

MAY 2

Judges 15-16

When you read all this about Samson today, you have to wonder what he would have been like if he had been fully devoted to God.

Judges 15

Vs. 1-8 According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 406, Samson was actually married to her. What had ensued while he was away was a divorce and remarriage to the best man. Notice in v. 6 she is called his wife. He actually thought he was still married to her.

V. 1 Although Samson, like all men, was driven by the need for oneness, like most men, he only saw this one way, *in the chamber*.

V. 3 This is another of those provoking moments God used to motivate Samson. Samson was driven by his passions and this was revenge for giving away his wife. Too bad he wasn't motivated by justice and love for God.

Vs. 4-5 Think about this. Not only is the destructive creativity pretty high-end, but what kind of skill, speed and strength was required to do this in such a short period of time? This is amazing. Foxes are not known for being slow, stupid or being found in crowds. And they bite (I hear). And then, how do you collect them and tie their tails together with a torch in between? This guy was like Superman.

Vs. 6-7 This wasn't to punish Samson, but they thought to punish this man and his daughter. Now Samson lost his mind, and a mind is a terrible thing to lose.

V. 8 If Samson's intent above was "X" rated (actually, he still thought she was his wife), the violence here was "R" rated. The expression *hip and thigh* meant vicious, deadly violence. Samson was a one-man horror, like the Terminator. Given all of the evidence, I think he also had a sort of invulnerability. If bees couldn't sting him and foxes couldn't bite him, I'll bet spears, swords and arrows didn't do much either, adding to the terror of fighting him. Samson fought by hand. I'm sure someone got close enough to land a blow with a sword. Imagine how discouraging it would have been to slash him, to no other effect than to get him *really* mad.

Just a note here: Some of David's mighty men must have had similar fighting abilities, but Samson was in a class of his own.

Vs. 9-13 In a way you can understand the distress of the men of Judah. Samson wasn't a good guy. He was an egotistical loose cannon and not an encourager or leader of men. Samson could have led these men against the Philistines. He could have led them in prayer. Instead, he had an idea. He just made them promise not to try to kill him themselves.

Vs. 14-17 The excitement of seeing the Philistines rush toward him and the Spirit rushing upon him sparked Samson into action. Apparently the men of Judah retreated.

V. 15 Obviously a fresh jawbone was preferred over an old, dry, brittle one. What is sort of interesting is that, in the course of human affairs, God had it right there at the right time.

According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC) there is a word play here, the word for *heap* being similar to the word for *donkey*. In essence, Samson the poet is saying he used the jawbone of a donkey to make donkey heaps. I wonder if he put that to some popular melody and hummed it as he killed these thousand guys.

V. 17 Where he threw the jawbone was thereafter called the "hill of the jawbone." I say this because in some translations it looks like the water comes out of the hollow place in the jawbone. Not so. The water came from the hill of the jawbone.

Vs. 18-20 Notice the faith and familiarity with God that Samson had. He knew that God was there with him. This guy is a complete contrast between faith and following the flesh. While this seems like a mystery, it really explains Christianity today. The Lord has called us to be devoted to Him, following Him in the harvest making disciples. To be doing anything else moves us closer to Samson's kind of faith than we think. Faith and devotion can exist right next to feeding our flesh, enjoying the good life and being virtually ineffective as disciples during our time on earth. This should frighten us.

Judges 16

Vs. 1-3 This is definitely not a story for your kids. What stands out to me is Samson's willingness to live in sin and conflict, and his confidence in the presence of the enemy. He walks into one of the Philistines' major cities, in plain view and then bides his time. Since these gates would have been huge, not to mention heavy, for Samson they must have been feather light. This is obviously supernatural and beyond what we can imagine.

Vs. 4-22 Samson was not seduced. He was just arrogantly stupid. He knew what she was after. There was no real trickery. He was the fool of Proverbs and magnificently over confident. He didn't imagine the Lord would leave him. Also, he didn't realize that the root of his need would betray him. What I mean is that Samson really wanted a "one-flesh" companion. We'd say, "a wife." But all of this would have to have been according to God's plan, and Samson wasn't really interested in God's plan. Unfortunately we don't follow God's plans very well either. Samson really wanted someone to trust, but breaking down and getting all vulnerable and honest with the object of his hormonal affections didn't make her the person he was seeking. God left Samson, and the Philistines put out his lights.

Vs. 23-31 This event gives you the sense of how great a relief it was for the Philistines to defeat Samson. It was like Christmas for them. In a final stroke of victory, God lured all of the leaders of the Philistines to Gaza to see what Dagon had done. Again, God used Samson in spite of himself, motivating Samson to ask to avenge the loss of his eyes rather than seeking God's glory.

In contrast to the movie, Samson doesn't tell the kid who shows him where the pillars are to run. You would have thought, with the way Samson asked for help identifying the pillars, that the *young man* would have been smarter.

It is sad to think what might have been if he had been a godly man. I think for any of us who feel that we've messed up "what could have been" by our own disobedience, the answer is in God's grace. Paul, a murderer, began to follow, and look what God did. Even King Manasseh began to follow. Regardless of lost time and opportunities missed, we can still begin today to follow. Life can become full of regret and tangled like the Gordian knot, but the solution is disarmingly simple. The next decision we make, we decide to honor God, and the one after that and the one after that. Following Christ in the harvest, despite our past failures, gives us a future and brings glory to the Father as we labor to bear fruit for Christ. Satan focuses us on past failure. God focuses us on our Savior, who paid it all for us - past, present and future.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

John 2

Vs. 1-12 This is sort of a funny event in Jesus' life, but also His first miracle in front of His disciples. Since John was there for this, he mentions its impact on the disciples in v. 11.

The *third day* is not only a good name for a Christian band, but it is probably the time measured from the last event: The calling of Philip and Nathanael.

There is no way for us to know the family dynamics going on here. I think there was some sense in Mary's understanding that Jesus was sent by God. No one really understood, but you see Mary pressing the issue here for Him to reveal Himself and Jesus' brothers taunt Him later to declare Himself publicly. Whatever was happening, with Jesus talking to Mary like this, I think it is playfully meant and is building off of some of what was known about Jesus in the family.

Besides, here Jesus was, this unmarried son without a job. He quit his job, stopped supporting the family (He had four brothers and at least two sisters to carry the load), He was bumming around teaching, and now He had these merry men. Maybe Mary just wanted Him to get the ball rolling.

V. 5 This is funny. In spite of what she just heard, she tells the servants to do what He says. She knew He could and would do something.

V. 7 We are so conditioned by what we know of Jesus, that it would be easy for us to miss what this would have looked like to the servants and to these brand new disciples, as Jesus did this. It would have looked like the world's worst practical joke gone bad. This wasn't a place for a joke. Even using those purification jars was not kosher. There was no way that this could be wine. And then why take water to the steward of the feast? Was this some sort of political statement against wine or weddings or something? No one would have understood what Jesus was doing until the servants drew the liquid out of the jars and saw and smelled that it was different.

V. 10 indicates that this was good, potent wine, not the diluted kind. It was the kind that one usually brought out first, dulling the senses of the guests so they would not notice the poor wine later.

V. 11 Jesus didn't just do a trick or a sign; He manifested His glory. He created. Remember the words in the first chapter of John. All things were made through Him.

V. 12 This seems like a side comment, but Jesus and his family would eventually take up residence at Peter's house in Capernaum.

Vs. 13-25 Jesus will appear at four Passovers during His three years of ministry. This is the first of those Passovers, kind of inaugurating the beginning of His ministry.

The selling of animals and changing of money could have been done in the city, away from the temple. There was a practical need since many Jews came from all over the Roman Empire. They needed animals and they needed to change their currency. This was all understandable. However, the fact that they did it in the temple in the court of the nations (Mark 11:17), was not only racism (the hating of Gentiles which would invade the church in Acts), but it was in denial of God's plan of redemption for man, the promise to Abraham, and God's design for Israel. This wasn't just some little noise Jesus was making in protest to the corruption of the priesthood. He, as the Savior of all men, was coming to the place all nations were to gather to receive forgiveness from Him. Someday, all men of all nations will come to the temple in Jerusalem and meet Jesus. Jesus had a right to do what He did.

Notice that the order of oxen and sheep is inverted from v. 14 to v. 15. It would have been easier to get the oxen out of the temple by scaring the sheep. Then the oxen would have moved too. That makes you think about the importance of little details in reading. Speaking of which, notice that Jesus didn't throw over the tables of those selling pigeons. He told the sellers to take them away. No animals were hurt in the performing of this cleansing.

V. 17 The disciples thought of this verse. The Holy Spirit was helping out.

V. 18 This is Jesus' first confrontation. In this sense, Jesus was like Samson. He invited hostility and His reply was not only cryptic, but was an "in your face" reply. We don't understand the severity, in God's eyes, of stiff-arming the Gentiles and using their court as a farmers' market.

Jesus cleansed the temple on His first visit and on His last visit to Jerusalem during the Passover. What He said to the Pharisees here was cryptic, but the disciples remembered it later and believed. Also, the priests and Pharisees eventually got the point too. That's why they demanded to have the garden tomb guarded. They believed something, but believed it in the way that sin and hate believe and still irrationally try to defeat the truth.

Vs. 23-25 Jesus understood the deep deadly sickness of sin in the people and understood not to entrust Himself to them. It is hard to know what the people actually had faith in. Whatever it was, Jesus didn't trust it. This mixture of faith and folly was in Samson, and it's in us, too. It is good for us as disciples to remember that we also have a deep irrationality because of sin. If not for the Spirit, I don't think we'd stand a chance of warding it off. Imagine what it is like for people who don't know Christ. We need to be wise, humble and understanding.

In John, Jesus will eventually define being a disciple as abiding in Him. It isn't just remaining in Him, but it is a kind of faith that redefines us. Paul probably described it best when he said in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

This is the kind of faith that makes a disciple in the harvest a fisher of men and a maker of disciples.

Psalm 103

This seems like the psalm that launched a thousand songs. I found allusions to at least six songs in it. There is not only strength of hope for His people, but the confirmation of salvation for those who seek Him. You'll find plenty to underline, like the phrase *steadfast love*. David must have written this in his early days as King of Israel, having brought the ark to Jerusalem. It seems that all of his suffering and waiting on God had borne fruit in his confidence and praise to God.

Vs. 1-5 This is the call to worship, summarizing God's salvation and renewal of those who trust Him.

Vs. 6-13 This seems to praise God's justice, discipline, love and forgiveness. For David, this was like summing up all of the years of running from Saul into one declaration of God's wise and sovereign working.

Vs. 14-19 Not only is there love, personally, but it is faithful love over generations and connected to the promise to Abraham. Through David's kingship, God would finally bring the peace to Israel. All of the confusion of the book of Judges was gone and godly order would arrive. David saw that God was using him for the nation and to bring some fulfillment to the covenant with Abraham.

Vs. 20-22 All of creation was being called to bless the Lord.

Proverbs 14:17-19

The thought of God's steadfast love makes a person prudent and slow to anger. Since He is in control, even to the place of making sure the fresh jawbone of a donkey is where it can be obtained when needed, we who are loved by Him can wait patiently as the storm rages around us and look for what the Lord is doing.

A *quick temper* is a denial of God's presence in the present. Being simple is ignorance of God's Word. God's Word is to make us prudent and alert and good, having the confidence to be godly in an evil world.