The Final Prayer of Samson: Judges 16:28-30

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> *Then Samson called out to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus, he killed many more when he died than while he lived.*

Judges 16:28-30 (NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The last words of Samson, between the pillars of the temple of the Philistine god, Dagon, has been subject to much scholarly debate. There are several features about this extended prayer that demand attention. First, it is a prayer for vengeance. Samson does not present lofty aspirations or words that would look to a higher or theological goal. It is sometimes considered a savage prayer, a version of *lex talionis*.[1] However, we will argue that this prayer taps into an ancient theology that was prevalent among the nations existing during the "settlement" period of Israel, the lifetime of Samson. Second, as a cursory reading might suggest, the dying words only seem to address *his* concerns, from *his* personal perspective. We will argue that this is a common theme throughout the narratives (Judges 13-

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[1] This, roughly, translates to the "law of retaliation".

16) and that such a focused prayer is a self-sacrifice, subordinating himself to the mission given to him before his birth (Judges 13:5). Third, this is a unique prayer in that it invokes the three titles ascribed to YHWH by the Hebrews: YHWH, Adonai, and Elohim.

The underlying structure of the prayer is held together by the concept of "vengeance." This word is derived from the Hebrew root term, נקם. It takes the general meaning of "to avenge oneself." The *lex talonis*, requiring "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exodus 21:23-25), is widely understood as prohibiting disproportionate punishment. Still basic to this principle is that wrongs have to be avenged. Vengeance reflects a sense of justice in restoring the right. It was also a national function, as Israel retaliated against its neighbors. Samson kills three thousand Philistines for blinding him (Judges 16:27). God is the avenger of last resort in destroying the Egyptians as Israel's enemies (Exodus 15:1-18 ; Deuteronomy 32:35-36). Divine vengeance in the Old Testament is not to be understood as God's desire for self-gratification in exacting punishment, but as an expression of displeasure over all unrighteousness to restore the original balance (Joel 3:19-21).   Vengeance anticipated redemption, that which is found in the New Testament.[2]

The second underlying aspect of this prayer is the theology of a name.   J.L. McKenzie argues that the name contains a "mysterious identity with its bearer." The name of something or someone is meaningful, and it distinguishes the being. The name reveals something about its bearer. To know, or to give, a name is to establish a measure of control over the being. To invoke the Divine name is to invoke the Lord's reputation and

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[2] W. Elwell, Walter A. s.v "'Vengeance'". *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.* (Grand Rapids: Baker) 1997.

glory.[3] To invoke the glory of the Lord in a Philistine temple would incite, at least, contempt from the Philistines.

The Hebrew term for "name" is שם. No certain etymology has been established for this root. The argument put forth by W. R. Smith is preferred by some today. It argues that *Shem* derives from the Arabic root meaning "to mark or brand," hence an external mark to distinguish one thing or person from another. As indicated by McKenzie, and supported by others, the concept of personal names in the OT often included existence, character, and reputation (I Sam 25:25). Therefore, when Samson invoked the names of his God, he was calling upon the image of YHWH that was growing in the region and pitting it directly against the attributed power of the Philistine Dagon.

The name chosen for a child was often descriptive of the parent's wishes or expectations for the personality that was to mature. We see this in the name of "Samson", שמשון , which translates well as "power of the sun". The name is a compound name which combines the Hebrew   שמש, which means "sun" and און , which means generative power. The first letter of the second term, *aleph,* apocopates, or drops out, of the pronunciation because it is a weak sound. As the sun was an instrument of YHWH and did His will, so, too, did his parents see him in his mission against the Philistines.[4]

M. Rose has shown that the term, שם , is common to the semitic languages. It serves as a "distinguishing mark". Rose states that the "name represents something wholesome and salutary". The knowledge of the name opens up specific human dimensions for communication and for fellowship. The one who knows the name of a god or human can appeal to them. The knowledge of the name can thereby have effective power.[5]

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[3] J.L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible.* (Chicago: Bruce, 1965) 603-604.

[4] J. Roskoski, *The Spiritual Value of the Samson Narratives.* (Hayesville; AJBT, 2022) 23.

[5] M. Rose, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (NY: Doubleday 1992) 4:1002.

We propose that this prayer, including the last exclamatory request, depicts a self-contained theology. Theology is the "study" of God's intervention in the lives of His people. Samson is posturing and calling, in pure and elemental faith, for a dramatic and paradigm-shifting intervention of the power of God. By this faith, he seemed to transcend the Consecration, his rudimentary Nazirite status, and Charisma, experiences of the Spirit of the Lord, that so strikingly marked his life. The faith displayed by Samson, between the pillars, had an impact that long outlived the rubble of the collapsed temple. Moreover, this is not a randomly composed prayer of man facing certain death. We will maintain that there is a distinct correlation between the titles of God and the petitions offered by Samson.

Part 1: The Underlying Structure of the Prayer

In breaking down the construction of Samson's words, a distinct pattern emerges. He begins each clause with an appeal to the name of God which seems to correlate to the request offered. It seems that Samson is appealing to the various properties of God that are represented by the various appellations. The prayer is introduced in the text by the phrase, "Samson cried out to YHWH". Since the four-letter name is used, the Tetragrammaton, we can assume that this prayer was written under David. Many scholars, typified by McKenzie, associates the writing tradition known as "J", or Yahwist, with the Kingship of David. It has been argued that the first compilation of the book of Judges was done under David.

PRAYER

According to McKenzie, prayer was addressed to YHWH. The Lord was usually invoked as a living person. This gave prayer an anthropomorphic texture, particularly in the period of judges. They were usually short, dignified, and humble.[6] However, in the text, this speech of Samson is not written of as

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[6] McKenzie, *Dictionary,* 687.

a "prayer". The text uses a different root that is common to semitic languages. The Hebrew term used is קרא , meaning "to call".[7] The root *qara* denotes primarily the enunciation of a specific vocable or message. The basic meaning of *qara* is apparently "to draw someone's attention with the sound of the voice in order to establish contact." In the case of the latter usage, it is customarily addressed to a specific recipient and is intended to elicit a specific response (hence, it may be translated "proclaim, invite"). We see this aspect of *qara* in the words of Samson, as he is trying to bring God's attention with his words to establish contact and bring about vengeance, a specific response to his words.

Infrequently, *gara* denotes just an outcry. The verb may represent the specification of a name. Frequently, the name given indicates a primary characteristic of the thing named. Sometimes this involves a play on words   Our verb also connotes calling one to a specific task, as seen in the idea of vengeance.   The most prominent usage here has to do with calling on the name of God. This root denotes a planned encounter wherein the subject intentionally confronts the object. Hostile usages entail a formal confrontation of objects. A frequent nuance is "to call on" in the sense of "to summon to oneself" or "to invite." It occurs particularly in cases involving the establishment of contact over some distance. The root occurs as a designation for "calling" to Yahweh when the context clearly indicates a reference to calling to God. also occurs in the sense "to call (on) for help" (thus e.g., Deut. 15:9; 24:15; Judg. 15:18; 16:28; Ezek. 8:18; Jonah 2:3; Psa. 28:1; 30:9; 50:15; 57:3; 81:8; 86:7; 88:10).[8]

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[7] We see a form of this root in Judges 15:18, with the "Spring of the Caller".

[8] C. J. Labuschagne, s,v, "vengeance". Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament 6 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997.

elicit a specific response. The verb may represent the specification of a name. Our verb also connotes calling one to a specific task The most prominent usage here has to do with calling on the name of God. Usually, the context has to do with a critical, as seen in Samson's call, or chronic need.[9]

Following earlier scholars, we would suggest that Samson called in an exclamatory manner; it was not a mental prayer as some might assume. He might possibly have expressed it aloud, without being heard and observed by the people, amidst their noise and mirth; and if it was heard, it might only furnish out more ridicule and contempt. It would be seen as the dying lament of an enemy; complete nonsense to the Philistine congregation. Therefore, his words and their purpose moved beyond the abuse of the Philistines.

LORD

Samson begins his entreaty with the title, "Lord", *Adonai* or *Adonim.* McKenzie sees the term "lord", אדן , or *Adonai* as a name that signifies authority, and power to command. This seems to appeal to the theology of "YHWH of hosts", a common warrior aspect of YHWH. It also seems to connote the Kingship of Yahweh.[10] Rose argues that the meaning of "Lord" is close to ba'al, not in the sense of ownership, but authority. From its beginning, Yahwism "took over royal imagery and royal titles".[11]

According to linguists, there is no doubt that exists about the meaning of this word. The Ugaritic *'adn* means "'lord" or "father" and the Akkadian *adannu* carries a similar meaning, "mighty."[12] Many Hebrew scholars and linguists, such as Gesenius, call the use of the plural form for a singular noun the *pluralis maestatis*, the plural of majesty. However, E.W.

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[9] L. Coppes, s.v "qara". *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2: vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1980) 2: 810.

[10] McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 516.

[11] Rose, *Anchor Bible* Dictionary. 4:1008

[12] R. Alden, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,*1:12-13.

Bullinger discusses a related figure of speech, the "heterosis of number" in which words are used in the plural in places that grammatically demand a singular use. This is done to emphasize great excellence or magnitude. With *adonim,* as with *Elohim*, the use of the plural intensive is so frequent it is part of the grammar and idiom of Hebrew itself.[13] This is a surprisingly proper title with which Samson begins his address, considering the circumstance. It sets a royal tone and appeals to the royal authority which this title implies. With this title, it is possible that Samson is purposely insulting the "lords" of the Philistines.

The Name YHWH

Samson doubles the title with the name of God, YHWH. This serves to build an insurmountable wall between the God of Samson and Dagon, the god of the Philistines. There can be no possibility of confusion. Samson is calling upon the God of Israel, thereby pitting his God against the chief god of the Philistines. Therefore, this action is more than simply a final stand, but a theological struggle. Even in the heart of an enemy temple, the power of YHWH is seen to be supreme.[14] To call upon the Lord YHWH at this point shows that Samson sees no boundaries to the power of his Lord. Such an aspect would not be lost on David, under whom the Samson narratives were compiled, as this would be part of the religious, unifying, spirit he wanted to emphasize in the narratives. David could easily make the argument that he now represented the authoritative and mighty Lord that allowed Samson to triumph over the Philistines, thus preparing the way for his kingship.

In some passages the name "Yahweh" is so inextricably bound up with the being of God, that it functions almost like an appearance of Yahweh (Ex 23:20-21; Isa 30:27). The name of God also signifies the whole self- disclosure of God in his

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[13] R, Manetti, "The Origin of Adonai in the Hebrew Scriptures" AJBT 12 #25 (June 19, 2011) 2.

[14] In this sense, Samson's defiant call to his God echoes the "plagues of Egypt" where YHWH came to Egypt to show his universal supremacy.

holiness and truth (Ps 22:22). This Name can be "walked in," i.e., people are to live according to its teaching (Mic 4:5).[15]

No certain etymology of the divine name can be offered. However, appropriate to the Sinai region in the second half of the 2d millennium would be an early form of a NW Semitic verb with the meaning "to be, become, show oneself, act," etc., like the Hebrew term *hyh* and Aramaic term *hwh*.[16]

M. Rose argues that to speak of YHWH is to speak of Israel. An early form of this coupling is the title, "YHWH, God of Israel". Moses personalized it with "YHWH, your God," occurring innumerable times and reflects a confession of faith and a special relationship between YHWH and Israel. In most cases "confession of faith" also connoted a "struggle situation." A struggle adds a powerful dimension to this formula as in confession, one's security and identity is invoked. However, a struggle situation can entail a "process of demarcation…with respect to those who think differently concerning YHWH's name and concerning its invocation in the cult."[17] If Rose is correct, Samson is standing as the lone, visible, representative of Israel and her Lord. The pillars act as the line of demarcation between the power of an idol and the power of the God of Israel.

Remember

At this point, he breaks the sequence of names to ask for remembrance. This is more than a simple reminder. It seems to acknowledge an estrangement between the Lord and Samson once his Consecration was broken. It also gives the message that estrangement can be remedied through repentant faith.[18] In this sense, it seems to be a case of Samson turning fully

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[15] W.Kaiser, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* 2:934-935.

[16] Jenni, s.v. "Yahweh", *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.*

[17] M. Rose, *Anchor Bible Dictionary.* 4:1003.

[18] This is said in the "Prayer of Solomon" in 1 Kings 8:48.

toward God, after his allowing his Consecration to be broken, and the Lord waiting for him.

The term for basic term for "remember" is זָכַר, which can connote "to mention" or "to remember". However, the latter meaning is more common in Hebrew. The various usages of the root in the Old Testament oppose derivation from a single origin. The basic meaning of the term is "to remember." But that *zkr* connotes an active relationship to the object of memory that it exceeds a simple thought process. It often entails an invocation of something or some deed. We will see the blinding of Samson being recalled. No semantic evolution may be traced. Yet terms in the semantic field and special constructions occasionally demonstrate nuances of meaning. Thus, in passages that have lament expressions in the semantic field of *zkr,* memory participates in the lament emphasis. In other passages, the verb expresses an attitude of trust. At times, *zkr* conveys a saving or harmful intention: "to remember to someone's benefit/harm." Memory pertains to past events and that the memory awakens to realization because of their present. The Imperative use occurs as a fixed religious term since antiquity in exclamations of petition (Judges 16:28; cf. 1 Sam 1:11), and then primarily in individual supplications and collective laments.[19] This affirms our idea that Samson is approaching the Lord, in trust or faith, and asking Him to rectify a past situation. However, Samson is casting these words in an urgent context, therefore the use of the Imperative is used.

According to O. Oladosu, remembrance is an action or practical word. When "God remembers," he acts. He intervenes in the situation of man. This is comforting and reassuring. The Creator God cares for his creation and never abandons his own. it is evident that the Hebrew term *zkr* has some nuances. When it is used of God, it appears that it does not mean God's cognitive capacity, but rather God's character. We would

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[19] W. Schottroff, s.v. "remember", *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* .

suggest that this is why Samson invoked a royal imagery that was associated with this couplet of names. Oladosu makes the strong statement that God's remembrance is interpreted more as an action directed toward someone.[20] Clearly, Samson is asking for God to perform an action that will be directed toward the Philistines.

<u>Now</u>

Samson affixes the particle of entreaty or exhortation, נא , *na,* "now." It is considered a colloquial imperative. Often this is rendered something like, "I pray". Modern translations tend to soften the rendering of this imperative by using the term, "please". However, in this context we would probably look for a derivative of שמע , which is usually understood as "to hear", a phrase that is concerned predominantly with calls, cries, laments, crying, asking, and wishing; God is asked and said to "hear,". This can include to help, deliver, forgive, etc., as the context often indicates more clearly. With such renderings, the translations add a context not called for by the narrative.

By using the imperative, Samson is conveying a forceful emotion. He is asking for immediate action on the part of the Lord. This complements the call for remembrance, as both parts of this clause connote an Imperative construction, urgent action, coupled with a tone of humility as he is acknowledging the sovereignty of the Lord. It is an unusual mix of perspectives. It combines the need to reconcile with God and a bold plan to enact against the Philistines and fulfill his mission. Samson is recognizing that he fell away from his relationship and asks to rekindle it in order to take this final stand. Grammatically, this odd combination of petition and Imperative might well be the reason this clause is isolated from the more savage part of the "prayer".

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[20] O. Oladosu, "The Meaning and Function of זכר in Genesis" *AJBT* 18# 23 June 4, 2015.

GOD

The Hebrew term, אל /אלהים, El/Elohim, means "God" and is seen to designate power as part of the conception of deity.[21] Rose points out that this is a common semitic appellative which pertains to the deity or Divinity. It is not the name, like YHWH, but it suggests the highest god, God-king, founding God, and god-creator.[22]

The etymology is uncertain, but it is generally agreed that the primary idea is that of strength, power of effect , and that it properly describes God in that character in which he is exhibited to all men in his works, as the creator, sustainer and supreme governor of the world. It denotes the fullness of divine strength, the sum of the powers displayed by God. [23]

In Hebrew, *EL* is interchangeable with *Elohim*, which is, linguistically, a plural form that refers to one God. Rose, and many other scholars, have suggested that this is an example of "plural of majesty". It serves as an intensification and eventually an absolutization of the deity's identity. It takes on a different theological reflection than YHWH, as this name is connected with the monotheistic/ national spirit of Israel. Whereas Elohim is a more general religious appellation, universally found in the Semitic world. It could represent the power of any god, but becomes realized in the name YHWH as a unique God of Israel.[24]

A study of the various accompanying descriptions of *El* where the name occurs in Scripture leads to the rather solid conclusion that, from the beginning of the use of this term in Scripture, it was intended to distinguish the true *El* (God) from all false uses of that name found in other semitic cultures.

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[21] McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 316.

[22] Rose, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:1004.

[23] W. Smith s.v. "God". *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (London: Murray) 1901.

[24] Rose , *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 4:1006.

We note first the use of *El* in terms denoting God's greatness or superiority over all other gods. This fostered a very personal relationship between *El* and His believers. However, *Elohim* is found more frequently in Scripture than either *El* or *Eldah* to denote the true God. Regarding the plural form, Albright has suggested that the use of this majestic plural comes from the tendency in the ancient near east toward a universalism.

Also, it could be a term conveying both the unity of the one God and yet allowing for a plurality of persons is found (Gen 1:2, 26). This is further borne out by the fact that the form occurs only in Hebrew and in no other Semitic language, not even in Biblical Aramaic.[25]

In the Old Testament the plural form *elohim* became the favored generic term for God. This development is lost in obscurity, but the evidence from ancient literature contemporary with the Old Testament attests to the use of the plural form in other cultures around Israel as the designation of a single deity that embodies the entirety of divine life. Some have taken the plural form as a plural of intensity, representing the indescribable, or as an abstract plural, corresponding to our words "Godhead" or "divinity, " and there is justification for both views.

Precisely when and why the Israelites took this title for their God, rather than the singular *el* or *eloh*, is not known. However, this term is appropriate for contexts that require a universal view of the deity, or contexts that connote his power and omnipotence. Even this broad understanding holds the view of God as personal is grounded in the image of God. He is a self-conscious being, who has will and purpose. The most satisfactory explanation of this name is one that grows out of the context. Recognizing this, Walter Eichrodt suggested that its significance lies in the promise of God's presence. God as the saving God can be seen on a universal scale. In the historical books, God as the saving God delivers his people from

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[25] J. Scott, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* 1:42-44.

national oppression and humiliation. The Book of Judges operates on the thesis that Joshua tried to carry out the commandment to destroy the Canaanites, but the period of the Judges operated by a new principle, allowing the Canaanites to remain in the land in order to test Israel's resolve to follow the Lord. In Judges, God intervenes in history at critical moments and manifests his sovereignty over nations. The Salvation of God. In the Old Testament, God's saving action appears in the form of deliverance from war, personal distress, illness, and political oppression.[26] Samson's moment between the pillars embodies these aspects of the term *El/Elohim*.

Samson is calling upon the God of the Hebrews. According to J. Scullion, it was believed that God is "forever active…always present and can be found anywhere". In the early Settlement and Monarchial period, God was understood as One who rescues and is a warrior. While in the settlement period God was often confused with the gods of Canaan, idols prevailed, people forgot beneficence of YHWH, hence the need for the Judges and, eventual King. However, as seen by the repetitive cycle of repentance in the book of Judges (Judges 2-3) and this dying prayer of Samson, the God of the Hebrews was always accessible by prayer. This meant that any member of His People, anywhere, anytime may speak freely.[27] Scullion points to the Hebrew concept that their God was truly omnipresent. This was a unique belief to the Hebrews, as more common in the region was the belief that a god is only powerful in the region in which he is worshipped. This can be termed "territorial dominion". The avoidance of this pagan theology allowed Samson to pray to the God of the Hebrews in the heart of the enemy temple, theoretically where the god should be at his strongest.[28] Samson was illustrating the Hebrew view of the

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[26] Elwell, Walter A. s,v, "God'". *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker,1997.).

[27] J. Scullion, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 2:1042-1048.

[28] Cf. J. Roskoski, "Samson's Death Account and the Ancient Theology of Territorial Dominion" *AJBT* 11 #15

(June 13, 2010).

omnipresence of the God and prayers can reach him even in the heart of an enemy temple. This was an advanced theological concept in a henotheistic, or pagan, world where the authority of gods and idols were limited by faith and geography.

Strengthen me

The chief meaning of the Hebrew term, חזק , is "to be/become strong, firm". However, the word is used with no basic distinction between physical and mental/emotional strength. In the theological sphere it means Yahweh's strengthening. It refers primarily to military defensive strength. Yet Samson, too, prays for divine power in his final stand (Judges 16:28).[29]

The basic meaning of this word in the simple stem is to "be(come) strong." In general, the causative is to "make one strong," "strengthen." The semantic field also includes "take hold of," "seize," and "strengthen oneself,' hence, "take courage."

The basic form, used eighty-two times, means to "be strong" or "become strong." In most cases it can be so translated, but often the variety of contexts encourages or necessitates a variety of renditions. Most often the word is used for strength in battle (I Kgs 20:23). The admonition to be strong in combat may simply be an exhortation to be of good courage (and is so translated in I Sam 10:12).[30]

Samson affixes the Imperative, *na*, again after his petition for strength. It is interesting to note that this suffix only occurs in relation to his physical relations with God. He is couching these terms in an apodictic, or incontrovertible, sense. There is no need to explain or continue his petitions. The suffix on these

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[29] A. van der Woude, s.v. "to be strong". *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.*

[30] C. Weber, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* 1:276.

words speaks strongly to the urgency of the situation in which Samson finds himself.

Vengeance

 The Hebrew root, נקם , *nqm ,* usually takes the meaning of "to avenge (oneself)." The Hebrew semantic field includes, "to avenge, avenge oneself, take revenge," "to avenge oneself" or "be avenged." The original meaning of the root *nqm* may have been legal. Punishment rectifies and thus cancels an injustice. The concept of vengeance refers to the "typical private penalty that properly pertains to persons located outside one's own jurisdiction and authority. The majority of cases do not involve vengeance for an individual (e.g., Judges 15:7 and 16:28, Samson) or against an individual but a community's dispute with its enemies. Emotionally laden action often assumes the foreground and largely determines the meaning of *nqm.* One may not strictly distinguish profane and religious usages of *nqm,* since both successful and desired human vengeance always require divine authorization or permission.[31] Noteworthy is the fact that the Imperative suffix, *na,* is not used. He knew that God would restore the balance in the relationship between Israel and the Philistines through his actions. However, Samson is asking for immediate remembrance, the returning of his invincible strength, and for vengeance. His words take on a casuistic tone, as he attaches the reason for the request. Furthermore, he not only is asking for, what he sees as, proper vengeance but he wants it to take place immediately in an enemy temple and he wants to be the instrument of this vengeance.

The term, applicable to Samson, entails an injured party's desire for retribution or repayment from those who harmed him or to demonstrate his innocence against false accusations. Vengeance demonstrates God's righteousness in compensating the wrong with right. Divine vengeance in the Old Testament is

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[31] G. Sauer , s,v, "vengeance". *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.*

not to be understood as God's desire for self-gratification in exacting punishment, but as an expression of displeasure over all unrighteousness to restore the original balance.[32] A basic function of the Judges, particularly Samson, was to restore the balance between Israel and her neighbors and Israel and her God.

Although this root, including its derivatives, is only used about seventy times in the Old Testament, it expresses a truth that is theologically important, but greatly misunderstood. Vengeance and revenge are ideas that would appear to have no good ethical validity whether coming from God or man. But such is not the case when the use of this root is properly understood in its Old Testament setting.

The concept of divine vengeance must be understood in the light of Old Testament teaching about the holiness and justice of God and its effect on man as a sinner. Understood in the full orb of Biblical revelation, balanced as it is by the mercy of God, divine vengeance is seen to be a necessary aspect of the history of redemption. Study of the use of this root reveals that there are comparatively few cases where man is considered a proper source of vengeance. Often man is a secondary cause while God is the source (Ezekiel 25:14). This is normally the case where the Israelites avenge themselves on their enemies (Joshua 10:13). In Numbers 31:2-3, the Israelites' wreaking vengeance on the Midianites (v. 2) is equivalent to the Lord's doing so (v. 3). Most of the uses of *nqm* involve God as the source of vengeance. [33]

Behind the Hebrew usage of *nqm* stands a sense of the solidarity and integrity of the community which, having been damaged by an offense, must be restored by some deed of retaliation or punishment. The range of meaning of the motif, however, extends beyond "vengeance" and/or "punishment" to

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[32] W. Elwell, s,v, :vengeance". " *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.* 1997.

[33] E. Smick, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* 2:598.

a sense of "deliverance." As an activity of God on behalf of His people, *nqm* is   sometimes   best   understood   as retribution.[34] However, it must be understood that Samson wants this activity on behalf of Israel through him personally. Moreover, he is casting the injuries of Israel at the hands of the Philistines in the mage of his lost eye.

At this point, the first-person speech momentarily ends and a detailed description of the actions of Samson is presented. The details are striking in their specificity. The text reads that he "braced" himself against the pillars, which were about six feet apart. The Hebrew term is סמך , *smk*. The primary meaning of the root is "to lean upon".[35]   The root smk "to support" is attested in Hebrew and Aramaic. In the reflexive the verb means "to rest upon" in the lit. and the fig. senses.[36]   The descriptive term is of some importance. The rendering, "brace", seems to serve the text optimally. The moment between the prayer and the last plea is not just a literary device which allows the reader to catch up to the story and understand what Samson may be planning. It is a notice of Samson martialing his forces, both physical and mental. Physically, he is placing his hands and feet in the best, biomechanical, position. He knows that he has little time and will not be afforded a second chance. Mentally, he is focusing on what he needs to do in order to make this final stand victorious. In short, he is eradicating any doubt, the opposite of faith, from his mind. This process is known well to people involved with strength sports. Moving extremely heavy loads is a matter of physical readiness and positive mental energy. Therefore, if one doubts the ability to move the object, the object will not move.

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[34] D.Cook, s.v. "vengeance" , *Holman Bible Dictionary*. T. Butler ed,(Nashville: Holman, 1991).

[35] R. Patterson, .*Theological Wordbook.* 2:628.

[36] F. Stolz, s.v. "to lean", *Theological Lexicon.*

Part 2: "Let me die with the Philistines"

Samson adds a final plea to his prayer for vengeance in Judges 16:30. He asks to die with the Philistines. Some have rendered this as "let my soul die with the Philistines". This seems to be adding a layer of theology which is not needed. The text seems to downplay the intensity of Samson's words, as the text uses a derivative of the simple root,אמר ,"to say".

The most common usage of the verb is in direct conversation. It is readily seen that the verb is pressed into service in literal contexts, personifications, allegories, and strict narratives. A variety of nouns, clauses, adverbs, prepositional phrases are employed after the verb. However, the word "say" gathers various connotations from the contexts in which it is used and some of these are of theological interest. It is a question, however, how many of these special meanings are inherent in the word actual term and how many are due to the context.[37] In the context of Samson between the pillars it would appear that the utterance did, indeed, act as a prayer. This is where the context lends definitively to the meaning to the simple term. A bigger question is the volume he used in saying the phrase. Was it a private prayer, known only to a few close on-lookers, or was it a final act of defiance that was said so that the leaders of the Philistines and the close members of the congregation could hear the words? The text lets the reader answer the question for him/herself.

Samson's Death

Death is the absence or withdrawal of breath and the life force that makes movement, metabolism, and interrelation with others possible. In the Old Testament, life and death are totally under Yahweh's sovereignty. God is the source of all life. Death is more than the cessation of all physiological processes. By divine command (Psalm 90:3), the body returns to dust and

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[37] C. Feinberg, *Theological Wordbook*. 1:54-55.

the spirit goes back to God who gave it (Gen 2:7 ; Eccl 12:7). Those who die are said to be gathered to their people. It is difficult to avoid the fact that in the Old Testament people believed a person's physical remains were interred in one place, and that part of the person capable of consciousness and personality went to another location. The gathering to one's people was an event taking place before burial at the time of death.[38]

The call he makes is a stark abrupt plea to, simply, die with his enemies. The Hebrew term is מות, *muth.* The term may refer to death by natural causes or to a violent death. The latter may be as a penalty or otherwise. The root is not limited to the death of humans although it is used predominantly that way. This is a universally used Semitic root for dying and death. The literal demise of the body in death is usually in view.[39] It is important to note that "although the semantic field of "death" is of extraordinary theological significance, one cannot speak of a specifically theological sphere of usage, and a distinction between profane and theological usage is impossible."[40]

In practicality, as McKenzie points out, "death is terminal". The person is seen as an animated body, not an incarcerated spirit.[41] It is the cessation of all vital activity; it was when the spirit departed. It was seen as the "natural end of man...ideal death was attained in fullness of old age and undiminished powers". The ideal death was easy and quick.[42]

Between the Pillars

After the plea for death among his enemies, the text once again moves to a detailed description of Samson's next act. The

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[38] Elwell, s.v. "Death". *Evangelical Dictionary.*

[39] E. Smick. *Theological Wordbook.* 1:1169.

[40] G. Gerleman, s,v, "death", *Theological Lexicon.*

[41] This idea was popularized by later Greek Philosophers.

[42] McKenzie, *Dictioonary*, 184. This was the description of the death of Moses (Dt. 34)

phrase is usually rendered, "he pushed with all his might". This phrase is built on derivatives of two words; נטה and כחח, *natah* and *koach.* The former term, *natah,* has a wide semantic field. The 215 occurrences of this verb, excluding derivatives, are translated some thirty-five different ways in some versions.

The root also occurs with the basic meaning of 'to bend." A wadi "'bends", the shoulder of an ass 'bends down" (with a load), and one "bends down" or "tilts" a pitcher of water to pour a drink. The term is also used figuratively of the "perverting" or "warping" of justice, the condemnation of which lies at the heart of Israel's law code.

A large number of other references employing *nata* carry the nuance of "turn," "'incline,'" or "decline." It is used in the literal sense of "turning aside" or "away," or "'diverting" from the path (Num 20:17; 21:22; 22:23, 26, 33; II Sam 6:10) or "'turning toward" something (Gen 38:1, 16).[43]

The capacity to act, *koach*, is understood both in physical and figurative terms. However, more commonly it expresses potency, capacity to produce. Generally, however, physical strength is intended, as in the references to Samson (Judges 16:5; etc.).[44] Therefore, this combination of words depicts, in clear detail, the actions of Samson in this final moment. It portrays a tableau of Samson praying for remembrance and the for strength and vengeance. He then braces himself against the pillars, setting his hands and feet. Once his position is set, he prays to die with his enemies. No one, not even the reader, is allowed to know his plan. He is standing somewhat behind the pillars, which stood about 6 feet apart, as suggested by excavated Philistine temples. While keeping a hand on each pillar, which were held in place by the weight of the temple, Samson bends or inclines violently, to initiate the movement, and drags the pillars off of their bases. This would cause the

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[43] M. Wilson. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* 2:573-574.

[44] J. Oswalt. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. 1:436-437.

temple to collapse. Samson was probably not crushed, as ancient Rabbis suggest, but died, as we would suggest, of an "aortic dissection".[45] Samson was dead before the crumbling temple touched him.

CONCLUSIONS

The final prayer of Samson was not, as some have suggested, a random collision of pleas for vengeance. The prayer exhibits a structure that depicts a deep and powerful understanding of the aspects of the Lord of Israel. The petitions from Samson move from deeply personal to a national scope. This progression matches the appellations used for the Lord of Israel.

If the Gaza temple was similar to the others which have been excavated, the pillars were set immediately before and perpendicular to the altar. This sets up the theological struggle between YHWH and Dagon. The lords of the Philistines are sitting on benches in the inner room of the temple, in the shade and so they can observe their enemy.

Samson entreats the Lord first with the royal imagery of the Lord of Israel. Herein we see his complete disregard for any thought of territorial limits of the power of his Lord. Moreover, it is to the royal sovereign that he asks to be remembered, essentially asking for an audience. He follows this with an entreaty to the God of Israel, who will hear the prayers of his people wherever they are- even in the heart of an enemy temple. It is to this aspect of YHWH that Samson petitions for strength and vengeance. This appeals to God's power, omnipotence, and His sovereignty over all nations. In his final words, Samson moves from depicting an extremely intense personal

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[45] According to the Mayo Clinic, an aortic dissection is a tear occurs in the inner layer of the body's main artery (aorta). Blood rushes through the tear, causing the inner and middle layers of the aorta to split (dissect). If the blood goes through the outside aortic wall, aortic dissection is often deadly. . . strenuous activity can cause such a rupture.

relationship with his Lord to demonstrating the universal power over all nations of the God of Israel.

Sources

My apologies or the archaic style of citations. But I was using different versions and editions of the same work and the pages were not the same. Therefore, I used the term "s.v." (sub verbum) to cite the actual entry. This was to avoid confusion if anything were to be further researched.

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