

Judges 15

Introduction – Holy violence sounds like an oxymoron to some, and brings images of religious fanaticism to others. The story of Samson is neither for the squeamish pacifist nor the Victorian prude. But the story is for the people of God, that they might fear a mighty and holy God and rest alone in the life, provision, and vengeance of our Savior.

Judgment Fire (vv1-5) – We are not told why Samson had returned to his father’s home without his wife. The story picks up as Samson returns to have relations with her. It is important to note this, because it bears upon the eye-for-an-eye justice he will bring. The problem is really with the Philistines of Timnah. They have robbed him of his wife and fertility, and so he responds by attacking *their* fertility. The choice of foxes (wild animals – possibly jackals), three hundred of them, sent in pairs, all lead to questions that are hard to answer. It is clear that this is not a fit of rage on Samson’s part when we hear his words in verse 3.

A Heap of Vengeance (vv6-8) – Samson’s wife had been afraid of being burned by her own people, and so she betrayed her husband (14:15). She ends up receiving the very judgment she thought she would escape. But she was Samson’s wife, and so he brings vengeance ‘hip and thigh’ with a great slaughter. Those who do not turn in repentance after receiving a slighter judgment will find that God has been patient in withholding His full wrath.

Judah’s Betrayal (vv9-13) – Like Samson’s wife, the men of Judah fear the Philistines more than God. In fact, they are quite bothered for the ruckus that Samson has raised. They may have been enslaved by the Philistine culture, but at least they were at ‘peace.’ Judah is the tribe that originally had faithfully gone into battle (1:1-20); they have now become spineless cowards. But something else is being pictured here. God’s own people are betraying their messiah, and this messiah is going along with it, with a greater plan of judgment and deliverance.

Jawbone Hill (vv14-17) – Once again, as the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson, judgment, as though fire, frees Samson and sets him on a holy war. Picking up the fresh jawbone of a donkey (another unclean animal), Samson kills 1000 Philistines, one by one. The poem in the Hebrew takes this into account much better (‘heap’ and ‘donkey’ sound exactly alike). The pun is supposed to be funny – we are supposed to laugh. Then the Nazirite throws the jawbone away, separating himself from that which is unclean.

“I’m Thirsty” (vv18-20) – God, in a clear reference to the 40-year wilderness wanderings, humbles this deliverer to show him that God alone must provide for all his needs. If we do not have water, we die in a matter of days. Just as the rock was Christ in the desert, so this rock was Christ, the water was His water of life. This was more than physical refreshment. As Samson represents Israel we are reminded that we are always in need of God for the water of life. As Samson represents Christ, remember we sing in Psalm 110 of our Messiah drinking from a brook and lifting up His head.

The Violent Comedy of God’s Good News – The terrible violence is not gratuitous. The good news is really good because of the horrible consequences of falling under the hand of a holy, righteous, and angry God. And here is His message.

Violent Vengeance (Is 63:3) - God is violent and His vengeance is unapologetically painted for us in pictures of great slaughters (God originated the idea of ‘shock and awe’). For those who continue in their rebellion and unbelief, this is used to bring great fear, and in His kindness, as a means of granting repentance and surrender. To the redeemed, it is a reminder of His preserving strength as we walk through our own holy wars.

Better for One Man to Die (John 11:49-52) – Over and over, Judah and Israel turn their back on God’s saviors until the Jews hand Jesus over to the Romans, believing this to be better. And God sits in heaven and laughs. This is the comedy of the gospel. This is exactly what He planned. It is exactly what He will use to accomplish His victory. 3000 will be slain by the Spirit at Pentecost when the Savior snaps His ropes of death like flax in a fire. And that is just the beginning of His victory march. Jesus told us “*..the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matt 11:12).

Our Savior Will Never Tire (Psalm 110) – There are none who stand in the way of our Greater Samson, who is constantly refreshed by the waters of the Holy Spirit. His work is never thwarted. No king, no nation, not even the devil himself can stand in the way of Christ’s saving work. Where is Christ’s spirit of gentleness and meekness? The Good Shepherd is gentle and caring over His flock while being fierce in His jealous protection from the thieves and wolves. Psalm 110:7 describes this Samson-like Warrior as unhindered in His work, focused and constantly refreshed. It is the Lord’s pleasure to bring salvation to the world.