

Judges 08-07-25a

This is Friday, the 25th of July, 2008. Last week we were in Judges chapter 14, we're going to be in chapter 15 this evening. We'll take a moment as we start to exercise our individual privilege of going to the Lord in prayer.

It's the opportunity to ensure that we are in a position to receive the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, without which we spend time, but not productively. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful for an opportunity to spend time together studying your word, seeing the unfolding of your plan and your purpose, the actions of your Holy Spirit. We know that it is the same Spirit who enabled the men of old, men of faith, that also is present within us to lead us and to enable us to fulfill the positive aspects of your plan.

We ask your blessing on us as we study this passage together. May each of us find in it those truths that will illuminate our path and enable us to walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling and that reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name, amen.

So Samson has begun to deliver Israel. He has started to tangle with the Philistines, and it begins with something that would seem to be the opposite. Down through history you can see kings contracting marriages.

You can go back even to the days of Solomon and see that by engaging in marriage with surrounding kings' daughters and so forth, this was supposed to cement an alliance, supposed to draw two people closer. You can look at the history of England and see where you've got Germans on the throne and you've got people scattered all over Europe that are interrelated and intermarried. You've got the Habsburgs and so on.

All of this is supposed to bring people closer, but it often fails. I think you can look at England fighting in World War II and realize that the whole Habsburg thing ultimately fell through. The same thing in this case where Samson is really excited about a Philistine girl.

He wants her. She looks right in his eyes, and so he's going to marry her. You would think, well, this is the beginning of the end.

Israel is going to come down to syncretism and amalgamation and intermarriage and the blending away. They'll be dissipated into the Philistine culture and there won't be any them or us. It'll just be we.

So he tells his parents he wants to contract this marriage. They put up a little bit of token resistance, but they go along and he heads down there to this marriage feast. We are told at the beginning of chapter 14 that God was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines, and he's going to use Samson.

Samson does not look like something God would use. He doesn't look like a man that God

would use. He's not a man of prayer.

He's not a man of faith. He's not even an obedient Nazarite, and we find this out as he's on his way down to Timnah. This young lion comes roaring against him.

The Spirit of the Lord rushes upon him. It's really an interesting choice of verb here in verse 6, because unlike come upon, which is the normal word used elsewhere, this is rushed upon. The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him all of a sudden, in a great hurry, and he tears this lion into, as easily as one would tear a young goat.

We talked about the implications of this, that you have the word for tear or cleave, which represents the, the only other place you find it used is with regard to sacrificial animals. So Samson, with the Spirit rushing upon him in sort of an unexpected fashion, basically tears this animal as one would separate a sacrifice, or as one would identify a sacrifice. It's the word used for the cloven hoof, remember that? And what this suggests to us is to step back and look at a symbolic value in this story.

We've already seen the symbolic value in the riddle, but also in the story itself, because Samson comes to represent Israel in its strength. Remember the parents who are weak, the parents who don't recognize a messenger when they see him, and they have to ask repeatedly for assurance and so on, kind of reminds you of the generation that dropped in the wilderness. Samson is like the strong generation, or the second phase, it's really more than a generation, because we're now several hundred years into the occupation of the land.

But you have those who were in Egypt and fell in the wilderness, you have those who have crossed with Joshua into the land and are now there, and God enabled them, God strengthened them, and they're powerful. So Samson sort of embodies Israel in its strength, and as he tears this lion like a sacrifice, you have a two-fold, you have a near and a far reflection. In the near term, this is what they are supposed to do to the strong native indigenous people of the land.

They are supposed to go in under the ministry of God and destroy this threat that would normally be stronger than them. God says, I'm sending you in against seven nations stronger and mightier than you, but I will drive them out before you, I will send hornets ahead of you, remember that? And they will drive the nations out from before you. And so this is kind of what they are supposed to do, and you have the spirit rushing on, you have this victory, tearing of the lion.

So then he goes on down to Timnah, because he's really not interested in tearing lions or in anything other than satisfying his own desires, and this is his sort of inherent flaw, this is his Achilles heel, is that he is very self-centered and he has a real weakness when it comes to women. So, he goes down to Timnah, and then later when he is going back to further engage in this whole marriage business, he turns aside to see if the lion remains, and he sees a swarm of bees in the lion's carcass as well as some honey. And this is unusual, bees do not take up residence in carcasses, they just don't.

This is, the reason it is remarkable in Samson's mind is, who has ever seen this happen? And people try to explain it by natural means, was it so hot in the summertime that the carcass sort of embalmed before it could disintegrate, it's just a real strange, plus animals are typically not ripped in half like this one was, so that there is a hollow perhaps inside the ribcage where some queen bee would start a colony, and within a matter of days apparently there is this entire comb with honey and the whole, this usually takes a long time and it has happened very quickly. It is of God, it is highly unusual. Samson sees this act of God, strange sight, and he doesn't tell anyone.

What he does do, is scoop the honey out of the carcass with his hands, he eats it, and he gives it to his parents. Now this does two things, it defiles him, because he has to get inside this carcass and he is a Nazirite, and one of the premier strictures against a Nazirite is to touch anything that is dead. So anything inside the dead lion, if you go back to Leviticus and read about a diseased house, a house that has the mildew or the mold or the leprosy in the house, anything in the house is contaminated.

You have a carcass, anything in the carcass is defiled by definition, but he reaches in and gets this honey because it is desirable, but by definition it is defiled. He's not supposed to touch anything dead, anything defiled by death, but he gets this honey and without telling his parents, he gives it to them and unwittingly they are defiled because you just don't take roadkill, there's lots of scriptures we could go to, you can look them up, but I think it's fairly obvious. And so he disrespects his Nazirite status, disrespects his parents by giving them something they don't know the origin of, who knows what they would have decided if they had known, but they are defiled without really even knowing it.

So he goes down to Timnah, you remember this story, the whole thing of the riddle and the thirty sets of clothes, and one other point to make on this that I didn't mention last time is you notice in verse 11 when the Philistines saw that he had no, actually it says when the Philistines saw him, and this is a place, I can't really find a single English translation that I can just unhesitatingly, unreservedly recommend. If you're going to do serious Bible study and you don't have access to the original languages, it's really good to have two or three Bibles, New American Standard, New King James, the New English Translation, the NET, the N-E-T Bible is good for its notes, the notes are just phenomenal, there's wealth of detail about the original language and so on, but sometimes they just get things really, really wrong, and after giving you a really superb note, their translation is very interpretive and you can't go just with their, I would skip the translation and just get the notes. NIV is good if you're reading big chunks and you just want to get through, if you want to read Job in a sitting, you can do that in the NIV.

But here is a case where in the NET Bible they give you a translation which says when the Philistines saw that he had no attendance, they gave him 30 groomsmen who kept him company. That's not what it says in Hebrew. In verse 11 it literally says, and it came to pass when they saw him, Samson evidently had not really made his presence noisily known when he met this girl and took up with her, so when he comes to town and the Philistines see him, they

decide he needs company, and so they get, and it says they brought 30 companions, this is the word in Hebrew that means to take, they took 30 guys and said, you watch him, this is a contingent of guards.

They put 30 men, this isn't, oh here's 30 buddies of Samson's, none of these people have seen him and they don't know him. So they, it's voicemail don't worry about it, I got a new phone, I can't figure out how to work it yet. So they give him these 30 men when they see him, why? He's a formidable guy, and so these 30 companions are to watch him, and probably to intimidate him, but he's not intimidated, he banters with them, he engages them in conversation and gets them to bite on this riddle, and it's really unfair because it's an unheard of thing for there to be a honey inside a dead line, and so by telling them this riddle, he is assured of aggrandizing himself and getting 30 tunics and 30 changes of clothes at their expense.

But you remember how that turned out. And so the woman that he is engaged to pleads with him and she says, you only hate me, you do not love me, you have posed a riddle to the sons of my people but you have not explained it to me, well, why is she doing this? Because on the fourth day, these 30 thugs, these 30 bodyguard guys, these 30 bouncers, go to her and say, entice your husband that he may explain the riddle to us or else we will do what? Burn you and your father's house with fire. So these guys, rather than lose one change of clothes each, will murder this woman and her father and burn their house to the ground.

That's how bad they want to win. That's how depraved this society is. What's a change of clothes going to cost them? I mean, if it's an expensive change of clothes, I mean, what, shirt and jeans and a couple of other things, maybe \$80, maybe \$100 each, but rather than that, they say they don't want to lose face and they don't want to lose the bet.

Well this comes into play later on then because when he goes down to Ashkelon and kills 30 of their men, and it says he took their apparel in verse 19, the word translated apparel there is not the same as the one up above. This is the one that means their belt, literally, it's not an English word to match it, but it's kind of like their girdments, their garments, but this is the word that's used for a war belt where you hang your sword and your mace and your weapons belt. This is your 782, he took their 782 gear if you were in the military, took their web belt, took their harness and their stuff, and he gives these guys this as payment.

And then it says Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his best man. This doesn't quite say best man, but it says his companion who had been his friend, he knew one guy down there, and he's the guy who hired the 30 bodyguards back up above. Okay, well that's a little bit of background for chapter 15, we need to review those things because in chapter 15, after a while in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat and said, I will go into my wife in her room.

He said, let me go into my wife into the room, her father would not permit him to go in, her father said, I really thought that you thoroughly hated her, therefore I gave her to your companion, the same friend that was mentioned at the end of the previous chapter. Is not her

younger sister better than she? Please take her instead. Samson said to them, this time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them.

Samson went and caught 300 foxes, he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain as well as the vineyards and olive groves. The Philistines said, who has done this? They answered, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.

So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. She didn't really escape the fate that she tried to escape by wheedling the answer out of Samson, she got burned in her house and her father anyway. Samson said, since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease.

So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter, then he went down and dwelt at the cleft of the rock of Etam. Okay, well that's the first several verses of chapter 15. It tells us in verse 1 that this is the time of wheat harvest.

When is the time of wheat harvest in this part of the world? Well, this is the common word for wheat, and we have a really old, one of the oldest Hebrew inscriptions in existence is the Gezer calendar. You might have heard of it, it's a little tablet. It's got some ancient Hebrew writing on it, and it's a schedule, it's a yearly planner.

You know, plant at this time, harvest at this time, and so on. The Gezer calendar tells us that the wheat harvest occurred in May, right after the barley harvest. You remember the feasts in Israel, you have Pentecost, coming after the early harvest right after the 14th of Nisan and Passover, and first fruits, the first fruits of the barley harvest, and then seven weeks later, you have the Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, and so on.

So, May after the barley harvest is about the time that we're talking about. And this is important because this is the time in the summer when all of the crops have just come to fruition. It's about time to harvest them.

Whenever I think of this, I think of reading Little House on the Prairie, and the work and the labor all by hand of bringing those crops to fruition. There's one episode in particular where they are just ready to harvest, and a giant hailstorm comes and destroys the entire crop. All of their hard work, all of the months of labor, all of the investment in the seed, the back-breaking work, one more day and the harvest would have been taken in, but it's just utterly destroyed.

Well, this harvest is just at that point when Samson visits his wife with a young goat. Now, why would he visit her with a young goat? Well in your New King James you have a note on that that says Genesis 38.17, and without even looking, can you remember what that is? Just remember the last many chapters of Genesis deal with the story of Joseph and a few little events that

happen while he's gone. There's the story of Judah and Tamar.

Remember that? You've got Onan and Ur and the sons of Judah, and they're married to Tamar, and she doesn't conceive any children with them because one of them gets killed and the other one refuses and so on. God slays the first two sons, and Judah won't give his third son to Tamar. And so she sets up shop by the side of the road and dresses up like a harlot, and Judah is going back and forth taking care of the flocks and so on, and he stops in.

And he says, I'm ready to have a hot time in the old town tonight. And she says, well, what are you going to pay me? And he says, well, I'll give you a young goat from the flock. So a young goat from the flock is sort of the payment for a one-night stand.

That's the rough equivalent. And of course he doesn't have a goat with him at the time, and she says, well, I need something until you show up with this goat. And so he's going to leave his staff and his signet ring, remember that whole thing.

But this is the idea, and somebody somewhere has said that a young goat was kind of like a box of expensive chocolates back in this day. You know, you want to visit a woman and kind of gain her goodwill, well, you bring her a young goat. And so that's what he does.

He shows up, and he says, let me go in to my wife, and when it says into her room, this is into the inner chamber. And I'm sorry, but there is double entendre and innuendo in Hebrew, just as there is in Greek, just as there is in English. And it's here.

And I would be deceiving you or leaving something out if I didn't tell you that there is a subtle sort of shady humor going on here. When Samson says this, he is clearly telling the father, it's time for me to consummate this marriage. I want to go into her, to the inner chamber, is what he literally says.

The father would not permit him to go in. Her father said, I really thought that you hated her. I gave her to your companion.

Well, this was a contract, and the Philistines are showing their character over and over again. They see Samson, and they put bodyguards around him. These bodyguards threaten the daughter and the father with death by burning and destruction of all of their property.

They cheat on the bet. They are thoroughly immoral. They are thoroughly showing the character that God said the iniquity of these people is full, and they need to be destroyed.

And so this guy, even though he has entered into a contract, he has accepted an arrangement through Samson's parents, gave his daughter to someone else. And so now he says, is not her younger sister better than she? Please take her instead. Well, this is an insult.

It doesn't look like it here. It looks like, well, he's being very gracious. But it's a twist, and it is a remnant.

It harks back to Laban and Jacob. There was a deceit and a cheating on a contract in that case, as well. And this is another one of the clues that tells us that we are to see in Samson a picture of Israel, a picture of Jacob and his offspring.

This is a conscious identification, and it tells us that Samson represents Israel in his strength. Remember, Jacob is the one who is going to have these twelve sons, ultimately. Some of them with Rachel, and Samson is Jacob wrestling with the man until dawn.

I will not let you go until you bless me. I will take what I want by force. I want what I want.

I will go. I will do whatever I have to do to get it. Samson says, this time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them.

Now, Samson does not take out, he does not put his wrath on the father, or on the household, certainly not on the girl. He is unhappy with the Philistines in general. You would think, well, it's the father who betrayed Samson, who broke the contract.

The father ought to pay. The father is not touched. The father is not harmed in this.

Samson doesn't target him. He is just bigoted. He is politically incorrect when it comes to the Philistines.

He is ready to do them all kinds of damage. Any Philistine will do, just as in the case of the 30 changes. So it says Samson went and caught 300 foxes.

The word for foxes here is used in Hebrew for foxes, but it is also used for jackals. In this particular context, these are in fact jackals. Jackals were known to inhabit this part of the ancient Near East, and the difference between foxes and jackals is this.

Foxes are solitary animals, and if you were going to get 300 foxes, it would take a long time to find them and trap them and keep them while you went and found the other 200 and so many. But jackals, they run in packs, and it would be relatively simple and it wouldn't take very long, especially for someone with Samson's abilities to use some bait, attract several groups or herds, I don't know what you call it, a gaggle or a covey or a clutch. You've got all these different words for groups of animals, school, but this is a pack.

These are packs of jackals. Think of hyenas and jackals that you've seen on National Geographic where some animal is down and maybe a lion or something has killed the animal, and all of a sudden the hyenas and the jackals are circling the dingoes in Australia, and they're in packs. Well, it would be fairly easy, and some of these packs were quite large.

If he gets 10 packs of 30 animals, he's got 300 jackals. He takes these jackals. In fact, the Arabic word for jackal is shagal, and that's where our word jackal actually comes from, is the Arabic word for this animal.

He caught these jackals, and he took torches. He turned the fox's tail to tail and put a torch

between each pair of tails. If you think of the physics of this, in the first place, jackals make a lot more sense.

If you've seen a jackal's tail, it's a lot more like a dog's tail. Fox tails, I mean my dad has a big thick brush that we always called the fox tail because it's so bushy and brushy. You'd probably set your foxes on fire if you tried to stick a torch in their tail before you ever got your mission accomplished.

I don't think that these animals are back-to-back. When it says tail-to-tail, it sounds like he overlapped the tails this way and they're trying to go in opposite directions, but it is more likely that he put the tails side-by-side. He put them tail-to-tail, bound them together with a torch behind.

What this does is cause a zig-zag pattern, and it also slows the jackals down because they're going to run so fast that they'll either put the torch out or it won't have time to light anything. By tying two of them together, they're going to have an erratic and slower path, but they're both going to be going in the same direction. Whichever one is stronger, they're going to go in a curve.

They're not going to run in a straight line. They're going to nip and wrestle and panic and be very erratic. So they're going to spend a lot of time in whatever field they're turned loose in.

So he takes this torch and he ties it. Of course, he doesn't have to do this all at once. He's got these things rounded up in a pen, so he gets pairs of them and he lights a couple of torches and he binds it in there and turns a couple of them loose.

He gets torches and so on, takes a live coal with him and puts a rope around these things, takes them off to another side of some other Philistine's field, binds a couple of them together and turns them loose. This is ancient terrorism. And remember what season it is.

Why were we given this notation that it is the height of the wheat harvest? Because all of this grain is standing and it's dry, it's ready for harvest. It's just before everything is supposed to come in and it's just like tinder. And these things create swaths and if he sets them upwind, well, the fire just sweeps through and destroys not only the standing grain, but also some of the harvest has already been done.

So they've got standing shocks of harvested grain out there. Remember the sheaves that Joseph saw in his dream and they were standing in the field and the sheaves were all bowing to Joseph's sheaf and it got his brothers all upset? Well, there are these big standing sheaves out in the field and you can imagine what those are like when they catch fire and they're dry. So this is horrendous.

There's black, billowing smoke on the horizon and these Philistines are running out and there's nothing they can do. It's like the wildfires in California. Even with modern technology and helicopters and buckets of water, they can't put those things out.

And so this is just utter ruination and destruction for the Philistines. Not only the standing grain that hasn't been harvested and the shocks that haven't been harvested, but the vineyards, the grape vines are ruined, charred, destroyed. There's not going to be any vintage.

And the olives, the olive groves, by the time all the rest of this gets to go in the heat of this fire, olive trees, and a lot of these are sort of low, bushy types of trees, they go up as well. It's not the time for figs or olives yet, but these trees are going up and there's not going to be anything later either. So it is utter devastation.

It's economic ruination for this whole region. So naturally the Philistines, finding these dead jackals with the stump of a torch tied between their tails, they recognize that this is arson. This is man-made incineration.

They say, well, who has done this? And everybody knows that Samson has been down there. Samson came knocking on the door. The father said, boy, he sure looked angry when he left.

And so they find out, and notice it says, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because they recognize that this was a valid contract. She is his wife. He is the man's son-in-law.

It doesn't say the one who had been betrothed. It says he's the son-in-law. Standard word.

This was a marriage, in fact, if not in experience. Notice how you read verse 6, the Philistines said, who has done this? And they answered, the other Philistines answered, Samson the son-in-law of the Timnite. And now they're talking about and pointing to the Timnite, because he, the Timnite, has taken his wife, Samson's wife, and given her to his Samson's friend.

His one friend in town, I guess, ended up with the wife. So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. Now you think about the weirdness of this.

Samson is wronged by the girl's father, and he takes it out on the Philistines. The Philistines are wronged by Samson, and they take it out on her father. Nobody can get the justice correct here.

It's unfair any way you slice it. The Philistines, a lot of these field owners, they didn't do anything to Samson. They weren't at the feast.

They didn't know anything about him. But they've been wiped out. And so Samson has done that to them, and they say, well, this guy, what's the point of burning him up? What's done is done, but they do it anyway.

And so there's a lot of irony here, because the girl, to avoid being burned and her father and his property, got Samson to tell. And because she got Samson to tell the answer to the riddle, now she and her father are burned up with fire anyway. And the moral of that story is it doesn't pay to be a Philistine.

When God is ready to judge the Philistines, there is no escape. Anything you do, you're going to

be judged. It is going to happen.

And it's going to spread from the point of contact with God's people, with God's deliverer, and it's just going to move outward in concentric circles. So, this thing is just escalating out of control. Samson looks at the Philistines who have burned up his father-in-law, with whom he was all put out, and his wife, who's gone and been given to another man.

And so he says, because you have done this thing, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease. And it comes across really awkward in English. What he's basically saying is, I'm not going to stop until I have utterly taken revenge on you.

I'm going to vengeance, vengeance upon you, and I'm not going to stop until I stop. Until the vengeance is completely expended. So then we have another euphemism here that says, he attacked them hip and thigh.

He attacked them hip and thigh. And once again, you can't help but be directed back to the book of Genesis. Who is the guy that used his strength to try to get a blessing, and what happened to him? He wrestled with the man until dawn, and what did he come away with? He withered his thigh.

He put his hip out of joint. Hip and thigh. It's a thing like hammer and tongs, or elbows and knees.

You know, he went at them hammer and tongs. He was all elbows and knees. These are euphemisms that we've lost the origin of in some cases.

So, he attacked them hip and thigh. This actually has the idea of attacking a guy and dominating him so that you've overpowered him physically. That's about as close as you can get in English.

It doesn't give us the details of this further slaughter, but it basically says, he struck them hip upon thigh. This is shok al yarek. Hip upon thigh.

With great blows. And then he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam. So, in spite of the fact that he is operating basically without regard to God, in spite of the fact that he is following his own passion and seeking to satisfy his own appetites, he is still accomplishing God's purpose.

God raised Samson up. God chose him. God told his parents he was going to be a chosen instrument.

God knew ahead of time exactly the kind of man Samson would be, and God is using him anyway. So, let's just stop and back up and review something we talked about a couple of weeks ago. There are two ways that the people of God get used in the plan of God.

Either positively because we are faithful and obedient, thoroughly equipped for every good

work because we have been good students of the word of God, we have been corrected, rebuked, and instructed in righteousness, and we are mature. That's a wonderful way to be used in the plan and purpose of God. Coming to Bible class.

Paying attention. Sometimes it's tough. You've got to concentrate.

There was a time when I was on the other side of this process and other people were talking. I know that despite your best intentions, sometimes it's like there is not enough blood getting above your neck. It's like, I can't focus.

I can't concentrate. You get sleepy. You say, I wish I could rewind him because I just missed those last two sentences.

The funniest thing I ever saw in Bible class in my entire life was after spending two full years with my roommate listening to tapes of Bible class, we went and saw that same teacher live in the auditorium. People would call it the sanctuary of the church. We were there after two full years of tapes.

There we were. Actually, here's the guy. He's live.

We're sitting in a pew. It's a standard type of thing. It's got the wooden pew with the hymnal rack and the little place to put the cups after you have the communion and a little card for visitors and that kind of thing.

We're sitting right in front of one of these little racks. It's got the hymnals there or a guest Bible and those little things on each side where you put the cups. I'm sitting on the left.

My good friend is sitting just to my right. Here he goes, ripping away in his usual fast fashion and trying to take notes. He can hardly keep up.

I see this motion. I hear this noise. I look over and Ken is tapping the wood.

He's reaching out and hitting the rack where you put the cups. He's trying to hit the pause button on the tape. It's just a reflex.

He's been doing it for two years. Stuff is going by and he's reaching out to try to stop the talking. I thought, boy, it's going to be so bad if I bust out laughing in the middle of this environment.

Some of you all know what that would have been like. It really amused me. I know it's hard sometimes when you're sitting there and you're trying to focus and you're trying to pay attention and you're trying to write one thing down and something else goes by.

But think about this. Samson is representative of Israel in their human strength, in their human ambition, and they're all messed up. Samson is all messed up.

He has violated his Nazarite vow. Isn't this what Israel did with the Levitical offerings and sacrifices? God finally says, by the time you get to Malachi, your sacrifices, just quit bringing them. They're a stench in my nostril.

You think you're bringing me a pleasing aroma sacrifice? It's like burning tires. It's a stench in my nose. It smells awful.

You've perverted it because your heart is not right. So you ask yourself the question, well, why would God do the whole Old Testament age thing? He doesn't give the Holy Spirit to Old Testament saints the way that he gives the Spirit now. The Holy Spirit was not yet given.

Christ was not yet glorified. We see failure upon failure upon failure. Some of the Old Testament saints, you have your Abrahams and your Noahs and your Moses and your Davids and so on.

But you've got the prophets and Daniel and them, Jonathan. But there are so many others, the run-of-the-mill people. They are the exception.

And you find out that God the Holy Spirit came to those who requested his presence. Jesus tells his generation, will not your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for him? But you had to ask. It wasn't just a universal gift.

So I'm back to the question. Here's the question. Why would God spend so many hundreds of years having a people of his very own, largely operating in their human strength, and failing so much? All day long I've held up my hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people.

And you remember what stiff-necked is? They turn the neck. They keep going the other way. The kind that you would have to throw the pearls beyond, and then they would just turn and tear you to pieces.

Why would God work with people like that? Well, here's the answer. This is the answer. Look at this passage.

God knew Samson before he was born. God went to his weak-kneed milk-sop parents and told them, just make sure this child fulfills the Nazarite vow. Samson doesn't even do that.

But God is using him. God has a larger objective. God is using him.

What is God's main purpose in the Samson story? Is he trying to raise up an example of faith and obedience for all of the Israelites to look at and emulate? Is he trying to renew and revitalize, revive faithful Levitical operations in Israel? What is God's purpose at this time in Israel? What's his goal? Begin to destroy the Philistines. It's not going to destroy them. It's going to begin it.

And the Philistines are going to be caught flat-footed and unawares because this is not like the Canaanites quaking in the land watching faithful Joshua coming up with God and the pillar of

fire and the pillar of smoke, and this is a God like no God we've ever seen. All of the nations have fallen before him. Rivers dry up.

Walls fall. Hail comes from heaven. We don't have a chance against this God.

What are the Philistines looking at? What's this one guy? Put 30 guards on him and we'll be okay. Let's burn down his father-in-law's house and we'll be okay. They're not looking at the God of Israel.

The God of Israel is not an issue. They've got their eyes on the man. And the man is the point of the wedge that God is going to use to ultimately displace, dispossess, and destroy the Philistines.

And they don't see it coming. They think, well, he's a formidable man, but he's just a man. We can handle him.

We're not dealing with the God that broke off Dagon's hands. That's coming up in the days of Eli and Samuel. Remember? Well, now think about what we've come to know as the angelic conflict.

Think about God's actual enemies in the universe. And think about what God is doing with his people Israel to begin the destruction of those enemies, to begin the judgment of those enemies. And they don't see it coming.

Because look at the instrument. Is this the best that the God of Israel... Am I a dog that Goliath will say that this is all you're throwing at me? So that's the subtext. That's the second channel behind the Samson story.

We'll pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we'll see how this is going to help us understand the remainder of chapter 15.