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Sightless in Gaza
On the Fate of Samson

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Abstract

In this paper, offered in tribute to Lawson Younger, I revisit the final moments in Samson's life when he was brought out of his cell for a public, possibly also ritual, execution. Additionally, I suggest a twofold motivation behind the restoration of his strength.

For the NIV Application Commentary series, Lawson Younger made fine contributions to elucidating *Judges* and *Ruth*, two biblical books that have likewise lured me by their endless charm (Younger 2002/2021). Over the years, I have followed Lawson's many works, at meetings and in print, on a broad arc of subjects and themes. To him, I credit the motivation to complete my own project on the Mari archives. But it was not until a lunch at an otherwise forgettable recent AOS meeting that I learned how matched were the lives of scholars, however different their backgrounds, faith, or upbringings. In joining other colleagues in honoring him, I offer a redraft of thoughts from a forthcoming *Judges 13–21* (AYB) commentary. I hope it amuses him even if he may not fully agree with my characterization of Samson.[1]

Samson … so far

Few readers of Scripture (and least of all Lawson) need to be reminded of the events that brought an eyeless Samson to a temple, likely in Gaza. Nonetheless, a gist of my own reading of the preceding accounts in Judges 16 might be usefully presented here. The opening segment (16:1–3) is a "Tall Tale" (that is, not meant for literal reception), in which a carnal Samson outwits the Philistines by hauling away the gate of one of their cities on his back, thus depriving them of protection. This isolated episode has no immediate consequences except to heighten his enemies' resolve to bring him under control. The narrator expresses no opinion on Samson's unhealthy pursuits as well as fails to grant God a role in it.[2]

The second segment (16:4–22) gives us a lovestruck Samson, eager to instill the same emotion in his current infatuation, Delilah. As it happens, Delilah was a professional courtesan of nebulous background but of undeniable greed. In a fateful encounter with her, Samson offers her several ways by which to take control of him. They all have to do with using specific numbers or freshness of sinews or ropes, as well as with weaving hair in special ways. These techniques are but adaptions of love charm instructions widely shared in antiquity.[3] This Judge of Israel is no dimwit who stubbornly fails to decipher Delilah's unsubtle requests; rather, he is a besotted swain who hopes magical manipulations would ensnare the target of his passion. For him, instructing Delilah to cut his hair is no great disclosure; rather, it is just one more amatory game to play.

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[1] To maintain a proper proportion for this contribution, I have purposely (perhaps also unforgivably) kept the annotations and bibliography light. Two essays that give fuller accounts are Sasson 2019a ("A Gate in Gaza") and 2020 ("Of Shekels and Shackles"); see the Bibliography below for download links. A third essay ("Samson as Riddle") is now published (2021). Fuller accounts on all Samson matters are slated for my forthcoming AYB *Judges 13–21*. I thank Dr. A.A. Gruseke for several stylistic improvements.

[2] In the literature, many have treated the opening verses as intrusive, not belonging to the original conception of the Samson and Delilah episode. This is arguably true. The Samson saga is no *Bildungsroman*, in which development of character is essential to the narrative (as say, Gilgamesh, Jacob, and David); rather it is a concatenation of different vignettes that may or may not have originally featured Samson. The Gaza segment stands so starkly apart in so many ways from the previous and succeeding materials, that it acts as a major caesura, shifting attention from the series involving Samson and his triumphs to the denouement set in Naḥal Soreq and then (apparently) Gaza. More on all this is in my forthcoming commentary.

[3] For examples and elaboration, see Sasson 2020. Here is one illustration (cited from p. 219): "You weave together into a single strand the tendons of a gazelle, [hemp,] and red wool; you tie it into fourteen knots. Each time you tie a knot, you recite the incantation. The woman places this cord around her waist, and she will be loved."

As we all know, no one in Israel morphed into Hercules just by adopting the practices of a Nazir. The sad truth is that unbeknownst to Samson his compact with God was coming to an end, with one final act left for him to accomplish.

The Fate of Captured Foes

Wars are never kind to combatants and less so to the defeated. Consider two earlier scenes in *Judges*: Judah's capture of Adoni-bezeq (1:5–7) and Gideon's treatment of Midian's leaders, Zebah and Zalmunna (8:18–21).[4] In the latter case, two proud kings are quizzed rather insolently before a youth is charged with their execution, a disgraceful end from which they are eventually spared. In the former, the thumbs and big toes of Adoni-bezeq are amputated, hampering his capacity to move, to feed or to defend himself. We may conjure up a forum at which this king accepts his fate by invoking his own mutilation of vanquished enemy rulers, forcing them to feed like dogs. Further, we may imagine a long trek during which a hobbled Adoni-bezeq is paraded ignominiously through towns until reaching the walls of Jerusalem. "There he died" is tersely stated; but if his death was meant to strike terror within a city's walls, there are plenty of Ancient Near Eastern textual and visual testimonies to solidify the conjecture. I touch lightly on each before addressing their import to unravelling Samson's mission.

Humiliation. After battles, enemy soldiers who were seriously injured were normally dispatched in situ, and no effort was made to heal their wounds. In the second millennium captured males, whether soldiers or non-combatants, were commonly released upon hefty ransoms.[5] Further down the centuries, they more likely became palace slaves or sold to merchants for trade hither and yon. As often as not, they could endure cosmetic disfiguration that perpetuated their status. Commanders and other officers wounded in battle might even beg for a quick death, not just to salvage their honor but also to avoid the horrors of a wretched death. Utter humiliation – if not also an unsettled afterlife – would nonetheless await them beyond death, for soldiers tossed their heads as sport, stacked their emasculated carcasses in piles, or left their remains to vultures and scavengers.[6]

Royal figures or tribal leaders who bore wounds grave enough to exclude marching under chain might choose to end their own lives. A pathetic description occurs in one of several reports on Saul's death (1 Sam 31). Gravely wounded, Israel's first king feared Philistine capture. His enemies, he knew, would inflict pain by "piercing me" (*ʷudqārūnî*), and "scornfully disgrace me" (*vĕhitᶜallĕlû⁻vî*). His death (however, it came about) did not save him from his fears; for when the Philistines discovered his cadaver, "they beheaded him, stripped off his armor, and having spread the good news to the shrines of their idols and among the people, they stashed his armor in the Ashtaroth temple and pinned his corpse on the walls of Beth-shan" (1 Sam 31:9–10).

Execution. For worthy foes who had successfully tormented them, as well as for vassals who fomented insurrections, victorious rulers might follow a more dramatic enactment. Vengeance was surely a motivation; but as satisfying was the sharing of that passion with the people who had been victimized by the captured foe. At such occasions, there would be praise and sacrifice to the god(s) who inspired the victory. While (sadly enough) such events can be chronicled even into our own days, I give just three illustrations from antiquity and across cultures: From Egypt, from Assyria, and from Rome.

1. This is how Amenhotep II (Dynasty 18, 15–14 c.) recorded on his Amada stela his triumph over his West Asian enemies:

> When his majesty returned in joy of heart to his father Amon, it was after he had slain with his own mace the seven princes who were in the region of Takhsi, they having been hung upside down on the prow of his majesty's Falcon Boat … Afterwards (the king) hung six of these wretched men before

[4] Notes and comments, respectively at Sasson 2014: 363–65 and 131–34.

[5] See Charpin 2014, with illustrations drawn from treaties, letters, and administrative documents.

[6] I need not justify these remarks, as they are amply documented in recent literature. See Dolce 2018.

> the rampart of Thebes, along with the hands … Then (the king) transported the other wretched one to Nubia [Kush], that he hanged on the wall of Napata to demonstrate the victories of his majesty for ever and ever …[7]

2. How Assurbanipal (7th c.) chronicled in words (as well as in art) the fate of the Elamite Teumman and his allies is paradigm for Assyrian retaliation against treachery, reversal of solemn oaths, and rebellion. Here is a creepy extract:

> I hung the head of Teumman, king of Elam, on the neck of Dunanu (Gambulu chieftain). I entered Nineveh with singers and music, (parading) Elamite captives and the booty of Gambulu that I captured at the command of Assur. When they saw the head of Teumman, their lord, insanity seized his ambassadors Umbadara (and) Nabudamik. Umbadara tore off his beard and Nabudamik pierced his own belly with his iron dagger. I displayed the severed head of Teumman conspicuously at the gate inside Nineveh, (so as) to show the people the might of Assur and Ishtar, my lords … In Arbela, I tore out the tongues and flayed Dunanu (and his brothers) for speaking insolently against my gods. In Nineveh, I had Dunanu laid out on a table in Nineveh and eviscerated like a lamb. … I had their members paraded as spectacle for the whole land.[8]

3. The Romans captured Simon b. Gioras, a top Jewish commander in besieged Jerusalem and featured him in the closing scene (71 CE) of a triumph in Rome honoring Vespasian and Titus.[9]

> He had been led in the procession amongst the prisoners of war; then, a noose round his neck, scourged by his guards, he had been taken to that place next to the Forum where Roman law prescribes that condemned criminals be executed. After the announcement came that he had met his end and the universal cheering that followed it, Vespasian and Titus began the sacrifice.[10]

The Torment

Debasement. With these unsettling scenes in mind, we may go back to the fate awaiting Samson on rising from Delilah's hair-strewn lap. Previously, the Philistines had succeeded in terrorizing the Hebrews into surrendering their main champion, only to suffer enormous losses (at 15: 9–15). This time, on sensing him changed, they took instant measures to neutralize him. They blinded him before chaining him, thus sharing the fate that will await poor Zedekiah, the last king of Judah.[11] Unlike Samson, who was moved a relatively

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[7] After Rainey 1973: 72. Takhsi is an area somewhere by Damascus.

[8] Adapted from Luckenbill (1927: 334–35; §§865–66). For good measure, Ashurbanipal also had descendants crush the bones of their own ancestors. The Teumman episode developed into an object of literary creativity with its own rendering of events; see Livingstone 1989: 67. On Assyrian sordid spectacles, see Liverani 2017: 79–90 ("Public Display"), Villard 2008, and Marti 2012. Several papers in Battini (ed., 2016) deal with these matters. There, Ariel Bagg's essay accounts for every mutilation and humiliation suffered by victims of every status, as described in art and texts. Such display of public executions hardly slackened in later empires; see Briant 2002: 122–23 for Achaemenid samples. Schneider (2018) suggests a similarly stigmatizing context in the poetic version of of Sisera's fate (at Judg 5:25–27).

[9] I cannot begin to imagine the horrors he suffered during his transport there for, as they were moved from stop to stop, chained and mutilated victims endured jeers, taunts, jostling, and projectiles.

[10] The conjunction of public spectacles and executions plays heavily through time, with this sample drawn from Josephus's *Jewish Wars* (7 2.2 [153–55]); cited from Beard (2007: 129). Her chapter, "Captives on Parade" (107–43) is a fine overview of the public dispatch of defeated enemies during Roman triumphs. See especially the sub-chapter "Execution" (128–32). Other testimonies about Simon's end have him either pushed to his death from a steep cliff on the south side of the Capitoline Hill or strangled publicly at the climax of the celebrations. The Roman treatment of Jesus as King of the Jews comes close to being a (mock) version of these indignities.

[11] Zedekiah was first made to watch the execution of his children. The account is told (with changes) in 2 Kings (25:6–7), Jeremiah (32:4–5; 34:2–3; 39:1–7; 52:10–11), 2 Chronicles (36:12), and Ezekiel (12:13). Jer 52:11 expands, "[The Babylonians] had him in a detention house [*bēʾt happĕquddôt*, LXX "mill-house"] until the time of his death (*ʿad-yôm mōtô*)."

short distance from Naḥal Sorek to (presumably) Gaza, Zedekiah was dragged all the way to Babylon, likely with public abuse at every stop.

Awaiting judgment on his fate, Samson was kept in the *bēʸt hā'ăsûrîm*, ("house of the prisoners," *b. hā'ēsûr* in Jer 37:15).[12] This is one of several Hebrew terms for places of confinement; the prisons that we know in our days – with dedicated space and "correctional" personnel – did not yet exist.[13] Rather, confinement occurred in any room with a sturdy door, with escape minimized by reinforcing the guard and by chaining or maiming the prisoner.[14] Samson's blinding and chaining were two such measures and we find Hittite officials referring to them: "Blind men have fled from the mill house in Šapinuwa and have come (to you) there. As soon as this tablet reaches you, take charge of the blind men and conduct them back here safely" (Hoffner 2009: 210).

Grinding grain (verb *ṭāḥan*) was the work of free women when done at home; if they were of means, then the chore was fobbed off on the lowliest in the household (see Exod 11:5; Isa 47:2, about humiliated Babylon). The work was so tedious and exhausting that until recent days, two women would team up to turn the upper millstone, then exchange spots to relieve themselves from damaging one of their arms (Dalman 1902). It was even more onerous when done for industry and especially brutal when forced on imprisoned people of all ages and genders. In Samson's case, the purpose was less to process grain than to shame him as, crouched over a sloping slab, he would endlessly move one heavy basal stone over another. Being eyeless obviously complicated his task of feeding and clearing the stones, one grind after the other.[15]

The Final Act. It was the custom in Roman triumphs, by no means contradicted by Ancient Near Eastern testimony, that the final act in disposing of worthy enemies was staged as entertainment before an exuberant public and often enough with the full approbation of gods in attendance. Debatable is whether to decipher the event juridically (as capital punishment) or ritually (as a human sacrifice) – perhaps a bit of both. What happened to Samson after his Philistine debasement takes up the last third of his sensual misadventures in Gaza (16:23–31).

Samson's Fate

Samson was no ordinary captive. We may question applying to him the label "judge" (*šōfēṭ*, obliquely at 15:20 and 16:31); yet to the Philistines he was a formidable enemy, a "ravager of our land, who multiplied our slain" (16:24). They were willing to pay astronomically (potentially 140 lbs of silver; 16:4) for Delilah to deliver him alive but defanged. As they told her (16:5), they intended to bind him (*va'ăsarnūhû*), aiming to demean him (*lĕʿannōtô*), likely by turning him servile. At any rate, Samson may not have remained long in his cell where relatively few could have witnessed his humiliation.[16] Whether or not the leaders had premeditated the next phase in Samson's mortification, an opportunity arose that would bring leaders, public, and Dagon in a festive assembly. Assigning victory to a god is fairly standard in ancient lore; but as the leaders made their declaration ("Our God has handed us Samson, our enemy," 15:24), their exuberant rhyme reverberated widely among the masses. By expanding the core sentiment into a grievance that addressed Dagon, the masses made it difficult for the leaders to refuse their petition. They wished to have Samson

[12] This is the Qere for Ketiv *bēʸt hā'ăsYrîm*. At Gen 39:20, the reverse correction is registered.

[13] There may have been a dedicated space in some places, at least. The Ur III evidence may imply this. See also Reid (2016).

[14] Other terms for confinement spaces are: *bēʸt hassōhar*, "h. of confinement" (Gen 39, often); *bēʸt* (*hak)kele'/kelî',* same meaning (1 Kgs 22:27; 2 Kgs 17:4, 25:27–29); *bēʸt happĕqudōt,* "h. of detention" (Jer 52:11); *ḥaṣar*/*šaʿar hammaṭṭārâ,* "guard compound" (Jer 32, often; Neh 12:39); *bôr*, "pit, dungeon" (Isa 24:22), and *masgēr*, "storeroom," (Ps 142:8). The same labeling diversity occurs in Mesopotamia (van der Toorn 1986). A.1401 is a memorandum from the Mari archives (Sasson 2017: 225–26) that records the very sad fate of several persons that languished in detention, dying from hunger and thirst among other horrors. On blind people in the workforce, see Justel 2017: 252–54.

[15] See Alcock 2006: 106–18. L. Milano, H. Hoffner, and R. Ellis post good details on milling and millstones in the *RlA* 8: 393–404 ("Mühle"). The famous movie scene in which Samson endlessly rotated two enormous millstones could only happen after the Persian period.

[16] Some installations were outdoors, but that is not what the tale implies at 16:21, 25.

vîśaḥeq-lānû (16:25). In fact, he does *yĕṣaḥēq lifnē*^{y}*hem* (also 16:25) and everyone watched *śĕḥôq šimšôn* (16:27). Much ink is spilled in trying to discern the meanings of these verbal forms, differing as they do in stems (Piel then Qal of *śḥq*) and in consonants (*śḥq* as well as *ṣḥq*) and my own translations are tentative.[17] The staging of his final act has also been debated, with several references to the archaeology of recently uncovered Philistine temples, none of which easily substantiates placing Samson between closely spaced columns. Nonetheless, I visualize a broad open space sided by a roofed perimeter and fronted by a temple with a façade that is supported by weight-bearing pillars, apparently set closely enough to span Samson's outstretched arms.[18]

Chained and blind, Samson was being led into the arena, but certainly not just to offer macabre amusement. In fact, he and the watchers must have known that he was not likely to see his cell again, for the occasion required a public expiation of his crime. Let us, then, place Samson between the central columns and highlight his plea: He wants God to restore him for one final act, not to replay what occurred at Einhaqqore by Lehi (15:18–19) but to avenge his loss of two eyes. Samson's language is dramatic ("take notice of me and please strengthen me just this one time, O God, so that with one blow I may avenge myself on the Philistines for both my eyes" 16:28); yet it has been faulted in the literature for its selfishness and/or for its potential embrace of suicide as a solution. The last notion might be specious, for those facing a certain sword cannot be faulted for choosing the manner or timing of their death.[19] However, whether Samson should be censured as an egocentric invites some further remarks.

Motivations

On concluding the narrative of Samson's extraordinary birth, the narrator slipped in a very obtrusive note. Omniscient though they may act, biblical writers do not indulge often in insertions of this kind, as they generally leave it to readers or audiences to deduce causation from developing events or conversations. When they do inject such interferences, however, narrators are most startling when they penetrate God's mind. The classic example is in Gen 22. There, we are made privy to God's purpose for demanding the sacrifice of Isaac, thus forestalling potentially damaging inferences on God's purpose or character.[20] In Samson tales,

[17] English renderings are all over the map, with many ignoring the verbal differences. I refer to my commentary for a full discussion. The translation I offer (undogmatically) for the relevant contexts is: [25] "Buoyed on wine, they demanded, 'Bring out Samson to perform for us' (Piel of *śḥq*). Fetched from prison, Samson cavorted (Piel of *ṣḥq*) in their presence … [27]… On the roof there were about three thousand men and women, those watching Samson's antics (Qal of *śḥq*) …"

[18] None of the temples associated with Philistine sites (Tell Qasile, Beth Shean, Tell Safi) was large enough to conform to the biblical scene. None gave evidence for weight-bearing pillars that could have been manipulated by anyone not a giant: a consideration that might have motivated Roman-period artists and Talmudic rabbis to turn him Gargantuan. To approximate the setting of our drama, I bring to mind here the temple complex at Seventh Century Tel Miqne-Ekron whose plan is widely reproduced; see King and Stager 2001: 337. An online reproduction is at <https://www.baslibrary.org/sites/default/files/bsbkea0000007841.jpg>. A nice 3D reconstruction is posted online at <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/664773594968554946/?d=t&mt=login> and at <https://tinyurl.com/22cdsyhm>. Whether or not such a construction could support 3,000+ frenzied onlookers is beyond secure determination.

[19] Shemesh (2009), places Samson among a handful of suicides cited in the Bible. The term might be applied to those who are losing face (Ahitophel, at 2 Sam 17:23) or are overwhelmed by remorse (Judas, at Matt 27:3–5). It is less appropriate when attached to those confronting an ignominious death (Abimelech, at Judg 9:52–54) or avoiding certain capture (Saul, at 1 Sam 31:4–7, but see 1 Sam 1:1–16; Zimri, at 1 Kgs 16:18). Dietrich (2009) has a more nuanced discussion of the issue.

In several cultures (from Rome to Japan) suicide is indeed an honorable resolution. The act of suicide has not gathered much scribal attention in Near Eastern literature beyond philosophical treatises (Mesopotamia's "Dialogue of Pessimism" or Egypt's "Dispute between a Man and his *Ba*"). Whether hyperbolically or not, Mesopotamian kings boasted about their enemies wishing suicide over certain capture; see Worthington 2010: 316. In the Mari archives, several writers threaten suicide, but how seriously is difficult to tell; see Sasson 2019b: 935–36, also now ARM 33 102, 161 (high official threatens to hang or stab himself should the king lose confidence in him).

[20] Imagine how much more unsettling the Akedah might have read had it begun with: "Some time afterward, God said to Abraham, 'Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you' …" (Gen. 22:1 TNK). In *Judges* there are at least three such moments: When explaining why God needs to appoint a series of judges from one generation to the next (at

such insertions occur at 13:16 (Manoah had not realized the divinity of his wife's visitor) and at 16:20 (Samson had not realized that God had turned away from him); but their significance or implication pale in comparison with what we learn from 14:4. Samson announces his desire to marry a Philistine, flabbergasting his parents, for they could not know that "this was from the Lord, for he was prodding a reaction from the Philistines" (*kî mēYHVH hî' kî tōʾănâ hû' měvaqqēš mippĕlištîm*). In this clause, the antecedent "he" is indefinite: it certainly refers to God; but Samson might also be the antecedent, as the episode was focusing on his stubborn, if incongruous, desire to wed a woman from among those who bullied his tribe.[21] With this ambiguity in mind – and by evading (legitimate) issues of sources and their integration into our received version – I may now pick up on Samson, planted as he was between pillars in Dagon's piazza.

Samson's Choice. As his arms twisted around or pushed against weight-bearing columns (let us not worry how for now), Samson knew that his life was about to end one way or another; for him, there will no longer be debasement in a dinky millhouse just as there cannot be any further bouts with hapless Philistines. Revelry and carnal escapes into Philistine territory and heaps of dead bodies about him may have persuaded Samson that Nazir regulations controlled his mother, not him, and his unshorn hair was a vestige of her own commitments more than of his. From the moment "Zeal for the LORD (*rûʷaḥ YHVH*) first began to pound in him at Maḥaneh-Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol" (13:25), Samson embraced a mission to provoke Philistines into destructive confrontations. The first of three divinely gifted onrushes, occurring at the outskirts of Timnah (14:6) – as well as two others subsequently (at 14:19 and 15:14) – could only validate the certainty of his cause.

As he faced the finality of death in a Philistine temple, Samson turned to the God who earlier (at 15:18–20) had granted him reprieve from an ending that felt too abrupt. Samson never got to feel another onrush of divinely bestowed power, not just because such injections may have belonged to other fragments from his sagas, but because there was no longer a need for reinforcing Samson's conviction. Beyond fulfilling his destiny as a thorn in enemy's flesh, Samson was also to be a goad for God's own plans. As such, he deserved the "judge" label conferred on him.

Theomachy. Mighty and past comparison with neighboring deities though he may have been, the Hebrew God was not beyond holding grudges and peeves against the deities of Israel's neighbors, not least because of their repeated successful seductions of a chosen folk. It was not enough to send prophets and leaders to warn deviating Israel; rather, the battle had to be taken directly to the other deities if only to disabuse their worshipers from futile hopes. God might threaten to humiliate gods before their own followers (see at Exod 12:12; Num 33:14); or God might assign an agent to publicly take down false gods, as when Elijah insults Baal before exterminating his priests (1 Kgs 18:20:20–46). In these theomachies, Dagon was an especially irritating foe, if only because his followers will lord it over Israel at least until David's days. Additionally, Dagon was resilient and so provoked God into launching other instances of humiliation for him and for his believers (see at 1 Sam 5 and 14). For God, using Samson as a tool would not be abusing him – as when, say, sending Jonah on a seemingly futile errand. Samson would not be the first (or last) life lost on a sacred mission or in a holy war. There are other narratives about faithful mouthpieces of the Hebrew God (Moses, Balaam, and the man of God of 1 Kgs 13 among them) who devoted service to God notwithstanding, compromised their future by relatively minor infractions.[22]

2:11–19); when rationalizing the survival of enemy nations in the Promised Land despite Joshua's many triumphs against them (at 2:22–23, 3:2); and when justifying Abimelech's sudden veer from initial success (at 9:23). See the good work on the subject in Paris 2014.

[21] Sternberg (1987: 237–38) reverses the sequence of actions in the relevant passage to assign God sole priority in motivation. If anything, Stenberg's argument reinforces the possibility that Samson believes himself as acting on his own volition.

[22] The motif of dutiful servants dying on causes that are not of their own making is not foreign to ancient literature. The conjunction is especially pronounced in the second of two versions of a Hittite (actually Hattian) myth in which the Storm God (Taru, among other names) struggles against the "dragon" Iluyanka (Hoffner 1998: 13; Beckman 1982, 1997). At one point, the Storm God loses heart and eyes (literally) to Iluyanka. Nonetheless he sires a human son who,

Symbiosis

Over time, biblical historiographers have made it their specialty to give the Hebrew God noble characteristics, among them exceptionality, exclusivity, transcendence, eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, immanence, and immutability. Yet they were not beyond spicing up their portrait with more intriguing attributes, such as inscrutability, opacity, volatility, and capriciousness.[23] As well, they have created heroes (especially in the book of *Judges*) who, despite grandeur and dignity, could display bottomless shortcomings. In their writings, the relationship between God and an elect is always symbiotic and most often leads to shared objectives. In the Samson tales, however, the goals merge, but the results remain distinct: For Samson, the trajectory was cartoonish – a romp in which besting and killing Philistines was a never-ending delight. It was fitting, therefore, that a narrator (better: a redactor) would set a notice on Samson's judgeship precisely here (at 15:20) as capsule on this phase of Samson's picaresque life.

For God, however, the object was pedagogic – a lesson taught to Philistines (if not also Hebrews) that confirms a credo that is affirmed elsewhere "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there are no (other) gods" (Isaiah 44:6). Nonetheless, I imagine that as he uttered his last words (16:30), Samson did achieve introspection, recognizing his role in a grander cosmological scheme. I would therefore embrace Pseudo-Philo's poignant reshaping of his final sentiments "Go forth, my soul, and do not be sad; die, my body, and do not weep about yourself" (*LAB* 43.7–8; see Harrington: 1985: 357); sentiments that will echo in another Testament (John 12:27).

As kin buried a fallen champion, the narrator (better: the redactor) celebrated this significant phase of Samson's life with yet another abstract about his judgeship (at 16:31). These two seemingly redundant notices formed perfect caesurae for two goals, separate yet jointly achieved.

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on marrying the daughter of the dragon, demands these organs as a bride-price. Once anatomically (hence also vigorously) restored, Taru defeats Iluyanka; but his son pays with his life for abusing his kinship privilege.

[23] Many of these oddities are charted in Crenshaw 1971.

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