

# **The Cycle of Retaliation**

## **Judges 15**

### **Notes**

When we focus solely on our rights, we abandon God's plan of grace for ourselves and others

#### **INTRODUCTION**

**My childhood was filled with fun and interesting events and stories. During one season of my life my brother and I got into a "get even" competition. This competition is exactly like it sounds. If one of us did something to the other, we would scheme and plan in order to get the other one paid back. I made my brother mad one day so in response he threw my toys under my bed. When I crawled under the bed to get them, he pulled the 2x4 that was on the top bunk to keep him from falling, off the bed and hit me with it under the bed.**

**In response to this I took some glass I broke and strategically placed it in the shag carpet in the trailer hallway and called for him to come to the room, resulting in some cut up feet.**

**To pay me back, he hit our horse on the backside with a metal strap used to bind lumber. My dad had not finished tightening the billet strap and the horse took off running across the gravel sawmill with the saddle falling under the horse with me getting drug around for a little while.**

**I didn't want his horse thing to outdo me, as we were leading the horse to eat one day, I ran behind the horse and slapped its rear end as hard as I could, and the horse kicked my brother so hard it knocked him out.**

**Since the horse knocked him out, he wanted to knock me out. As I was riding our three-wheeler in the sawmill, I came around the weigh station house and as I did, he was waiting behind the corner and hit me in the eye with a huge stone and busted my eye up and I wrecked the three-wheeler.**

**My momma got me patched up and sat us down and explained to us that this was getting out of hand and if we kept this up, we would kill each other.**

**You see, we were so concerned with getting even, making it right, or standing up for ourselves, we couldn't see that our actions were not only hurting a person we loved, but they were going to cause us pain in the end.**

**When we are more concerned about our rights than God's grace, we rob ourselves and others of his grace.**

**My brother nor I even thought about the pain we would cause in defending ourselves, we only thought about coming out on top.**

We allowed selfishness and pride to bring hurt to our family.

In our story of Samson in Judges 15, we will notice the dangers of living for self, of trying to get even, of retaliation, and of pride.

Ask yourself, do I feel as though I must be right about everything?

When I am angry about not getting my way, how do I respond?

When I have been mistreated, what is my attitude toward the person who mistreated me?

When we live only for self or when we seek to get even, we are failing to allow the gospel to work in us and through us.

Let's look at our text.

*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. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> Samson then said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm." <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit." <sup>8</sup> He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi. <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> 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." <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> 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.*

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. <sup>16</sup> Then Samson said,*

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

*<sup>17</sup> When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi. <sup>18</sup> Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the Lord and said, “You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” <sup>19</sup> But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. <sup>20</sup> So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.*

The first thing we notice from this story is that God can use sinful people and sinful plans for his glory.

### **GOD CAN USE SINFUL PEOPLE & PLANS FOR HIS GLORY**

As you read through the story of Samson and in this episode specifically, you notice that God works behind the scenes, in front of the scene, and in the scene.

This story of foolishness and retaliation demonstrates how God can take sinful actions and use them to accomplish his purposes.

God used Samson’s foolishness, anger, pride, and lust to cause a necessary rift between Israel and the Philistines, thus ushering in the era of the monarchy.

Samson was not meant to free the people, but to begin to free the people.

Samson’s actions, along with the actions of the Philistines, and even the Israelites in this story show us the danger of allowing sin to have its way in our hearts.

But even in that truth, God’s grace is still present. God does not allow the foolishness and the sinfulness of men to thwart his plans.

God absolutely uses the actions of sinful men for his purposes, and this is seen most wonderfully on the cross of calvary.

God used the free actions of sinful men to kill his son, so that those same men may have a way to be forgiven of those free sinful actions.

Don’t think God cannot turn your bad situation into a testimony for his glory.

You might think God cannot use you because of your past. You may think God cannot use you because of your current situation.

God is not as concerned with situations and circumstances as he is with the status of our heart.

Now, what I am not saying is that it is ok to live in unrepentant sin and think that God will pour out his blessings on you.

We have seen the exact opposite of that in this book.

What I am saying is that just as God used Samson's flaws to accomplish his purposes, he can use you with all your flaws and intricacies, and perceived defects for his purposes and glory.

Think about this.

At your job

At your school

On your team

In your marriage

As a parent

As a child

This does not mean we do not wholeheartedly pursue Jesus and allow him to strengthen us in our weaknesses, but it does mean we are to allow God to begin to use us right now for his glory.

Please don't wait until you have it all together in your head as the perfect Christian before you try to serve the Lord.

### **OUR PLANS DON'T ALWAYS TURN OUT THE WAY WE INTEND**

At the end of Chapter 14 we see Samson get mad and run back home to his momma and daddy. He does not even consummate his marriage to his bride.

Sometime later, a few months perhaps, he grabs a goat and takes off toward his bride's daddy's house, only to be surprised when he got there.

Samson thought everything would be ok; there would be no consequences for his actions; everyone would just bend to his will.

He arrives, shows the daddy in law the goat, and asks to go see his bride only to find out the bride had been given away to the best man in the wedding.

Since Samson had already paid the bride price, the daddy in law offers Samson the younger, prettier sister.

Samson becomes enraged at the situation, and he goes off and set fire to all the harvest fields of the Philistines, effectively tanking their economy.

In Samsons' mind, all was well, but he failed to consider his own attitude and actions. Samson also failed to be flexible in the Lord.

**Proverbs 16:9** tells us,

*"A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."*

I think this is one of the most difficult things for people, especially planners.

We make plans and there is nothing wrong with making plans. God intends for us to live orderly lives. But as believers whose purpose is to glorify God with our lives, we should work to be flexible when it comes to what God is doing in our lives.

As we are submitting our lives to God, his will is our will, things will take place that are unexpected and even unwanted, but each and every situation God brings into your life is designed to make you more like Jesus.

There is a subpoint to this one though.

Sin often has unintended consequences.

Follow the path with me.

Samson's pride caused him to want material wealth which he sought in an unethical way

The men he tried to deceive threatened his pride

To fulfill the bargain he made, Samson killed 30 people

Samson's anger caused him to leave his new wife

She is given to his best man

Samson again gets mad and ruins the entire economy of the Philistines

They respond by killing his daddy in law and wife

Samson then commits a slaughter of untold number of Philistines

The Philistines come to arrest Samson

Samson's own people, who are absolutely comfortable living in sin, under Philistine rule, capture Samson and turn him over to the Philistines

Samson escapes and kills 1,000 men with a jawbone of a donkey

You see how many people one man's sin effected?

We like to think our sin takes place in a vacuum, but the fact is, it cannot.

By design, we are creatures built to have relationship with other image bearers of God. We are interconnected and intertwined emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically.

I can throw a single rock into a pond, but the rock will cause a ripple effect that spreads out far beyond the impact of where the rock hit.

**One summer after July 4, my brother and I had some left-over bottle rockets. We were staying at my grandpas and grandmas for a few weeks. So, we decided to hike the mile and a half up the gravel road to a private airport. We snuck on the airport runway and proceeded to launch the bottle rockets. We did not have any ill intent this day, we really did not. But something happened. A single bottle rocket landed in the Homochitto National Forest on some dry pine straw on this hot July day. What started out as a fun day, ended with us lighting several hundred acres of National Forest on fire and having multiple fire departments get to work. We did not intend this, but our careless actions caused it.**

One word. One uncontrolled thought. One selfish act. Our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions can have unintended consequences far beyond what we think they will.

Let me ask you this. If the results of all your careless words and actions throughout last week were shown to you, how do you think you would feel?

The Apostle Paul tells us in **Eph. 5:15-16**,

*“Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—<sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”*

We know full well the evilness of the days we are living in. Let us, as believers, as followers, as disciples of Jesus, let us commit to living in the Word and will of God, being filled with the Spirit of God, so that our lives will bring glory to God and be a wonderful display of his amazing grace.

### **GOD’S GRACE IS LARGER THAN WE KNOW**

Samson does all this, he allows his childish, selfish, prideful nature to cause destruction to many.

I wonder what his parents are thinking through all of this. He was supposed to be this example, this treasure, this man set apart for the Lord’s glory, yet he lives in the fullness of his flesh.

The entirety of the book of Judges is a testament and display of God’s great grace. Each and every episode should result in the complete destruction of Israel, yet God displays grace.

Chapter 15 is no different. After killing the 1,000 men with the donkey jawbone, which was a violation of his Nazarite vow, Samson is physically worn out.

He falls down and in typical Samson fashion, he exaggerates his condition and for the first time in his story, he calls out to the Lord.

He is not a bit concerned of all his violation of God’s law in his personal life. Samson is concerned that he will die of thirst and embarrassed by the Philistines once he is dead.

God would have been fully justified in allowing Samson to die, but God was not done showing grace to Samson or to the nation of Israel through Samson.

So, God splits open a rock and allows water to pour from the rock to bring strength to Samson.

We can all read along and see just how horrible Samson’s actions are and the destruction he has caused. We can come to our conclusions of what should happen to him, but God has other plans.

Aren’t you glad God has plans of grace for your life instead of plans of justice?

Aren’t you glad you are not judged by your worst day or even your worst year?

God’s grace is larger than you can imagine, and his grace is ready to completely cover all your sin.

What decision in your life are you needing grace for right now?

Call out to Christ and the grace of the cross is immediately available to you in this very moment.

There is no layaway for the love of Christ. The love of God is instantaneous for those who need it.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have observed the dangers of retaliation and the unintended consequences of sin.

We have seen the destruction selfishness can and does cause.

We are reminded of the times in our lives that we regret when we have acted shamefully, said a careless word, and been selfish, prideful, greedy, and lustful.

We have also been reminded that God's grace is bigger than all our sin.

The cycle of retaliation, the cycle of sin will continue in your life, the unintended hurt and disappointment will grow until you turn to Christ.

Would you turn to Jesus? Would you call out to him for grace? Would you ask him for forgiveness and power?

God is faithful to respond to all those who call to him.

In just a moment I am going to pray and then we are going to sing as a church.

As we sing, the Spirit of God will be moving in this place. The Holy Spirit will be in your heart, moving you to the grace of God.

Allow the Spirit of God to move in your heart and draw you to the grace of God this morning.

If God is calling you to repent of sin, come and repent. If he is calling you to give your life to Jesus, come and receive salvation.

Don't allow this time to pass and not respond to what God is wanting to do in your life.