

## **“I WILL BE AS WEAK AS ANY OTHER MAN:**

### **The Theological Significance of Judges 16:7, 11, 13, and 17**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The story of Samson’s dalliance with Delilah, Judges 16:4-22, is a masterfully composed passage combining dramatic narrative and powerful theological structures. The dialogue between Samson and Delilah is repetitive and features a unique phrase; “I will be as weak as any other man”. On the surface, this explanation to Delilah seems to be Samson separating himself from ordinary men and seeing them all as group of weaklings. To be sure, Samson was aware of his own surpassing power. But, he was also aware of different levels of strength and levels of prowess among other men. He engaged many men throughout his life, from soldier to shepherd and knew well that all men could not be described with such a sweeping statement about their weakness. To attribute such a simplistic and arrogant intention to Samson is not to understand the full context and meaning of his words. We contend that this characterization was not an insult to the men of the region, but was a reference to that which set him apart; the strength which came from his consecration to YHWH.

#### **THE NARRATIVE CONTEXT**

Judges 16:4-22 presents the story of Samson’s love for Delilah, her betrayal, his lost consecration and capture by the Philistines. The story begins with an indeterminate description of time after the incident with the gates of Gaza (Judges 16:1-3). For the first time in the narratives, we read that Samson fell in love. The Philistine governors found out about Samson’s relationship with her and bribed her to betray him. The governors asked her to “beguile Samson”, which has connotations of “fool”,

“deceive”, “persuade”, or “seduce”.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Delilah was to use any means necessary to pull out of him the secret of his strength. Scholars have argued that the Philistines engaged in a superstitious religion with a reliance on idols, stationary and portable, so would have little idea of such strength being bound to a consecration.<sup>2</sup> J.D. Crossan comments that the Philistines felt that his strength was the result of some sort of magical charm, amulet, or talisman and once this object was removed or stolen Samson could be conquered.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the Philistines had good reason to indulge the repetition, as they thought it was only a matter of finding something that was hidden.

Three times Delilah asks Samson for the secret of his strength. With each false response, her reactions became more desperate and angry. Here is where the historical context blends well with the literary context. Three unsuccessful attempts were followed by the successful attempt. Scholars have pointed to this as dramatic narrative at its best; with each attempt the intensity increases.<sup>4</sup> By using the 3/1 presentation, the compiler is tying the narrative into Hebrew theology, as the number three was seen as one of the perfect numbers which designated a form of completeness. Therefore, after the third attempt, which comes dangerously close to the truth, the audience is ready for a shift in narrative and the plot to move ahead.

Admittedly, the stories are highly repetitious. Often such repetition is seen as a hallmark of traditional storytelling. However, these three accounts should not be understood as simply variants of the same story. We contend that each story of the failed attempts originated from a different source and was edited into the uniformity which we read today.

Judges 16:6-9 narrates the “bowstring” attempt. The Hebrew term that we render “bowstring” is the subject of debate among scholars. Some translations render the meaning “withes”, meaning some form of moist vine-like plant. Others suggest a meaning of sinew. We suggest that the

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<sup>1</sup> W. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 300.

<sup>2</sup> E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971). 131.

<sup>3</sup> J.D. Crossan, “Judges”, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* 2 vols (Englewood cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 160.

<sup>4</sup> D.L. Larson, *Telling the Old, Old, Story* (Grand Rapids; Kregge, 1995) 105.

textual evidence suggests “bowstrings”. McKenzie seems to strike the reconciliation between the differing positions. He points out that bowstrings were made of “linen cord or sinew”.<sup>5</sup> We would suggest that Delilah bound him, with men lying in wait in the chambers, with bowstrings for two reasons. First, this same term was used to denote bowstring in Psalm 11:2. Second, the text clearly states that the Philistine governors brought her the tying implements, suggesting that these were not readily available to her and that these were a warrior’s weapon. The source of the details may have come from the Philistines themselves and through David. He must have been exposed to the memories of Samson during his sojourns among the Philistines (1 Samuel 21: 11-16, 27: 1-12). The image of “new” should be understood as moist or fresh, as dry sinew or bowstrings were useless and would break easily. It is also a literary device to increase the drama and showcase his surpassing power.

The image of new ropes derives from a different source. While ropes of all types were common, based on the Hebrew, Delilah seemed to have used some form of woven cords or bands to tie Samson. This specific term serves to highlight the strength of Samson, as woven material is much stronger than isolated material. The depiction of the ropes being “new” adds to the drama of Samson’s strength, as new ropes were untested and not weakened by wear or weather. Again, Delilah has men lying in wait. The idea of “new” ropes is roughly synonymous with the still moist bowstrings; it depicts objects that have not been stressed in any way and are at their strongest. However, the term “new”, which also appears in Judges 15:13, seems to intensify the actions. J. Martin contends that this depiction is based on the ancient belief that new objects were sacred and, therefore, particularly effective.<sup>6</sup> These texts seem to have been edited with an eye toward the theology of actions.

The incident of weaving Samson’s into the loom seems to come from an independent source. Quite possibly, this story circulated through the upper aristocratic circles of the Philistines, as Delilah seems to have been

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<sup>5</sup> J. L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Chicago: Bruce, 1966) 103.

<sup>6</sup> J. Martin, *The Book of Judges*, ( NY: Cambridge, 1975) 172.

“known” to the leaders. David, quite likely would have heard this comical tale during his sojourns. Significantly, there were no men lying in wait this time. This speaks to how the Philistines were not looking to something as his hair for the secret of his strength. Narratively, it should be noted that the source of drama has now changed. Instead of the strength of the binding objects creating the drama of his show of power, the tension derives from the proximity to the truth of his consecrated hair this response comes.

The exchanges between Samson and Delilah are often read as the games played between lovers and, if read as such, would offer little historical credibility and relegated to romantic narratives. However, we suggest that these events were known among the Philistines and that David, with Abiathar, had access to them. Abiathar was the Priest who allied with David after Saul killed his family (1 Samuel 22). David, in his conflict with Saul, spent time among the Philistines (1 Samuel 21: 11-16 and 1 Samuel 27). David would have been exposed to many memories of Samson while among the Philistines. B.N. Peterson, following the scholars that suggest the book of Judges was originally compiled under David, argues that Abiathar “would have had ample opportunity to gain important ‘history’ from those who travelled in David’s inner circle. . . It is reasonable to conceive that soldiers sitting around a campfire would have recounted the various legends of their tribal heroes/Judges”.<sup>7</sup> Abiathar seems to be the most likely person who oversaw the compilation of the book of Judges and, particularly the Samson narratives. To weave together these different traditions and memories in a coherent narrative would require literacy; it is unlikely that such a complex narrative construct would have developed only from the oral traditions of the tribes and other sources. Moreover, Peterson argues that the “Priestly community has long been recognized as a literate class of society in Israel as well as in the Ancient Near East”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we contend that the narrative construct of Judges 16: 4-22 combines tribal

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<sup>7</sup> B.N. Peterson, *The Authors of the Deuteronomistic History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014) 190.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

memories, theological elements, and historical traditions and was compiled by the Davidic Scribes under the supervision of Abiathar.

## THE HEBREW CONSTRUCTION

The Hebrew phrase used by Samson breaks into two parts: “And then I shall be weak and be as another man”. It should be noted that not all ancient manuscripts contain this statement of Samson in Judges 16:13. However, most modern translations favor following the LXX which includes the two part comment. We will follow the weight of scholarship, as the Hebrew text of Judges 16:13 ends abruptly in way that is inconsistent with the rest of the narrative and seems to be simply an omission that resulted from an editorial oversight. In other words, it seems unlikely that the storytellers in the oral stage or the Davidic scribes would purposely omit this recurring comment when the dramatic tension in this critical passage is moving toward its climax.

### “Then I shall be weak”

The Hebrew term for weak comes from the root, *ḥālâ* (חלה). The term is usually associated with sickness, as weakness is the result of being sick. The use of this term in the Samson narrative is unique, as there is no distinction made between sickness and weakness. Therefore, C.P. Weber argues that “sickness cannot be involved” because of the second clause which refers to “another man”.<sup>9</sup> Weber is correct if we condense the two clauses, as many translations render the phrase. But, if we take a more literal reading of the couplet of clauses another understanding emerges. Samson’s words seem to indicate a sudden change in that he will be or become weak. It might indicate something extrinsic or external to him had to change. Samson, and the reader, knows that it is the consecration that is symbolized in his hair. As we saw, Crossan argued that the Philistines were looking for a charm or amulet of some sort; something that was easily taken from Samson. E. Hindson points out that, as part of the superstitions

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<sup>9</sup> C.P.Weber, “to become sick...”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2 vols (Chicago, Moody 1980) 286.

of battle, the Philistines carried small and portable idols and amulets into battle. This was done in the belief that this would win the god's favor and secure victory. It was believed that that the strongest, smartest, and most benevolent gods always won in battle. Such a practice was Aegean in nature.<sup>10</sup> The Philistines originated in the Aegean area and brought many of their cultural characteristics and beliefs with them to Canaan and Israel. Therefore, they would have felt that the loss of such an idol would result in an immediate loss of strength and favor of Samson's God. This loss of an idol would be the external change that was needed to make his capture possible. Furthermore, because they were imposing their cultural beliefs on Samson it is perfectly plausible that they were lying in wait in the chamber. The image of them lying in wait does not produce an anomaly of the soldiers watching the interplay between the romantic partners, but depicts men waiting for the opportune time to attack their enemy.

We can only conjecture, but it is possible that the bowstrings, acting as an amulet that takes away his strength, may have had a superstitious or religious significance to the Philistine warriors. Delilah, either being a Hebrew or living amongst them in the Wadi Sorek, would know the significance of "7" as a sacred number. Therefore, both parties involved in this betrayal attached significance to Samson's words and would act upon them.

The ropes, in the second attempt, would be acting in a way similar to the bowstrings in the superstitious religious view of the Philistines. The Philistines and Delilah may have respected the concept of "new" having sacred qualities. Again, in light of these superstitions, it is quite plausible that they would lie in wait. We must note that a reference to "7" does not occur in this passage. This supports our earlier suggestion that the response of the ropes seems to have originated or developed from a different source. It seems that the concept of "7", prominent in the rest of the responses is supplanted by the cultural significance of something being "new". It might be a more profane account of Samson's response, one that

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<sup>10</sup> E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971) 32.

was widely known and popular, prompting the Davidic scribes to leave it untouched.

Samson use of “weak” is somewhat peculiar; F. Stolz points out that this root has “no direct counterparts in the other Semitic languages”. In the Biblical occurrences, it almost always refers to some bodily weakness. It can also connote emotional suffering. With Samson, it seems to refer to “weakness at the normal human state in comparison to the strength of the charismatic Samson [emphasis, mine]”.<sup>11</sup> Stolz is making an observation that points us to the true meaning of Samson’s recurring phrase. As the narratives tell us, Samson engaged the Philistines only as a charismatic warrior, one on whom the YHWH Spirit descends and acts out against the enemies of Israel. The Philistines are only interested in defeating this, seemingly, invincible warrior of the God of Israel. They are searching for a way to end the Divine favor given to him, either by taking something or imposing something, that will allow him to be defeated. His hair has not yet been understood as a key to his invincible power.

### **The Loom**

As noted above, the context and elements of this account shift. The focus is now on his hair and there are no men lying in wait, which seems to support our proposal that they have yet to understand his hair as a key to his defeat. Delilah acts upon his instructions, seemingly understanding to an extent the importance of hair in the Ancient Near East. G. Cooke, an early Biblical scholar, argued that the aspect of long hair is very primitive and based on the belief that the hair is an extension of a man’s self. If uncut, a man’s strength is undiminished and he is viewed as being intact.<sup>12</sup> Recently, L. Jones argued that “in the ancient world, hair and beards were highly significant and were surrounded with rituals and symbolic undertones”. The men of the elite classes grew their hair long and full. The warrior elite carefully groomed their hair to “represent strength and virility.” They were careful to dress and arrange their hair, “symbolically taming and civilizing it”. Excessive or wild hair was the sign of the

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<sup>11</sup> F. Stolz, “to be sick”, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* 3 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997) 1:425-426.

<sup>12</sup> G. Cooke, *The Book of Judges* (Cambridge: University Press, 1918) 133.

barbarian.<sup>13</sup> Delilah saw the seven braids of Samson's hair and recognized that this was not just a lone barbarian renegade. However, she could not convince the Philistines because, if Jones is correct, the Philistines would not view this Danite peasant on an elite level and, therefore, would not attribute any meaning to his hair. The demi-gods Gilgamesh and Herakles have been associated with long hair and they were certainly familiar to the Philistines. Samson was not seen as Divine or the son of any deity. His braids, if they knew of them before, would be seen as an anomaly. When Samson tore out her loom, Delilah reacts in frustration as she thought this was the truth.

## **THE SECRET REVEALED**

In his first three responses, Samson gives small pieces and slight hints regarding the source of his invincible power. He mixes religious elements, such as the number "7" and "newness", with profane elements such as ropes and the common loom. The mention of hair was only partially understood by Delilah and seen as folly by the Philistines. This admixture of elements kept his secret safe, prolonged his time with Delilah, and confused the Philistines.

However, in his final response he combines the pieces of the puzzle as he presents the "secret" in the correct way. He explains his strength in terms all of the interested parties could understand and, in doing this, Samson seems to combine his charisma and his Naziricy in a most unique way.

### **"He told her all his heart"**

With this third response, many translations read that Samson "took her into his confidence". Whereas this is a fair interpretation, it does not convey the dynamics which transpired between Samson and Delilah. In the Hebrew text, the term for "heart" occurs in verse 15, 17, and twice in 18. J.L. McKenzie comments that, to the Hebrews, the heart was the "chief bodily

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<sup>13</sup> L. Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2013) 58. While his focus is on a later period than Samson's time, his argument depicts the ANE concept of hair that predated the Persians and Samson.

focus of emotional activity . . . heart is used in the Bible where in English we should use mind or will . . . wisdom, discernment, and knowledge are seated in the heart”.<sup>14</sup> G.F. Moore argues that this information was all that Samson knew of his special strength and we would add that, according to Judges 13:2-5, this was the all the information that could have been known by Samson.<sup>15</sup>

J. Walton has argues that “it is a common tradition in the Ancient Near East for the heart to be the seat of intellect (Proverbs 14:33)”. It was also seen as the “source of stability for one who would adhere to a just and wise life (1 Kings 3:5-9).<sup>16</sup> H. Ringgren describes the heart as “above all the seat of intellect, the will, emotions, as well of abilities and virtues . . . [and] stands in contrast to hypocritical speech and actions”.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, although the text does say that he loved her (Judges 16:4), this is not describing a profession of romantic love by Samson to Delilah. He was about to give her the facts of strength, *as he knew them*, the games played between the lovers were over. More importantly, this clause indicates that in the exchanges with Delilah this was not a tale of romance patterned after many mythological accounts in the Ancient Near East. The knowledge which Samson presents gives us a glimpse of the history of the development of the Nazirite.

## **A Nazirite**

That Samson only mentions his hair seems to be because this was the only restriction that he knew or was imposed upon him before his birth (Judges 13:3-5). The Hebrew term, *nzr*, has the basic meaning of “separate”. The reference to a person, a Nazirite, is a specialized occurrence defining a person as one who lives under a “special vow” as an act of devotion to YHWH. Therefore, “Samson was a Nazirite to God, i.e. one who was

<sup>14</sup> McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 344.

<sup>15</sup> G.F. Moore, *Judges*, (NY: Scribner’s, 1903) 355.

<sup>16</sup> J.Walton, V. Matthews M. Chavalis., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove : IVP, 2000) 562.

<sup>17</sup> H. Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,2004) 376.

separated because of the votive restriction placed on him”.<sup>18</sup> J. Kühlewein comments that term originally referred to “something removed from everyday life, elevated above the customary and set aside for something special, dedicated.”<sup>19</sup> Samson was born to a special mission, to begin the liberation of Israel from Philistine power. This suggests that Samson represented an early, warrior, form of the ascetic Nazirites whose laws are found in Numbers 6. That Samson was a warrior finds support in the scholarly argument, typified by C. Schedl and W. Eichrodt, that “the origins of the Naziricy are perhaps to be sought in the concept of sacred war, in which certain individuals dedicated themselves by a vow, which was extremely recognizable in their flowing hair, to wage an unconditional war against the enemies of YHWH”.<sup>20</sup> Admittedly, there is a lack of examples on which to base an argument. From what scholarship has been able to gather, the early Nazirites and the “holy warriors” were either one in the same or were closely related. These warriors were sanctified, placed in a state of holiness to conduct holy activity. This period of sanctification most likely included sexual abstinence (1 Samuel 21:6, 2 Samuel 11:4).<sup>21</sup> Based on the theologies surrounding hair, it seems likely that keeping their uncut was also part of the sanctification process. These warriors, typically, dedicated themselves. Samson was dedicated and his hair seems to have been a symbol of perpetual readiness, sanctification, for war. Charismatic leaders were different; they were endowed with the YHWH Spirit and, by virtue of the Spirit, would rise to leadership. In Samson, these two types of leadership were fused together.

### **The Charismatic Leader**

The term “Charismatic Leadership” was popularized by the Sociologist, Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber saw a distinct pattern of authority in ancient Israel and presented a detailed discussion of his observations.

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<sup>18</sup> L. Coppes “separate”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2 vols (Chicago, Moody 1980) 2:568..

<sup>19</sup> J. Kühlewein, “consecrated person”, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* 3 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson ,1997) 2:727.

<sup>20</sup> C. Schedl, *History of the Old Testament* 5 vols (NY: Alba House, 1972) 3:11. Cf. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:200, M. Noth, *History of Israel* 93.

<sup>21</sup> McKenzie, *Dictionary*,919. Cf. Rad, von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 67.

These comments have been foundational to charismatic and Samson studies in the field of Biblical research. He defines “charisma”;

“[A] certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of Divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader”.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike many forms of leadership, charisma entails a form of acceptance from the people who are to be led. Weber points out that much of the validity of charisma rests on the “recognition on the part of those subject to the authority” and this recognition is, usually, decisive. The recognized validity is guaranteed by some “sign or proof”. We would suggest that Samson’s hair was the visible, constant, proof of his charisma while his strength was the manifestation of his charisma. In addition, a basis of legitimacy of this type of leadership lies in the “conception that it is the duty of those who have been called to a charismatic mission to recognize its quality and to act accordingly”. There is often a type of momentum that fuels the acceptance of the leader as the popular recognition usually arises “out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope”.<sup>23</sup>

Weber’s theories resonate powerfully in regard to the Samson narratives. Weber argues that if the proof of the charisma fails the leader for long, the leader will think that his power, or God, has left him. In Judges 16: 7, 11, 13, and 17 Samson tells Delilah that he will be as weak as any other man if she follows his instructions about binding him. The last answer to her question was the truth. In 16:20, we read that he did not realize that “the Lord had left him”. Once he realized that the proof of his charisma was gone, his capture was immediate. In 16:22, we read a comment, seemingly from the editor, that his hair began to grow as soon as it was cut. Many scholars have interpreted this comment as a literary device to keep hope alive in the audience. We would add that it was kept in the narratives to

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<sup>22</sup> M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. (NY: Oxford University Press, reprint, 1947) 358-359.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

show that the symbol of his consecration was returning and his charisma will be regained. We would suggest that these texts, possibly originating with Samson himself, blur the distinction of naziricy and charisma. Essentially, his hair became the physical symbol of his charisma. Weber continues that if the leadership fails to benefit the followers, the authority will erode.<sup>24</sup> This might also be applied to Gideon's son, Abimelech (Judges 9).

Weber views charismatic authority as extraordinary powers that were not allowed nor were accessible to every person. He argues for two categories; a gift from natural endowments, that could not be acquired, and a type that was produced by "extraordinary means". In the latter, the assumed powers were developed from the "germ which already existed" which would remain "dormant unless evoked".<sup>25</sup> Weber's characterization might suggest that Samson embodied both types of Charismatic Leader; as the narratives suggest, Samson was a man of huge proportions or natural endowments and bestowals of the YHWH Spirit (Judges 13:25, 14:6, 19, and 15:14) suggest the "extraordinary means" which aroused the "dormant germ" within him.

J.L. McKenzie offers a powerful summary of "Charismatic Leaders". The "charisma" was the bestowal of the YHWH Spirit. He writes;

"The spirit of YHWH is a charismatic spirit when imparted to those who an office in Israel. . . The spirit not only confers upon those who receive it the qualities necessary to fulfill their mission, but also inspires them to deeds above and beyond the expected and their normal habits and powers; and this is true sign of the spirit , that a man rises above his habits and attainments."<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, in light of the theology described by Weber and McKenzie and following the words and actions of Samson, the narratives are forging together the Charisma to the Naziritic warrior, in a singular way. Hair is not

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 360

<sup>25</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth/c. Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 400

<sup>26</sup> McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 841.

readily associated with the Charisma, but with Naziricy. Yet, in Samson the hair became the physical symbol of his Nazirite status. In this coupling, Samson had culminated the theological entities of the Holy Warrior and Charismatic Leader. With the advent of the Kingship came a standing army, with little need of the lone warriors. With the Davidic Kingship, the Charisma became “routinized”. Weber pointed to a phenomenon in which the Charisma, or some such hallmark of leadership, would take on the character of a “permanent relationship forming a stable community. . .or organization”. The character of leadership becomes “radically changed” and remains in its pure form only in the original stages of the leadership.<sup>27</sup> In Israel, the irruptive nature of the Charisma remained throughout the Judges, Saul, and the Davidic Kingship. However, with Solomon dynastic succession and not charisma became the hallmark of kingly authority. The Davidic Kingship remained “charismatic” because it was established by David, but the actual charisma became part of the trappings of the kingly office; routinized.

### **“Seven Braids”**

While men and heroes of renown were known for their long hair, usually in four or six braids or curls, we contend that Samson’s long hair sets him apart from these figures of antiquity. Samson’s hair was contained in seven braids, or locks (Judges 16: 13, 14, 18). Some have tried to construct the argument that the image of “seven” is just the editors trying to make Samson more palatable to the Yahwistic theology; it was a reworking of the mythologies that were common in the region. However, we contend that Samson was an authentic Danite and Israelite leader, whose authority was validated by strength, and his seven braids of hair reveal a powerful sense of mission.

The Hebrew term for “seven” is שבע. This identical consonantal root serves for both the cardinal number, “seven” and “to swear [an oath]”. To swear an oath “was to give one’s sacred and unbreakable word in testimony that the one swearing would faithfully perform some promised deed, or that he would faithfully refrain from some evil act. . . Occasionally one swore that

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<sup>27</sup> Weber, *Theory*, 364.

he freely acknowledged a truth and would continue to acknowledge it in the future”.<sup>28</sup>

C.A. Keller points out that in most cases, the act of swearing “never confirmed an existing circumstance with an oath but assumed a future obligation” and “often seems to mean only ‘to promise’”. While this act may be part of an oath-formula, its basic meaning refers to a “solemn, irrevocable promise, the obligation to do or not to do something no matter the circumstance”. In this context, YHWH is the guardian or guarantor of Samson’s obligations. The term connotes an “irrevocable, total obligation with inescapable consequences in the event of nonfulfillment”.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the circumstances around Samson’s hair being cut do not matter, as the conditions of his consecration were now broken or unfulfilled.

Scholars have often commented on an “oath-formula” in connection with the number “seven”. McKenzie states that there is great significance attached to the number through the entire Ancient Near East; Biblically, “it means totality, fullness, completeness”.<sup>30</sup> McKenzie points out that there are two Hebrew terms for “oath”, שבע and אלה; the former, associated with the number “seven” means to swear an oath, the latter means to curse. The oath formula that is often alluded to by scholars, “probably alludes to rite of swearing which does not appear in the OT”.<sup>31</sup> We propose that Samson’s seven braids of hair is only known evidence of this formula. Gesenius’ Lexicon gives a prolonged treatment of this root and contends that “to swear” and the number should be combined. The prefatory comment reads, “since seven was a sacred number and oaths were confirmed either by seven victims offered in sacrifice. . . or by seven witnesses or pledges”.<sup>32</sup> Gesenius offers foundational support for McKenzie’s conjecture. Furthermore, if Gesenius is correct we can argue

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<sup>28</sup> V. Hamilton, “swear”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2 vols (Chicago, Moody 1980) 2: 901.

<sup>29</sup> C.A. Keller, “to swear”, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* 3 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997) 3:1295-1296. It must be noted that Keller admits that some scholars doubt the connection between the oath and the cardinal number. We accept the connection, as the weight of scholarship still seems to affirm the connection.

<sup>30</sup> McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 794.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 623.

<sup>32</sup> W. Gesenius, “to swear”, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885) 1030.

that Samson's seven braids were indeed evidence of this formula. Theologically, the "seven braids" were not just for functional fighting with the enemy or a common motif of Ancient Near Eastern mythologies adjusted to Yahwistic principle. Rather, the braids can be seen as the pledges or witnesses to which Gesenius refers.<sup>33</sup> Such marks of the oath further strengthen the connection between naziricy and charisma which appears in the words of Samson.

### **"My Strength Will Leave Me"**

Significantly, only in this last response does Samson preface his instructions with "my strength will leave me". The Hebrew root for "strength" seems to be נכח, with a basic meaning of "capacity to act" in both figurative and physical terms. It can connote a "capacity to endure", but usually "potency, capacity to produce . . . physical strength".<sup>34</sup> A.S van der Woude points out that it is the "human capacity" produce and reproduce, along with physical power. The term occurs in the Psalter predominantly in isolated individual laments with reference to dissipated human might that occasions the pious to pray for God's assistance".<sup>35</sup>

The use of this term serves the narrative in a literary and theological way. Literarily, it creates a subtle wordplay with the description of Delilah's continual nagging Samson for the secret. The Hebrew literally reads, "his life was shortened to die". More figuratively, Samson was "deathly weary" or "exasperated to death" of the continual harping which Delilah was employing. Samson's words could, easily, be understood as meaning that he could endure no more of Delilah's admonishments. Theologically, Samson is telling her that he will lose the strength that gives him the capacity to carry out his mission; his campaigns against the Philistines. The Philistines set the circumstances in this scene; they only knew him as the warrior with long hair with no hint of a consecrated status. Once again,

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<sup>33</sup> To invoke non-animated entities as witnesses was not uncommon in the Old Testament. It was sometimes seen as part of *riv*, or indictment or lawsuit. A predominance of these occurrences appear in Prophetic literature cf. Isaiah 1:2)

<sup>34</sup> J. Oswalt, "strong", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2 vols (Chicago, Moody 1980) 1: 437.

<sup>35</sup> A.S. van der Woude, "power", *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* 3 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997) 2:611. If, as many commentators suggest, David was responsible for many of the Psalms, we might suggest that Samson provided a model for this type of lament.

we see Samson fusing together his Naziricy with his charismatic war against the Philistines. According to the birth account, the Naziritic status of Samson, and his uncut hair, was tied to his mission from before his birth. Yet, actual strength, power, and prowess are not directly mentioned. This is the first time in the narratives that his long hair is equated with his invincible strength and power. By joining his hair to his charisma, the actions of the YHWH Spirit, Samson is now removed from the social mythologies that were so pervasive in the Ancient Near East. Samson's hair and strength were now parts of the Yahwistic theology, an avenue through which YHWH interacts with His people, Israel. Essentially, Samson is making his hair the physical symbol of his consecrated status of being a Nazirite. Up until this point, any origin of the Spirit was mysterious; "neither its origin nor course can be discovered".<sup>36</sup> Samson is presenting his hair as the symbol of the YHWH Spirit. This is the closest thing to an origin or direction of the Spirit that was revealed to the early Israelites.

### **"Be As Another Man"**

The Hebrew phrase, often translated as "any other man", deserves special consideration. In the narratives, Samson does not use the same phrase in all the occurrences. In verses 7 and 11 the phrase כִּאֲחֵד הָאָדָם is used. The term, תַּנְא, is seen as a categorical description that entails connotations of unity or cohesion. H. Wolf points out that this term contains the notion of a "certain" individual that was chosen by YHWH as seen in Judges 13:2, with the reference to Manoah of the clan of Dan.<sup>37</sup> Used collectively, it can mean "as one man" or "all at once".<sup>38</sup> Not to overstate the point, but the theme of Israelite unity was a priority to David, under whom the first edition of Judges was written. As McKenzie comments;

"The history of early Israel and the history of the early monarchy were produced by the same school of writers. One may probably attribute this school to David himself. In uniting Israel and Judah in his monarchy he wished the traditions of the tribes to be fused into a

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<sup>36</sup> McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 842.

<sup>37</sup> The use of this phrase in both Judges 13 and 16 seems to suggest that these chapters were Danite memories of Samson, coupled with Judahite memories contained in Judges 14 and 15.

<sup>38</sup> H. Wolf, "one", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2 vols (Chicago, Moody 1980) 1:30.

single tradition which would identify **as one** the nation which he had created and merge its dangerous diversities”.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, based on the semantic field to which Wolf points and the theology to which McKenzie points, we will contend that the use of this term not only serves to bind chapters 13 and 16 but that Samson is further separated, by Divine commission, from the one special people of God, Israel. This was not a random choice of words, but they were chosen to support the Davidic Kingship. We cannot be certain if they were genuine to Samson but, possibly, these words were kept because of their agreement with the Davidic purposes. If, indeed, these words were placed in the mouth of Samson we would expect uniformity in all of his responses.

In Samson’s final response, Judges 16:17, the phrase reads, ככל האדם, which seems to read, literally, “like all men”. Lexically, the term for “all” is a categorical statement, it entails the concept of any entire group or the totality of a concept. The shift is subtle, but important. The sense of “all” in these words fits into the Davidic theology of history. It is under David that we begin to see a theme of unity that emerges in the writing of the book of Judges, as Israel is presented as acting in unison (Judges 20: 1, 2, 11 among others).<sup>40</sup> McKenzie points out that scholarship has recognized an “Israelite national epic” and has attributed its writing to David. The “epic” begins with the “primeval fall of man” and portrays YHWH as the “lord of history”. He moves on through the Abrahamic promises and the difficulties faced by the people of Israel. The “epic” allows the reader “to conclude that that monarchy of David is the fulfillment of the saving promise”. A chief concern is the “unity of Israel”.<sup>41</sup> The unique phrasing of this response, we contend, ties into this Davidic theology.

The Hebrew term connotes concepts such as “all”, “every” “any”, “whole”, or “none”. It is an expression of totality and, in a wider sense it can refer to “the whole of creation. . . [and] the idea of God’s lordship over all things”.<sup>42</sup> The term can also mean “totality”, in that if the reference is determined the

<sup>39</sup> McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 770. Italics, mine.

<sup>40</sup> Scholars often refer to this as the concept of “all Israel”.

<sup>41</sup> McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 656.

<sup>42</sup> J. Oswalt, “all”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2 vols (Chicago, Moody 1980) 1:441.

term should be rendered “whole” or “all”.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, Samson uses a general term for mankind and this construction may yield a rendering of “any, all sorts of”, similar to many modern translations.

However, we contend that this phrase refers to the “totality” of mankind, as distinct from himself, because he uses the article  $\text{--}\eta$ , not the word for “man” with no article attached. The word used, consistently, is *adam* not *‘ish*. Manoah was referred to as a “certain man” (*aḥad ‘ish*). Therefore, this phrase seems to have originated from a different source. It seems likely that this phrase originated from the Judahite, or Davidic writing. It is more consistent with the universal perspective the Davidic writing assumed. Lexically, it means men or humankind which bears the same categorical concept of “all”. However, it serves as more than just a couplet; Gesenius suggests that it means “other men” as opposed to “those in question”.<sup>44</sup> Following the lead of Gesenius, we contend that Samson’s comparison to another man, or men, is not suggesting that they are of low rank or esteem. L. Coppes, points out that the word needs to be distinguished from *‘ish*, which means the opposite of woman and a man “distinguished in his manliness”. The term, *‘adam*, seems to refer to man as separate from the rest of creation. While Samson’s words may not reflect the full theology of the Divine Image the foundations of this theology is seen. With the image of *‘adam* comes the idea that man determines “his destiny by volitional choice”. The term “may be defined, in summary, as the totality of man’s higher powers that distinguish him from brute creation”.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps, the most significant aspect of this complex theological statement is that Samson was separated from the part of creation, mankind, who governs his own destiny. Samson, from before birth, had little control of his destiny. He is now, by his truthful response to Delilah, is entering the rest of humanity that makes choices and must reap the benefits or suffer the consequences. Essentially, he is saying that if his separation to YHWH, his naziricy, is forsaken he will be subject to that

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<sup>43</sup> G. Sauer, “totality”, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* 3 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997) 2:615.

<sup>44</sup> Gesenius, 14.

<sup>45</sup> L. Coppes, “man”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2 vols (Chicago, Moody 1980) 1:10.

which all other men endure; the inherent weakness of the human condition. The physical symbol of separation is his hair.

Although there is a concentration of occurrences in Job, there is a connotation that “man”, *adam*, is “mortal, frail, and limited”.<sup>46</sup> Samson, by virtue of his consecration and charisma, was separated from this human condition. Once this separation is breached, he becomes as the rest; weak. Westermann, argues that the term “has its proper place in the primeval history. . . [that] ‘*adam* signifies humanity (in a collective sense) *before* and *beyond* any specification that begins in the names of the genealogies. . . the creation of humanity and the finitude of human existence in the narratives of guilt and punishment.”<sup>47</sup> Essentially, Samson is joining the failed and frail human race and giving up his special status of being set apart to God. He is allowing himself to now be subject to the guilt, punishments, and – in Keller’s words- the “inescapable consequences” of his actions. This term is consistent with the Davidic writing, particularly Abiathar, the Davidic Priest. Better than most, Abiathar would understand and be able to apply this theological concept, the full spectrum of the current meaning of the term and status, *nazir*, the charisma, and the universal perspective of the Davidic epic which he, most probably, oversaw. Abiathar, being a priest and among the literate classes, would understand the impact of Samson words here forming a counter to the earlier responses. As throughout the entire Samson narratives, the Davidic school will juxtapose the individual with the universal image. In Judges 13:1-2, we see this juxtaposition; beginning with the Philistine oppression moving to the focus on “a certain man”, Manoah. We see the personal exploits of Samson throughout Judges 14 and 15: 2 being joined to events of a national scope with Samson’s talk of vengeance upon the Philistines. Now we see Samson first comparing himself to the people chosen by YHWH followed by a comparison to fallen humanity. In these responses we see the comparison again; the panorama of humanity to individual man. The comparison mirrors that which is found in the narratives, and the overall Davidic epic.

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<sup>46</sup> C. Westermann, “person”, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* 3 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997) 1:33.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:34.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have maintained that Samson's responses to Delilah, at least two of which may be genuine to Samson himself, represent the powerful, Davidic theology, which permeated the Samson narratives and the book of Judges. While, undoubtedly, stylized by the editors in a 3+1 pattern they should not be relegated to lovers' games or local mythology. Rather, they seem to represent the two theological perspectives which David was attempting to unite in his kingship.

The first clause in all of the answers, "I shall become weak", speak to the theology of blending charisma with Naziricy. For the first time we see an actual mark of the charisma; Samson's words make his hair the physical symbol of the YHWH Spirit, whose origins and destination were heretofore unknown. Here is a visible symbol joined to the manifestation of the presence of the YHWH Spirit. But, it was symbol which could be lost and with it the special status that accompanied it.

The second clause contains a significant variant, usually not found in translations, that reflects the blending or merging of the two disparate theologies contained in the Samson narratives. In Judges 16: 7, 11, 13, we see a construction that was consistent with Danite traditions in which a focus was placed on the individual or individual groups' roles in Israelite history. The overall context of Judges 13-15:2 and 16 are intensely personal and individual. Whereas the events depicted in 15:3-15:20 are given a national scope and sharply focused on the Philistine threat; the breaking of which David used to portray the establishment of his throne (2 Samuel 5). It is only between the pillars of Dagon that the personal and national interests, manifesting the saving actions of YHWH for His people, converge. His last response reflects this national scope.

Samson is joining the weak human race and now is subject to its consequences and punishments. However, in his death he regains and rejoins the consecration and charisma which fused together and allowed him to begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines. In

Delilah's bedchamber he joins the two and between the pillars of Dagon he culminates the coupling.

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