

Samson: a lesson in consecration.

INTRODUCTION

As the title of the book indicates, the Book of Judges is concerned with the lives of a series of ancient deliverers/leaders in Israel, known as 'judges',¹ of which the book mentions twelve in all.²

When we come to the case of Samson, we discover that there are *several unique features* which stand out, both (1) about the account given of his life and (2) about the man himself. These unusual features raise interesting questions about the significance which Samson had for the people of Israel of his day.

1. The narrative.

We begin by noting four distinctive features about *the account* given of Samson's life:

(i) Samson's history is not only recorded last but it also provides by far *the fullest portrait of any of the judges*, occupying four whole chapters.³ Although, as we shall see, the life of Samson accomplished relatively little, his story is recorded in far more detail than are the stories of any of the other judges.

(ii) Samson comes on the scene at a time when the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and were delivered by Him into the hands of the Philistines.⁴ It was nothing new, of course, for God to raise up a deliverer following a period of oppression.⁵ But what is different in this instance is that *God's people do not first cry to Him for His help*,⁶ even though the Philistine oppression was both the *longest*⁷ and, seemingly, the *most extensive* that Israel endured.

In the case of each of the other major judges, there was first an outcry to God begging Him to intervene and to deliver the people from their sufferings.⁸ Alone among the judges, then, Samson was not raised up in response to the pleading of God's people.

Samson's story, therefore, marks a clear departure from the cycle which runs through the rest of the book and which is stated succinctly in Nehemiah 9: 'they worked great provocations. Therefore, you delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them. And in the time of their trouble, *when they cried to you*, you heard from heaven. And according to your abundant mercies, you gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies'.⁹

That God Himself took the initiative in the case of Samson alone suggests strongly that there was something which God wanted to accomplish (and, as we shall find later, 'to say') through Samson's life and experience.

(iii) Samson's story begins with *a detailed account of the prior announcement of his conception and birth*¹⁰, an announcement made by no less a personage than 'the angel of the Lord' Himself. This feature stands in marked contrast to the histories of the judges who had come before him, whose births aren't even mentioned ... save that in the case of Jephthah a brief mention is made to the fact that he had been born illegitimately.¹¹ The histories of the other judges commence with their call to service when mature in life. Clearly, then, there was something about Samson's birth which was of special significance.

(iv) Samson's story ends with *a detailed account of his death*. We know nothing of the circumstances of the death of any of the other judges; at the most,¹² we are told simply that they died and were buried.¹³ Clearly, then, there was something about the circumstances of Samson's death which was also of special significance.

2. The man.

We next note two distinctive features about *Samson himself*.¹⁴

(i) Samson *never attempted to raise or rally an army in Israel* to go to war against the enemy. Indeed, it is clear that, at the time, Israel had no stomach whatever for a fight against the Philistines. As we noted above, they didn't even cry to God for deliverance. And, when at one stage, Samson had provoked the Philistines by setting fire to their standing corn to avenge the killing of his wife and father-in-law, his own people protested, 'Don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What is this that you have done to us?'¹⁵

Yes, it is true that Samson fought against the Philistines. But he did so in an altogether different way from that in which the earlier judges had fought against their oppressors. The other judges delivered Israel by their leadership, force of character and courage,¹⁶ and not by any personal strength and prowess. But Samson was different. He waged a private one-man war against the Philistines, tackling them with no aid from others. The son of Manoah didn't lead an army; he was an army! And he put paid to large numbers of his uncircumcised adversaries by his singular feats of strength.

(ii) **Samson only 'began' to deliver Israel.**¹⁷ Yes, he certainly 'began' to do that well enough. He proved to be a terrible (and terrifying) scourge to the Philistines, despatching not only (i) the 30 men at *Ashkelon*,¹⁸ (ii) an unquantified number of men in the 'hip and thigh' slaughter at *Timnah*,¹⁹ and (iii) 1,000 men at *Lehi*,²⁰ but also (iv) vastly in excess of 3,000 men and women at his death in *Gaza*.²¹

And yet, we are told plainly that he only 'began'. That is, whereas each of the other judges accomplished a complete deliverance for Israel, Samson did not.

In the cases of judges like Ehud, Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah, we read that, through them, God 'subdued' Israel's enemies ... 'subdued' Moab, Jabin (King of Canaan), Midian and the children of Ammon²² respectively.²³

But Samson didn't 'subdue' the Philistines. It fell to Samuel to do that. For it was following the victory which Samuel helped achieve at Mizpah that we read, 'so the Philistines were subdued'.²⁴

For his part, Samson was only a partial deliverer.

Taken together, these six interesting features alert us to the fact that Samson was in a category all of his own. And they invite us to ask some serious questions about the significance of his life and experience.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

We now need to consider where and how the life of Samson fits into the key events of his time. The facts can be simply stated:

(i) The Philistine oppression of Israel during the days of the judges lasted for forty years.²⁵

(ii) Samson was born sometime during that oppression²⁶ and he went on later to judge Israel for twenty years during the forty-year period.²⁷ It follows, therefore, (a) that (allowing time for him to reach maturity and to commence his role as judge) Samson must have been born very near the beginning of the Philistine oppression²⁸ and (b) that he must have died very near its end.

(iii) The forty-year period of Philistine oppression was brought to an end by Israel's victory under the leadership of Samuel at the battle at Mizpah.²⁹

(iv) Israel's decisive victory at Mizpah was fought twenty years after their disastrous defeat by the Philistines at the battle at Aphek. This is clear because, at the time of the battle at Mizpah, the ark of God had 'remained in Kirjath Jearim ... twenty years'³⁰ after its restoration by the Philistines, who had kept it³¹ a mere seven months following its capture at the battle at Aphek.³²

Putting these facts together,³³ I conclude that:

(a) Samson's life must have run more-or-less in parallel with the duration of the Philistine oppression,

and

(b) the twenty-year period of Samson's judgeship and exploits must have more-or-less matched the period between (i) the battle at Aphek recorded in 1 Samuel 4 and (ii) the battle at Mizpah in 1 Samuel 7.

If my reasoning is correct, Samson's public work for God more-or-less coincided with the period between (i) the battle at Aphek (when Israel was roundly defeated) and the ark of God

was captured by the Philistines) and (ii) the battle at Mizpah (*when Israel enjoyed a conclusive victory* over the Philistines).

We are now well on the way to understanding the significance of Samson's life and experience.

'TWO REMARKABLE BOYS': SIMILARITIES

But, before we reach the position *fully* to grasp that significance, we have more ground to cover.

At some time about the beginning of the Philistine oppression, two very remarkable boys were born in Israel. They were given the names 'Samson' and 'Samuel'. Their lives had many things in common:

(i) Both Samson and Samuel were '*miracle babies*', being conceived supernaturally; the mothers of both had previously been not only childless but also barren.³⁴

(ii) Both Samson and Samuel were to be Nazirites for the whole of their lifetime,³⁵ and the *public symbol* and *tangible evidence* of their consecration to God was to be their long hair.³⁶ Before *Samson* was conceived, his mother-to-be was *informed by* God that '*no razor may be used on his head*',³⁷ and, before *Samuel* was conceived, his mother-to-be *vowed to* God that '*no razor will ever be used on his head*'.³⁸

(iii) Both Samson and Samuel began their public work for God shortly before the disastrous battle at Aphek.

(iv) Both Samson and Samuel are said, more than once, to have 'judged/delivered' Israel.³⁹

(v) Both Samson and Samuel receive honourable mention in the same verse in the inspired catalogue of faith in Hebrews 11.⁴⁰

But there the similarities between Samson and Samuel end. For there were also notable differences between the two men.

'TWO REMARKABLE BOYS': DIFFERENCES

As we noted earlier, Samson only '*began*' to deliver Israel from the Philistines,⁴¹ leaving it to Samuel to finish the job and to end the Philistine occupation of Israel, which he did at the battle at Mizpah.⁴²

For, alas, in later life, *Samson defiled his consecration*. As a result of his own folly, his hair was shaved off and, in consequence, very soon afterwards he died⁴³ blind.⁴⁴ This was just a short time before Israel's decisive victory at Mizpah over the Philistines.⁴⁵ As far as we know, Samson left no descendants.

By way of contrast, *Samuel preserved his consecration intact*. He played a key role in Israel's decisive victory at Mizpah (his only known military achievement)⁴⁶ and went on to live for another 40 years or so after that.⁴⁷

Scripture speaks of Samuel's descendants for many generations to come. Included among Samuel's descendants were his seventeen great-grandchildren through his son, Joel, and his grandson, Heman.⁴⁸ Of these, his fourteen great-grandsons were all accomplished musicians, playing cymbals, harps and lyres when they contributed to the temple worship.⁴⁹

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND LESSON OF SAMSON'S LIFE

We know that Samson had a liking for riddles and rhymes, on occasions composing several about lions, bees, heifers and asses.⁵⁰ But in many ways *Samson was himself a riddle*, a curious mixture of great strengths and of great weaknesses.

I am persuaded that, if we wish to get to grips with the significance and lesson of Samson's life, we must keep in mind that all the key events of his life (revealing, as they do, both his strengths and his weaknesses) were sandwiched between the two battles which marked Israel's great defeat (at Aphek) and Israel's great victory (at Mizpah).

And what, we now ask, is the special significance of Samson's life?

At a superficial glance, it might seem to be no more than that God set out to prove that (although His people had proved faithless and been defeated and His ark had been taken captive for a brief time) He was still very much in control and that He retained the power both to help His people and to smite His foes.

And *that* was certainly and most wonderfully true. But I suggest there is a much deeper meaning to Samson's chequered experiences.

A LIVING OBJECT LESSON

At this point, we need to remind ourselves of some of the distinctive features which we noted at the outset about both (a) the biblical narrative concerning Samson and (b) the man himself.

1. The unique features recalled.

We noted the following six distinctive features:⁵¹

(i) That an abnormal amount of space is devoted to the story of Samson.

(ii) That, of all twelve 'judges' ('deliverers') in the Book of Judges, Samson alone was raised up on God's own initiative, without any previous pleading by His afflicted people for deliverance. Unlike with the other judges, Samson's appearance on the stage was the result of the sovereign intervention of God alone.

(iii) That his role was unique in that he didn't rally or lead an army ... Samson was his own one-man army.

(iv) That we are given a detailed account of the prior announcement of his conception and birth. It was in the course of this account that we learn (twice⁵²) that Samson was to be a Nazirite, a circumstance which was to prove all-important later.⁵³

(v) That we are given a detailed account of the circumstances of his death, together with the events which led up to these.

(vi) That, unlike the military successes of the other judges, Samson only 'began' to deliver Israel from their oppressors, whom he conspicuously failed to 'subdue'.

2. The unique features explained.

Pulling these six threads together, I suggest that the chief significance of Samson's exploits and actions lay in that God meant him to be **a living object lesson** to his own generation. That is, that the nation's very own character and history were themselves being played out in Samson's story of mingled strength and weakness.

I am convinced, not only that, uniquely, the Lord had acted on His own initiative when choosing this particular man to be a 'deliverer' in Israel [*Feature (ii)*], but also that He deliberately fitted him to be the unusual kind of deliverer that he was. That is, God equipped Samson to work alone, by providing him with supernatural strength, in contrast to the other judges who led armies into battle [*Feature (iii)*], and did so because He meant Israel to see, in Samson, a vivid picture of their own experiences at that very time.

For, on the one hand, Samson exerted a supernatural power not dissimilar to that which *should* have been the constant experience of God's people ... and which *would* have been their constant experience if (but *only 'if'*) they remained true to their covenant vow to God and continued in wholehearted consecration to Him.

But, on the other hand, when Samson defiled and compromised his consecration [*Feature (iv)*], he forfeited God's power and became weak 'like any other man' (something he foolishly disclosed to Delilah). This fact should have cried loud and clear to Israel that *their* supernatural strength was also entirely conditional on their consecration to the Lord.

Samson's abysmal failure to deliver the people completely from the oppression of their enemy (in marked contrast to the success of each of the earlier judges) [*Feature (vi)*] was due

entirely to his unfaithfulness to his Nazirite vow and to his consequential premature death [*Feature (v)*].

In precisely the same way, Israel, through its spiritual unfaithfulness to its covenant with God, had lost its power against its enemy. Hence, the disastrous and humiliating defeat had suffered at Aphek.

And the outcome of that battle had demonstrated beyond any doubt that there was no substitute whatever for God's presence and power, because, on that occasion, the people had placed their trust in 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord'⁵⁴ to secure victory for them. In effect, 'It will save us', was their battle-cry. But, just as in the case of Samson, 'they did not know that the Lord had departed'⁵⁵ from them, and Israel soon found to its cost that its strength lay alone, not in the ark of the Lord, but in the Lord of the ark!

And it is that *you and I* might learn from God's dealings with Samson and with His people in those far-off days that the Holy Spirit has recorded the unusually long and detailed account of Samson's up-and-down career [*Feature (i)*].

In summary, I suggest that God raised up Samson to his unique style of judgeship that he might be a fitting picture of a people who were invincible in God's strength but who were weak and wholly ineffective without it.

NO BULGING BICEPS HERE!

But, before I develop the fascinating parallel between (i) the experiences of Samson and (ii) the experiences of the people of Israel of his day, I need to correct the popular (but altogether false) idea and impression that Samson was a man of outstanding physique, endowed with huge, rippling muscles.



It is clear from Scripture that, in himself, Samson was no stronger than any other man. This is why his enemies were totally baffled by the secret and source of his strength: 'the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and said to her, "Entice him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may prevail against him".⁵⁶ It has been well said that, 'See where his great strength lies' would have been 'a fairly stupid question to ask if he had arms the size of tree trunks or elephant legs'⁵⁷

As an aside, although 'the lords of the Philistines' were totally unaware of the secret and source of Samson's superhuman strength, they entertained no doubts about the secret and source of Samson's human weakness; namely, his tendency to enter into romantic liaisons with women. And, given that Samson's two previous recorded associations with women had been with *Philistine* women,⁵⁸ it comes as no surprise that the Philistine lords knew precisely where to look for Samson's 'Achilles' heel'!

But, to return to the point, the sequel to Samson's betrayal of his Nazirite secret to Delilah⁵⁹ (namely, his easy capture by the Philistines; 'the Philistines took him'⁶⁰) provides conclusive proof that Samson's strength was entirely supernatural in character and that it did not lie in any outstanding physical attributes.

THE TRUE SOURCE OF SAMSON'S EXCEPTIONAL STRENGTH

Make no mistake, it wasn't Samson's build or biceps which accounted for his exceptional strength. It was the power and the Spirit of God which accounted for Samson's strength, from

that time when 'the Spirit of the Lord began to move ('to stir', 'to rouse') him ...between Zorah and Eshtaol'.⁶¹

And, from that moment on, Samson possessed superhuman strength sufficient for most circumstances, as witness, for example:

(i) The gruesome 'hip and thigh' slaughter.⁶²

(ii) The transportation of the gate structure of the city of Gaza to the top of a mountain about forty miles to the east as the crow flies.⁶³ (This impressive feat was particularly humiliating for the Philistine occupants of Gaza because the gate represented and symbolised the strength of a city.)

(iii) The spectacular demolition of the temple of Dagon (or 'Dagan').⁶⁴

And yet there were occasions which called for *special* empowerment, and, for this reason, we read three times of the Spirit of the Lord coming 'upon him *mightily*'.⁶⁵

In the final analysis, it wasn't Samson's arm or fist (or the jawbone of an ass, for that matter) with which he defeated the Philistines. No, most certainly, it wasn't a donkey's dentures which made him mightier than a thousand Philistines; it was the power of God's Spirit.⁶⁶

THE TRUE SOURCE OF ISRAEL'S EXCEPTIONAL STRENGTH

And, in exactly the same way, the tribes of Israel were not bigger, not stronger, nor more impressive than the nations around them. Far from it. The Lord had made clear to them before they even entered the land of Canaan that there they would encounter 'seven nations greater and mightier than' they were.⁶⁷

In almost every battle it ever fought, Israel was hopelessly outnumbered by its foes and, often, far less well equipped for warfare.

Indeed, in the days of Samson, Samuel and Saul, the Philistines enjoyed an enormous advantage over Israel in that the Philistines held a monopoly on smelting iron, a skill which, seemingly, they had acquired from the powerful Hittite kingdom. Needless to say, iron swords could easily slice through swords made of bronze, which were the weapons which Israel wielded.⁶⁸

SAMSON'S STRENGTH: UNFELT AND SUPERNATURAL

Clearly, Samson experienced no special sensations or physical indications to inform him that he possessed superhuman strength. He knew that he had such strength only when he used it. Consequently (but, in one sense, strange to say), even when his seven locks had been shaved, 'he did not know that the Lord had departed from him'.⁶⁹

Samson was in no doubt, however, that his great strength was God-given. And so, having slaughtered a thousand Philistines with the fresh⁷⁰ jawbone of an ass and having become very thirsty at Lehi, he called on the Lord, saying, 'You have given this great deliverance by the hand of your servant: and now shall I die of thirst?'⁷¹ Samson was well aware that his strength wasn't natural and that it was supplied by God.

SAMSON'S STRENGTH: CONDITIONAL

But Samson's strength wasn't only an imparted strength. From the very beginning, it had been bound up inseparably with his faithfulness to his status as a Nazirite.

And we know that Samson was well aware of this. For he confided to Delilah, 'I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. *If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me*, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man'.⁷²

The three outward expressions of Samson's status (affecting (i) his *appetite* (not eating or drinking anything which came from the vine⁷³), (ii) his *appearance* (his conspicuously long hair⁷⁴), and (iii) his *associations* (having no contact with any human corpse⁷⁵) were a constant, indeed a daily, reminder to him of his Naziriteship.

But his words to Delilah strongly suggest that, above all else, it was the length of his hair which was to Samson the main symbol of his separation to God. And this was perfectly consistent with the way in which the Lord had spoken to Moses long before about the Nazirite's 'separation to God' being 'on his head'.⁷⁶

Oh yes, Samson was in no doubt that his supernatural powers were altogether conditional!

ISRAEL'S STRENGTH: CONDITIONAL

And the same held true for Israel.

Moses had made this clear to the nation before they had entered the land. 'It shall come to pass', he had told them, '*if* you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today ... the Lord your God ... will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways'.⁷⁷

Samson was, then, a graphic picture to the men of his day (if they had only had the eyes to see it) of the supernatural strength which they, the people of God, could (and should) have exerted in overcoming the very strongest of their foes ... but on condition, of course, that they adhered faithfully to their covenant vow and to their consecration to the Lord.

HOW THE SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH OF SAMSON AND OF ISRAEL WAS LOST

But Samson was an equally graphic picture to Israel of the weakness which the nation so often experienced on account of their unfaithfulness to God and through their sustained intercourse with the heathen.

And we note that, in Samson's case, it was his indulgence in sensual desires which proved fatal to his consecration and which cost him (i) his supernatural strength, (ii) his sight, (iii) his freedom, (iii) his dignity⁷⁸ and eventually (iv) his life.⁷⁹

It is no doubt fitting that a man, whose problems stemmed, to no small extent, from the occasions when he 'saw' a Philistine woman in Timnah,⁸⁰ and 'saw' a Philistine prostitute in Gaza,⁸¹ should have his very eyes gouged out by the Philistines.⁸²

There can be no question that Samson's *physical* weakness was the direct result of his *moral and spiritual* weakness. And I suggest that *even the nature* of this weakness was significant. For I don't need to labour the point that his outstanding weakness of character lay in his undisciplined affections, desires and passions.

And Samson's repeated intrigues and intimate relationships with the daughters of a foreign people (relationships which were contrary to God's law⁸³ and against which his own parents had earnestly warned him from the outset⁸⁴) provided a distinct mirror image of Israel's constant tendency to fraternise with the heathen and their gods (actions which blatantly violated the terms of their covenant with God and against which they had repeatedly been warned⁸⁵).

And we ought not to miss the link which the Holy Spirit has forged between Samson and Israel in that very connection by one particular expression which He used.

We are told that one of the key symptoms of Israel's departure from God at the time lay in the way that 'everyone did what was *right in his own eyes*', a point made twice towards the end of the Book of Judges.⁸⁶ And we should note that the very same expression occurs twice in connection with Samson's first amorous relationship with a Philistine woman: (i) first, when challenged by his parents about the relationship, he responded sharply, 'she is *right in my eyes*',⁸⁷ and then (ii) when 'he went down and talked with the woman, and she was *right in Samson's eyes*'.⁸⁸

And, exactly as with Samson, the people of Israel forfeited the power of God which was necessary to secure victory over their foes precisely because they surrendered to the power of the flesh, doing that which was right in their 'own eyes'.

The point I want to establish is that, just as Samson's loss of strength at Sorek came about as a result of the betrayal of his vow and the loss of his consecration to God,⁸⁹ so Israel's sickening defeat at Aphek had come about because of their departure from their covenant

with God and their loss of consecration to Him. For, sadly, the Israel which had then put her trust in the 'ark of the covenant of the Lord'⁹⁰ was herself then guilty of violating the terms of that very covenant.

HOW THE SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH OF SAMSON AND OF ISRAEL WAS REGAINED

Samson's subsequent regaining of his strength at the house of Dagon⁹¹ provided Israel with a further simple object lesson.

For Samson's recovered strength at Gath testified to God's people that, if they (having forfeited their strength because of their unfaithfulness to their covenant with God and their loss of consecration to Him) should turn again to the Lord in true repentance and prayer, they, too, would regain their former strength.

And that is exactly what did happen.

For, prior to the next battle with the Philistines, Samuel hammered it home to the people that victory and deliverance from their enemies would be altogether conditional on the people's (i) returning to God with all their hearts, (ii) putting away their foreign gods and (iii) committing themselves to serve the Lord only.⁹²

And, in the same way that Samson, when his hair (the tangible symbol of his Nazirite oath) began to grow again,⁹³ had prayed to the sovereign Lord,⁹⁴ so the people of Israel, having 'put away' their Ba'als and their Ashtaroth⁹⁵ (a tangible evidence of their renewed covenant with God), fasted and confessed, 'we have sinned against the Lord'.⁹⁶

And, as in the case of Samson, Israel's renewed consecration to God led to restored and regained strength, which, in their case, served to *transform the earlier ignominious defeat at Aphek into the glorious and decisive victory at Mizpah*.⁹⁷

IMPORTANT LESSONS

Two important lessons were impressed upon the people of Israel at Mizpah that day.

(i) It was made abundantly clear to them that the vanquishing power was God's, and not theirs!

Of this there could be no question. For '*the Lord thundered* with a loud thunder ('with a great noise', literally⁹⁸) on that day *on the Philistines*, and discomfited them',⁹⁹ in fulfilment of the prophetic words of Samuel's mother, Hannah, spoken at the time of Samuel's dedication as a weaned child: 'the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall *He thunder on them*'.¹⁰⁰

As a consequence, Israel was left with little more than a mopping-up operation.¹⁰¹

God's people were, therefore, left in no doubt that day that their victory was achieved with the help (and in the power) of God. We read, therefore, both of (i) the name given to the stone which Samuel set up near Mizpah to commemorate Israel's victory, 'Ebenezer' ('The Stone of Help') and of (ii) Samuel's glad acknowledgement, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us'.¹⁰²

(ii) Israel proved that, as Samuel had forewarned the nation, victory would be theirs only *if* they returned to God with all their hearts, put away their foreign gods and devoted themselves to serve the Lord alone.¹⁰³

Israel was forcibly reminded that victory over its foes was entirely conditional on its unreserved commitment and consecration to Him.¹⁰⁴

THE CONCLUSION

I hope you can see now why I made the point earlier that, if we are to discover the significance and the central lesson of Samson's life, it is necessary that we keep in mind that the key events of his life (both those which displayed his strengths and those which exposed his weaknesses) were sandwiched between the two battles which marked Israel's shameful defeat (at Aphek) and Israel's great victory (at Mizpah).

Samson was, then, a pointed object lesson for Israel and the central message which his experiences conveyed to them was unmistakable; namely, that

**power and strength come only as a result of wholehearted
and complete consecration to God.**

AND YOU AND ME?

But that message is, surely, equally true for you and me, too. For the Christian also is spiritually effective only in God-supplied strength. It was the apostle Paul (no less) who acknowledged, '*not* that we are sufficient *of ourselves* ... but our sufficiency is *from God*'.¹⁰⁵

And we each need to learn that, although (in one sense, at least) God's *love* is entirely unconditional, His *power* certainly is not! And the circumstances and events of Samson's life scream out to us today that the unreserved surrender, the wholehearted consecration, of all that we have and are (of our time, our energies and all else) is the essential prerequisite if we are to experience spiritual power and effectiveness in the service of God.¹⁰⁶

Ouch!

And ouch again!

I have a good Christian friend who lives local to me in Cardiff. Several years ago, George gave me a copy of 'The Methodist Covenant Prayer'. The following is an extract from that 'Prayer', which spoke to me then (and speaks to me still) more loudly than I want to admit:

'I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you or brought low for you;
let me be full, let me be empty;
let me have all things, let me have nothing;
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.'

And that, dare I suggest, is what total consecration is all about!

May God help *each of us* to get a little nearer to it.

Notes

¹ Note, for example, the inspired description of Othniel, the first 'judge': 'when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a *saviour* ('deliverer', ESV) to the children of Israel, who *saved* them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz', Judg. 3. 9.

'Their influence therefore went beyond that of the legal sphere of administering justice and arbitrating in disputes between the people. Clearly, they were looked upon as leaders and saviours from the power of Israel's enemies', C. T. Lacey, '*Judges (What the Bible Teaches)*', Introduction: Setting the Scene.

'The term "Judges" (is used), not in the sense in which we are accustomed to use it in English of officials who decide legal cases and act as arbitrators between man and man, but with the meaning "Vindicators" or "Deliverers" from the power of foreign oppressors', C. F. Burney, '*Judges*', Introduction, page xxxiii.

'In some cases "judging" really means delivering from injustice or oppression. David says to Saul: "The Lord therefore be judge and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand" (1 Sam. 24. 15). This sense (in addition to the judicial sense), "to deliver" is to be understood when one speaks of the judges of Israel (Judg. 2. 16): "Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that [plundered] them"', Merrill Unger and William White Jr., '*Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*', article 'To judge', page 125.

² Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon and Samson. (Abimelech, the son of Gideon, was a self-appointed 'king'; he is not listed in Scripture as a 'judge'.)

³ Judg. 13-16.

⁴ Judg. 13. 1. The Philistines had previously harassed Israel, Judg. 3. 31.

⁵ Judg. 2. 11-18.

⁶ 'An Israel who not only does not cry out in repentance from sin but also does not even cry out for relief from misery', Dale Ralph Davis, '*Judges (Focus Commentary)*', page 160.

⁷ Othniel: 8 years servitude; Ehud: 18 years servitude; Deborah and Barak: 20 years servitude; Gideon: 7 years servitude; Samson: 40 years servitude.

⁸ Othniel, Judg. 3. 9; Ehud, Judg. 3. 15; Deborah and Barak, Judg. 4. 3; Gideon, Judg. 6. 6-7. Cf. Judg. 10. 10.

⁹ Neh. 9. 27-28; cf. Psa. 106. 34-46 (noting, especially, verse 44).

¹⁰ This account occupies no less than twenty-two verses, Judg. 13. 2-23.

¹¹ Judg. 11. 1-2.

¹² No mention at all is made of the death and burial of Ehud; see 'after him', Judg. 3. 31.

¹³ For example, see Judg. 3. 11; 8. 32; 10. 2, 5; 12. 7.

¹⁴ 'All the judges were individualists; most of them had their flaws of character. Perhaps a 'typical judge' exists only in our imagination! Nevertheless it must be agreed that, in a group of unique individuals, Samson was in a category all of his own', A. E. Cundall and L. Morris, '*Judges and Ruth (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)*', on 'Samson and the Philistines'.

¹⁵ Judg. 15. 11. 'The tribe that had formerly waded into battle after battle (Judg. 1. 1-20) has become a collection of spineless wimps ... They don't even want to be Yahweh's free people; they don't even see that as a possibility', Dale Ralph Davis, *op. cit.*, page 182.

¹⁶ Remember, for example, the description of Gideon as 'a mighty man of valour', Judg. 6. 12.

¹⁷ Judg. 13. 5.

¹⁸ Judg. 14. 19.

¹⁹ Judg. 15. 8.

²⁰ Judg. 15. 15.

²¹ 'Now the house was full of men and women ... *and* there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women', Judg. 16. 27.

²² The Ammonite oppression, dealt with by Jephthah, began about the same time as the Philistine oppression, Judg. 10. 6-7. The first mainly concerns affairs east of the Jordan River, whereas the second concerns affairs west of the Jordan River. The first oppression lasted 18 years, and the second oppression lasted 40 years.

²³ Judg. 3. 30; 4. 23; 8. 28; 11. 33.

²⁴ 1 Sam. 7. 13.

²⁵ Judg. 13. 1.

²⁶ Judg. 13. 2-24.

²⁷ Judg. 15. 20; cf. Judg. 16. 31.

²⁸ 'The Philistines were harassing Israel at the time of the announcement of Samson's birth (ver. 5); therefore the "forty years" (ver. 1) begin just before his birth. He judged Israel for twenty years (ch. 16. 31), which begin from his first exploits (ch. 13. 25)', A. R. Fausset, '*A critical and expository commentary on the Book of Judges*', page 210.

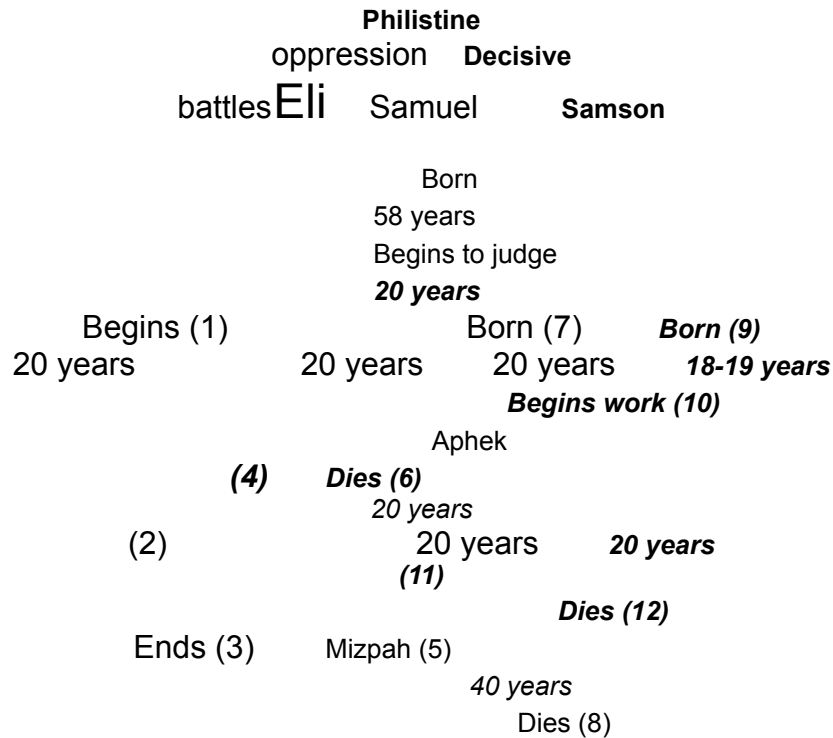
²⁹ 'So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel', 1 Sam. 7. 13. 'The oppression of the Philistines ... was almost certainly brought to an end by the battle of Mizpah, in which Samuel led the Israelites to a complete victory over the Philistines, following a time of revival before God', Leon Wood, '*The Distressing Days of the Judges*', page 304.

³⁰ 1 Sam. 7. 2.

³¹ The Philistines were more than happy to return the ark to the land of Israel, 1 Sam. 5. 1-6. 16. You might say that the sacred item which Israel had regarded as no more than a 'talisman' became a veritable 'hot potato' in the hands of their enemies!

³² 'The disastrous battle of Aphek, when Israel was so badly defeated by the Philistines, occurred twenty years before the battle of Mizpah, which means that this battle [that of Aphek] transpired exactly half-way through the total forty-year period of oppression', Leon Wood, *ibid.*, page 304.

The relationship between the life of Samson and the key events of his time.



Biblical references:

(1) Judg. 13. 1;

(2) 1 Sam. 7. 2;

(3) 1 Sam. 7. 13-14;

(4) 1 Sam. 4. 1-11;

(5) 1 Sam. 7. 3-14;

(6) 1 Sam. 4. 15, 18;

(7) 1 Sam. 1. 20 ('The presence of the Philistines in the early years of Samuel must be related to the forty-year oppression mentioned in Judges 13. 1. This is evident both (a) from the fact that no chronology can allow Samuel to be a youth before 1124 BC, the beginning of the only known Philistine oppression in the twelfth century, and (b) from the clear statement that it was Samuel himself who finally ended the Philistine rule and enabled the Israelites to regain their former territories (1 Sam. 7. 13-14). This accomplishment by Samuel must be dated at 1084 BC because the Philistine oppression lasted forty years', Eugene Merrill, *'Kingdom of Priests'*, page 176);

(8) 1 Sam. 25. 1;

(9) Judg. 13. 24;

(10) Judg. 13. 5, 25;

(11) Judg. 15. 20; 16. 31;

(12) Judg. 16. 30.

That is, the first part of 1 Samuel overlaps historically with the end of the Book of Judges. 'Samson was born just a few years before Samuel. Samson's 20-year judgeship evidently began shortly before the battle of Aphhek (1104 B.C.) at which time Eli died (1 Sam. 4. 18). It ended not many years before the battle of Mizpah (1084 B.C.) when the Philistine domination of Israel ceased temporarily (1 Sam. 7. 13). Samuel's ministry, therefore, probably ran concurrent with that of Samson until Samson died', Thomas L. Constable, *'Notes on 1 Samuel (2021 Edition)'*, Introduction: Scope

As I understand it, the incidents recorded in the early chapters of 1 Samuel, in common with those recorded in Judges 17-21, occurred *during* the period recorded in Judges 1-16. (I note that 1 Samuel begins with an introductory formula that is similar to the introductory formula in Judges 17. 1: 'Now there was a man from X whose name was Y').

³⁴ Judg. 13. 2; 1 Sam. 1. 2. 5, 6.

³⁵ It is possible, but by no means certain, that John the Baptist was also a life-time Nazirite; see Luke 1. 15.

³⁶ 'Only with Samson is the specified term, "Nazirite", used. It's as if God is making it undeniably clear this Nazirite identity is to be of paramount importance in the life of Samson', Brad Gray, *'Make Your Mark'*.

³⁷ Judg. 13. 5.

³⁸ 1 Sam. 1. 11.

³⁹ Judg. 15. 20; 16. 31; 1 Sam. 7. 6, 15-17.

⁴⁰ Heb. 11. 32. Hebrews 11 has been appropriately termed 'The Westminster Abbey' of saints who lived prior to the New Testament.

⁴¹ Judg. 13. 5.

⁴² 1 Sam. 7. 13.

⁴³ 'Though he died with them, yet not as one of them in his everlasting portion; his was the death of the righteous, theirs was the death of the enemies of God (Num, 23. 10; Prov. 14. 32)', A. R. Fausset, *op. cit.*, page 262.

⁴⁴ 'Samson went after (the desire of) his eyes; therefore the Philistines put out his eyes', *'Babylonian Talmud'*, Sotah 9b, Mishnah.

'His eyes were the first offenders, which betrayed him to lust; and now they are first pulled out, and he is led a blind captive to Gaza [Judg. 16. 21], where he was first captivated [Judg. 16. 1]', Joseph Hall, *'Contemplations on the historical passages of the Holy Scriptures'*, page 135.

⁴⁵ 'When the beleaguered Samson finally blurts out the secret of his strength, it is only the final indication in a string of many that Samson had never really respected the vow imposed upon him at birth. No serious Nazirite would have reached into the carcass of a dead lion to eat (Judg. 14. 8-9) or selected a donkey's bone as a weapon (Judg. 15. 15), much less bragged about it (Judg. 15. 16). [R. G.] Boling is surely correct when he observes that the plot of the Samson narrative "revolves not so much around a broken vow, as it does around a vow that had never been taken seriously"', Stephen M. Hooks, *'New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis'*, Volume 4, page 1167, article 'Samson'.

⁴⁶ 1 Sam. 7. 3-14.

⁴⁷ 1 Sam. 25. 1.

⁴⁸ 1 Chron. 6. 33.

⁴⁹ 1 Chron. 25. 1, 4-6. I suspect that it must have been a nightmare living next door to Heman and his family when they were practising. A good case, I suppose, for a pair of decent ear plugs ... or for putting up your house for sale!

⁵⁰ Judg. 14. 14, 18; 15. 16.

⁵¹ Not in the same order.

⁵² Judg. 13. 5, 7.

⁵³ See Judg. 16. 17.

⁵⁴ 1 Sam. 4. 3, 4, 5.

⁵⁵ Judg. 16. 20.

⁵⁶ Judg. 16. 5.

⁵⁷ Will Graham, *'Did Samson have muscles?'* Evangelical Focus: 2 April 2016.

⁵⁸ Judg. 14. 1; 16. 1.

⁵⁹ Delilah is the only woman identified by name in the long account of Samson's life; we are not given even the name of his mother, Judg. 13. 2-24.

⁶⁰ Judg. 16. 21.

⁶¹ Judg. 13. 25.

⁶² Judg. 15. 8.

⁶³ Judg. 16. 3.

⁶⁴ Judg. 16. 30. There is no mention of the Spirit of God's coming on Samson for his 'swansong', which 'brought the house down'. 'According to the excavated findings, the wooden pillars were held in place by the weight of the temple. To dislodge and set the pillars in motion would demand an immense surge of power', John Roskoski, '*Between the Pillars: Revisiting Samson and the House of Dagon*', accessed at ...

<https://biblearchaeology.org/research/chronological-categories/israel-in-the-era-of-the-judges/3800-between-the-pillars-revisiting-samson-and-the-house-of-dagon>.

For 'Dagan', see '*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*', Volume 1, page 163.

⁶⁵ Judg. 14. 6, 19; 15. 14. 'The Spirit of Yahweh is also mentioned in connection with other judges but only once in each case (Othniel, Judg. 3. 10; Gideon, 6. 34; Jephthah, 11. 29). Hence Samson's association with Yahweh's Spirit receives special emphasis', Dale Ralph Davis, *op. cit.*, page 185.

⁶⁶ Judg. 15.14-16.

⁶⁷ See Deut. 7. 1; cf Judg. 4. 38; 7. 7, 17.

⁶⁸ Leon Wood, *op. cit.*, page 305.

⁶⁹ Judg. 16. 19-20.

⁷⁰ 'A fresh one, the text says, so having its teeth intact—a mean weapon', Dale Ralph Davis, *op. cit.*, page 183.

⁷¹ Judg. 15. 18.

⁷² Judg. 16. 17.

⁷³ Num. 6. 3-4. 'The charge to Samson not to drink wine, or eat what came of the vine, was the severer test of faith, because Zorah and the neighbourhood were famed for their choice vines (Judg. 15. 5; 16. 4; Gen. 49. 11', A. R. Fausset, *op. cit.*, page 211.

⁷⁴ Num. 6. 5.

⁷⁵ Num. 6. 6-7.

⁷⁶ Num. 6. 7.

⁷⁷ Deut. 28. 1, 7.

⁷⁸ 'Grinding a handmill was the hardest and *lowest kind of slave labour* ... and both Greeks and Romans sentenced their slaves to this as a punishment', Keil and Delitzsch on Judg. 16. 21.

⁷⁹ Judg. 16. 19-30.

⁸⁰ Judg. 14. 1.

⁸¹ Judg. 16. 1. 'The city from which he, in his strength, had stolen the gate now, in his weakness, became his prison', Eugene Merrill, '*Kingdom of Priests*', page 174.

⁸² Judg. 16. 21.

⁸³ Cf. Exod. 34. 16.

⁸⁴ Judg. 14. 3.

⁸⁵ Cf. Exod. 23. 32; 34. 12; Deut. 7.1-4 (written of, specifically, the nations of Canaan).

⁸⁶ Judg. 17. 6; 21. 25. Cf. Deut. 12. 8.

⁸⁷ Judg. 14. 3 (literally).

⁸⁸ Judg. 14. 7.

⁸⁹ Judg. 16. 17-20.

⁹⁰ 1 Sam. 4. 3, 4.

⁹¹ 'The fact that Samson "took hold" (AV, RV; lit. "*grasped*", RSV) of the two central pillars indicates that, exerting his strength, he pushed forward either directly towards or directly away from the open courtyard. Had he pushed sideways he would not have 'grasped' the pillars. Aided by the weight of the crowd above, who would be pressing forward since Samson was now out of their sight, the main supporting pillars were displaced, causing them to slide off their stone bases. When the roof collapsed many would be killed instantly; others would be crushed in the ensuing panic', A. E. Cundall and L. Morris, *op. cit.*, on Judg. 16. 28.

⁹² 1 Sam. 7. 3-6.

⁹³ Judg. 16. 22.

⁹⁴ '*Adonay Jehovah*', Judg. 16. 28.

⁹⁵ 1 Sam. 7. 4. 'Ashtaroth' is the plural of 'Ashtoreth'. 'Ashtoreth' (or 'Astarte' as she was generally known) was a goddess of fertility and war, and a consort of Ba'al.

⁹⁶ 1 Sam. 7. 6.

⁹⁷ 1 Sam. 7. 10-11.

⁹⁸ The same word as in 1 Sam. 4. 6: 'when the Philistines heard the noise of the great {mighty} shout, they said, 'What means the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews?' That is, it was the 'noise' which God made at Mizpah, and not that which man made at Aphek, which secured victory for His people.

⁹⁹ 1 Sam. 7. 10.

¹⁰⁰ 1 Sam. 2. 10.

¹⁰¹ 1 Sam. 7. 11.

¹⁰² 1 Sam. 7. 12.

¹⁰³ 1 Sam. 7. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Samson's experiences taught Israel 'that deliverance could come only in connection with Nazarite-like consecration', A. R. Fausset, *op. cit.*, page 211.

¹⁰⁵ 2 Cor. 3. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Samson's 'very failure to accomplish Israel's deliverance, through his unfaithfulness to his Nazarite vow, in contrast to his extraordinary prowess when moved by the Spirit of God, qualified him the better to be an embodied reproof to the Israelites, whose calling was to be a nation of priests, though through apostasy they lost their power against the enemy. Samson was, in his own person, a lesson to teach Israel that her strength lay in separation from idols, and complete consecration to Jehovah. So the Christian, who also is called to be a priest unto God, is mighty through God against all foes, so long as he makes an entire self-surrender to Him', A. R. Fausset, *op. cit.*, page 218.