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THE LESSON OF SAMSON'S LIFE
- JUDGES 16:21-31. - DECEMBER 1. -

Golden Text: – "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." – Eph. 6:10.

MANY have wondered that three chapters of the Old Testament have been devoted to the story of Samson – great, strong, good-natured, witty. Still more strange it has seemed to some of us that his name should appear in the list of faith-heroes enumerated by the Apostle in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11. Here his name appears with those of Abraham, David, Gideon, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions." No other similar character is mentioned in the Scriptures; he stands unique amongst the Bible heroes. Dr. Lang remarks: –

"His irony, his grim laughter as well as his feats of strength are duly recorded. The story is strange, [R4087 : page 341] pathetic – one over which we smile and sigh, one of boisterous mirth and fearful sorrow – such wit, such folly, such force, such feebleness, comedy so grotesque and tragedy so awful."

Those who have not learned to rightly divide the Word of Truth – those who have not learned to study Scripture dispensationally – will surely be perplexed when they think of Samson as one of the saints of God, and then attempt to measure such saintship with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love, Samson no doubt possessed in some measure, as might any natural man; but most evidently he was not begotten of the holy Spirit – not, therefore, one of the sons of God in the sense that Jesus and his followers are recognized in the

Scriptures. The same is true in considerable measure of all the ancient worthies. No such standards were set before them as are set before us of this Gospel Age. They were not called to the high calling of a change of nature from human to divine. They were not begotten again to be New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The time for this was not yet. Christ, the forerunner on this heavenly narrow way, had not yet come. The sacrifice of atonement had not yet been offered, and none therefore could come unto the Father as sons or receive the begetting of his Spirit. The very highest rank possible to the most noble of that time was that they might be called servants of God. Moses was faithful as a servant over his house, and Samson and the others belonged to that house of servants. So, then, we must not think to copy Samson nor to set his life as a standard for our children or others. We are to assign him the place in the divine plan which the Scriptures give him, and then his life and his doings will be seen in their proper light and not prove a stumbling-block to us.

THE MISSION OF SAMSON

Samson's parents were consecrated people of God in the fullest sense that it was possible for them to be at the time. They believed in God, trusted him, and desired that in some way their son might be used of him in his service. They and their son, had they lived during this Gospel Age, under its light and privileges, no doubt would have been saints of a high order in the Church. Samson's special consecration to the Lord was followed by a Nazarite vow, such as is described in **[R4088 : page 341]** Numbers 6:2-6: it included total abstinence from grapes, wine and all intoxicants, permission of the hair to go uncut, and the avoidance of contamination with dead bodies. Many took such a vow temporarily, but Samson and John the Baptist apparently voluntarily took the vow for life. And here it is well to remember that through all the vicissitudes of his peculiar

career there is no intimation that Samson ever violated this vow. In its observance we have a testimony to his faith and his loyalty to God – in harmony with God. In this respect at least he was an overcomer of a high order; and all the faithful, all the overcomers of this Gospel Age, who have taken the vows of the cross and the narrow way in the footsteps of Jesus, should be able to appreciate very highly the loyalty of Samson to his vow. If we are similarly faithful to the observance of our vows we may be sure of a place in the heavenly Kingdom.

SAMSON JUDGED ISRAEL TWENTY YEARS

We have seen the child Samson consecrated to the Lord's service; we have seen his acceptance of this consecration in his taking of the Nazarite vow. Some have confused this vow with the statement that our Lord was called a Nazarene. This is a mistake. The people of the city of Nazareth were called Nazarenes, but those who took the special vow were called the Nazarites. Our Lord was not a Nazarite. He took no vow respecting his hair or the use of grapes and the fruit of the vine. He was a Nazarene, because for years his home had been in that city.

The Scriptures indicate also that God accepted Samson for his service. Now the question arises, In what way could God use him? What service could he render? Would God send him to preach the Gospel? No, there was no Gospel, no good tidings, no message to declare yet. That message could not go forth until first of all the Redeemer had come and the satisfaction for our sins had been made. Thus the Scriptures declare that Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel – life eternal, life for the world of mankind, for all who eventually would receive the goodness of God through Christ, and be restored by him to the full of human perfection. For these the eternal life is the divine intention. More than this, our Lord

brought immortality to light as the special gift of God to that special class, which – called during this Gospel Age, in the dark time when the way is narrow and difficult – has been obedient to the heavenly calling, and, laying aside every weight, runs with patience the race set before it. For these the divine provision is glory, honor and immortality. But these things were not available either to Jews or Gentiles in Samson's day, and hence there were no missions or ministries of grace and truth as we have these now. However, God had a work to be done at that time, as we shall see, and he used Samson as his agent in connection with that work.

After settling in Palestine the Israelites did not remain earnest and loyal to God and inspired with the promise made to Abraham, that through their nation God intended to bless all nations under the leadership of Messiah. When more or less of lack of faith with idolatry came in, God allowed them to be oppressed by the heathen nations on either side of them. At the time in question the Philistines had, by divine permission, conquered them and reduced them to a kind of slavery, by not permitting them to have any except the very crudest of tools and by not allowing amongst them blacksmiths, whose trade at that time was largely the forging of swords and spears and other implements of warfare. Thus the Israelites were unarmed, while the Philistines, their oppressors, were well armed. And **[R4088 : page 342]** while the Israelites were learning a lesson from their captivity they were also losing their courage. The Lord, knowing their condition, was preparing for their deliverance, and he accepted the consecration of Samson and made of him his agent for the raising of a patriotic spirit amongst the people, for their invigoration by hope, and for the paralyzing to some extent of the power of the Philistines, so that the Israelites might gradually begin to recover themselves from their bondage and to look again to the Lord for the deliverance which he was willing to grant them on their return to his favor. Samson's great

strength, considered by the people in its relationship to his Nazarite vow, would be a continual lesson to them of the power of God. They could see that the Lord was quite able to accept of all who were consecrated to him, and to make them mighty indeed to the overthrow of their enemies. Had the lesson been rightly applied we may readily suppose that all the children of the Israelites would have been similarly consecrated, and that the people would have been looking forward to the Lord's mighty deliverance of them; but they were slow to learn.

Samson judged Israel after the proper meaning of that word "judging" in the original, but not according to the usual acceptance of the word today. He judged Israel in the sense of avenging wrongs that they sustained upon the enemies who committed those wrongs. Samson was not merely a warrior because of his love of fighting; he was a patriot, he was a firm believer in the Oath-Bound Covenant, he was hoping for the deliverance of Israel from all antagonists, and for the nation's exaltation as God's people, to be his mighty power in the world for the blessing of all nations. He was therefore opposed to everything that opposed the Israelites; and the Philistines being their oppressors and opponents he directed his energies against them. Their wealth was gained largely from the extensive wheat-fields lying between the mountains of Judea and the Mediterranean Sea, and in order to injure them financially Samson on one occasion took peculiar means for setting fire to these wheat-fields owned and operated by the Philistines for their own profit. It was not a joke, although the means used were peculiar, unusual. Samson was a general in the field of battle, and in his own person and in his own ingenuity he represented infantry, cavalry and artillery, using every means at his command to break the forces of the oppressors and to deliver his people, judging their oppressors or penalizing them, injuring them, punishing them, and to that extent helping to deliver Israel.

The abject servility of the Israelites is manifested by the fact that, instead of cooperating with Samson and with him claiming the divine promises for the possession of the land of Palestine and the overthrow of all opponents, they so feared the Philistines and had so little faith in God that they were even willing to deliver Samson to the Philistines, and did deliver him bound. He allowed the binding and delivery, knowing his ability to break the bonds and to put to flight those who thought they had him in their power, and he did so. What a lesson again to the faint-hearted, that they should have courage to accept the Lord's promises and be obedient to his directions. They had already been in the land for a long time, but had failed to conquer it because of lack of faith, whereas with the proper faith one might have chased a thousand and two might have put ten thousand to flight.

SAMSON A BLIND PRISONER

When we remember Samson's zeal for God and for his people, when we remember his faithfulness to his vow as a Nazarite, when we remember his great strength – which enabled him with no other weapon than the jawbone of an ass to fight a large company of his enemies and to slay about a thousand of them – his undoing by a woman carries with it a great lesson. The Philistines directly and indirectly planned the seduction of their powerful enemy, using as a decoy the beautiful Delilah, and the man who was so strong in other respects was found vulnerable from this point of attack.

What a lesson to Spiritual Israelites! How we also should realize that the great Adversary will be on the alert to use any snare or trap for the undoing of those who are faithful soldiers of the cross. If we were to draw an analogy as between Samson's temptation and the temptation of the Body of Christ it would imply that we should be specially on guard against the

blandishments of the world and the Adversary through the nominal Church, which figuratively is called a woman – more, she is described in the Scriptures as a harlot.

It was when Samson rested his head upon the lap of Delilah that he was shorn of his hair and of his strength – a condition of his vow being broken. Similarly those who are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might through their faithfulness to the vows of consecration as followers of the Lord Jesus are in danger of going to sleep in the lap of the modern Delilah, Churchianity. A spirit of drowsiness is their spirit, of rest from the activities and self-sacrifices of their vow, a spirit of slumber; and with that spirit goes their strength. Is there not in some respects an analogy between the experiences of Samson and the experiences of the Church of Christ? Consider the activities of the early Church and the victories they gained in the name and strength of the Lord. Consider how the Adversary entangled and seduced the Church, and how for a considerable time the stupor and drowsiness and ease and worldliness were upon those who vowed to be faithful to the Lord and his service. Consider how the strength of the Gospel message was lost while in that drowsy condition in the "dark ages." Consider how the eyes of our understanding were put out even as Samson lost his natural sight. Consider that even since the Reformation time the Church has been to a large extent under the blinding influence of the Adversary, a slave to Churchianity and the world, even as Samson was the slave of the Philistines. As their slave Samson was used instead of a horse to turn a great wheel for grinding [R4089 : page 343] their food; and thus indeed the Church has been grinding food of a certain kind for many while still a slave to the world and under its blinding influences.

THE DEATH OF SAMSON

Here our lesson really begins. The Philistine worshipers of Dagon had called for a great religious festival in honor of their

god, whom they credited with the success of their warfare not only upon the Israelites but their sea victories against the Sidonians and Egyptians. Samson was a prisoner in their prominent city, Gaza, where the festival was to begin in a great temple. In the midst of their hilarities Samson was brought forth as an exhibit of the power of their idol, of their god Dagon, over all enemies. They would have this one who had slain thousands to sing and play on an instrument and dance before them, and after he had thus made sport for them he stood between the two main pillars upon which the center of the structure rested and where he was in full view of the thousands who were in the temple proper itself, and also from the roof of it could be seen by about three thousand congregated thereon, the prominent men and women of the nation, the lords of the Philistines. Samson, still full of the spirit of his consecration, still full of the desire to serve God and his nation, entreated that the sacrifice of his life in the Lord's cause might be acceptable and might be used at this time in the slaughter of all the principal people of the Philistines, and thus signify a greater opportunity for the Israelites to be released from their slavery than any other means that could be thought of or made available at the time. The Lord was pleased to accept the sacrifice, and Samson, exerting his great natural strength combined with whatever the Lord was pleased to additionally grant, the two great central pillars of the structure gave way, the whole edifice came down with a crash, the three thousand people on the roof as well as the materials of the building serving as the executioner of the hour; or, as in the other figure, as Samson's artillery against his enemies, who were also the enemies of the Lord and the opponents of the divine program for which Israel stood.

Modern buildings in many respects differ from those of ancient times, so that to us it may be difficult to imagine the truthfulness of this description. However, we have items of history which somewhat correspond. Pliny describes two

theaters built of wood by L. Curio, which he says were large enough to contain all the people of Rome, and were supported by a single hinge; and if this were to give way, there would have been a greater slaughter than at the battle of Cannae.

We have seen some analogy as between Samson's experiences and the history of the Gospel Church: may we not carry this analogy farther, and see in the death of Samson and its influence an illustration of the closing of this Gospel Age, the consummation of the sacrifice of the Church and the resulting influence upon the world? It is of course hazardous to attempt the reading of prophecies or symbols not yet fulfilled. Nevertheless we suggest that the Scriptural delineations of the future correspond in many respects with the picture given us in the life of Samson. Have we not come to the time when the Lord's people are recovering a little of the strength of the early Church? and have we not also come to the time when the worldly wise are feasting and rejoicing and giving honor to the god of Evolution, and through their Higher Critics denouncing the true Israelites and their hopes and the divine testimonies? Have we not come very near to the time when those who are still faithful to the Lord and the principles of his Word are made sport of by the worldly-wise? and have we not come to the time when some at least of the Lord's true people are ready to put forth all the strength in their power through the Volunteer work and the Colporteur work, the Pilgrim work, and a thousand other energies to move the pillars of error which uphold Churchianity? It is appointed for the Church to die, to die in sacrifice, to die in the interests and service of the Truth – to lay down their lives for the brethren, the Israelites indeed, for their deliverance from the bondage of the world. The strength of our reformation lies in the Abrahamic promise, in our confidence in God, and in our vow to do his will. With the death of the last member of the Church, the Body of Christ, will surely come, as the Scriptures point out, the downfall of Churchianity and the

present system of world power, and all this will but make ready for the glorious Kingdom of God's dear Son, though the incidentals shall signify a time of trouble upon the great ones, the mighty ones, the chief captains of earth.

OUR GOLDEN TEXT

"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Here we have an exhortation applicable to the people of God at all times and under all conditions and under all circumstances. It would have applied to Samson in his day as a natural man, a servant, and it applies to us of today who are New Creatures in Christ Jesus, servant-sons of the Most High. If we look back to Samson and all the ancient worthies recounted by the Apostle, we note that the secret of their strength of character, by which they endured and overcame, resided in their faith in God and in the promises. And so it must be with us. But there is a difference between faith and credulity: the latter may give a spirit of energy, but will not endure. The former is the power of God which enables us to endure all things as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ, soldiers of the Truth, soldiers of righteousness, fighting against sin and error and all ungodliness, including the artful wiles of the Adversary, by which he would deceive us and the whole world, misrepresenting the divine character by the "doctrines of devils" foisted upon the Lord's people during the "dark ages," to the blinding of the eyes of their understanding. Now in the Lord's providence our eyes are becoming more and more opened, in harmony with the Apostle's prayer, "I pray God for you that you may be able to comprehend with all saints **[R4089 : page 344]** what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of God which passeth knowledge." – Eph. 3:18,19.

Hence it is important for us, not merely to believe, but to believe the truth. Our Redeemer prayed, "Sanctify them with

thy truth, thy Word is truth," and the Scripture tells us of some who, not having sufficient love for the truth, are abandoned of the Lord to believe a lie, and through that false faith to find ultimately the condemnation of their heart attitude and to be counted unworthy a place with the "Very Elect." Let us set the Word of the Lord above all other messages: yea, more than this, let us prize the divine Word and plan above any of our own misconceptions and imaginings. Thus we shall be willing to buy the truth at any cost and to sell it not for any price. Thus we shall be found acceptable to our Lord, and shall be kept strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, until our trials shall be finished and he shall say, It is enough; come up higher; enter into the joys of thy Lord.
