

Revenge Is Sweet—or Maybe Not Judges 15:1-8, 1 Samuel 12

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Last week we learned that Samson had fallen in love with a non-Jewish girl.

Then, at the wedding feast, he told a riddle to some of the guests saying if they could answer it, he would give them some clothes and if they couldn't they'd have to give him some.

They couldn't come up with the answer, so they threatened the bride to get the solution.

Ultimately, with her constant pestering, Samson told her the answer which she immediately relayed to the guests.

After they told Samson the answer, he knew they had gotten the information from his wife.

As a result, Samson, angered, left the party and killed 30 Philistines, took their clothes and gave them to the guests, after which he went stormed off.

So today, we're going to see what Samson does next.

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Judges 15:1-2, *“Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife. He said, ‘I’m going to my wife’s room.’ But her father would not let him go in. ‘I was so sure you hated her,’ he said, ‘that I gave her to your companion. Isn’t her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead.’”*

Verse 1 says Samson went back to his bride's home during the time of wheat harvest, which Biblical commentators believe usually took place in the drier seasons.

Their logic is gleaned from 1 Samuel where Samuel declared to Israel that their demand for a king was so wicked in God's eyes that He would send thunder and rain.

Had this been in the rainy season, this wouldn't have been remarkable. Therefore, this happened on the day the wheat harvest was to begin and definitely was something the Israelites weren't expecting.

With wheat harvest in progress, this tells us it was in the dry season. Regardless of the season, why is Samson leaving? Didn't the family need his help with the harvest?

Samson seems to be a little self-centered. He probably thought, "*I'm still married, so I'm going to visit my wife.*" He was even bringing her a gift, a young goat, to demonstrate his sincerity.

Now, some people I've talked with were puzzled about when Samson left. Why did the bride stay home? Why didn't he take her with him?

Well, it was customary in a Philistine marriage for the wife to continue living in her father's house. The husband would visit her when he could and bring a gift when he did.

You must understand in the Philistine culture, the husbands would often be away a long time on army duty, therefore it was therefore safer for their wives to live with their family.

Alternately, it may be that the husband was expected to move into the bride's house and become a part of her family.

Also, Samson's marriage was not a traditional Hebrew marriage, where the bride leaves her family and moves in with her husband—like Rebekah.

There's no record that Samson's bride wanted anything to do with Israel or Israel's people. Her siding with her own people against Samson speaks volumes about her character.

Dr. Ed Hindson, a former professor at Liberty University in the mid-1970's, gave another possibility: paraphrasing the text, the *"marriage was more or less sanctioned payment in exchange for her love."*

Thus, he brought a gift, thinking everything was going to be okay. Was he surprised when he got to Timnah and his father-in-law told him, *"I was so sure you hated her that I gave her to your companion."*

Remember, he did this without ever asking Samson, when he left, if he wanted a divorce, annulment or whatever options were available.

Finally, he offered his younger daughter as a replacement bride to Samson. This wouldn't work for Samson as it was forbidden under the Law of Moses.

Leviticus 18:18, *"Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living."*

The father wasn't antagonistic, in fact he was probably a little afraid of Samson, but he failed to realize Samson's genuine affection for his elder daughter.

Besides, there's no record that Samson found this younger daughter attractive or even that he paid her any attention, but as stated, it was unlawful for an Israelite to accept a wife's sister.

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And this brought about Samson's first act of revenge. Listen to these next three verses.

Judges 15:3, *"Samson said to them, 'This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them.'"*

There's no doubt he was twice as furious, not only because his wife betrayed him to her own people but also because her father had given her to another.

In a word, Samson was "seeing red." He believed he had done nothing wrong by honoring his wager, but now he had been double-crossed again.

So, Samson decided to exact his own restitution for the theft of his wife.

Judges 15:4-5, *"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."*

How he accomplished his revenge apparently took a lot of effort. Samson managed to catch 300 foxes and then used them as the source of his revenge.

He put them "tail to tail", placed a firebrand between their tails, and turned them loose.

These eight-legged torches ran through the wheat fields, the vineyards, and the olive groves, catching everything on fire.

One can only imagine Samson's emotions and feelings as he saw this bonfire. He was probably convinced, in his own mind, that he had paid them back as they deserved, but he was wrong.

Needless to say, the Philistines weren't happy that their wheat, olives, and vineyards had been destroyed.

Judges 15:6, *"When the Philistines asked, "Who did this?" they were told, "Samson, the Timnite's son-in-law, because his wife was given to his companion." So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death."*

When 'the Philistines' learned that the devastating damage to their crops and olives had been the result of a quarrel Samson had with his wife and her father, their fury knew no bounds.

So, they took their revenge on them. Why? Because they considered them to blame for bringing Samson's actions to bear against them.

Therefore, they burned them to death in their home. It was a case of 'a fire for a fire.'

Ironically, this was the same death the other Philistines had promised her and *"her father's household"* if she didn't get the answer to Samson's riddle.

Now she and her father paid the price for Samson's revenge.

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Judges 15:7-8a, *"Samson said to them, "Since you've acted like this, I swear that I won't stop until I get my revenge on you." He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them."*

Samson heard about what they did to his wife and her father, so he took revenge again.

Who knows what he was thinking, but one thing we do know is that he killed a lot of Philistines. We don't know how many, or where, or if he was injured, just that he "*slaughtered many of them.*"

Now, Samson was careful to ensure that his people didn't suffer for his actions, because after this he went into the hill country, away from his own people, until things blew over.

Judges 15:8b, "*Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.*"

It's possible that while hiding, he came to realize that revenge didn't have a sweet taste after all. Many people had died for a relatively small issue and it seemed there was no end in sight.

Maybe Samson began to realize that where there were Philistines, there was trouble. He would've been wise to have kept that in mind.

Think of what his revenge had cost him. Now he was a fugitive, living on top of a rock. He had no wife, his family was nowhere around, and he was accomplishing nothing at that season of his life.

Revenge rarely leads to justice but merely traps the recipients in a never-ending cycle of violence.

Even though Samson's retribution fulfilled his "higher calling" to weaken the Philistines this did not justify his selfish motives to appease his wrath and satisfy his pride.

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Conclusion

Is revenge sweet? No! In Samson it left a bitter aftertaste. That's why we must trust in the Lord. He'll make it right!

So, what can we learn from this terrible sense of self-control:

First, no matter how messy things seem to be in our world, God is in control!! We need to acknowledge God every day!!

Second, we must pray and cling to God's Word when fears come our way! And lastly, we need to watch out for sins, anger, and revenge. They will just repeat themselves and lead to bad consequences!

Many times, Samson thought he could be better than God! Do we ever do that? Think about it.

Especially today with all sorts of information in our hands; how many times do we "Google" an issue compared to searching for the answer in the Bible?

Remember, we can never outsmart God! So, don't just "Google it," "Bible it"!!!