

Down with the Philistines!

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[0 : 00] Well, now we come to our reading from Scripture. So perhaps you'd turn with me to the book of Judges in the Old Testament, chapter 15, Judges 15. And you'll find this on page 214 of our Pew Bibles, page 214.

We're halfway through the story of Samson. Samson's story occupies four full chapters of Judges, chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16.

Last week we read about his marriage, about the lion, the honey and the bees, and the riddle. And we have further deeds of Samson tonight. So Judges, chapter 15.

After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. And he said, I will go in to my wife in the chamber.

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

[1 : 14] Please take her instead. And Samson said to them, this time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm. So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches.

And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. 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. 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. 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. 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. Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi.

[2 : 27] 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. Then three thousand 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? And he said to them, as they did to me, so have I done to them. And they said to him, we have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.

And Samson said to them, swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves. 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. When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him.

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. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey and put out his hand and took it.

[3 : 41] And with it, he struck a thousand men. 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.

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

It is at Lehi to this day. And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years. Amen.

[4 : 43] May the Lord's blessing be upon his word to our hearts. Well, do let's turn again to Judges chapter fifteen, page two, one, four. When you're preparing sermons, the first thing you do is to sit down with your Bible passage open in front of you in a large piece of paper.

And then prayerfully and carefully you read the Bible passage. And then you ask, and what is the message of this passage? Well, I was doing this a week or two ago with Judges chapter fifteen. And my first thought was, oh no, not another chapter of conflict and battle. Samson versus the Philistines again. More bloodshed and mayhem.

And then I thought, in my weakness, do we really need so many chapters detailing Samson's victories over these Philistines? We have three chapters, fourteen, fifteen and sixteen.

Wouldn't one perhaps have been enough? And then I thought, and before we get even to the story of Samson, we have chapter after chapter of very similar material in the book of Judges.

[5 : 56] Ehud defeating Eglon, the king of Moab. We have Deborah and Barak defeating Sisera and the Canaanites. We have Gideon subduing Midian. We have Jephthah putting down the Ammonites.

It's battle, violence and conflict on every page. Wouldn't it be lovely, I thought, to be able to preach on a quiet, gentle passage? To have a sermon, for example, on how to develop tranquility and serenity in the inner depths of one's being.

Well, if you came here tonight hoping for a sermon on tranquility in the inner depths of your being, I'm afraid it's not going to come.

We have got battling and mayhem this week, and we're going to have mayhem and battling next week as well in chapter 16. But perhaps it is good for us after all.

Our default position, certainly I speak for myself, is the armchair rather than the gymnasium and certainly not the parade ground. It's more comfortable, isn't it, for all of us to keep our heads below the parapet when the enemy gets firing.

[7 : 04] But one of the purposes, one of the great purposes of the Bible is to train the Lord's people for the Lord's warfare. Even the Apostle John, who had so much to say about love, teaches us in his first letter that the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

The Creator has come to be the destroyer. He creates what is good and lovely, and he destroys what is evil and destructive. So his servants need to be taught to be battlers, loving the truth, but setting ourselves against everything that hates the truth.

So we can be sure that the Lord made no mistake when he caused the author of Judges to write chapter 14 and chapter 15 and then chapter 16. Because at one level, these chapters are training manuals for Christian people in the Lord's warfare.

Maybe also it's good for our church to be geared up again for battle at this particular point in our congregation's history. Those of you who are not very new to the church will know that we as a congregation had to fight a difficult, painful battle a couple of years ago, which involved many months of wrestling with the denomination from which finally we have been parted.

The Lord gave us great unity and great focus and a sense of purpose together. And once that battle had been fought and the break had been made, we were panting for breath.

[8 : 39] We felt tired. We felt, if I can use a football analogy, we felt we'd played the full 90 minutes and we needed a rest. Maybe we've been thinking since then, wouldn't five years of rest be pleasant?

Ten years would be even better. And yet here is Samson reaching out for a donkey's jawbone. Our weapons are prayer and the preaching of the gospel, of course, not swords, spirits, or guns.

Sorry, swords or guns or donkey's jawbones. Our prayers are the preaching of the gospel and our weapons are prayer and gospel preaching. And yet we are called to carry on battling with the devil's lies.

Our job, thank God, is not to kill people, but rather lovingly to bring them under the lordship of Christ. And as the gospel is extended, the devil's kingdom is reduced.

We need, perhaps especially on Remembrance Sunday, to be able to distinguish between necessary warfare and unnecessary warfare. Much human warfare in this world has been unnecessary.

[9 : 47] It's arisen from squabbles which should have been resolved by diplomatic channels or in some other way. Some human warfare, of course, has been necessary. For example, Britain surely had to go to war with the Nazis in 1939.

Not to have done so would have been to abdicate responsibility. But the lord's warfare, the lord's warfare is always necessary because it is warfare against Satan.

Satan's final defeat is promised to us in the Bible. But if we belong to the lord Jesus, we are involved in battling for the greatest of all causes. Well, with that in mind, then, let's turn to verse 1 in our Judges chapter 15.

After some days. Well, after some days, after what? Just look back at the last few verses of chapter 14, and you'll see that Samson's wedding has ended with Samson killing 30 men from Ashkelon, thus fulfilling the lord's purpose expressed in chapter 14, verse 4, where the lord was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

Remember, Samson has been raised up for this very purpose, to subdue the Philistines and weaken their grip on the people of Israel. But Samson's very short-lived marriage becomes a casualty of this war, and Samson's father-in-law, as the final verse of chapter 14 tells us, gives Samson's wife to Samson's best man, but without Samson's knowledge.

[11 : 19] Because Samson, in verse 19, do you remember, has stormed back to his own parents' house in a towering rage. So, chapter 15, verse 1. After some days, Samson's temper seems to have cooled, but his interest in his wife seems to have been refreshed and warmed up.

Now, it's wheat harvest time, we're told in verse 1. When is wheat harvested in Scotland? Chilly Scotland. August, even September possibly. But in warm Palestine, the wheat comes to its ripeness much earlier.

So, it's May or June when it's harvested there. Lovely time of year. And we're told in verse 1 that Samson goes to visit his wife. His wife. Leading a young goat.

Now, in Britain, a let's kiss and make up present is more likely to be 20 red roses or carnations. But in Palestine in those days, it was a goat kid.

Goats are great for milk and meat. This is a valuable gift. Samson comes to his father-in-law's door, his father-in-law's door, and he knocks on the door. His father-in-law looks through the peephole.

[12 : 31] Oh, no, thinks his father-in-law. It's Samson. This is just awful. He opens the door, knowing things that Samson does not. Hello, Samson, he says.

Hello. I've come to see my wife. I want to go to bed with her right now. That's what first one says. Very blunt, isn't it? Samson, Samson, says the older man, Samson.

Samson has just something that you need to know. It's this. She's not your wife anymore. You see, I thought you loathed her for telling the story about your riddle, about the honey and the lion and so on.

So I've given her in marriage to your best man. But just look in the kitchen there. Do you see that girl sitting there? That's her younger sister. She's the beauty queen of all Timna. Surely you'd be happy with her, would you not?

But Samson replies in verse 3, When I harm the Philistines this time, I shall be innocent. In other words, they have treated me so awfully, you cannot blame me now for anything I do to them.

[13 : 35] And what he then does to them is really very inventive. Who would have thought of it? He catches 300 foxes, ties them.

Don't ask me how he did it. He ties them in pairs, tail to tail. He attaches a torch to each pair of tails, lights the torches, and releases these animals into the corn, the standing corn, which hasn't been cut.

He then turns his attention to the corn that has already been cut and stacked, and is ready for threshing, and he sets fire to it. And for good measure, he burns down a few olive orchards as well.

No happy harvest home supper for the Philistines that year. All they get is ashes and barbecued fox, which is not a delicacy in any country that I know of.

We now have a series of tit-for-tat revenge killings. The Philistines, in verse 6, discover that Samson is responsible for this arson attack on their crops, and they realize that the thing that has angered Samson is the fact that his father-in-law has given his wife to the best man.

[14 : 46] So the Philistines, rather than blaming Samson directly or seeking issue with him, they make scapegoats out of his father-in-law and his wife, and they burn down their house with the father and the daughter in it.

Just imagine seeing this on the big screen. It would be awful, wouldn't it? And it was awful, awful. But that's not the end of it. Tit-for-tat, Samson is filled with rage again when he hears that they've killed his wife and his father-in-law.

And it says in verse 8, he strikes them hip and thigh, which is an odd phrase, isn't it? Why not shoulders and belly? It probably just means that he laid into them with mighty power and created carnage.

Hips and thighs everywhere, if you like. And when he'd finished, he went away, not back to his parents' home in Zorah this time. Perhaps he didn't want to put them in danger of having their house burned down over their heads.

So he goes to what verse 8 calls the cleft of the rock at Etam. He has become essentially a wild outlaw, living in a cave out in the countryside. But the Philistines want tit-for-tat.

[15:57] The desire for revenge goes on. So they come in force to a place called Lehi in Judah. And the men of Judah come and say to them, why have you come against us?

I guess rather fearfully they say this. And the Philistines reply, it's that blaggard Samson, your Samson. We've come to truss him up so that we can do to him as he has done to us.

Hand him over. Then, verse 11. And this is an important verse, and we'll come back to it. Then 3,000 men of Judah.

They are so much in awe of Samson, they have to send 3,000 men. Anyway, this large body of men go to Samson's hiding place in the cave, and they say to him fearfully, don't you know who's in charge around here, Samson?

It's the Philistines. What then is this that you have done to us? Now just look at that question. What have you done to us? They're regarding Samson as their enemy, not as their friend and rescuer.

[17:00] Was there to be a time, a thousand years or more later, when the people of God were going to regard the ones sent to rescue them as their enemy? There's a pattern here.

So the men of Judah are wishing that Samson would just stop stirring up this trouble for them. They would prefer to live quietly under Philistine rule than to back Samson in his God-directed warfare.

Now look at his reply to them at the end of verse 11. As they did to me, so I have done to them. And just look at what they had said in verse 10.

We have come to do to him as he did to us. Tit-for-tat revenge. That's the underlying pattern of chapter 15, and it carries on through chapter 16 as well.

Now look on to verses 12 and 13. Who needs enemies if your friends are like this? The men of Judah, Samson's fellow Hebrews, say to him, We've come here now to bind you, so that we can give you into the hands of the Philistines.

[18:08] Perhaps that explains why they'd come in such huge numbers. Maybe they thought it might require 3,000 of us to truss up this particular man. But Samson mildly says, Okay, as long as you swear not to attack me yourselves, you can do it.

And they reply in effect, No, Samson, we'll agree to that. That's fine. We won't kill you. We'll just give you to the Philistines so that they can finish you off. Thank you, he might have replied.

How kind and thoughtful of you, my brothers. So they tie him up with two new ropes and escort him from his cave to the town of Lehi, where the Philistines are waiting for him.

And when he comes to Lehi, and the Philistines see him coming, they erupt like Ibrox on a Saturday afternoon. Here he is, they're shouting, the vile enemy of our nation.

Let's get him. Let's do him in. Let's do to him as he has done to us. And you see the two great rushings of verse 14. The Philistines are rushing towards Samson, shouting with joy and vengeance.

[19:17] But at the same moment, the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon Samson and fills him with irresistible strength. The ropes snap off his arms like flax catching fire, and the cords melt off his hands.

He has no sword or spear. But a donkey had thoughtfully and providentially died on that spot a couple of years previously. There is his jawbone lying on the ground.

Have you ever thought of the length of a donkey's jawbone? How long is it from the back of a donkey's head, where his ears are, to where his nostrils are? It's about like that, isn't it? That's quite a long jaw.

It's about five miles, five times the length of my jaw, I would say. Not five miles, five times mine. So Samson picks up this lethal weapon, the teeth, of course.

It was a fresh jawbone. Still, the teeth would have been there. He picks it up, and he lays about him and kills a thousand men. And having done so, Samson then breaks into verse.

[20 : 18] That little piece of poetry there that he utters in verse 16, in fact, turns on a pun in the Hebrew language. Apparently, the Hebrew words for ass and heap are spelled the same.

Now, we have similar eccentricities in our English language, don't we? I mean, think, for example, of the words, or word or words that are spelled B-O-W.

That could be bow, couldn't it? As in bowing your head. It could be the bow of a boat. It could be bow, as in bow tie. Or it could be the bow that you shoot an arrow with.

So we have similar eccentricities. Now, these two Hebrew words are spelt the same, but they mean either donkey or heap. In fact, one witty Bible translator has put verse 16 like this, with the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass.

The play on words is really designed to make the reader chuckle. We'll perhaps return to that chuckle element a little bit later. Now, verse 17. After the poem, Samson throws away the jawbone, and the play subsequently becomes known as Ramath-Lehi, which means jawbone hill.

[21 : 32] Got a fine battling ring to it, hasn't it? Jawbone hill. Bannockburn. Waterloo. Jawbone hill. That sort of a name. Now, we'll look at the final paragraph of the chapter in a few minutes' time.

But I want to draw breath at this stage and stand back a little from the story so that we can begin to think about the message that the author of Judges is conveying to the reader. And let me try to outline the message of the chapter under three headings.

First, it's a very bad idea to be an enemy of the Lord. This chapter is making the point that the Philistines come off worse in every episode, every part of the story.

In football terms, each time there's a skirmish, each time there's a conflict, the score is Israelites two, Philistines one.

I put it like that because in each tangle, the Philistines seem to take the lead. They seem to score the first goal. But each time, Samson comes from a goal down and he scores two to win the match.

[22 : 42] Now, let me just trace this pattern through. The first contest comes in chapter 14 over the riddle at the wedding feast. The Philistines, by devious means, have managed to get the answer to Samson's riddle out of Samson's wife.

We've got you now, they think. Philistines one, Israelites nil. But Samson, filled with the spirit of the Lord, pays his debt, the 30 suits of clothes, he leaves 30 men dead in the streets of Ashkelon.

Philistines one, Israelites two. The next round comes in the early part of chapter 15 where the Philistines again seem to get ahead.

Samson has cleared out of town, his wife has been given to another man, and all seems peaceful and quiet in Timnah at wheat harvest time. First goal to the Philistines.

But then Samson appears with the young goat. I want my wife, he says. You can't have her, his father-in-law says. Okay then, 300 foxes, mayhem, arson, and devastation.

[23 : 53] Two goals to Samson. The next encounter follows straight on in verses 6, 7, and 8. The Philistines get the first goal against Samson by burning his wife and his father-in-law to death and hurting him.

But Samson replies by striking them hip and thigh with a great blow. More slaughter. Two goals to Samson. The next round sees Samson bound and trussed with two new ropes and then frog-marched into the town of Lehi by his fellow Israelites.

The Philistines have got him now. They rush towards him shouting in triumph. The ball hits the back of the net. But Samson picks up the jawbone and kills a thousand.

Israelites, two. Now this is the pattern that runs right the way through to the end of Samson's story, to the end of chapter 16. The great final moment which we'll look at next week is the moment when the Philistines have their joyful festival to praise their god Dagon because they've managed to capture Samson and they've put his eyes out and they bring him in so as to play before them and entertain them and mock him.

They want to make fun of him and gloat over his downfall. Philistines won. But his strength is returning and he breaks down the whole temple and kills thousands as he dies.

[25 : 15] Israelites, two. And what do you think Satan was thinking on that quiet Friday evening when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrapped the lifeless body of Jesus in a shroud and laid it to rest in the tomb in Jerusalem?

Satan won. God, nil. There's a pattern. It's a very bad idea to be an enemy of the Lord.

And isn't this encouraging to those who are on the Lord's side, those who are willing to fight for the cause of the gospel? The encouragement is this, that the enemy may appear to make advances but he will be overcome in the end.

Throughout the Bible, there is a clear note sounded of the certain victory of the Lord over all his enemies in the end. Remember how it's put in Psalm 2 as the godless rulers of the world get together, plot together against the Lord and his anointed.

What happens in Psalm 2? The Lord, I'm quoting now, sits in the heavens and laughs. The Lord holds them in derision because their attempt to overthrow him is so utterly pathetic and powerless. [26 : 35] And it's like this here in Judges 15. Samson, the man filled with the spirit of the Lord, is unbeatable. In this chapter, as in Psalm 2, there is the humour of derision.

The author of Judges is showing his readers how weak and puny these Philistines really are when they are faced with the power of God. The author of Judges is saying to us, don't be frightened of those who oppose God.

It's a very bad idea to be an enemy of the Lord. If there's any person here tonight who is still hostile to God and hostile to the Bible or the Gospel, you're in a very dangerous position.

Now secondly, and here I want to draw out some of the implications of what chapter 15 is saying. It's a very bad idea to be a church that has capitulated to the Lord's enemies.

Now when I say that, I'm not suggesting that our church is in that position. I don't think it is. But it could decline. Any church could decline to that kind of position at some future point. There is no church that is decline-proof.

[27 : 50] Now think of this in terms of Samson's fellow Israelites, his contemporaries in Israel. The people of Israel and Judah at this stage in their history should have been living in freedom in the promised land under the sovereignty of God.

That was God's purpose. It was his gift to them, this land. But they weren't. Because of their sinful idolatries, the Lord had caused them to be oppressed and subjugated by the Philistines.

And the Israelites quite simply had lost their backbone. They were meekly submitting to Philistine rule. That's why I said earlier that verse 11 here is so revealing.

There are the men of Judah, Samson's fellow Israelites. They come to Samson in his rocky cave and they say to him, do you not know, Samson, that the Philistines are rulers over us?

They're in charge. In other words, stop causing all this trouble. Submit to the status quo. They're in charge and we'll have a more quiet life if we don't resist them. You, Samson, are a loose cannon.

[28 : 52] You're going to bring trouble and reprisals on us if you carry on like this. But Samson was doing the right thing and his fellow Israelites had lost all their sense of love and devotion to the Lord God of Israel.

They were meekly submitting to the pagan culture which was now dominating them. Now a church can behave just like that. A church can feel the pressure of the pagan culture all around it and it prefers to opt for a quiet life.

The church doesn't fancy becoming unpopular because it starts to disagree with the values of the surrounding culture. I shall never forget something which I heard at a conference for pastors almost 30 years ago.

It was in the 1980s. I was a young parish minister down in England in charge of my very first parish and I think it was the first time that Philip Jensen from Sydney from Australia had come over to England to speak to pastors.

Philip Jensen is due to be with us here in this building on the 7th of March so do remember that date. Anyway as he was speaking to these pastors many of them quite young there was one sentence he said which was a formative moment for me.

[30 : 09] He said brothers if we are really going to be Bible believing pastors we have got to be prepared to be massively unpopular. He said that with his strong Australian accent to be massively unpopular he said.

Now I found that so challenging was I prepared to be massively unpopular in the pleasant country town in Derbyshire where I was the friendly young vicar who was said to be terribly nice.

I began to realise that if I was to be true to the Lord I might have to become very unpopular at least with quite a few people. But this is not just a challenge to ministers it's a challenge to every Christian.

If we are going to be true to the Lord we need to be willing to be called a variety of unpleasant things by people whose good opinion we might naturally value.

This is why Jesus calls his followers to be unashamed of him and his words. There's a pressure upon us to be ashamed of him. So if we start bending to the values of the pagan culture around us we are bound to turn away from the Lord Jesus.

[31 : 22] We cannot simultaneously be friends with Jesus and friends with a culture that treats him as unimportant. Samson's contemporaries may have paid lip service to the God of Abraham.

We can be sure they did but they were meekly submitting to the rule of the Philistines. What then are some of the issues that might threaten to derail a Christian church today?

There are many of them but I'll just name three which are perhaps amongst the most dangerous for us. The first is the issue of the uniqueness of Christ and the uniqueness of Christianity.

The pagan culture around us is prepared to tolerate quite a bit of religion as long as its teachings are vague and are not laying claim to clear truth.

But as soon as Bible Christians point out that the Bible draws clear lines between truth and falsehood, between true revelation and false religion, or between godly behavior and ungodly behavior, that's where we start to become massively unpopular.

[32 : 33] But the Bible's teaching is that there is only one way to God, only one way to the forgiveness of sins and to eternal life, and that is through Jesus, and there are ethical consequences of our trust in him.

The second issue is homosexual activity. And let me say this, friends, there is not one person, I guess, in this building who has never transgressed in matters of sex.

All Christians are forgiven sinners in the area of sex. The transgressions may have been in the mind rather than expressed physically, but all of us have known ill-discipline and ungodliness in matters of sex.

Now, today's particular problem is that our secular culture has made a beloved idol of homosexuality. Let me give just one example. The BBC, which I admire in so many ways for the quality of its radio and television work.

It produces many fine, beautiful programs, but I'm afraid the BBC has been particularly determined in its promotion of homosexuality over the last 15 or 20 years.

[33 : 43] Now, in our church here, we welcome with joy into our fellowship those who have come from a homosexual lifestyle but are leaving it behind so as to follow Christ.

Just as we welcome with joy ex-swindlers, ex-thieves, ex-adulterers. Friends, we are all ex-something. We've all bowed down to idols in the past, but the Lord calls us to repent of them and to leave them behind.

Now, the Bible teaches that homosexual activity is always wrong, always sinful. Any church, then, that holds with the Bible's teaching on this is going to become massively unpopular with some people.

Many churches and denominations, as you know, have simply rolled over and have said, it's just too painful to resist this cultural tsunami. Let's go with the flow.

Let's not try and resist it any longer. And in doing so, they desert Christ and the teaching of the Bible. A third issue is the question of eternity.

[34 : 55] eternal life, the eternal consequences of our decisions. Our secular culture doesn't believe in eternity. So, it demands, it wants, for all the pleasure and meaning of life to be located here and now in this world, in this life.

The idea of joys and pleasures deferred until the world to come is not written into the value system of modern Britain. Carpe diem, that's the motto, seize the day.

And extract from it every last drop of pleasure that you can, even if it means riding roughshod over other people. Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. After our death, there is nothing.

That's the thinking of our secular culture. And it's possible for churches to bow to this agenda, to teach, for example, that God will give us a life in this world, which is untroubled by suffering and pain, where hardship is banned, and every Christian is as full of pleasure and comfort as a sardine tin is full of sardines.

But the Bible's teaching is different. The Christian life is hard. It's characterized by self-sacrifice and often by suffering. It's the world to come where there is no more pain and tears and mourning and death.

[36 : 16] But a church that teaches these things about eternity will not be very popular. It's a very bad idea to be a church that has capitulated to the Lord's enemies and to the things that they value.

And Samson, for all his flaws, is honored by the book of Judges for being willing to battle with the Philistines when his fellow Israelites had meekly rolled over and submitted to them.

We're now third. And just briefly, from verses 18 to 20, the last paragraph, it's very refreshing to see how the Lord helps the one who battles for him.

This battle of Jawbone Hill exhausted Samson. And there he is in verse 18, very thirsty and very weary, and he calls out to the Lord. It's actually the first time that we see him praying to the Lord in the whole story.

There's one other time later. But this is the first time and he cries out to the Lord in verse 18, 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?

[37 : 30] So the mighty man has suddenly become weak, and he does the right thing, and the only thing, he prays, he prays for help. And just as Moses and the Israelites several centuries earlier were given water by the Lord in the wilderness, so Samson suddenly hears a bubbling and a gurgling as the Lord splits open a hollow place at Lehi, a ditch or a little gully, and up comes a spring, and he drinks, and verse 19 says his spirit returned, and he revived.

Just compare the two Hebrew names that were given here. Verse 17, Ramath, Lehi, Jawbone Hill, but verse 19, Enhakare, which means the spring of him who called.

Jawbone Hill is a reminder of Samson's God-given strength. The spring of the one who called is a reminder of Samson's weakness and of how the Lord took care of him and revived him.

And friends, the Lord is still in the business of reviving the strength of those who grow weak in his service. Well, Tron Church, who's for battle?

Who's willing to battle for the teaching and the standards and the lifestyle of the Bible? Who is willing, where necessary, to be massively unpopular? Who is willing to be unashamed of the Lord and of his words?

[39 : 03] Battling with the pagan culture cost Samson everything in the end. Everything. nothing. But it was worth it. Let's pray together.

Dear God, our Father, we often sing in that lovely hymn, I am weak, but you are mighty. Hold me with your powerful hand. God's hand.

And our prayer is that because we are weak, often our strength is sapped. Often we feel that we perhaps don't have much courage or heart to stand for you and to take our stand on the various issues that so distinguish the church from secular society.

but our prayer, dear Father, is that you will help us gladly to bear witness to the truth of Christ and his words, never to be ashamed of them, but to bring glory to your name so that your name, your truth, your honor, your reputation are wonderfully upheld.

And we pray these things in the name of our Savior Jesus. Amen. Amen.