

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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## The Christian's Armor: All Prayer (Part 4) Samson's Humiliation and Prayer

**O**f all the people we meet in the pages of the Old Testament, Samson is surely one of the most memorable. He was from the little tribe of Dan and stands as its most renowned member. His life, however, is an enigma.<sup>1</sup> He was distinguished by his supernatural physical strength,<sup>2</sup> but not for any outstanding fervor for the LORD. The early church father Ambrose said of him, "Samson, when strong and brave strangled a lion; but could not strangle his own affections. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned up the crops of his enemies, and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman." What a strange champion for the LORD to have! The history of Samson's life reveals that he was subject, as the rest of the Israelites were, to the same weakness, namely a desire to associate with the Canaanites, particularly with Philistine women. This weakness was to bring him only misery. "Samson was raised up," wrote G.T. Purves, "to teach this single truth: strength comes through obedience to God."<sup>3</sup>

### I. SAMSON AND THE HARLOT

Gaza was one of the five chief towns of Philistia. Its name AZZĀH (this is its Hebrew name and is used in Deuteronomy 2:23; I Kings 4:24; Jeremiah 25:20 in the King James Version) means "strength". How or why Samson went to Gaza, the chief town of the Philistines, we are not told. Once there, his wandering eyes led him into sin. The LORD's champion willingly yields to the solicitation of a harlot and he spends the night in her arms.

- A. The Plot of the Philistines: The word spreads through the populace – "Samson is here!" And with a prostitute no less! The Philistines surround the place and, confident that Samson cannot escape because the gates are locked, fall asleep waiting for sunrise.
- B. The Power of Samson: He leaves, however, around midnight and not only rips the gates open, but completely tears them loose; he rips the posts out of the ground, and along with the bar, carries the whole mass on his shoulders (while the stunned and terrified Philistines looked on!) to the top of a hill (Tel el Muntar) that the NIV states "faces Hebron."<sup>4</sup> The typical door gate (there would have been two of these) of a city of the ancient world would have been 12 to 15 feet wide and 10 to 12 feet high. They would have been made of solid wood beams, bound together, studded with nails and covered with sheets of copper or some other metal to prevent them from being burned (cf. I Kings 4:13; Isaiah 45:2).<sup>5</sup> The posts would have been like massive telephone poles sunk 6 to 8 feet into the ground. The bar would have been made of a solid heavy metal or a thick wooden beam reinforced with metal. Needless to say, all of this would have been tremendously heavy. Samson is, however, on the downward course. He is presuming on God's grace. But God did not design for him to perish at this time. He would return to Gaza a different man (cf. v. 21).

### II. SAMSON AND DELILAH

The text does not directly say so, but it appears that Delilah (whose name, interestingly enough, means "to make weak, bring down, humbling") was also a harlot – she certainly was quick to sell Samson for a price!

- A. The Entanglement: Again Samson's weakness is displayed. Old Bishop Hall has correctly observed, "Every willing sinner is a Samson; let us none inveigh against his senselessness, but our own."<sup>6</sup> Samson forgot, or did not seem to grasp, the truth expressed by Paul. "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (II Timothy 2:4).
- B. The Enticement: The lords of the Philistines were delighted by Samson's new infatuation. "The Philistines knew already where Samson's weakness lay, though not his strength."<sup>7</sup> So they offer Delilah a large sum of money to help ensnare Samson. Unlike Hedi Lamar's Delilah in Cecil B. Demille's movie *Samson and Delilah* she appears to be totally without scruples and had no feelings whatsoever for Samson.
- C. The Ensnarement: The Philistines thought that Samson's strength rested in some sort of magic charm or secret amulet. (This might suggest that Samson was not some huge muscled man. He is not described so we do not know, but it is quite possible that he looked fairly normal.) Immediately, Delilah begins her

scheme. The first two efforts to discover the secret of his strength give the impression that Samson is yielding more and more to Delilah's blandishments so that by the third effort on her part, Samson actually allows the symbol of his strength, his hair, to become the issue. Finally, due to her persistence, Samson reveals the truth. He is a Nazirite and a razor has never touched his hair. The hair was the symbol of the dedication of Samson to the LORD. Losing his hair was the symbol of a lost dedication. Notice the language of verse 19, and his strength left him, and compare this with the words at the end of verse 20, but he did not know the LORD had left him. "The whole of Samson's misfortune came upon him. God permitted him to lose his strength that he might learn by experience how utterly powerless he was without the help of God. We have no better teachers than our own infirmities."<sup>8</sup> John Owen wrote, "A man shall see that it is God alone who keeps from all sin. Until we are tempted, we think we live on our own strength."<sup>9</sup>

- III. **SAMSON HUMBLLED:** "He that sleeps in sin must look to wake in loss and weakness."<sup>10</sup> The Philistines take their prize captive and gouge out his eyes and make him grind grain in shackles. Israel's deliverer is now a feeble slave to the Philistines who decide to have a gala event (probably on the first anniversary of Samson's capture, since we read in verse 22 his hair began to grow back)<sup>11</sup> to give thanks to their god Dagon for delivering Samson into their hands. But the story is not finished. Samson is led into the arena in order to provide sport for the Philistines. "What a spectacle of compassion was Samson in the slavery of the Philistines? He that had been general and judge of Israel, was deprived of his sight, and divine strength: his warlike hands, that had been of equal power with an army, and performed such glorious achievements, were employed in turning a mill, the work of a beast: and his misery was pointed and made sharper by the insulation of his enemies. The true emblem of the degenerate state of men; the soul that was created in the image of God, and had a peaceful sovereignty over the sensual appetites, a superiority over sensible things, is now enslaved and employed in the vile drudgery of sin, and become the derision of the devils."<sup>12</sup> The text tells us that the Temple of Dagon was capable of holding 3,000 people on the roof (like an open-dome stadium). There may have been twice that number inside the Temple.
- IV. **SAMSON'S PRAYER:** This is the first mention of prayer since chapter 15:18 – 19 where we read that Samson prayed for water after slaying 3,000 Philistines with a jawbone of an ass.
- A. Calling on the Lord: "Samson's last solemn prayer (v. 28) in which he uses three different titles of God, *Adonai, Yahweh, and Elohim*, was for strength that vengeance might be taken on his persecutors for the loss of his two eyes."<sup>13</sup>
  - B. A Plea for Remembrance: Here, as elsewhere in the OT, the use of the word *remember* (Heb. ZĀKHAR) has covenantal significance (cf. Jer. 14:21; Ps. 25:6; 74:2; 119:49; II Kings 20:3; Isa. 38:3). "Most of the passage presupposes the existence of the covenant and expresses gratitude to God for remembering it."<sup>14</sup> This word is frequently used of God's *gracious* faithfulness to His covenantal promises. "It is with a heart full of penitence that he makes this petition. For formerly, God had departed from him, and he had been deprived of God's care over him. If now God but takes thought of him, he will once more be received into divine favor."<sup>15</sup>
  - C. His Request: "He could not but feel God mocked through him; and therefore while they are scoffing, he prays: his seriousness hopes to pay them for all those jests. If he could have been thus earnest with God in his prosperity, the Philistines had wanted this laughing-stock. No devotion is so fervent, as that which arises from extremity: 'O Lord God, I pray thee think upon me; O God, I beseech thee strengthen me at this time only.' Though Samson's hair was shorter, yet he knew God's hand was not. As one therefore that had yet eyes enough to see him that was invisible, and whose faith was recovered before his strength, he sues to that God, which was a party in this indignity, for power to revenge his wrongs, more than his own. It is zeal that moves him, and not malice. His renewed faith tells him, that he was destined to plague the Philistines; and reason tells him, that his blindness puts him out of the hope of such another opportunity."<sup>16</sup>

CONCLUSION: Samson was far nobler as a blinded and humbled man than he was as a boastful and self-pleasing man. How easy it is to fall into sin and be so insensitive to the truth that our communion with the Lord is broken. Indifference to the things of the Bible becomes our lot. We pursue other things. Weeks, month, years go by and we are spiritually lethargic. We are not prepared; we are not alert. "A man knows not the pride, fury, madness of a corruption, until it meets with a suitable temptation."<sup>17</sup> Secondly, note how it is that sin indulged in often leaves permanent marks (verses 21, 30). Samson, when his hair grew back, received again his old strength, but not his old sight. Finally, Samson is an illustration of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. He fell into sin and it brought him only misery, but like the roots of his hair that began to grow back, so also Samson had the true root of faith in him. In the end, he displays not only his great strength once more, but his faith as well. He gave himself in death for the deliverance of his people. In his life and especially in his death, Samson was the mighty One of Israel, a type of the Redeemer who would one day come and by His death deliver the people of God from all their enemies. And what more shall I say? declares the writer to the Hebrews, for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, *AND OF SAMSON...* (Hebrews 11:32).

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Samson is honored, along with Isaac (Genesis 18:1 – 16) with having his birth foretold by none less than the Angel of the LORD. This implies unusual divine favor. cf. L.J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, (Zondervan, 1986), p. 190.
- <sup>2</sup> Adam Clarke has an extended discussion on how ancient heroes of great strength, like Hercules, appear to have been patterned after Samson. Clarke's documentation is impressive, cf. *Clarke's Commentary I*, (rpt. Abington, N.D.), p. 172.
- <sup>3</sup> G.T. Purves, *The Sinless Christ*, (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902), p. 91.
- <sup>4</sup> The KJV reads "to the top of an hill that is before Hebron." The city of Hebron was some 38 miles away. Some scholars contend that Samson merely carried the gates outside the city of Gaza to a hill about a quarter of a mile away (cf. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible*, (Zondervan, 1965), p. 92. If this were the case, why does the text mention Hebron? I believe that Samson indeed brought the gates back to Israelite soil and that the book of Judges included the name Hebron to show that he deposited them in the center of Judah so that Israel would have tangible proof of his victory. The citizens of Hebron would have had a clear view of the gates erected on the hilltop, cf. the discussion by C.J. Goslinga, *Bible Students Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, (Zondervan, 1986), p. 440.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible II*, General Editor, M.C. Tenney (Zondervan, 1975) p. 656.
- <sup>6</sup> *Bishop Hall's Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments I*, (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), p. 347.
- <sup>7</sup> G. Bush, *Joshua and Judges*, (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1981), p. 205.
- <sup>8</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament II*, (rpt. Eerdmans, 1980), p. 423.
- <sup>9</sup> John Owen, *On Temptation: The Nature and Power of It: Works VI*, (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 93.
- <sup>10</sup> Bishop Hall, op. cit. p. 349.
- <sup>11</sup> "Samson's hair grew back, but his eyes did not—a reminder that some consequences of sin are permanent", E.W. Lutzer, *When a Good Man Falls*, (Victor Books, 1987), p. 61.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Complete Works of Wm. Bates II*, (rpt. Sprinkle, 1990), p. 256.
- <sup>13</sup> *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures II*, (rpt. Zondervan, 1960), p. 223. R.A. Watson completely misunderstands the import of Samson's prayer, and in the process indulges in a type of moralistic sentimentalism that was gaining wide acceptance towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He says of this prayer, "that was no prayer of a faithful heart. It was the prayer of envenomed hatred, of a soul still unregenerate after trial. His death was indeed *self-sacrifice*—the sacrifice of the higher self, there true self, to the lower. Samson should have endured patiently, magnifying God. Or we can imagine something not perfect yet heroic. Had he said to those Philistines, My people and you have been too long at enmity. Let there be an end of it. Avenge your selves on me, then cease from harassing Israel, —that would have been like a brave man. But it is not this we find. And we close the story of Samson more sad than ever that Israel's history has not taught a great man to be a good man, that the hero has not achieved the morally heroic, that adversity has not begotten in him a wise patience and magnanimity." *The Expositor's Bible I*, ed. W.R. Nicoll (rpt. Eerdmans, 1956), p. 826.
- <sup>14</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament IV*, eds. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Eerdmans, 1980), p. 70.
- <sup>15</sup> A.E. Cundall and L. Morris, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Judges & Ruth*, (IVP, 1968), p. 181.
- <sup>16</sup> Hall, p. 351.
- <sup>17</sup> Owen, op. cit., p. 110.