

for my two eyes.” As Jesus committed His spirit to His Father, Samson also prays “Let me die with the Philistines!”

Matthew tells us that at the moment Jesus died the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and many holy people were raised to life. When Samson died the pillars of the temple fell; down came the home of the false god Dagon and many of his unholy servants were killed.

Though Samson was a maverick Nazarite and ultimately that led him into deep personal tragedy, but God did not reject Him and abandon him, for Samson in his own wrong way did God’s work and still trusted in God. Hebrews c11 tells us that he is one of the ancients commended for his faith, for as the angel told his mother through Him God began the deliverance of Israel and by him God showed His sovereignty over all the earth. Glory to God, amen.



Reflection [1] for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Trinity, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021

**Marah Moments! [2]**  
**Judges 16:15-30**

What can we say of Samson? He lived at the time when the Philistines were deepening their hold over Israel. They had settled on the coast about 1200 BC, a generation or so after Israel entered the Promised Land. You can call their coming geographic if you like, sea adventurers like the Vikings looking for somewhere to lie up safe for the winter, when the sea was too dangerous to cross, which led into staying all year. You can see it as simple happenstance of history that they came in and set up 5 towns and competed with Israel for the fertile land.

Or, you can see it theologically. The enemy of God moving through a powerful people to oppress Israel and block God’s purposes for His people. Remember God’s word to Moses in Exodus 19:5 to be said to Israel: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

This was God’s great purpose for Israel - so it was opposed by the evil one. His aim then and always has been to dilute, dismantle and discard our keeping God’s Kingdom purpose.

One way to do this is by direct warfare. In Judges 10 we read of how Israel served many gods including the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And that God sold Israel into the hands of the Ammonites and the Philistines. Then we are told that the Ammonites made war on Israel but God crushed them through Jephthah. Yet the enemy has other ways than warfare, and these were the ways of the Philistines. Ways our enemy still works in the hearts of God’s people. They came with trade, they came with inter-marriage, and they came with worship that had a greater sensual appeal than traditional Israelite worship. They didn’t come

with fighting spears but with tempting prospects. And Israel fell for them.

Warfare with the world makes you fight for what you value as a God's society, but peaceful co-existence with the world corrodes your Godly values, and the blessings of prosperity can enslave you in its comforts. Israel was seeking to serve two masters, but being seduced away from God, selling out her life as God's holy nation for peace and quiet and getting along.

You can see this in Judges c15. Briefly Samson's desire to marry a Philistine woman had been thwarted. So he decided to get even with the Philistines and through 300 foxes sets fire to their standing corn, and corn stores, burning it all up along with the vineyards and olive groves. The Philistines then reveal their true self by burning his intended and her father, leading Samson to attack them even more. All this by himself, with no help from Israel, no soldiers, no fellow band of men. Then the Philistines send a military force into Judah, which reacts by gathering 3000 men. Is there going to be a battle? No, a conference. Judah asks "Why have you come to fight us?" The Philistines explain that all they want is to take Samson prisoner and do to him as he had done to them. So what does Judah do? They find Samson and say to him, "Don't you realise that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?"

Judah has swapped God's rule for the rule of the people of another god, Dagon. They came to Samson to hand him over to the Philistines, as one day Israel will hand over Jesus to the Romans. Perhaps some of them anticipated Caiphas saying, "it is better for us that one man die for the people than that the whole nation suffers." What has happened to God's people?

But God's purposes will not be thwarted. When His people lose their sense of His will they can only be rescued by men and women God chooses to disturb their sold-out comfort, disrupt their appeasement with the world and disorder their false faiths. Every man and woman is in some way different, and God takes that difference and works with that difference to deliver His people.

Moses was different, a Jew raised as a Prince in Egypt but also a murderer. The Judges were different. Ehud was left-handed. Lappidoth is only known as the husband of Deborah the prophetess, who was the one who really ruled over Israel, and led the revolt against their Canaanite oppressors. Gideon belonged to the tribe that was least in Israel and his own family the least in that tribe. But his father worshipped Baal, and Gideon fired off Israel's defeat of the Midianites by destroying his father's altar to Baal. Jephtha, who defeated the Ammonites, was the son of a prostitute, who when his father's wife became a mother to her own sons was rejected and driven from the family home. Samson's birth was announced by an angel and from the womb he was a Nazarite, a man consecrated to God, for the work God would give him to do. But Samson was not your usual Nazarite, he seemed to disdain his Nazarite vow and defiled his consecration when he insisted on marrying a young Philistine woman, rather than a daughter of Israel. Why, did he do that? Because as the writer of Judges tells us in 14:4 "... this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel."

Samson was different in ways which meant he broke the rules you would have expected him to keep. We do not know how he would have delivered Israel if he had kept them, but by his rule breaking he made Judah see that getting along nicely with their Philistine neighbours was wrong. Wrong for them in their present living, for it was slow enslavement and wrong for the world, for if Philistine culture, society and worship had fully captured Israel there would not have been a David, and there would not have been an Israel fit to be a home for David's offspring, Jesus.

Like Jesus, Samson was betrayed for money. Like Jesus he was humiliated. Like Jesus nailed to a cross, he was bound to a grinding wheel and people scorned his shackled form. Like Jesus, Samson facing death prays. It's a prayer consistent with his life. "O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines