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Judges 12 - 14



Judges - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg discusses the story of Samson from Judges 12 - 14. He highlights Samson's role as a judge of Israel and the unique circumstances of his birth as a Nazarite. Gregg questions Samson's commitment to his vow, citing his marriage to a Philistine woman and his participation in revelry. The speaker notes that despite Samson's flaws, he was chosen by God to defend his people against the Philistines.

Transcript

We'll resume our coverage of Jephthah's story. The most famous part of his story, of course, is that he made this vow, which ended up affecting his daughter. And we were talking at the end of the last session about how many feel that she was offered as a sacrifice, others do not.

I do not. I think she she was just committed to service of God for the rest of her life and never married. Now, in Chapter 12, the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over towards Zaphon and said to Jephthah, Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire.

He's a great people, Ephraimites, they did the same thing to Gideon, remember? They're just guys who get offended easy, I guess, you know? Why didn't you invite us to have a role in this? We'd like to share some of that glory with you. That's what it really is. I mean, if they wanted to fight the Ammonites, they could have fought the Ammonites any time they wanted to, you know, in the last several years that the Ammonites were bugging them.

Why didn't they rise up and do it on their own if they were so eager? The point is now that the battle's over, you know, they wish they had a bit of the glory and they feel like they've been ripped off by not being able to have a piece of that action. And now, Gideon, when they made the same complaint to him, he was able to ameliorate them and avoid conflict. Jephthah was not able to do so.

This ended up being a war between the people of Gilead under Jephthah and the

Ephraimites. But the Ephraimites really picked the fight. I mean, they said we're going to burn down Jephthah's house with him in it, as if he hadn't suffered enough, you know, he'd suffered rejection from his father's household all his life.

And then he, you know, fought and won the victory. And then he had to go through this heartbreak about his daughter. And now they're wanting to bug him, you know, kill him and burn his house down with him in it.

And Jephthah said to them, my people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon. And when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. Apparently, although it's not recorded, he must have sent a summons up to the other tribes nearby and offered them a place to help them in the war.

They either were slow or ignored his summons. And they could have been thinking, well, you know, he might not win. So we don't know if we want to take sides with him and get the people of Ammon angry at us.

And so, you know, he's suggesting that they had the opportunity, but didn't take it. Why they didn't take it, he doesn't necessarily bring up. He doesn't accuse them of cowardice or anything.

He just says you didn't come. Now, Jephthah gathered together, well, in verse 30, I'm sorry. So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon and Yahweh delivered them into my hand.

Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me? Now, Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim because they said, you Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites. Now, we're not sure what that's about, but apparently the unrecorded previously, there was this insult that the Ephraimites use either on this occasion or maybe commonly. There may have been a common bad blood between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites over a long period of time because the Ephraimites saw the people of Gilead as not legitimately having broken off from the Manassites and the Ephraimites to live over on the other side of the Jordan.

It's not clear exactly what that offense was, except that the Ephraimites had insulted the Gileadites, perhaps on a regular basis or maybe on this occasion, but there ended up being a fight and the Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan. Now, the fords are where people cross over the river. I don't know what they had for that.

I don't know if there were shallower areas or areas that were just not as far across the river. So, if they crossed on boats or whatever, they wouldn't have to go as far. But, the fords of a river are the places where armies would usually cross.

And, the Gileadites, which were under Jephthah, seized control of these crossing points

of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived. And, when any Ephraimite who escaped said, let me cross over, the men of Gilead would say to him, are you an Ephraimite? Now, it would seem that the Ephraimites had crossed to the east side, where Jephthah was, to make this threat to burn his house and so forth. And, in the war that followed, the Ephraimites saw that they were losing.

And, so many Ephraimites tried to flee back across the river, but the Gileadites had seized the crossing points. So, that whoever wanted to cross had to get by them. Now, since these people were all Israelites, and they all looked pretty much alike, you couldn't tell which tribe someone was of by looking at them.

So, the Ephraimites, trying to get by the Gileadites at the river to go home, to get across to safety from them, would have to masquerade as not being Ephraimites. Now, of course, the very fact that they were trying to cross back to Ephraim might raise questions, what tribe are you of then? You know, you're running from this battle, and the Ephraimites are losing, so you might expect Ephraimites to retreat and try to get back across the river. So, I mean, obviously, it would be, almost in every case, Ephraimites trying to cross over anyway.

But, the Gileadites, who were guarding the fords, would give the person who was in flight at least the opportunity to claim to be an Ephraimite or not. And, so they'd say, are you an Ephraimite? And, if he said no, then they would say to him, say then, Shibboleth. Now, Shibboleth, the people of Ephraim apparently had a different pronunciation of words.

There were regional dialects, just like there are in different parts of this country. There are certain words that people from New York or Boston can't say, in the same way that Westerners would say them, or that Southerners say things differently. And, so the people of Ephraim apparently were unable to pronounce the S-H sound.

Shibboleth means stream, or something like that. And, it's just a word that didn't really have any significance, except that they knew that Ephraimites could not pronounce it correctly. And, so they said, then say Shibboleth.

And, he would say Sibboleth, for he could not pronounce it right. Then, they would take him and kill him at the ford of the Jordan. And, there fell at that time 42,000 Ephraimites.

And, that's a lot. So, one at a time, apparently as they were fleeing from the battle, they got picked off, because none of them could say Shibboleth. In modern English, in modern literature, sometimes a certain thing will be called a Shibboleth.

You may not have encountered it, it's not all the time, but I encounter it from time to time. A Shibboleth is sort of a figure of speech nowadays, for some kind of, maybe a

small matter that becomes larger in the circumstances than it would ordinarily be. Like the ability to say Shibboleth would not be a major issue, except on this occasion it was a matter of life and death for these people.

And, anyway, Jephthah judged Israel for six years. Then, Jephthah the Gileadite died, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead. So, he didn't judge Israel for very long, only six years.

But, he probably had less will to live after he had no family left, and so forth. I know when I lost my family, it took a long time for me to feel like it was any reason to go on. You know, when your family's gone, you don't have much else to live for.

Maybe he just didn't have much, maybe he pined away for his daughter, or whatever. Hard to say, but he certainly didn't live as long as most of the judges did, after they had served their purpose and delivered Israel. Now, after him, Ibn Zan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

He had 30 sons, and he gave away 30 daughters in marriage, and brought in 30 daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israel seven years, and Ibn Zan died and was buried at Bethlehem. Now, a number of things about this man, I mean, not much is said, but there are some things worth saying.

Notice it says he is of Bethlehem. Some scholars think this might not have been Bethlehem Judah, where Jesus was born, where David was born. There were apparently other Bethlehems.

There was one in the region of Zebulun, and some think that this might have been a different Bethlehem of Zebulun. However, we know that Bethlehem Judah existed at this time, because that's where Ruth and Boaz lived. In fact, Jewish tradition says that this Ibn Zan is another name for Boaz.

Now, there's apparently no evidence for it at all. Probably the only evidence is that both are said to be in Bethlehem, and both lived during the period of the judges. Those are not enough points of connection to really establish the identity.

But Ibn Zan, we don't know that Boaz was ever known as Ibn Zan, or that he ever judged Israel. So, the Jewish tradition is not based on anything very significant. If it were true, however, then these 30 sons and 30 daughters would presumably be those of Ruth's offspring by Boaz.

But that doesn't seem likely at all. Likely, Ibn Zan had many wives. You don't have 60 children by one woman, usually.

You need at least two for that, or at least three. Susannah Wesley had 20 children. They didn't all live.

But this man raised 60 children to maturity. 30 sons and 30 daughters. And he brought in daughters from other tribes to marry his sons, and sent his daughters out to marry men of other tribes.

Apparently, he's building alliances between the different tribes through marriages. And we don't know much else about him. Okay, but if this is Bethlehem Judah, then he did live in the same town that Ruth and Boaz lived in.

But there is another Bethlehem, and scholars are not sure which one this was. After him, Elon, the Zebulonite, judged Israel. And he judged Israel 10 years.

And Elon, the Zebulonite, died and was buried at Ejealon in the country of Zebulun. Now, with these guys, Idvan and Elon, and the next one is Abdon, who's mentioned. We don't read of them delivering Israel from any armies or anything like that.

So, in what sense they, or by what means they rose to their position to be judges of Israel, we have no idea. And it's intriguing for those who would like to get sort of a clear picture about how things were going at those times. But we don't really have enough information to say what brought them to prominence.

After him, Abdon, the son of Hillel, the Pyrethonite, judged Israel. And he had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, who rode on 70 donkeys. And he judged Israel eight years.

Then Abdon, the son of Hillel, the Pyrethonite, died and was buried in Pyrethon in the land of Ephraim. In the mountains of the Amalekites. Apparently, the land that had once been inhabited by the Amalekites.

You know, when there's nothing more you can say about a man, about his eight years of service, than that he had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, and they rode on donkeys. That one bit of information apparently is mentioned because it's the most significant thing to say about him. And that means that there may be significance in it beyond what we would think if we read over it just casually.

We remember, it was said of an earlier judge, Jair, that he had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys. And I said this may have reflected a sort of a mentality that was developing in Israel at this time of having hereditary rulers. Not that his sons, not that Jair's sons became judges after him, but that during his judgeship, they seemed to hold positions over 30 cities.

And when we come to this man, Abdon, not only his sons, but his grandsons rode on donkeys. So it may be that we're seeing more of an idea of men trying to extend their own authority beyond their time. More generations like a hereditary king would.

We know that Samuel appointed his sons to be judges after him. But then that got interrupted by the people asking him to make them a king instead. So his sons didn't

serve as judges for very long.

But the idea that judges were raised up as individuals out of nowhere by God, seems to be the way it was supposed to be. But we find in some cases, these men are trying to set up a continuation of their authority in their sons, maybe in this case, even in his grandson. And that may be why it's mentioned.

However, whether he tried to do so or not, it does not appear that any of them really succeeded him or came to power after his death. Okay, now chapter 13, we have the beginning of the story of Samson and Samson goes for what four chapters. It's the longest, most detailed story of a judge that we get of his life.

And yet he's in some ways the most unlikely of the judges. None of the judges were perfect men, necessarily, but most of them seem to be pious. Most of them seem to be, most of them seem to take their responsibilities seriously.

Samson seemed like a guy who just kind of just wanted to party, you know, he just, you know, he was born to responsibility. As far as we know, he's the only one of the judges that was called to that before his birth. A little bit like John the Baptist, who before his birth, the significance of his ministry was already announced by an angel.

So also here, before Samson was born, his birth and its significance was announced by an angel and he was a Nazirite from his childhood on. So he grew up with the knowledge that he was to have this significant role. However, in adult life, he did not seem to ever take it very seriously.

He violated his Nazirite law on a regular basis. True, he did kill a lot of Philistines, but usually it was over personal grudges rather than a sense that he's the deliverer of Israel. It's more like he gets angry at them because of things they do to him.

Sometimes it's even unreasonable of him. Sometimes he overreacts and he compromises, you know, on one occasion, he spends night with a prostitute in the Philistine country and gets involved romantically and in marriage, even with Philistine women. The guy is simply not really the guy you think God would use as a judge.

He's a guy who God called and he knew his calling, but he didn't live up to it well and his life was shortened because of it. And he was a man who had remarkable power, as we know, although it was power from the Holy Spirit. More than the other judges, we read about the Spirit of God coming on Samson and giving him power to do his feats.

I mentioned that it's probably not accurate for us to picture Samson as we do, because we think of him as maybe one of the, like a Hercules type of character, like some of these Greek gods who are, you know, mountains of men, they're giant, you know, muscular people. And yet Samson is not anywhere described as being muscular or large. Or strong himself.

But that when the Spirit of God came upon him, he did supernatural feats of strength. Just like the demons allowed a demon-possessed man who lived in the tombs in Jesus' day to break chains supernaturally. There's not a reason for us to think that man was particularly muscular.

He might have been, but it had nothing to do with breaking chains. No matter how muscular a man is, he's not going to be able to break chains. And no matter how muscular a man is, he's not going to be able to do things Samson did.

So muscles had nothing to do with it. The power of the Holy Spirit had to do with it. So this man had really manifestations of the power of the Spirit in his life that were remarkable and apparently unique.

Although you do find guys like Shamgar killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad. It's not very much different than Samson killing a thousand of them with a jawbone of an ass. But we aren't told that Shamgar lived a life where the Spirit was coming upon him regularly and he's doing these supernatural feats of strength.

So he's an enigmatic character. And he has his counterpart, I think, in some of the charismatic preachers and such that have had, at times, the power to heal and to do things like that. But in some cases have not really been as godly, or at least not more godly than others.

And sometimes they even have had scandalous lives. Samson did too. And some of these modern evangelists have been compared sometimes to modern day Samson's.

I'm not thinking of Jimmy Swaggart. I'm not thinking of Jim Baker. These men didn't exhibit any power that I know of in their lives.

I'm not thinking of them as really gifted. They may have been talented in some area. I'm not sure of what.

But I'm talking about more men who actually had ministries where there's healings and miracles being done through their lives. And yet, if you know the history of revivals, you know that some of these men were, and some were not, unusually godly. A. A. Allen was a healing evangelist.

And he was known to be a drunkard. And he'd be drunk when he wasn't at meetings. And he'd come in to preach.

He'd suddenly be sober and preach, heal people, and so forth, and leave and get drunk again. I mean, it was like weird, weird stuff. Some people say, well, then he wasn't, you know, it wasn't God that was working through him.

It was a demon or something like that. Well, maybe. It's not really easy to know how to

explain that.

Samson was kind of the same way. And we're told it was the Spirit of God that used him. Sometimes God will use persons that are very unworthy, maybe just to show his grace.

Samson is remembered as a man of faith in the New Testament. In Hebrews chapter 11, he's listed with those who were through faith subdued kingdoms and brought, you know, feats and so forth. And we are told that he judged Israel for 20 years.

We don't have any record of him doing that. Of course, we don't. The record we have of him is just going out and getting into fights and getting into trouble.

But apparently between his scandalous troubles that he got into, there were 20 years there where he served as a judge of some kind in Israel. So, his story is a little perplexing. And there does seem, the story is told almost as if the length of his hair really had something to do with his strength.

Though the Bible nowhere says that's true. He says it's true. He's the one who told Delilah that if his hair was cut, that he'd lose his strength.

The Bible nowhere says that it would be so. But when his hair was cut, he did lose his strength. But whether that's because he thought it would and his faith was in his hair, I don't know.

We do know that when his hair grew back, it is specifically mentioned that his hair was growing back while he was grinding at the mill. And that was just before he did his last of strength. A lot of things woven into this story are confusing.

It's not a one dimensional character we're reading about here. We begin to hear about him in chapter 13. It says, Again, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years.

Now, this time that they were in the hands of the Philistines for 40 years included the 20 years, apparently, that Samson judged because he did not ever drive the Philistines out. The Philistines were still in power after Samson died. So his judgeship of Israel must have been 20 years contained within the 40 years of the Philistine oppression.

And we know that the Philistine oppression didn't really end until the time of Samuel. And then the Philistines came and made trouble again in the time of David, and David finally dealt with them in a way that they were never a problem to Israel again. But Samuel pretty much was the one in his time, I think is in chapters five of 1 Samuel, that under Samuel's God defeated the Philistines through thunder and lightning out of heaven.

And the Philistines came no more for a very long time into the land. So that must have

been the end of the 40 years of the oppression spoken of here. That would mean that Eli and Samuel also lived during this time of this Philistine oppression because when Eli was the priest at Shiloh, there was a war where the priest's sons got killed in war against the Philistines.

The Philistines captured the Ark and so forth. So this 40 years of Philistine oppression included 20 years of Samson's judgeship and apparently Eli's time of ministry and the early days of Samuel. So these men must have somehow lived in some sense overlapping.

We won't read about Eli and Samuel in this book, we'll read about them in 1 Samuel, but it would appear that some part of their lives overlapped that of Samson because of this being 40 years of Philistine oppression. Now there was a certain man from Zorah of the family of the Danites, the tribe of Dan, whose name was Manoah. And his wife, whose name is never given, was barren and had no children.

And the angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman and said to her, Indeed, now you are barren and have born no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink and not to eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son and no razor shall come upon his head for the child should be a Nazarite to God from the womb and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

He did not ever completely deliver them out of the hand of Philistines, of course, because he died before that was accomplished. However, it is clear that he did begin to do so and that was completed by Samuel. Now the commandment that she should eat no unclean thing and drink no wine or similar drink means that she would have to be clean herself in order to be the conduit through whom this Nazarite son would be born.

She essentially had to be like a Nazarite too. A Nazarite was not the same thing as a Nazarene. Jesus was a Nazarene, but he's not a Nazarite.

John the Baptist was a Nazarite. But a Nazarene, which is what Jesus was, simply means a person from Nazareth. Nazareth is the town and someone from Nazareth was a Nazarene.

But a Nazarite was a person who took a special vow and that vow is described in the book of Numbers chapter six. If a person took a Nazarite vow, it would be for a period of time because it would have a beginning and an end in most cases. In a few cases, there were people who were Nazarites from birth.

The cases we know of are ones where actually their parents had an agreement between them and God about this. This is one case that we know of. Samuel was another one.

John the Baptist was another one. We know of all those three. In this case, the angel of

the Lord said that Samson would be a Nazarite from birth.

In the case of Samuel, his mother made that vow to the Lord. If you give me a child, then he'll be a Nazarite. John the Baptist was an angel and also announced that he should be a Nazarite from birth.

But that was unusual for a person to be Nazarite for a whole lifetime from birth. The Nazarite vow was usually something people would take for a month or more. They'd have a beginning to it and an end to it.

During the time of the vow, they were separated, especially unto the Lord, for what purpose we're not told, but no doubt to give more time to prayer and service to the Lord in some way. The Nazarite vow was about separation to the Lord, separation from normal activities. There were three things that a Nazarite was forbidden to do.

First, they could not cut any of their hair or beard. Secondly, they could not touch anything that was a product of a vine. This did not only apply to wine and fermented drink, it applied to anything from the vine.

So, a raisin or a grape would be forbidden too. And then the last thing was they were not allowed to come near a dead body. Now, under the law, any Jew would be defiled if they came near a dead body.

And they'd be defiled for a week. But they would do it anyway because relatives would die and things like that. You have to bury it, you have to carry the body, you can bury it, and so forth.

A person who attended to the burial of a dead person would be uncleared for a week because it was a necessary thing to do at times. But a Nazarite was not allowed to do that. They couldn't participate in a funeral, they couldn't participate in any way coming into contact with a dead body.

So, they had to keep clean at all times, and they had to avoid the product of a grape vine, and they had to avoid cutting any of their hair during the time of the vow. Paul took a vow of Nazarite in Acts chapter 18, in verse 18. And later on in the book of Acts, when he came to Jerusalem, James mentioned to him that there were four men of the church there who had a Nazarite vow and they were completing their vow, going to the temple to do the rituals necessary for the completion of the vow.

And James asked Paul if Paul would go and pay the fees for them. At the end of a vow, a person would shave their head. During the time of the vow, they'd grow their hair, unhindered, wild, apparently, wild beard and hair as long as they were on the vow.

And then at the end of the vow, they'd shave their head, and the hair would be called the hair of their separation, and they'd burn it as a sacrifice to God, the hair. And they'd

also offer certain other animals as part of a sacrificial ritual to end the vow. The reason I said Paul had a vow is because it says in Acts 18, 18, that when he was in Corinth, he shaved his head because he had a vow.

Well, there's no vow that would involve him shaving his head except the Nazirite vow, and that would be at the end of it. Which is interesting because he had just spent 18 months in Corinth. And apparently that was the time when he had the vow, when he was in Corinth, because he ended it when he left.

So when he was in Corinth, he was growing his hair out. Yet it's to the Corinthians, he wrote, that it's a shame for men to have long hair. And yet while he was among them, his hair was long.

Which is one of the things that needs to be considered when we're asking this business of, when Paul talks about that subject, of the women covering their heads, and men not covering their heads, and women have to have their hair long, and men have to have their hair short. And then when he says in 1 Corinthians 11, 16, if anyone is contentious about these things, we have no such custom. Neither do the churches of Christ.

It seems clear what he's saying is that these customs of head coverings and such that he's talking about there were simply the customs of the region, of the Corinthians, the Greeks. Paul, a Jew, didn't follow those customs. And he demonstrated it by actually having a Nazirite vow while he was there, and shaving his head when he left.

Anyway, this child was to be Nazirite, and therefore the mother, during the time of the pregnancy, had to observe the Nazirite vows and remain clean. And says in verse 5, For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son, and no razor shall come upon his head. The child shall be Nazirite to God from the womb.

And he'll begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. So the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, or of the angel of God. Very awesome.

But I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name. And he said to me, Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean.

For the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb until the day of his death. Now this was in fact the angel of the Lord, it says in verse 3, and this is the third time in the book of Judges that the angel of the Lord has been seen visiting somebody. He came and rebuked people early in the book, and then he also appeared to Gideon to call him, and now he appears to Manoah's wife.

And the angel of the Lord is generally believed to be Christ in a pre-incarnate appearance, a theophany by theologians. And again, usually that's because he speaks as

if he is God. It's not so much the case here that he speaks that way, but the angel of the Lord is an expression that is in contrast with an angel of the Lord.

Many times the Bible talks about an angel, or an angel of the Lord, but the angel of the Lord is more like a proper title for a particular messenger, which may be the pre-incarnate Christ. This is certainly the view of most evangelicals. Now she told her husband about it.

Verse 8, Then Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, O my Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born. And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field. But Manoah, her husband, was not with her.

Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband and said to him, Look, the man has just now appeared to me, the one who came to me the other day. So Manoah rose and followed his wife. And when he came to the man, he said to him, Are you the man who spoke to this woman? And he said, I am.

And Manoah said, Now let your words come to pass. What will be the boy's rule of life and his work? So the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, Of all that I said to the woman, let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean.

All that I commanded her, let her observe. Now, it's interesting because the husband wanted more information. You know, what is the vocation of the boy going to be? What's he supposed to do? And the angel doesn't answer that.

He just repeats the impression. He doesn't say what the boy's mother's to do, which is what he already told her. And she had already told Manoah that.

So it's like the angel is deliberately not going any further than to give the same information as before. The boy's going to be a Nazarite, he told the wife, but he doesn't mention it to Manoah. He assumes that he's heard that already from his wife.

But what he repeats is just what he said before. And it's not what the boy will do. So it may be that maybe he's just saying you should listen to your wife.

I don't have anything more to say to you than what I already told your wife. In any case, Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, please let us detain you and we will prepare a young goat for you. Now, Manoah at this point did not know for sure that this was an angel, but it was treating him as one might treat a guest in their home.

People always would invite a guest to stay for dinner and they'd go and prepare something. And so he says, why don't you wait here and I'll prepare a goat for you. And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, though you detain me, I will not eat your food.

But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to Yahweh. For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord. So it would appear that Manoah is offering to have him over for a meal.

I'll fix a goat. And he says, well, you can fix a goat if you want, but I'm not going to eat. You'll have to offer that as a sacrifice to the Lord.

Then Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, what is your name? That when your words come to pass, we may honor you. Again, he apparently thought this man was a prophet or something, but he didn't know the man's name. And he says, well, you know, if your prophecy comes true, then we want to commemorate you and give you proper recognition for who you are.

And the angel of the Lord said to him, why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful? You might remember that when Jacob wrestled all night with a man, at the end, when the day was dawning, Jacob asked him, you know, what is your name? And the man said, why do you ask after my name? But he didn't finish out like this. He just said, why do you ask after my name? And here, and I do believe that man who wrestled with Jacob, I think was no doubt the angel of the Lord, was the Lord himself. But it's in Genesis 32, verse 29, says, Then Jacob asked him, saying, tell me your name, I pray.

And he said, why is it that you ask about my name? And he blessed him there. So he does not give his name. Now, one suggestion that this, in fact, is Jesus might be that this is not the time for the name of the Messiah to be revealed to anyone.

And it's a secret. Now, when he says in this case, in Judges 13, why do you ask after my name, seeing it is wonderful? It could mean that it is a wonder, it's a mystery, it's something you wouldn't understand. It's not clear when he says his name is wonderful.

Of course, we think of his name is wonderful. You know, in Isaiah 9, 6, we can't help but see that similarity. In fact, it is the same word in a slightly different form in both places.

In Isaiah 9, 6, it says his name, the child who should be born, the son who is given his name should be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the Mighty God, and Everlasting Father, all that stuff. But his name is called Wonderful in Isaiah 9, 6. We know that's Jesus. But wonderful there might even mean mysterious, something that is not revealed at this present time.

But it's the same word here. And in all likelihood, it's the same person talked about in both places. So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it upon the rock to the Lord.

And he did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on. As the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, it happened that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. Then when Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to

the ground.

When the angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord. And Manoah said to his wife, we shall surely die because we've seen God. So even they understood that the angel of the Lord is a reference to God.

And that's what Jacob said. He didn't say he would die. But when he wrestled with the man and said, what is your name? And the man said, why do you ask for my name? Jacob named the place Peniel, which means face of God, because I've seen God face to face and my life is preserved.

If I didn't die. And so people tended to think that if they saw God, they would die. And this said he knew it was the angel of the Lord and said, we've seen God.

So equating the angel of the Lord with God was apparently their understanding. Then his wife said to him, if Yahweh had desired to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would he have shown us all these things, nor would he have told us such things as these at this time. She's the voice of reason in this family.

I mean, he should have known that God who made these promises that they're going to have a child is not going to kill them because they've seen him, especially since they didn't do any impiety in seeing him. Then he appeared to them. They didn't go looking for him.

So she said, I don't think, I don't think God has the mind to kill us. He accepted his offering from us and, and he's made these promises. So I think you're wrong.

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson and the child grew and Yahweh blessed him. Now it doesn't say in what way Yahweh blessed him, but he might've even been a pious young boy who got, you know, steered wrong later on in life through the influence of the wrong kind of interest in a woman. And the spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahana Dan between Zorah and Eshphel.

Well, it's hard to know what that really means. It may mean that he began to judge Israel in that location because you'd think, you know, what does it mean? The Lord began to move upon him between those two places in this spot. That spot may in fact be the place where he judged Israel from for 20 years.

And therefore, because he was being used of God, like a prophet of God, the spirit of God came upon him. And it may be that in the early days of his life, he was a godly young man. Certainly the events in chapters 14, 15, and 16, which make up the rest of his story, didn't take 20 years to go by.

It begins with him actually seeking a wife among the Philistines. And then things seem to happen in rather rapid succession until he's dead. It seems like one thing follows another as, you know, he retaliates against the Philistines and they retaliate against him and so forth.

And so one gets the impression that the events of chapters 14, 15, and 16 take place within a short space of time, maybe a few years at the most. And yet, we're going to be told that he judged Israel for 20 years. So that would have been not from his birth.

He didn't judge Israel from his birth, certainly. So he must have reached some stage of maturity, maybe 13, which is the age when a Jewish boy is considered to be an adult. And we don't know how long he lived or how old he was when he died, but he may have, in fact, died when he was about 33 or thereabouts.

So that from his, you know, becoming an adolescent to the time he died was 20 years. Now, if the problems between him and the Philistines arose, particularly in the last few years, he might have judged Israel righteously for some period of time in his youth and then been led astray in the manner that chapter 14 begins to tell about by his taking an interest in a bad woman from the wrong side of the tracks, really. But how long this period of time that the Spirit of the Lord was moving upon him happened before all the rest of the story that we read about it happened, we don't know.

I guess what I'm saying is it could have been most of that period of 20 years. And during that time he was doing something and the Spirit of God was moving upon him. He was blessed by the Lord.

It may be that we are to picture Samson in his youth as a prodigy of spirituality and of wisdom and able to judge his people through the special gifting of the Holy Spirit upon him in those times, that special blessing that was on him. But this carnality that we read about in his later life was maybe a backslidden state that he entered into. Because once we begin to read about his exploits and fighting with the Philistines and so forth, it hardly leaves any time for him to do much judging of Israel.

He's always going back and forth with the Philistines about his last grudge against them. And that's not the same thing as judging Israel. So I don't know what to think.

Except that a period of almost 20 years might be summarized in verses 24 and 25. And a much shorter period of time cataloged in chapters 14, 15, and 16. Let's look at chapter 14.

Now Samson went down to Timnah and he saw a woman in Timnah of the Philistines. He went up and told his father and mother, saying, I have seen a woman of Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. Now, therefore, get her for me as a wife.

Then his father and mother said to him, Is there no woman among the daughters of your

brethren or among all my people that you must go get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said to his father, Get her for me, for she pleases me well. But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord that he was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time, the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

So this is a difficult verse because a man would be expected to honor his parents decision. In fact, in those days, probably the parents, not the child, would initiate the matter of marriage with another family. They'd either get a matchmaker or they'd go and themselves negotiate with another family for their son to marry the daughter of the other family.

It probably was not unheard of, maybe not even uncommon, for the young adult to request to his parents, arrange a marriage between me and this other person I'd seen. I like her. But it was the parent's responsibility.

And when the parents raised an objection, ordinarily, that would be the end of it. Because the parents certainly had the right of veto. That was something that was understood in their society more than ours.

That is that the parents have a lot to say, a lot of right to say, who they bring into their family as a spouse to their children, and as the future parent of their grandchildren, and so forth. I mean, parents have a lot at stake in the marriage of their children. We don't really note that in our society so much.

I know when I got married, it didn't occur to me to ask my parents' permission or the girl's parents' permission. We just announced them, we're getting married. And they didn't raise an objection, but partly because in our culture, parents don't really seem to have that much authority.

Though I think they might have raised objections if they'd been asked, but they weren't. And I don't know, I don't think I was different than other kids my age for the most part, in that we just found someone we wanted to marry and just made the arrangement with the person, not with the parents in most cases. And so, I grew up not realizing that grandparents have a real stake in who the parents of their grandchildren are.

Most people think, well, I'm a grown up now, who I marry is between me and me, me and my wife, no one else is affected. Not so. Anyone who's now a grandparent, most of us are old enough to be, know that if our kids married foolishly, then our grandkids are being raised by people that we would rather not have raise our grandkids, you know.

And that was understood in biblical times, that families were not atomized like that. They didn't have what we call the atomic family, they had the extended family. Several generations would often live under one roof.

And we don't have that going on these days, except when economic times are really hard. It was considered that your living ancestors have a lot at stake in your children and your grandchildren. As long as your ancestors are alive, their hearts are wrapped up in what you do and what your family does.

So, parents were given the right, essentially, to choose or at least to nullify the plans of their children about who they would marry. But Samson was not going to take no for an answer. It's possible that his parents were somewhat kowtowed by him, they were somewhat intimidated by him.

Not because he was strong, because we don't read that he was doing supernatural physical feats prior to the time, though he might have been. Those times when the Spirit of God began to move upon him during those earlier years, maybe he was doing supernatural feats of strength that are not recorded for us, because they don't play into this essential story at the end as much. But his parents seemed to be kind of caving in to it, because we object to this.

Why do you have to marry one of these daughters of these uncircumcised Philistines? Aren't there any good girls in Israel? Obviously, his parents were disapproving, and he just said, no, get her for me. That's the one I want. Get her for me.

And he didn't really honor his parents' choice, which seems like a wrong and sinful thing for him to do. But what's confusing to us is not that he did that, because children often are rude to their parents, but that it says in verse 4, his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord. What was of the Lord? Apparently, that Samson had taken an interest in this Philistine was something that God had allowed to happen, because God intended for it to play out a certain way that would cause a fight between him and the Philistines.

It sounds like maybe Samson, in judging Israel up to this time, had not really engaged the Philistines in any warfare, any fight. He was judging Israel, we might say, but he was not necessarily delivering them from the Philistines. So, God provided an occasion of offense between Samson and the Philistines on the basis of this marriage that he wanted to make.

So, it would appear that though Samson was doing a stupid thing, and not even a good thing, that God at least had arranged for him to see and to find it attracted this woman. And this was going to end up being the way that God would launch him into his career of fighting the Philistines. So, Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother and came to the vineyards of Timnah.

Now, to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. This was apparently while he was in Timnah or else while he was in route with his parents. And so, he and his parents were apparently threatened by a wild lion on the way there.

And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat. To be honest with you, I don't know that I would be able to tear apart a young goat that easily, but the way he tore apart that lion was the way that an ordinary man might tear apart a young goat. A chicken maybe, not a young goat, I'm not sure.

Maybe a newborn goat. So, though he had nothing in his hand, that is he didn't have a weapon. He did this barehanded without a weapon.

So, he was even better than Tarzan. Tarzan always had a knife. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

Well, if this happened while he and they were on the way down there, it seems like they would know it. Unless they were going down together by different routes. I mean, in other words, from different starting points or different points on the road.

If his parents had already gone around the bend ahead of him and this lion came and he tore it apart and didn't mention it to them, somehow they were not aware that he had done it. Okay, then he went down and talked to the woman and she pleased Samson well. After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion and behold a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion.

He took some of it in his hands and went along eating. Probably a violation of his vows because touching, eating from the carcass of an animal, especially an unclean animal like a lion, would have been very much a no-no for someone trying to remain ceremonially clean. No issue is made of it here, but I mean, Samson just seems to take very lightly his vows in general.

Even eventually being willing to have his hair cut off in order to keep a woman happy. So, he ate some of it and he took some of it in his hands and went along eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they also ate, but he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

So, his father went down to the woman, that is to make the arrangements with her parents, and Samson gave a feast there for young men used to do so. That is, they'd throw a bachelor party of some kind, or maybe at the wedding itself they invited a bunch of young men. Now, it would appear that Samson did not have Israelite men who were willing to go down there with him, so Philistine men had to be brought in to be the attendants for the wedding.

And it was so, when they saw him, that they brought 30 companions to be with him. Then Samson said to them, let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothing.

These would normally be very expensive things, so it was a reward if they could get the riddle answered. A reward, perhaps, that was very tempting to them. But if you cannot explain it to me, then you should give me 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothing.

And they said to impose your riddle that we may hear it. So he said to them, out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet. Now, for three days they could not explain the riddle.

So it came to pass on the seventh day that they said to Samson's wife, entice your husband that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? Is that not so? So they felt like it was an unfair thing for him to come with something that was so unanswerable and to put them in a position where they have to provide him with 30 garments. So we were invited to your wedding just so that your husband could rip us off and take stuff from us.

You need to tell him he has to tell you what the answer is, and you have to tell us. Then Samson's wife wept on him and said, 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. And he said to her, look, I have not explained it to my father and my mother. So shall I explain it to you? Now she had wept on him the seven days while their feast lasted.

And it happened on the seventh day that he told her because she pressed him so much. Then she explained the riddle to the sons of her people. Now, Samson caved into this woman's continual pestering, just like he did with Delilah later on.

I wonder sometimes if that's what Solomon had in mind in Proverbs 27, 15, where he said, you know, the contentions of a wife are like continual dripping on a rainy day. When we hear that proverb, maybe we're thinking of the Chinese water torture, you know, where a continual dripping on your forehead drives you nuts eventually. But I don't think I don't think it has to do with driving nuts.

I think it has to do with erosion. Continual dripping from a roof or from a tree in one spot erodes the ground underneath. It makes a hole.

And if it's like a waterfall or something, it even erodes rock eventually. Something soft like water hitting again and again at the same spot can erode something hard like rock or ground, like a continual dripping. He says, so the contentions of life can be.

Eventually, they can break down a man's resistance. Samson was a strong man. His wife was a soft creature of the fairer sex, but her continual nagging broke him down.

So she told the Philistines, so the men of that city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, what is sweeter than honey and what is stronger than a lion?

Apparently they had to say nothing more. He knew that they had been let in on it. And he said to them, if you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle.

Referring to his wife as his heifer. Heifers were used to plow fields. My wife is supposed to be working for me, not for you.

You were plowing with my heifer and you wouldn't have gotten it if you hadn't cheated. Then the spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily. And it seems strange that the spirit of the Lord came upon him and let him do this.

He went down to Ashkelon, another Philistine city and killed 30 men of the men, took their apparel and gave it the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused and he went back to his father's house. Now he left the wedding apparently after it was over or after it was.

He believed he was married, but he was angry at his wife and the Philistines. So he just left for a while later. He's going to want to go back and he expects to have his wife, but her father misunderstood, thought that he was annulling the marriage.

And so he actually gave her away. Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man. Now, all of this set things up for God to have for Samson to have problems with the Philistines and eventually for violence to break out between them, because he believed that she was still his wife, though he had not taken her.

And the father misunderstood and gave her away to somebody else. And Samson took that as a reason to lash out and do a lot of killing. And more than more than was reasonable, actually, in the circumstances.

But it's strange that the spirit of the Lord came upon him. He went and killed. He killed 30, we might say innocent bystanders in Ashkelon and took their clothes.

But if we're to understand the Philistines were the enemies of Israel, they were the oppressors of Israel. The Philistines were not innocent. They were the oppressors and they were the very people that he was sent to defeat.

Apparently, he took out 30 of them initially to get their clothes. They might have even been military men that he killed. I don't know.

But that's how he began to deliver Israel from Philistines by starting to take off Philistines. Eventually, he killed over 3000 of them, but not didn't deliver them as much as he could have been able to hold his temper more. You know, says in Proverbs 16, 32, he that is slow to wrath is better than the mighty.

And he that can rule his spirit is greater than he that can take a city. Samson could have

done more good if he had ruled his spirit more and was slow to wrath. It's true, his anger did cause him to do some of the exploits against the Philistines.

But he didn't rule his spirit enough. And he got himself into more trouble than he needed to. And ended his life earlier and did not fully deliver Israel because of it.

But we'll see the rest of the story next time. Right now, we're going to have some noise happening in this building. So we better end our recording.