

En-Hakkore

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] In Judges chapter 15, we read verses 18 to 20. He that is Samson 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-Hakor.

It is at Lehi to this day. And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines, 20 years. The book of Judges is not a happy book.

It begins with the death of Joshua, God's faithful servant, and it ends in the blood and slaughter of an Israelite civil war.

Nearly 400 years later. From the outset, the Israelites are driven by their desire for an easy life, rather than a faithful one.

[1 : 10] And as a result of taking what they think will be the easy way, they heap up more and more difficulties for themselves. They are given the promised land with the clear instruction to make it a holy land, purged and purified of idolatry and false gods and those who worship them.

But whilst the Israelites are quite happy to do as much killing as is convenient for them, they find it's a lot less hassle in the short term to just grab as much land as you can, drive out the inhabitants from the bits that you want, but generally settle down and let them just live round about you.

Having gained what they wanted by conquest, which they foolishly ascribed to their own strength, they settled for a measure of material wealth and comfort, rather than the rigor of a religious duty to create a purified and holy land.

If we were to go back to chapter 2 in Judges, we'd read in verses 12 to 14, They abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed down to them, and they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreth.

[2 : 39] So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies so they could no longer withstand their enemies.

And then if we read at verse 18 on to verse 22, Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge.

For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.

They did not stop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And he said, Because this people has transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died in order to test Israel by them whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did or not.

So we see a recurring theme throughout these four centuries of the judges. Disobedience and then defeat and distress.

[3 : 56] And then in due course, the Lord raises up a judge to deliver Israel and for a while they return to the Lord and the land has rest.

And then they get used to the rest. And then they get comfortable and they get complacent and they drift away from the Lord and the whole cycle begins again.

It is a solemn reality that power belongs to the Lord and that weakness will always be the portion of his people when they abandon him.

I'll say that again. Power belongs to the Lord and weakness will always be the portion of his people when they abandon him.

Over the course of these four centuries of the judges, if you count them, you will see that the Lord raises up twelve judges over the course of those centuries.

[4 : 54] Twelve judges, just like there are twelve tribes of Israel, just like there are twelve apostles, just like four and twenty elders around the throne, doubling up the twelve, and so on. It's obviously a significant number for the Lord.

And if you'll take my word for it, if not, you can go through it yourself with a fine-tooth comb, that these twelve are, first of all, Othniel, and then secondly, Ehud, and then Shamgar, and fourthly, Deborah the prophetess, then fifthly, Gideon, then sixth, Sutola, seventh, Jair, eighth, Jephthah, nine, Ibliam, ten, Elon, eleven, Abdon, and finally, Samson, the twelfth, and last.

Each of these judges was able to deliver Israel for one reason, and one reason only. And we read of that in chapter 2, at verse 18. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge.

For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. Samson is unique among the judges, not least because the Lord goes to extraordinary lengths to ensure that his very conception and birth are from a state of Nazarite purity without any defilement of any kind, and this is stipulated as a condition for Samson's own life that he is never to cut his hair nor to drink any kind of alcohol.

Now, obviously, there is no magic formula in either long hair or teetotalism which would of themselves endow Samson with such superhuman strength.

[6 : 41] Rather, it is the gift of God from which Samson continues to benefit for as long as he keeps faith with what the Lord requires of him.

The not cutting his hair and the not drinking alcohol is what the Lord requires of him as a Nazarite. He is also unusual in that whilst many of the judges are sent by the Lord in direct response to the cry of the people, you know, if we think in chapter 3, verse 9, when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel who saved them, off near the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

Chapter 3, verse 15, then the people of Israel cried to the Lord and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer. Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. Chapter 4, verse 3, when then the people of Israel cried unto the Lord.

Chapter 6, verse 7, when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites, he sent a prophet to the people of Israel and so on. As they cry out to the Lord, the Lord helps them. But in this instance, despite the long oppression of the Philistines, the Lord does not wait to be asked. He just gives freely.

[8 : 01] Samson is not given in response to the people crying out to the Lord. Samson is simply a gift of the Lord. God's free gift to the suffering Israelites.

To that extent, he points us to Christ. For the Lord did not wait for us to come to him. He did not wait for us to call, but rather, as Romans tells us, chapter 5, verse 8, you know, God commendeth his love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

But there, the similarity ends. Samson may have had superhuman strength, but he had at least one fearful human weakness. Yet even that could be and was used of the Lord for what his purposes intended.

The Lord was never with Samson going to conclude or complete the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, but he was going to make a start.

Chapter 13, verse 5, For behold, he said to Samson's mother, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

[9 : 20] The Philistines oppressed Israel for 40 years. That's what we read in chapter 13, verse 1. 40 years. And since, in the end, they succeeded in capturing Samson, and he died as their prisoner, Samson's 20 years of judging the children of Israel must have been in the midst of the Philistine years, if you think about it.

It's not, oh, they got free of the Philistines, and then Samson judged them for 20 years, and then he died, and then the Philistines came back. No. Samson's judging of Israel was unusual in that it was in the midst of the Philistine oppression.

Those years were still going on when Samson died. In a nutshell, the Lord permitted Samson's fatal weakness, for women in this case, to become the means of challenging the Philistine oppression. Once the Philistines become a threat to Israel, if you think about it, nobody ever takes them on directly. Nobody takes them on until Samson.

In chapter 14, at verse 19, where after Samson, you know, puts his riddle at his wedding, and then because they plead with his wife and then she tells them the truth of the riddle, we see it in chapter 14, verse 19, the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him.

[10:41] He went down to Ashkelon and struck down 30 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. Killing 30 Philistines, it just wasn't done by a single solitary Israelite.

It's the first recorded attack by an Israelite upon the Philistines anywhere in the Bible. Although, you could say the motivation was personal rather than political, but still, the killing of 30 Philistines, the overlords, the rulers of the Hebrew people by an Israelite without any comeback, without any repercussions as far as anyone could ascertain, would be a major embarrassment to the Philistine rule.

It's as if, if you can think back, those of you that are old enough to remember, let's say that in apartheid South Africa, if, say, a black person in those days of apartheid had killed 30 white people, just white people, and just walked away from it.

If you could imagine the old apartheid regime just not responding to that. This is an oppressed people here of whom one has killed 30 of the oppressors and there's been no comeback.

And that would have been frightening and worrying and embarrassing for the Philistine regime, even if the motivation is personal rather than political. The destroying of their entire harvest, which is what follows on after they put Samson's wife and father-in-law to death, you know, he puts the foxes tail to tail, catches 300 foxes now, think about that, that's not something you just do in an afternoon, I think I'll go out and catch 300 foxes.

[12:27] Foxes don't herd together like sheep. If you're going to catch 300 foxes, you're going to have to catch them one and two at a time and put them in some kind of pen or enclosure where they can't get away.

You're going to have to build up your store of foxes and catch them individually and keep them until you've built up 300 of them. And then you take them in pairs, 150 pairs, and you put a lighted torch between each of the two tails bound together.

The animals must have been absolutely terrified. And then you light the torch, you set it in amongst the crops. Now, if you've ever seen heather burning on a hillside, it's quite, you know, it's quite a, not frightening, but alarming, you know, prospect.

And you see a huge whole hillside ablaze with the smoke billowing out. And that's a controlled blaze for the good of the hillside. Imagine if you've got agricultural crops that everyone is depending on. And these go ablaze like wall-to-wall fire, like a carpet of fire, and the sky absolutely choked with black smoke.

[13:35] This is your food for the next year that has all been burned to cinders and ashes by one person. That's going to be a frightening prospect, especially if you consider yourselves to be the rulers, the overlords.

It must have been an absolutely terrifying sight for the ordinary civilian population, the Philistine population. The knowledge of this was done by one man, one person, must likewise have been deeply worried.

When they murder his wife and his father-in-law, this is the revenge he takes. He kills more of them. And then he consents to be handed over to them and he kills another thousand of them with the jawbone of a donkey.

Now, that's not an insignificant weapon. If you think of how big a donkey is, and these were beasts of burden. Obviously, one had just sort of collapsed under its burden on the highway or wherever it was and just been left there and been picked clean by the scavengers, by vultures or whatever.

So it was clean bones because it's described as a fresh jawbone of a donkey. So it's quite recent and it's quite new. Now, a jawbone of a donkey, it's a big club of a thing.

[14:53] A great big handle it would have, the teeth would still be in it. This is not a mean weapon. This is not an insignificant weapon. It's not like a little sheep jawbone or whatever. This is a significant weapon.

You want somebody with that, with the sort of strength that Samson has, yes, you'd kill them. And with all the teeth in it as well that would make a sharp, jagged weapon, this is a significant weapon, a new jawbone of an ass, as the old Bible puts it.

Ramath Lehi means either the lifting up of the jawbone, I know it's put in some words to the hill of the jawbone, but lifting up of the jawbone, or alternatively the casting away of the jawbone, which is what he does afterwards when he has killed these thousand people, and it's all great as far as it goes.

But if now he's going to collapse from thirst and dehydration, then what was the use of it? That's the context in which we have our verse here. Then 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?

Great victory! But then, if he's going to die of thirst and dehydration, then nature is going to do what the Philistines couldn't do. You see, no matter what aspect, or what age in history, or aspect of life we are dealing with, success, or blessing, or suffering, or hardship, that you just barely get through and no more, there is always the next problem.

[16:30] You may think, oh, if I can only get, just get through this thing, get through this problem that's here, and then once that's done, oh, get through to some calmer water. Things will be more, next week when I've got this out of the way, or that out of the way, things will be a bit more smooth, things will be easier if I can just get this done.

So you get it done. You get it done, you get it sorted, you get that bill paid, you get that problem solved, you get that meeting done, or the thing you were worried about, and that's great. But then there's just the next problem.

There's the next emergency, there's the next challenge, there's the next thing. The next problem is always there, the next crisis is always just around the corner, and if the Lord doesn't help with that one, then all the previous ones lose any benefit.

If you're a student, and you're studies, you're exams, and you're doing say your third year exams, and you're struggling, and you're not sure if you're going to pass, then yes, you pray to the Lord for your help, but it's no use saying, ah, yeah, but I passed second year, and I got through first year, okay, look at the flying colors I got for there.

That's great, that was then, this is now. You may have sweated blood for your first year exams, and for your second year exams, but now you're in third year, and now you've got a whole new set of problems.

[17:46] You may have eaten sumptuously last week, but today you're hungry. You may have slaked your thirst yesterday, but now your body needs to be refreshed again, and it's thirsty again.

There is always the next crisis. You can slaughter a thousand of the oppressing Philistines, but if you're about to die of thirst, it's no use to you, because you'll be dead by tomorrow.

All the meals you ever ate in the past are no help to you if you're starving now today. All the water you ever drank does you no good now if you're dying of thirst in the present.

All the good things you may have enjoyed that were great, they were wonderful, and you thank the Lord for them all, but they can't help you now. It will have been of benefit to you only insofar as you can keep building on it.

The manna was needed every day in the wilderness. The victory over the Philistines by Samson here was great.

[18:53] It was a thousand men with a jawbone of an ass, the jawbone of a donkey. It's a major victory. He didn't have a spear, a shield, or a knife, or a sword, just the jawbone of a donkey.

He killed a thousand men. That was a great victory. But now it's done, and it will all be undone, and Samson will die of thirst and dehydration unless the Lord helps him and there isn't any water around.

But unlike the Israelites in the desert, Samson doesn't murmur or grumble against the Lord. He doesn't say, oh Lord, what use is it now?

I went and killed all these Philistines, but look, look here I am dying of thirst. What have you ever done for me? He doesn't grumble or moan. He cries out to him and calls upon him in prayer.

This is what he says, he was very thirsty. He called upon the Lord and said, you have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant.

[20 : 00] He doesn't say, Lord, how great I am. You should give me the water I need because I'm a faithful servant of God. Look at the victory I have won. Rather, he says, you have granted this great victory. He cries to the Lord.

He gives God the credit and he acknowledges that the Lord has enabled him to be the instrument in his hand for this victory. but he has a real, actual, genuine life or death need.

And he cries out to the Lord. This is what he ought to do. And he was right to do it. He took it straight to the Lord. And he got an answer straight back.

Samson acknowledges the Lord's goodness in the past before he asks for help in the present. And he doesn't feel guilty about asking.

God's desire is not to keep us at arm's length, having to beg for every hour, for every crumb, but his delight is to richly supply all our needs as we ask them in faith.

[21 : 06] Take it to the Lord as Samson did. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Ask and it shall be given. Don't go thinking, oh I can't ask the Lord for this. I asked him for something yesterday.

I asked him for something the other day and he answered, it would be ungrateful to go back again and again. No it wouldn't. When you're young, your mum doesn't say to you, what? You want tea? I gave you lunch yesterday. My goodness, what's the money with you? Want fed again? Why are you asking? Why are you saying you're hungry? Of course you're hungry. You need fed. Of course he's thirsty.

He's going to die of dehydration. If he doesn't get the water that he needs. He's not asking for a banquet of wine. He's just asking for water. Because his body needs it.

And when we ask the Lord for the things that we need, as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, your heavenly father knoweth what things ye have need of. All we're asking for is what he is ready and willing to supply.

[22 : 08] But as we ask, we should always be ready to do as Samson does here. And to acknowledge God's goodness in the past. That it has been the Lord who has got us this far.

If you're the student slogging through your exams in third year, say, thank you Lord for the help you gave me in first year and second year. But now, Lord, I'm really struggling here. If you're starving, you say, thank you Lord for the meals you gave me yesterday and earlier today or whatever.

But Lord, I really need something now. Or I'm not going to be able to concentrate. I'm not going to be able to do the task in hand if I don't have enough food. Don't go thinking, oh, I can't ask the Lord. He's not bothered about my individual problems. He's not concerned with that. He's got a universe to run. How can he possibly care about my little problems? He does care about your little problems. If you're a father and one of your children, their toy gets broken, you don't stop and think, oh, it's only a plastic toy, for goodness sake, I'm not going to bother about that. I've got things to do. I've got busy in the work and the study.

[23 : 12] I've got a meeting up, a phone call to make. No, you'll stop. If you can, if you're able to, you'll find a bit of glue, you'll screw the thing back together again, you'll give it back to them. Because your child matters.

Your child's happiness matters. Maybe the little toy doesn't matter, but they matter. And because they matter, you, the father or the mother, will take the time to mend it, to do it, to give them what they need, what is breaking their heart because it's broken.

You sort it. You fix it if you can. The Lord always can. But if we ask for what we need, he will readily supply it. We can't say, oh, I asked for something yesterday.

I can't ask again today. This is today. This is another day, another need, another opportunity of prayer. It's never wrong to pray to the Lord, to ask that we may receive, and that our joy may be full, and that our victories be not lost.

Samson has built up a great series of victories. But nobody is going to be more delighted than the Philistines, if when they come across all the bodies of their slain, there's the skeleton of the donkey there, and there's Samson, dead from dehydration.

[24 : 23] They'll think it was well worth it. The victory will all have been for nothing. All for want of water. And Samson asks, and God supplies.

The victory then is not lost. Stay with him. Stay with the Lord and keep your steady flow of requests. Season with thanksgiving and praise.

This is what we read in Philippians chapter 4, verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known unto God. Don't be anxious yourself about it. Take it to the Lord. There is always going to be the next problem.

There is always going to be the next crisis. You may today or yesterday have a superbly, supremely perfect, victorious, successful day.

[25 : 32] But tomorrow comes and it will have its own new set of problems. There is always the next problem. There is always the next crisis. There is always the next meal to worry about.

There is always the need to take it to the Lord. This is the cry of faith. And the Lord delights to answer such cries.

En hakor, the well of him that cried. That is what it means. The well of him that cried.

Or the spring, the fountain of him that cried. His prayer was answered. And he was refreshed and he was revived. And he picked up and went on with whatever the Lord had for him next.

You see, all through the long years of the judges, the key to Israel's chaotic disintegration and their scattered political weakness and their regular oppressive invasions by foreign powers lay not in the absence of any earthly kingship or figurehead.

[26 : 39] Human kingship was in some ways like the law. So we read in Galatians, you know, it says, chapter 3, verse 19, why then the law? It was added because of transgressions until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.

Just like Jesus says in Mark's account of the gospel when they're asking about divorce and adultery, he says, because of your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment.

But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Like the law, the monarchy in Israel had become a sorrowful necessity, the last resort of restraint and forced obedience instead of the anarchy that had prevailed for centuries.

It meant a binding unity instead of a band of loosely scattered tribes who only came together in times of crisis. Monarchy was never going to be a cure for all Israel's evils, and experience would prove, not surprisingly, that Israel's kingdom would only ever be as good or as pure or as strong or as powerful as the king himself.

If the king was weak or sinful or corrupt, then the kingdom itself would become likewise corrupted and weak. The kingdom was strong when the king was faithful.

[27 : 59] And that was only ever going to be a hit or a miss. It's one reason why Samuel was displeased when the Israelites first asked for a king after 400 years of judges.

1 Samuel 8, verses 6 and 7, the thing displeased Samuel when they said, give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said to Samuel, obey the voice of the people and all they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

Again in chapter 12 at verse 12, when you saw, he said to them, that Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, came against you, you said to me, no, but a king shall reign over us when the Lord your God was your king.

It is, I would suggest to you in this context, that we must go back and read what it says at various stages throughout the book of Judges.

Chapter 17, verse 6, in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Chapter 18, verse 1, in those days there was no king in Israel.

[29 : 06] In those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in. And that story goes on with all the idolatry into which Dan fell. Chapter 19, verse 1, in those days when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the whole country of Ephraim who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

And from the story of that concubine and that Levite then all the civil war and the bloodshed that follows upon the evil that they do. And the very last verse in the book of Judges, in those days there was no king in Israel.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. If the Lord is not your king, if the Lord does not rule over you, lead you, guide you, fight your battles and protect you from your enemies, if he is not doing that because he is not your king, because you have no king, then you are truly on your own for now and for eternity.

For the wheel will turn and the enemy will come back. If he is not wrecking your life already, he will come perhaps after a long period of peace by which time you may be grown soft and warm on the outside and hard and cold on the inside.

Out of the way of seeking the Lord and you suddenly find yourself vulnerable, helpless, alone, like the Israelites. Learn from them, not just from their mistakes, not just from their judges, but from the response in time of trouble.

[30 : 43] As we mentioned earlier, so often when the Lord sent them a judge, it was because they had cried to him at last. In chapter 3, they are oppressed by the Mesopotamians.

What is the solution? We read, when the people of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer. They get a great victory and then the land has rest 40 years. Then they are oppressed by the Moabites.

What is the solution? Chapter 3, verse 15. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer. A great victory and the land has rest 80 years. Then they are oppressed by the Canaanites and what is the solution?

Chapter 4, verse 3. Then the people of Israel cried to the Lord, a great victory. And then they have rest 40 years and then they are oppressed by the Midianites. Well, you are getting the picture. They cry to the Lord.

The Lord sends them a prophet. The Lord sends them deliverance. And the land has rest for so many years. They have a warning. They have a victory. And then they drift away.

[31 : 41] And then it is the Ammonites. And this time the people of Israel cry to the Lord, we have sinned because we have forsaken the Lord. Learn from the Israelites. Learn from the judges.

There is always going to be another crisis. Always going to be the next problem. Always the next battle. You don't want to be dragging yourself backwards and forwards from the throne of grace. Feeling guilty each time about asking for the next thing. And then the next and then the next. Just dwell there. Just stay there. Stay.

Just be at his footstool. Just have him always as your king. Not a temporary fix in a time of crisis. But an eternal father. Jesus said, Ask and it shall be given you.

Seek and you shall fight. Knock and it shall be opened to you. God understands your needs better than you know them yourself. Your heavenly father knoweth you have need of these things.

[32 : 38] Jesus said. In the judges we read here of how Samson in the midst of his victory was about to lose it all because there was another crisis.

He was dying of thirst. He was very thirsty. He called upon the Lord and said, You have granted this great salvation for the hand of your servant and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised.

En hakor. The well of him that cried. In John's account of the gospel Jesus says in chapter 7 On the last day of the feast of the great day Jesus stood up and cried out If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me as the scripture has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. It is an inexhaustible resource. An ongoing supply both physical and spiritual.

For you are both body and soul. And he knows your needs. And he stands ready to meet those needs and to satisfy your soul.

[33 : 51] But you must be his. You must come to him with your requests. You must acknowledge what he has done in the past and ask for his help with the next thing.

Learn from the judges. Learn from the Israelites. Since the Lord was not their king they had no king but they should have done.

The Lord should have been their king. They had no king but they should have done. And so should I. And so should you.

Let us pray.