Samson - A Tragic Tale Of Aborted Destiny

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Samson – A Tragic Tale of Aborted Destiny

Christian Philosopher and apologist J. P. Moreland suggests that all humans have within us a divinely given hunger for what he calls, "Kingdom Drama."

> It doesn't really matter who you are or what you believe. You love drama. In fact, you hunger for it. God made you — yes, you — to lead a dramatic life.... From romance novels to Harrison Ford movies to athletic events to tense moments on the evening news, people love to experience drama, even if only vicariously....
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> I suspect you have had this same longing for drama, faint though its realization may seem when your life appears boring and you feel trapped. Many of us have seen a good movie, finished a great novel, or left an invigorating sporting event, only to return to a life we may consider drab compared to the supposed drama we have just experienced vicariously. It is precisely this convergence of two factors — a persistent hunger for drama and a feeling of boredom with our own lives — that creates an addiction to dramatic stories, media-driven celebrities, sports, or other vicarious substitutes for our own authentic drama. This tells us two things: We were made for greatness, but there is something about our culture that undermines both its intelligibility and achievement....
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> This is what people hunger for whether they know it or not. We were created for drama, we were meant to live dramatic lives. Followers of Jesus understand that they have a dramatic calling that makes the presence or absence of a fleeting amount of pleasurable satisfaction irrelevant compared to the thick happiness offered by their precious Lord.

We are to be dramatic even in the "little" things that grace the daily routines of our "ordinary" lives. As part of a pursuit of classical happiness, "little" things and "ordinary" activities quickly become big and extraordinary! No wonder people who are preoccupied with pleasurable happiness become empty selves! Their vision is too small, too confining, too mundane to justify their three score and ten years, too little to demand their best efforts over the long haul! No wonder people would rather spend themselves for an important cause — specifically, the cause of Christ and leading a life well lived — than enjoy a pampered idleness. No wonder the primary problem of contemporary culture is boredom! A central part of the church's educational program, including its pulpit ministry, is to constantly present a vision of life in the Kingdom of God that is so rich and real that people want to give themselves away for it and in light of which the empty self is seen and felt to be the trivial fraud that it really is.
- Moreland, J. P.. Kingdom Triangle (p. 146). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

The truth is, we are all made to hunger for this kingdom drama. But not all of us experience it. It is the destiny of every child of God, but it is a destiny from which we can find ourselves distracted. Samson's story is a story of someone distracted from this destiny.

13:1-25 – Samson is a Miracle Baby with a Mission

4 Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, 5 for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:4-5)

The angel tells Manoah's wife that Samson will be a Nazarite set apart to God for a special purpose from the womb. The vow had three parts;

2 "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord,3 he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. 4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins. (Num. 6:2-4)

Taking the vow signaled that one was going to serve a special purpose. In this case, Samson has a unique destiny chosen by God. Israel is under Philistine oppression, the longest period of such oppression yet (13:1), and God has raised up Samson to rescue them from this.

Manoah's wife seems not to repeat this element of Samson's calling to her husband (13:6-7), and so Manoah ends up ignorant of Samson's calling in life (13:12). Samson too seems never to have grasped his unique identity. He never understood his calling, and never lived out his destiny.

But he is born with the special powers to fullfil it. (13:24-25)

24 And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lordblessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the Lordbegan to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

14:1-3 – Samson finds a Philistine Woman

Samson shows total disgregard for God's law, and for God's purpose for them. He is supposed to start a war with the Philistines, and instead he cozies up to them and marries one. Nonetheless, despite his sin, God is still at work, and still in charge, and ultimately is still in control (14:4)

4 His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

14:5-6 – Samson kills a lion

14:8-9 – Samson chooses his sweet tooth over his destiny

14:10-18 – Samson loses a bet, and abuses his power to pay it off

15:1-20 – Samson seeks revenge because he had a wedding with no honeymoon

15:1-8 – Samson lights Foxes on Fire

15:9-13 – A Good army put to waste

15:14-20 – A vengeful battle at jawbone hill

16:1-3 – Samson chooses a prostitute over his destiny

He moves the gates as a bitter prank, instead of using his power to wage a holy war! The gates would have weighed at minimum 5,350 pounds. He moved them some 40 miles.

16:4-22 – Falling for Delilah - Again and Again

After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 5 And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." 6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."

7 Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9 Now she had men lying in ambush

in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

10 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound." 11 And he said to her, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 12 So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

13 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 14 So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.

15 And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies." 16 And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. 17 And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."

18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. 19 She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. 20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. 21 And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. 22 But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.
- The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jdg 16:4–22.

The men offer Delilah an astronomical figure.

> If ten shekels was the average annual wage (cf. Judg. 17:10), then 5500 shekels was 550 times this figure. If we assume for illustrative purposes that the annual average wage today is $25,000, then 5500 shekels would be equivalent to fifteen million dollars in modern currency.

And she tries again and again to entrap Samson. He is so spiritually dull, and so captivated by his sexual appetites, that he doesn't even recognize what is happening. And so eventually he falls, and is imprisoned.

16:23-31 – A tragic end and an aborted destiny

Samson is put in prison and used for sport. But his hair has regrown, and he prays a vengeful prayer which God is gracious to answer, and so finds his supernatural strength again. His life is not nothing; but it is far less than it should have and could have been.

Samson ends up accomplishing only a *fraction* of what God had planned for him. When we read the statement,

So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. (16:30)

This is a statement of a wasted life.

> In a concluding note the narrator acknowledges the significance of this act: in his death Samson killed more Philistines than he had slain in his life. In popular circles at least this statement is generally interpreted as a vindication of Samson. While he may have wasted his life, in the end he does indeed begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. But the narrator's comment should not be interpreted as a compliment. This is a tragic note. This man, with his unprecedentedly high calling and with his extraordinary divine gifts, has wasted his life. Indeed, he accomplishes more for God dead than alive. [2]
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> ...those who are called into divine service must focus their energies on the divine agenda rather than getting sidetracked into personal adventures. Samson offers the reader of Scripture the clearest example of "Thy kingdom come" being supplanted and displaced by "My kingdom come." He also reminds us that the temptation may be the greatest to those who are most gifted. The extraordinary physical prowess and power of this man have become proverbial. Unfortunately, like many contemporary divinely called leaders, Samson wasted his life playing with the gifts God had given him and indulging in every sensual adventure he desired. Even in the aftermath of victory he thought only of his own thirst. There was no thought for the implications of his actions for Yahweh's agenda or the fortunes of Israel. It is not surprising then that he ends up one more example of fallen and failed leaders with whom the path of human history is strewn.[1]

Samson is Us

Webb explains;

> Samson was a holy man; Israel was a holy nation. Samson went after other women; Israel went after other gods. In his extremity Samson called out to God to save him (16:28). In its extremity Israel too cried out to Yahweh, as we have seen again and again in Judges. Samson was finally handed over to his enemies and taken down to exile in Gaza. Israel was handed over to the Babylonians and taken away in exile to Babylon. Both outcomes were tragic, and both could have been avoided if other choices had been made.
>
> Samson's story is Israel's story. But it is also our story, and his tragedy may be ours too if we resist God's call as he did. We too are holy people, or "saints" in the proper Biblical sense of that term (1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:1, 2; 14:33; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2). In the words of the Apostle Peter we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Incredible though it may sound, it's God's intention to take the fight to the enemy through us, reveal his glory to the world through us, and expose its gods for the hollow shams they are. The question for us is, will we embrace that? Will we run with it and find our whole joy and reason for living in being what God has called us to be? Or will we be reluctant saints, as Samson was, always looking over our shoulder and wishing we could be as other people? Will we, too, be led by our eyes and the covetousness of our hearts? Will we serve God because we must or because we love him? And how will it be ten years from now, or twenty, when we've fought many battles and know there are still harder ones ahead? Will we want out, as Samson did? Or will the call of God to be his saints and servants still captivate our hearts, still fill us with a sense of wonder and privilege, and nerve us to continue as his faithful servants to the end?

The fact is, we are called to be saints. That is the word that has been spoken over us. It was settled by God's own decree, not just before we were born, but in eternity: "he chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy" (Ephesians 1:4). It's not fundamentally our choice, but God's. And we're in this for life. There's no early discharge. It won't be over until we cross the finishing line and stand on the victory dais. And we are not in this alone. Many have gone before us, including Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Deborah, Mary, Peter, John, Paul, and James, and since then a host of others—Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and the many pioneers and martyrs, both men and women, of the modern missionary movement. And above all, Jesus himself has gone before us, "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34), "the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). It was not easy for Jesus to be a saint; nor will it be easy for us. And we cannot match the perfection of his unblemished obedience to God. But we can look to him, follow him, and find our joy, as he did, in what God has called us to be and do. God has chosen us to be saints. We are not as other people, and we will not in the end find true joy in wishing to be.

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[1]Daniel Isaac Block, Judges, Ruth, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 471.

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