philistines could have quickly rushed to stop the flames
 - But with 300 jackals running loose with burning tails, there would be no way to stop the spread of the flames

- Sure enough the fire spreads fast
 - It burns up the stacked grain that had been already been reaped
 - And the standing grain still in the fields
 - Eventually, it spread to the vineyards and fruit groves
 - This is a devastating loss
- When the village sees the devastation and learns the cause, they too take action

Judg. 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 inquiry leads the villagers back to the house of Samson’s wife
 - When they learn that this family broke a marriage covenant, they realize that Samson’s actions were justified to a degree
 - The true blame for the episode rested with the family that violated their covenant with Samson
 - So they brought justice to the family, burning the bride and her father
- At this point, we’re all a little uncomfortable with all the violence, and we should be
 - All that’s happened has been a cascading of sin
 - Beginning with Samson’s decision to pursue the Philistine wife
 - To his behavior at the wedding
 - To his carnal reasons to attack the Philistines
 - To his abandonment of his wife
- And then the Philistines have committed their own offenses
 - In betraying Samson’s honor in cheating on the wager
 - And then breaking the marriage covenant
 - No one is innocent here

- But step back for a moment and consider what you know about the society of these days
 - Men are doing what is right in their own eyes
 - They aren't guided by God's law so much as by their own desires,
 - They follow hearts that are drifting farther and farther from the Lord
 - And even the men appointed by God to lead them are growing less godly by each generation
 - And of course the Philistines aren't godly in the least, so it's only natural to expect them to act in vengeful ways
 - And seeing it all we're drawn to one, unavoidable conclusion: the evil of the human heart is an incurable disease
 - Israel had the covenants, the prophets, the judges, the tabernacle and on and on
 - And all of it couldn't bring men to live and act in righteous ways
 - When God stepped in forcefully as He did after the Exodus or under Joshua, the people would tow the line briefly
 - But without fail, they returned to their sinning ways
 - And of course the Gentile nations were even farther from the truth and righteousness
 - They lived without the revelation of the Lord nor His direction or representatives
 - Clearly we need something more than law and human judges
 - We need the power of God to overcome our very nature
 - The Lord knew this already, but He's using the time and experiences of Judges to demonstrate that truth to us
 - That's why we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a fallen world
 - Because we too live in a time when everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes
 - And our judges are ruling according whims and selfish desires

- And even the people of God are often weak, untaught and unwilling to discipline their flesh to the restraint of God's law
 - What will address this problem?
 - Not law, not judges, not kings
 - Only the Spirit living inside us Who comes as we submit to the truth of Jesus as Lord
- The Philistine's decision to take revenge against Samson's wife gives Samson one more chance to retaliate

Judg. 15:7 Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit."

Judg. 15:8 He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

- It would seem that Samson had true love for his Philistine bride, since he's willing to carry the war one step further
 - He vows to avenge his wife's death with one more act against the Philistines
 - Interestingly, he's declaring that this will be the end for him
 - Of course that's easy to promise when you're assuming you're going to be the last one to act
 - In any case, Samson goes back into the territory of the Philistines and conducts a great slaughter against them
 - Once again, we're not overlooking the chain of sinful events that brought us to this point
 - But we must also remember that the Lord declared at the beginning of chapter 14 that these events were part of God's plan
 - He's working to bring Samson to the point where he will fulfill his mission to conduct war against the Philistines
 - And Samson's sinful choice to pursue a Philistine wife left the Lord with little choice but to disrupt those plans
 - And in the process, the Lord drove Samson into a battle that supposed to happen a whole different way

- I can't stress enough that God always gets His way in our lives and in the larger events of the world around us
 - And when we're stubborn in refusing to following Him in an obedient way, then we leave Him with no choice but to drive us from behind
 - We have the stories in Judges so we might notice the Lord's ways and determine for ourselves not to test Him in the way these people did
 - Don't force God's hand, because you won't like the result
 - Like Jonah, you're going to Nineveh one way or another: either by first class or fish class
- After Samson fights, he has to retreat somewhere to hide from the Philistines' response
 - So he ends up in Etam, which is an area of caves near Timnah
 - Samson's hiding out waiting for the Philistines to give up looking for him
 - But he's stirred up a hornet's nest, and he's Hebrew brothers aren't happy
 - But in the Lord's wisdom, He has a plan for this as well

Judg. 15:9 Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi.

Judg. 15:10 The men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" And they said, "We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us."

Judg. 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."

Judg. 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."

Judg. 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.

Judg. 15:14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

[Judg. 15:15](#) He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it.

[Judg. 15:16](#) Then Samson said,

“With the jawbone of a donkey,
Heaps upon heaps,
With the jawbone of a donkey
I have killed a thousand men.”

[Judg. 15:17](#) When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi.

- In response to Samson’s brutal actions, the Philistines move up into Judah and spread out in an area called Lehi, a location unknown today
 - Obviously, this game of tit-for-tat is growing out of control quickly
 - What began as a family dispute soon engulfed a village
 - And now it threatens to bring two nations of people against one another
 - But remember the Philistines essentially ruled over Israel in these days
 - Like Rome ruling Israel in Jesus’ day, the Philistines could impose their will on the Jews virtually with impunity
 - So when a Jew steps into a Philistines village and kills man men, the Philistines are going to exact revenge
- So Samson’s own people come looking for him to hand him over to the Philistines
 - Samson explains why he did what he did, but they will hear nothing of it
 - They would rather turn in a brother to have peace with their enemy than risk their lives in the warfare that resistance required
 - But this is why the Lord raised up Samson in the first place
 - He was to break the stronghold of the Philistines on the Jews
 - He was to free his people
 - Samson’s reluctance to obey led to the Lord bringing it about in this odd fashion

- Still the Jewish leaders are so blind and weakened they don't want freedom
 - They prefer a life of quiet bondage to a life of victorious obedience to God
 - God's people can fall for this pattern of complacency at any time...it wasn't unique to the Jewish people
 - One observer of 1 Samuel 15 remarked:

It is a sad fact of Christian experience that if you are a Christian committed to growing and maturing in Jesus Christ, you will often be hindered the most by other Christians who have become accustomed and accommodated to an anemic, wishy-washy spiritual life.

- For the Jewish leaders, Samson is messing up a good thing, or so they think
- Now if this pattern sounds a little familiar, it should, because it's another picture of Christ
 - Samson pictures Christ's arrival to rescue his people from the oppression of the Gentiles
 - Unlike Samson, Christ embraced His mission wholeheartedly, of course
 - But like Samson, Christ was persecuted and betrayed by His own people against the very enemies He came to defeat
 - We're learning another lesson about the evil hearts of men and women
 - We prefer our sinful lives even with all the misery our sin brings upon us
 - We say no to God and to His redemption
 - We refuse to acknowledge Him much less bend our knee
 - Only by the supernatural work of the Spirit will someone come to know the Lord as follow Him
- Speaking of the anointing of the Spirit, Samson sees an opportunity to exercise his escape from the Philistines and the Jews
 - He asks in v.12 if they will promise not to kill him

- They agree they will only bind him
- But they will not kill him
- Samson agrees then to go with them, because he knows that he has the strength to break their bonds
 - This is probably a high point in Samson's spiritual life
 - For all his stumbling about so far, we can be encouraged by his patience with his brother sin
 - And for his confidence and faith in the Lord's faithfulness to deliver him over his enemies
 - He's putting himself in a very vulnerable position, which can only mean he's confident the Lord will be there to rescue him
- Here's another picture of Christ
 - Samson pictures a man of God endowed with all power yet willing to submit to an unfair fate for the good of his people
 - Christ had the strength to resist any attempt to bind Him much less to kill Him
 - But because of His obedience to the Lord and His desire to win salvation for His people, He willingly submitted to capture, trial, torture and ultimately death
- In Samson's case, he won't face death, not yet
 - He is brought bound before the Philistines who shout in anticipation of killing this man they despise so much
 - But Samson breaks his bonds and begins to fight the Philistines who were caught off guard
- Of course, the most amazing part of this battle is the implement Samson used to win his battle
 - He notices a dead donkey that had only just died
 - Once again, his Nazarite vows prohibited touch a dead body
 - But he had violated that vow already when he touched the lion
 - So without a hesitation, he reaches out and grabs the jawbone

- The dentures of the donkey provide an interesting focal point for us, but in reality the jawbone played no meaningful role in the battle
 - In effect, Samson killed 1,000 men with his bare hands
 - His supernatural strength was the tool that granted him victory
- After the battle, Samson names the place “Jawbone Hill” in memorial to the victory
 - And he coins another riddle
 - If you want to get the full sense of the wordplay in his riddle, you could restate it this way
 - With the jawbone of an ass, I have piled them in a mass.
- Then why the detail of the jawbone?
 - I believe it’s another picture of Christ
 - Samson is winning a great victory by means of the cheek of a dead donkey or ass, an unclean animal even when alive
 - Likewise, Christ won a great victory through an unclean death
 - Scripture teaches that Jesus was “smitten” or struck on the “cheek” in His death on Calvary
 - The phrase to strike the cheek means to treat with contempt
 - Furthermore, the jawbone or cheek of the donkey was moist or fresh
 - The word in Hebrew for “new” literally means moist
 - The point is the body hadn’t undergone decay
 - Neither did Jesus’ body undergo decay in winning our victory
 - And the bone was from a donkey because the donkey is unclean
 - And Jesus became unclean in the sense that He became sin on the cross
 - He Who knew no sin became sin so we might become the righteousness of God

- Finally, the jaw seems connected to the mouth in a way that suggests that the victory will be won by the word of God, supernaturally
 - And at the end of the battle, he disposes of the jawbone
 - Just as Christ will declare it is finished when the victory is won
 - Never again will Christ need to suffer to defeat sin
 - All of these details in the story remind us that Samson is acting in ways that God intends to reminds us of His Son