**The Wedding Fight:**

**The Intensity of Samson’s Rage**

**Judges 14-15**

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Last Sunday, we began a three week journey into the land of Judges to study the life of Samson. We began with chapter 13 and the prophecy of Samson’s rise. And this morning, we turn to chapter 14 to see the intensity of Samson’s rage. Judges chapter 14. We’ll read verses 1-4 together and then we’ll read the rest as we go through the passage in the message.

***1*** *Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.****2*** *Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.”****3*** *But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.”* ***4*** *His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.*

The first roller coaster I ever remember riding was call “The Big Bad Wolf.” I must have been about six years old. I had no idea what I was getting into. The lap bar locked down and suddenly I was in for the most terrifying 90 seconds of my young life. I didn’t brave another theme park drop for about two decades. But from what I’ve read, roller coasters are nothing compared to the maneuvers performed by military pilots. Take for one example the F16. It’s designed for agile and dynamic air combat. It can fly above 15,000 feet, so I’ve read. And it exceeds speeds of 1,500 miles per hour. That’s Mach 2 at altitude. When you accelerate that fast, it gives you the sense of weight and increased gravity. They call it G-force. Like when you accelerate up in an elevator, you feel a little bit heavier. That’s 1.1 G’s probably, and sports cars can be about 2 G’s. F16’s get up to 9. One maneuver that pilots are trained to make is called a high G-turn. To get out of a dangerous situation or circle back on enemy jets, they speed around at 8 G’s or more. These are intense maneuvers.

I think sometimes life feels like that, doesn’t it? One minute you’re soaring in the clouds and the next, you feel 8 times heavier. Graduations, first dates, breakups, promotions, weddings, adoptions, miscarriages, birthdays, finals, remodels, vacations, cancer, bonuses, elections, layoffs, grandchildren, foreclosures, funerals. Sometimes life is a blast, and other times, it’s terrifying. Sometimes you want it to speed up. Other times you’re screaming for it to slow down. It’s important to remember that life is not a luxury flight. It’s a dog fight. It’s not drifting into Hawaii. We’re diving into war! And sometimes we think we have control, but we really start to realize that all we can do is hold on. In Judges 14, God is about to maneuver Israel into a high G-turn.

They’ve been suffering beneath the evil rule of the Philistines for over 5 decades. It’s a tragic tale that brought them to this point. They were commissioned by God to enter into the land of Canaan to establish His rule. After the leadership of Moses and Joshua, their courage completely eroded. The first chapter in Judges is a story of surrender, really. Judah goes up first to take the land and they succeed so far. But tribe after tribe, they begin to slowly recede and take less and less ground until the tribe of Dan fails utterly in chapter 1, verse 34. Instead of conquering the enemy. They’re actually driven back themselves.

**Judges 1:34-35a** The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. The Amorites persisted in dwelling [there].

So it’s no surprise as we see the Book of Judges and Israel fails to accomplish God’s purpose and then again falls into sin and idolatry, becoming like the land that they were supposed to conquer, that God exposes their need. We summarize this book with two words: Epic Fail. They continue to sin and then they cry out eventually as God allows discipline to come upon them and they recognize their need and then again they go to sin. It’s a downward spiral. It gets worse and worse. So much so at this point, that God chooses to unleash on the Philistines His secret, supernatural weapon, a young boy named Samson. He happens to come from the tribe of Dan.

It’s interesting that Samson is born into a family and a culture where God’s mission seems to be forgotten. Israel has finally ceased to cry out for help. At the beginning of his story, the cry that we’ve seen come again and again is not present. They’re not asking God to save. This nation that has been sent to conquer has finally been corrupted and compromised to such an extent that they’re happy to co-exist, even intermingle. And last week, we saw Mr. and Mrs. Manoah neglect the very purpose God had given. They seemed to be unconcerned about this salvation. Samson will be a mirror for Israel, intended to provide the nation with a sobering self-portrait. Because Samson, like Israel, always does what is right in his own eyes. So God is about to pull some drastic maneuvers here to rescue His people from self-destruction and expose their need and make us ask: What does God have to do to make us cry out for help? What does He have to do to make us feel we need Him and cry out? This really relates to our lives. We’re so often uninterested in God’s salvation. We’re happy to continue our lives without concern for what’s right in God’s eyes because we’ve already decided what’s right in ours. And sometimes God has to pull some pretty bizarre maneuvers to show us who is in control and make us cry for help. And that’s what we see here in this chapter.

Last week we beheld the mystery of God’s nature and we learned the lesson of reverence. This week, we move on to Lesson #2. We brace for the supremacy of God’s power with confidence. So that even when God has to pull the most intensive maneuvers, we can hold on with trust in His power. There are four maneuvers we’ll look at for which we can brace ourselves.

**I. Brace for His sovereign purpose. God’s Control: A Fight Intended (14:1-4)**

This control is about to be revealed in a fight that by God, is completely intended. The wedding fight before us is something that God wants to happen. It’s like an African elephant that marches right through the trees, making his own path and not caring about any animals or obstacles in the way. It is in this way that God’s purpose cannot be thwarted. There’s no obstacle that can stop Him from doing what He desires. And when God intends for a fight to break out, there’s no stopping it. You just brace yourself. And God is about to pick a fight with His enemies. So we brace ourselves here for His sovereign purpose. He overcomes many obstacles.

Obstacle #1: Human Defiance—God’s purpose goes unheeded by Samson (14:1-3)

Human defiance is no match for God’s purpose. Look at chapter 14 verses 1-3. We finally start to get to know this golden boy, Samson. His defiance against God is blatant.

***1*** *Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.*

This is the enemy territory. This isn’t a military mission, a recon to fulfill what God had sent him to do. This is sort of a personal visit. He seems to be somewhat comfortable with the enemy, fitting in, mixing in, utterly blatant in defiance because this foreign girl catches his eye.

***2*** *Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.”*

He’s not only blatant, but indulgent. He’s drawn in by his lust. It’s lust at first sight. Utterly indulgent, he’s driven by his eyes. It’s something that we should remember. And his defiance continues with a command to his parents. His defiance is utterly impudent. It’s irreverent. It’s disrespectful. The nerve! “You get her for me as a wife!” He’s hurrying the process of arranged marriage, common in the day, expecting them to pay. And their response in verse 3 is interesting.

***3*** *But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.”*

They’re immediately opposed. They’re critical. But the issue here is not so much what they say, but what they don’t say. They don’t say anything about Samson’s mission. They don’t say anything about God or the Law. Apparently they’re still not very concerned about God’s agenda to deliver them from the Philistines. They try redirection. “How about a nice Israeli girl?” But Samson is your classic spoiled son. He’s independent, stubborn, a maverick, and he expects his parents to follow orders. His defiance is utterly persistent. “She’s the one. Do it!” He’s captured already by his opponents. Not by weapons; but by a woman. Not by an army; but by beauty. He should have been going to this country for war. Instead, he will go for a wedding. His defiance is arrogant. “Right in my eyes.” And we can’t help but note that that’s picked up by the author of Judges in chapter 17 verse 6 and at the end, in chapter 21 verse 25.

**Judges 21:25** In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

It’s not just a matter of vision, but of the will. It’s not just their sight that reigns, but their desires. It is satisfying their cravings. And so there’s a human defiance that regards God’s sovereign purpose as nothing, with defiance. But that’s not the only obstacle that God has to overcome.

Obstacle #2: Human Ignorance—God’s purpose goes unnoticed by Samson’s parents (14:4)

***4*** *His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.*

So both mom and dad missed two essential facts. The source of the circumstance was Yahweh, the Lord. And the reason for the circumstance was the exact purpose God had already said: Deliverance from the Philistines. And just so you don’t let mom and dad off the hook, he gives you a hint. Remember the Philistines ruled the land in those days. Hint! Hint! This is what they’re supposed to be doing, and yet they miss it. How could they be so ignorant? Well, maybe Samson might say, “You could fill a chapter with all the things that mom and dad don’t know.” Because that’s what happens here.

Throughout the story, Samson’s parents are ignorant. They’re blind to what God is doing in verse 4. They’re unaware in verse 6 of Samson’s encounter with the lion. They don’t know about a snack they receive in verse 9. And they’re ignorant of the answer to his riddle in verse 16. Samson has his parents literally eating honey from the palms of his hands, which we’ll see. Human ignorance plays into this attitude of defiant rebellion. And we think God’s sovereign purpose can’t overcome these obstacles, can it? I mean, how could He work with this? And then somehow Samson, the ultimate free spirit, is left to do his own thing. And unbeknownst to him, simultaneously he is being used by God to accomplish His precise, sovereign purpose. And it’s through this wedding that God actually will start a war.

Here’s the point before we move on. God’s control remains unthreatened. His power stands supreme over human defiance and over human ignorance. He always accomplishes His sovereign purposes. He never disappoints in the way He delivers. And when we think everything is falling apart and God could never overcome these obstacles, we remember that He is working. He actually is in the process of helping. It may seem like He’s hurting, but He actually is helping. Now to do so, He has to pull some crazy maneuvers. So we have to brace for it and hold on with trust. But, if He can’t accomplish His plan with us, He will accomplish it through us, in spite of us. We see Him at work. And it’s not a surprise.

At the very center of our Christian faith stands this cross, the place where man’s will appeared to collide with God’s. He could never overcome what was about to happen. Sinners in a desperate attempt to defy God, murder the God-man upon the cross. And yet, God used this very action, not plan B but plan A, to bring about the salvation of the world and the revelation of His glory. And we never saw it coming! God has moves you’ve never even dreamed of. So we hold on. We hold on when life gets hard and when we have days that overwhelm us. We hold on and trust God and brace for the maneuvers of His control with confidence in the supremacy of His power to secure His sovereign purpose. Always! And sometimes, help comes in the form of a charging lion as we see here in verses 5-18.

**II. Brace for His stunning patience. God’s Compassion: A Fight Foreshadowed (14:5-18)**

His compassion, His willingness to wait, to go slow, to be gentle. It’s like when you call for a child and you give them a chance to obey. You want to see them and extend patience and compassion. Sometimes it’s hard. When we look at God as a Father, His patience is stunning! Brace yourself to see how He deals with Samson. He gives him time. There is an upcoming fight that is going to be foreshadowed here with some previews. So three previews we get of Samson’s secrets.

Preview #1: His secret power—Samson slays the beast (14:5-7)

This is where we see the kindness that God’s patience extends. There are a few observations. This power that Samson has is very daring.

***5*** *Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah.*

Samson is going into enemy territory, directly against the purpose of God, to intermarry with the enemy. And not just that, but his family is traveling through the vineyards. What was one of the very few commands Samson was given? This is a dangerous place to be for someone told to avoid grapes. It’s daring!

*And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring.*

I know maybe many of us have not seen young lions roaring, rushing. I’ve been, I don’t know if I’d say blessed, but I’ve had the opportunity to see that. It’s a scary thing! So we think, “Here’s God’s judgment. He’s done with Samson. You shouldn’t have been in there, Buddy.” Except, God is not punishing him here, necessarily. He’s showing a preview of power.

***6*** *Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.*

This is a miracle. Samson’s power may be daring, but the source of his power is divine. God steps in and we see His patience in permitting Samson to rip this lion to pieces. And it’s actually a preview of what’s about to happen in chapter 15, verse 14, where another enemy rushes and shouts in attack. But for now, we move on. Samson, in verse 6 actually disguises his power, which surprises us. If one of us would have ripped a lion in pieces, we probably would have been telling some people about it.

*But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.*

They’d been traveling together and apparently he’d drifted far enough away that they didn’t recognize this attack or hear it. And so, when he comes back, he doesn’t say anything to them. Why? Apparently there are some things Samson doesn’t want his parents to know about. Interesting! The visibility of his power is disguised. And for all it offers, this strength that Samson enjoys is deficient. There’s a limit to it because it doesn’t stop him from what he was doing.

***7*** *Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.*

He talked to the woman, apparently maybe for the first time, and he confirms that she is right in his eyes. And yet, God is patient. It’s stunning really that God didn’t just smite him. That even while in sin, Samson enjoys a secret power. And this is the kindness God’s patience extends. But in verses 8-9 we see the scorn His patience endures.

Preview #2: His secret pleasure—He succumbs to his sweet tooth (14:8-9)

Samson is going to test God further with the pleasure.

***8*** *After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey.* ***9*** *He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion.*

So, forbidden sweets here. His vulnerability to pleasure is evident. He’s on his way to feed his drive for intimacy and he fails to say no to an urge of curiosity. He turned aside to see this lion carcass, even though being a Nazarite explicitly means not to go near dead bodies. He goes there to check it out and he’s shocked! What do you expect to see when you go to see a dying, rotting carcass? You expect to see flies and maggots. Instead, there’s a pleasant surprise. Instead of flies, there’s bees. There’s a little buzzing community of sugar suppliers all for him. Honey. And his callous appetite for pleasure is made explicit. In a nonchalant manner, he just scrapes it right into his bare hands. There’s no precaution and no concern. He just shockingly starts to eat this honey. And God’s judgment doesn’t drop on him right away. God is patient even though Samson’s focus on pleasure is flippant. He’s just eating it as he goes, like a two-year old with a sucker. He’s just kind of walking around. And then he comes up to his parents and in a perverse way, he defiles them, inviting them to join, not telling them that this is coming from a carcass. He cannot say no to his sweet tooth. And yet, God is patient. It’s stunning really! And not without some warning, after suffering such scorn in verses 10-18 we see the caution that God’s patience would entreat. There’s another preview. It’s sort of an alert.

Preview #3: Samson’s secret problem—He strikes a bet (14:10-18)

Here’s where Samson strikes a bet and we realize that Samson has a woman problem. And it’s about to be exposed.

***10*** *His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do.*

This was a custom of the Philistines. They had a seven day celebration, often with wine and drinking. And the choice men would come. These were usually strapping warriors who would enjoy this kind of feast. And so the people of the Philistines are a little bit concerned at this warrior, Samson.

***11*** *As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.*

They had to supply the wedding party since probably no other Israelites were joining the wedding. These thirty men were probably not friends, but were more like guards. Maybe it was like David’s mighty men, like a military unit. They were taken there and stuck in at his wedding party, at his side to make sure that nothing bad happens. They probably weren’t happy to be there. It was probably tense. So Samson decides to lighten the mood with a little wager. He challenges his wedding guests with a riddle. And we see his willingness to enter into and create a problem that wasn’t even there in the first place. He has a flagrant disregard for his sin. He’s callous toward the warnings, he’s flirting with sin. He makes a joke, a game about it. And a riddle about evil here in verse 12. Rumpel-Samson!

***12*** *And Samson said to them, “Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes,*

Some new suits! A nice party cape!

***13*** *but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes.” And they said to him, “Put your riddle, that we may hear it.”* ***14*** *And he said to them, “Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.”*

We know the answer, but they don’t. Samson thinks it’s not dangerous. This is tame, harmless.

*And in three days they could not solve the riddle.*

“I’ve got this in the bag!” But we see the heart of the problem here in his relationship with this woman.

***15*** *On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, “Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?”*

They threatened her with blackmail. They tried to guilt her, accuse her of dispossessing them. It was exactly what Israel was supposed to do.

***16*** *And Samson's wife wept over him and said, “You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is.” And he said to her, “Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?”*

That’s probably not what you should say to your fiancé, anyway.

***17*** *She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people.*

So she nags him, uses emotions, weeping. “Love doesn’t keep secrets. Prove your love. You hate me.” On the seventh day, right before the marriage was about to be consummated, he caves. And we can hardly wonder why. She pressures him then betrays him. And “he told her” instantly becomes “she told them.” It’s a dark omen, a patient preview from God warning Samson not to share important secrets with untrustworthy women whining about love. And we’ll finally see the inevitable result to come.

Here’s the punishment. On the last day the sun is about to set. And these guys drop in dramatically as if Samson has his bride in his hand. They’re about to leave and he gets a tap on the shoulder. They don’t actually solve the riddle. They just pose a question to tease him, to prove they’ve caught him.

***18*** *And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, “What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?”*

Their smug smiles give away that they’d gone to his wife. They’ve invaded his intimacy. And he recognizes this and gives a quick retort in his own words.

*And he said to them, “If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle.”*

The point is, “You cheated. You broke the rules.” Heifers weren’t used for plowing. But it also was an insult. I’m sure every new bride loves to be called a heifer. You can almost see him saying it to them while looking at her. It’s not a pretty picture. My cow! Samson’s going to keep his end of the bargain, but he’ll end up bending a few rules of his own. Samson gets burned because he’s let his secret slip to a foreign woman, and it won’t be the last time.

But God has secrets too, doesn’t He? This messenger with a secret name who promised a secret weapon, and He now has a secret agenda. And in this game of secrets, God always wins. But we look at this patience for Samson and we hardly get it. I mean, this guy doesn’t deserve it. Extending kindness to him? Enduring scorn from him? Entreating caution from him? And he won’t listen. This is stunning patience! God’s compassion is unbelievable. His power to show patience even amidst previews of greater sin is stunning. He never disappoints in the way He delivers. He’s working and helping in the ugliest of situations. And that’s good because we need help, serious help. His patience exposes our need so much. And to get that help to us and expose our need, He’s going to pull some crazy maneuvers so that we have to brace. And His show of patience in extending this compassion for us and enduring millennia of rebellion, and then sending His own Son to live this perfect life and then be persecuted and mocked and put on a trial, accused, killed. It shows the power of His compassion and the evil of our hearts. And His patience is stunning!

Do we recognize our weaknesses? Do we see our sweet tooth? The patience that God is extending us? The scorn He’s enduring from us? The caution He’s entreating, telling us to turn? Hold on with trust and brace for the maneuvers of His compassion not only with patience for you, but for other people. Why would He do that? God is working. He is helping and we need help. And so we trust Him and His patience at work, His sovereign purpose, His stunning patience. The fiasco is just getting started. It’s going to be a wedding turned into a funeral.

**III. Brace for His surprising providence. God’s Creativity: A Fight Provoked (14:19-15:17)**

Providence is how God works in invisible ways to accomplish His purpose. He works in ways that are very surprising and creative. It’s hard to follow everything that takes place here. There’s an old Looney Tunes cartoon with Bugs Bunny dropped into a bullfighting ring. And this bull was after him with nostrils flaring. Bugs Bunny would use his red cape and do very creative things to get the bull to come after him, until finally he stuck the horns into the wall. And it’s almost a joke. And yet when we watch, it’s almost like Samson is like this bull that is flying around and God is just leading him exactly where He wants him to go. There’s this very creative way that the author exposes what happens in this story. And what we read here almost shocks us! God provokes a fight. And His providence takes on some shocking qualities.

Quality #1: Dramatic—Thirty “fresh” suits (14:19-20)

Samson loses his bet and we suppose God is done with him now. But no, in dramatic fashion,

***19*** *And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house.*

So a supernatural power rushes upon Samson. He goes 20 miles away, probably so the news of the slaughter doesn’t reach Timnah when everybody calls 911 at the same time. And Samson kills these guys. And even though he lost the riddle, he has a greater defeat upon the Philistines. He takes out thirty of their guys, steals their suits, and drops them at these guys’ feet. And their smiles maybe fade. It’s almost like they’re like, “These clothes are worn. This smells like Uncle Dagon. What’s up with this?” And Samson is furious and he goes off in a huff. After his revenge, he goes back to smolder alone. It’s a wedding without a honeymoon. Except there’s something Samson doesn’t know. It’s a final secret. There actually was a honeymoon. It just wasn’t with Samson.

***20*** *And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.*

And you can almost see the red cape coming out here. It’s as if the music was going and Samson storms off {Hums the Wedding March} Oh no! The wedding’s off. The bride looks over and the best man smiles. “Hey!” Wait, it’s back on! {Hums Wedding March} And Samson doesn’t even know. The marriage is consummated with the best man and by God’s providence it will lead to more violence, and for Israel, deliverance. It’s a messy kind of dramatic providence at work. And it’s not only dramatic, it’s

Quality #2: Ironic—A stolen bride (15:1-3)

There’s a bit of satire that God’s providence enjoys. Look at the irony of Samson’s desire. He’s fighting with them and angry. And yet, he still wants to return to his foreign bride.

***1*** *After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat.*

This is probably the ancient equivalent of a box of chocolates.

*And he said, “I will go in to my wife in the chamber.”*

His intention is clear. He wants to go into the inner chamber, but there’s a snag.

*But her father would not allow him to go in.*

The door is locked. We see the irony of the father’s offer.

***2*** *And her father said, “I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead.”*

He’s trying to placate Samson, but no one tells Samson how to run his love life. So in verse 3 we see the irony of Samson’s anger. He came to claim his bride only to find out he paid for the wedding, missed the honeymoon, and lost his honey. And you can see the look on his face. The whole chapter could be called “Oh no, you didn’t!”

***3*** *And Samson said to them, “This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.”*

And dad’s like, “What does that mean? Oh no! What just happened?” Here is Samson. He came to go to bed with the enemy and now he’s going to battle. It’s a total reversal. Look at the irony of God’s providence. The dominoes are about to fall, and it’s leading somewhere.

Quality #3: Unique—300 tails of fire (15:4-8)

You talk about creativity…

***4*** *So Samson went and caught 300 foxes…*

In Hebrew, this is the same word for jackals. The NET Bible translates this word as jackals. They were common in the region. They were small dogs that travel in packs. So it was probably jackals.

*…and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails.*

So this is intense. There’s a lot of action here. But the rapid pace of the verbs make it feel like it’s no big deal. He just rounded up 300 jackals and he ties torches.

***5*** *And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards.*

And now we know why it matters that it was harvest time. I mean, this is flare. Samson’s ingenuity. Some agricultural arson. This is like true guerilla warfare. He does his own thing. He’s ancient Sambo. He’s just at them. And it happens that the Philistines’ god Dagon, was the god of grain. And so while Samson smashes the economy, God insults their idolatry.

***6*** *Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?” And they said, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.” And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.*

This is a unique fallout here. Unintentional consequences. She suffers the fate she had attempted to avoid, as a scapegoat for Samson’s rage. But you don’t get in between Samson and his woman. They didn’t learn. This is another small victory, but Samson’s about to raise the bar.

***7*** *And Samson said to them, “If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.”*

I’m going to have the last word!

***8*** *And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.*

He says, “You poked the bear and I’m going to finish this!” Verse 8 is very vague. Hip and thigh is a wrestling term for total domination. We’re not even told what he did. It was so bad. It’s like the camera turns away and there’s just smoke coming out. He just smote them ruthlessly with a great slaughter. It’s like a wushi finger hold. It’s just “What happened?” I don’t know. It was so bad, though. He woke the dragon. He hit the hornet’s nest. The aftermath is that he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam. He’s like, “That was so bad. It makes the jackals look like a joke.” And he’s hiding because that was intense. A bloody slaughter and then fuming isolation. It’s unique providence, but

Quality #4: Tragic—3,000 cowards (15:9-13)

We see the disdain His providence suffers. Here’s the opportunity God brought.

***9*** *Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi.*

In Hebrew, that means “jawbone.” So they come and they rally the forces and they say “To arms! To war!” They’re coming against Judah, that tribe that was initially leading the charge. And they’re ready to go. This is a military march. God picked a fight and the stage is set. He gave them a savior, a secret weapon, the Incredible Hulk. But Judah is overcome with a tragic apathy. They don’t want a war. They want peace, compromise, negotiation.

***10*** *And the men of Judah said, “Why have you come up against us?” They said, “We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us.”*

Samson is taking refuge in Judah and it’s an international crisis. They don’t want to mess up the peace, so they work hard to enforce it. 3,000 men don’t go to battle against the enemy. They don’t go up to fight.

***11*** *Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?”*

They are blind to what God desires. They don’t want to call out. They just want peace.

*And he said to them, “As they did to me, so have I done to them.”*

You hit me, I hit you harder! Here’s Judah with tragic apathy. They refuse to cry out. They don’t want to be saved. It’s tragic apathy, but also treachery. They are allied with their enemies against their own deliverer.

***12*** *And they said to him, “We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.”*

It’s always down! Down, down, downhill.

*And Samson said to them, “Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves.”* ***13*** *They said to him, “No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you.” So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.*

Instead of sending an army against the enemy, they send an army against the God-given savior. Instead of letting their leader take them to victory, they give their very hero into the hands of the enemy to be killed. That sounds kind of familiar, doesn’t it? Tragic apathy and treachery. This is the human heart. But God’s providence isn’t merely tragic.

Quality #5: Epic—1,000 corpses (15:14-17)

He doesn’t need their help. And His victory is going to be enforced either way.

***14*** *When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him.*

They were roaring at him like an attacking lion. And we’ve already seen the preview for this. We know what happens.

*Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.* ***15*** *And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men.*

How random is that! Talk about epic! There’s no pictures in here. There’s just that sentence. A jawbone. 1,000 men. I mean, this is a fresh jawbone. It’s not even dried yet. It wasn’t even hard enough to truly be effective. What’s going on here? And the message seems to be: If God can deliver this man with a tool as crude as a fresh jawbone, then he can deliver Israel with a tool as crude as a fresh son of Manoah named Samson. He can use whatever He wants to deliver. And Samson seems a bit blind to it.

***16*** *And Samson said, “With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men.”*

It’s a poem. Donkey and heap are spelled the same in Hebrew. It sounds maybe more like “with the jawbone of an ass, I’ve piled them in a mass.” This is a poem, but it says nothing about God. This isn’t like Deborah’s song in Judges 5. Samson writes his own legendary tag line. He’s the hero. And his victory seems epic.

***17*** *As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi.*

“The Jawbone Hill.” The providential working of God. There’s something strange about it, and yet, if God can use a donkey’s jawbone, He can use Samson. The working of God is dramatic, it’s ironic, it’s unique, it’s tragic. But it is epic. It is always surprising. His creativity is unparalleled. He doesn’t disappoint in the way He delivers. He’s helping even when it seems like He isn’t. And He knows we need help. Our confidence is that no one can stop God’s help. You can’t stop His help. You can’t get in His way. You can’t stop Him from judging. You can’t stop Him from saving.

And there’s no better showcase of God’s creativity than by sending His own Son to the womb of this obscure young woman to be rejected by the very ones He came to save. The heart of man is rebelling. We don’t want to be healed. We don’t want to be saved. But here’s God to conquer death by dying. Is there anything more surprising, dramatic, more ironic, more unique, more tragic, more epic than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? All of history turns on it. It’s how God works. In a scandalous, surprising way. We see it and we hold on. We have to refuse to settle for the compromise beneath the rule of sin, even though our hearts desire not to be saved. We want the peace. We don’t want the fight. We want compromise, status quo. And so, we hand over our Savior to die again and again. “He’ll forgive me. He’ll forgive me. Sin can reign.” And God wants us to make war, to do work with zeal, to hold on with trust in the supremacy of His power, to brace for the maneuvers of His creativity with surprising providence, and to trust that He will save. But we must cry out. What does He have to do to make us cry out?

**IV. Brace for His sure provision. God’s Care: A Fight Commended (15:18-20)**

God’s care is revealed here exactly when it is needed. The story concludes with a show of God’s care and it’s highlighted through two reminders about the relationship between man and God.

Reminder #1: Neediness—Samson cries out. (15:18)

This is the position from which provision is sought; a position of need. In verse 18, Samson finally needs God. After fighting to slay 1,000 men, he’s physically exhausted and very thirsty. This is the point to which all of the dominoes have been falling. It is the aim of God’s hidden agenda. His neediness is finally experienced physically, so he expresses it verbally. And for all the stubbornness of Israel to refuse to ask for help, Samson finally calls out.

***18*** *And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the Lord and said, “You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?”*

Finally! All of this was moving him to call upon the Lord. But it’s still not pretty. He kind of squeaks out this prayer. It’s not much of a call. It’s almost a bit of an accusation. It seems maybe even shortsighted and almost like he’s assuming that he’s the next servant of the Lord like Joshua or Moses. It seems kind of hypocritical after what we’ve just witnessed. In other passages when Israel cried out, it was a different Hebrew word. It was an urgent public appeal. And here, Samson just makes a personal call. It’s hardly the national cry. And yet, God commanded it and here he is. Even though Israel refuses to ask God for help, one arrogant man finally manages a pathetic call. And here’s the thing that’s most shocking, more than the lion, more than the thirty suits, more than the 300 jackals, more than 1,000 corpses combined. The shock is that God listens. He listens!

Reminder #2: Divine Eagerness—God delivers (15:19-20)

Look at the readiness with which God’s provision is granted. Samson finally calls out and God listens. And He provides swiftly. It’s almost like the narrator is shocked too! Samson calls to the covenant name Yahweh, and the narrator changes it to Elohim, the broad-basic name, as if he’s surprised by what happens here. God is still listening.

***19*** *And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day.* ***20*** *And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.*

Finally, someone calls out! Finally, he recognizes his need and God is so eager to save. Even though this guy deserves it least of anyone, it seems, God listens. He’s so eager.

Here’s something we have to note. In the rest of Judges, when Israel finally cries out and God delivers, there’s this formula. The length of the judges rule is given and we read about his death or burial, some kind of epitaph. But not here. There’s no mention of Samson’s death or burial. There’s no mention of the land having rest like in chapter 3 verse 11, or 30 or 5:31. It’s because chapter 16 is actually one drawn-out account of his descent to the grave. His burial account will be extended and we’ll read it in detail. And that just shows us how shocking it is that God cares and that He’s helping. We need help! No one can stop Him from helping. And He’s so eager and ready to help and save. But we have to cry out. And so He brings all kinds of circumstances to move us to a position of need. And He is so ready to answer. He has already proven that in Romans 8.

**Romans 8:32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

And yet, we don’t like it. We like being our own master. We would rather be God. We don’t want to be saved. And God will use whatever maneuvers He has to, to get us into a position of need so that we cry out. So we brace ourselves. We hold on with trust and we seek to humble our hearts and get into that position earlier rather than later. To cry out!

God saves whoever He wants. And so often, those He saves are nobodies. The problem is that God uses this nobody to defeat everybody and he starts to think he’s somebody. And that ends in disaster. We’ve witnessed the prophecy of his rise. We’ve experienced the intensity of his rage. And we’re about to witness the tragedy of his ruin. If you hang around honey long enough, you’re going to get stung.

In 2010 America and a foreign nation held the biggest spy swap in almost two decades. 10 foreigners were sent back to their homeland by charter plane. The most famous of those spies was a woman. She was a 28 year old female who had successfully gained British citizenship. She was living in New York, socializing in wealthy circles, including dating a prominent restaurant owner, all the while supplying this nation with intelligence. And she was caught in an undercover FBI agent sting. She had accepted a fake passport at a Starbucks. She’d been under suspicion for targeting a senior member of the President’s cabinet for seduction and information extraction in an operation that is referred to as a honey trap.

If you’re thinking that this wedding fight was a bad consequence for spilling secrets to a woman that was forbidden, well next week in chapter 16, God’s secret weapon will reveal a secret weakness in a finale that will bring down the house and Samson in *The Costly Risk*. God and His salvation are not taken lightly without consequence.