

## 12

JUDGES 15

## THE PATH OF REVENGE

## opening ILLUSTRATION

Enlist two student volunteers. Explain to the class, “I’m going to read some basic story plots. I want one of my volunteers to tell me a good decision to make in that situation, and I want the other volunteer to come up with a bad decision.” Read aloud the following and then provide each volunteer a chance to complete each (very short) story. “As I walked down the road, I saw a turtle trying to cross it . . .” “As we left school for the weekend, our teacher reminded us about the big math test on Monday . . .” “One day, my dog found my sister’s favorite stuffed animal and tore it to bits . . .” (Feel free to add some of your own situations.) Say, “This was a funny exercise, but in real life it’s often not so funny when people make bad decisions. We’ll definitely see some bad decisions in today’s Scripture.”

## context

Last week’s lesson concerning Samson’s parents came from Judges 13; this week’s comes from Judges 15. But the chapter in between the two gives insight into Samson’s early years. Leaders should be familiar with the story and be able to summarize it, particularly the following: 1) Samson chooses a Philistine bride, though it’s against his parents’ wishes. This choice is outside God’s standards, but God uses it for His glory. 2) Samson is tiptoeing close to breaking his Nazirite vow, and he certainly deceives his parents. 3) Samson’s involvement with the Philistines foreshadows the conflict that will arise. Similarly, he shows that he is easily swayed by a woman who he loves. Still, God’s power is on Samson, and the story continues.

## expository OUTLINE

**JUDGES 15:1-6** *Revenge tends to lead to more revenge.* The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) entitles this chapter, “Samson’s Revenge.” In this chapter, we see many hurt feelings and retributive actions. This is *not* how God’s people were called to live. In Chapter 14, Samson married a Philistine woman, but the relationship was strained, to say the least. As this chapter begins, we see that he has gone to see her, only to find out that her father has given her in marriage to another man. Samson’s response takes the situation from bad to worse: he captures three hundred foxes (just imagine how long that took!), ties them in pairs by their tails, and sends them into the wheat harvest, tails on fire. Not only was this premeditated revenge, but it would have been a disastrous financial loss to those farmers. Sadly, the girl and her father paid for Samson’s revenge with their lives.

**JUDGES 15:7-13** *When we live in fear, we make the wrong decisions.* The revenge of the Philistines (killing Samson’s wife and her father) leads to more revenge; in this passage, Samson in turn kills the people who killed his wife and her father. The phrase translated “tore them limb from limb” (v. 8) literally means “he struck them hip and thigh”—the exact meaning is uncertain, but it is clearly a brutal massacre. Yes, Samson has been empowered with amazing strength from God, but he uses it selfishly. So the Philistines raid some of the Israelites in retaliation. The revenge doesn’t stop there; the Israelites feel the need to turn Samson over to the Philistines. Three thousand Israelites still seem skittish as they approach the mighty man in his hidden cave. They try reasoning with him: the Philistines had power over them, yet he was picking fights. Samson agrees to go with them if they promise not to kill him themselves; they make good on the promise, tying him up with two new, strong ropes. Maybe the revenge is about to stop.

**JUDGES 15:14-20** *God empowers us when we are willing to be used for His glory.* The Philistines, seeing the mighty Samson tied up, begin shouting in victory. And though Samson has been living selfishly and foolishly, God chooses him to bring judgment to the Philistines. Samson snaps the new ropes as though they were “burnt flax” (v. 14), picks up a jawbone of a donkey like a weapon, and kills a thousand Philistine men. We can only imagine the horror of both the Philistines and the Israelites as word gets around. What kind of man could cause this kind of carnage? Only one who had been given strength from the Lord. Samson, completely exhausted, finally calls out to God for water after the battle; God hears his cry and answers. Even the mightiest of men recognizes his own weakness from time to time and cries out to God.

## group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 15:1-6.

**.01** If you could ask Samson, “Why did you set those flaming foxes loose?” what would he say? Would his reasoning be valid?

**.02** When have you acted out of anger or revenge? What did this act says about your faith?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 15:7-13.

**.03** What does “vengeance” mean? How does Samson take vengeance in verses 7-8? What does God say about vengeance in Romans 12:19?

**.04** If you could pause the story right here and talk to Samson, what would you tell him to do?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 15:14-20.

**.05** To whom does Samson give glory after his jawbone victory? What does this say about his faith?

**.06** How does God show grace to Samson? When has God answered your prayer even in a selfish or foolish time?

## session CONNECTION

Mark 15:24-39 and Judges 15 both point to God’s power and perfect plan. In Mark’s account of the crucifixion, we read about the graphic death of Jesus. We can only imagine the thoughts of His friends and mother: *Everything is wrong. This wasn’t supposed to happen.* But God never set aside His power; the narrative was going according to His plan. Jesus died so that all who came to Him for salvation would find it. Because Jesus didn’t use His heavenly power to stop His death, we have victory over death from Him. Samson, though selfish, also revealed the God as he helped judge the Philistines for the way they treated the Israelites. Though we easily see Samson’s faults, he too revealed God’s power and plan.

## application

Remind students of the opening “Bad decision/Good decision” activity. Say something like this, “Samson was chosen by God from before birth to be His judge and bring judgment on the Philistines. Because God is great and arranges everything as He wants it, judgment came on the Philistines. But Samson was not living obediently.” Help students see that the Bible is the story of God; this passage shows God’s standard and God’s plan. God brings about His purpose in spite of Samson’s selfishness and foolishness. Say, “God is merciful and forgiving, and He loves us in spite of our sin and our mistakes. But each time we repent and confess our sins, we must remember that He calls us to obedience and righteousness.” Close with prayer, inviting God to reveal to students where they should obey and trust Him in faith.

Even  
when we  
act selfishly, God  
can use our actions  
to accomplish His  
good plans.