

In the life of Samson and his tribe Dan we are reacquainted with the sordid history of this tribe, and we marvel at God's love for the most *unlovely* and *undeserving* of His people. It is good for us to pause at Jacob's blessing of Dan in Gen. 49:16-17, because God's grace towards this most undeserving tribe reminds us of His wholly unexpected saving grace towards us.

*How wretched was our former state,  
when, slaves to Satan's sway,  
With hearts disordered and impure,  
o'erwhelmed in sin we lay!*

*But, O my soul! for ever praise,  
for ever love his name,  
Who turned thee from the fatal paths  
of folly, sin, and shame.*

*Vain and presumptuous is the trust  
which in our works we place,  
Salvation from a higher source  
flows to the human race.*

*'Tis from the mercy of our God  
that all our hopes begin;  
His mercy saved our souls from death,  
and washed our souls from sin.*

Titus 3:3-9, Scottish paraphrase

### Monday/Tuesday: Read Genesis 49:16-18 & Judges 18:28-31

### Warrior God

You may well ask why we are pausing again to study Jacob's blessing of the ill-fated tribe of Dan in Genesis 49:16-17.

- Why focus on this tribe of Dan, whose idolatry in Judges 18:30-31 seals the doom of the Northern tribes who followed Dan into idolatry and early exile?
- Why focus on a tribe who is not even mentioned in the list of tribes in the book of Revelation, presumably because of their corruption?
- Why focus on this tribe's hero Samson who “squandered God's gift of miraculous strength and ignored his calling? Is the history of Samson given for its entertainment value? Is Samson an Israeli 'Rambo', a Superman for a biblical comic strip?” (Ed Clowney, *Unfolding the Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*)

In order to exalt His free grace, which depends “not on works but on Him who calls” (Rom. 9:12), God determined through Samson to prove that the *determination* and *ability* to save sinners was so strong in God Himself that He could save *even through someone as compromised as Samson*. Clowney also points out that just as Samson could use the lowly jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15-17) to slay a thousand of God's enemies, so God Himself could victoriously conquer the kingdoms of rebel men – not just when He had an army of willing volunteers in the days of Deborah (Jdg. 5:2, 9); not just when He had three hundred brave, handpicked warriors in the days of Gideon (Jdg. 7:8); but even when all He had to work with was a stubborn, rebellious son named Samson – whom not even his own fellow Israelites received or honored (Jdg. 15:12ff). What a Warrior-King is our God, able to successfully wage war against the kingdoms of darkness even when no one else joins Him on the battlefield! As Isaiah 59:16 says of our great warrior-God: “He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so His own arm worked salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him.”

**Meditate and Pray:** Let us rejoice that, when so many around us appear to be absolutely unconcerned about *their own* spiritual state, that we have a God who *is* urgently concerned with saving sinners. He never takes a vacation! He never retreats from the battlefield, though all others flee! He stands alone, saving by His *own* arm

and strength! As John Henry Newman put it in his poem, transcribed in many hymnals, describing God Himself in verse 4 coming down in the Person of His Son to win the battle:

*Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
And in the depth be praise;  
In all His words most wonderful,  
Most sure in all His ways.*

*O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
A second Adam to the fight  
And to the rescue came.*

*O wisest love! that flesh and blood,  
Which did in Adam fail,  
Should strive afresh against the foe,  
Should strive and should prevail.*

*And that a higher gift than grace  
Should flesh and blood refine,  
**God's Presence and His very Self,**  
**And Essence all divine.***

### Wednesday/Thursday: Read Judges 15:16-20 and Hebrews 11:32-34

### Faith Triumphant

Samson's career is summarized in Jdg. 15:20: "Samson led (or judged) Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines." An impressive statement. Yet, what were the long-term blessings for Israel from Samson's twenty years in this God-given office of judge? Not many, in terms of corporate salvation from sin. Nor is there any lasting repentance mentioned on the part of God's people during Samson's rule. In fact, the greatest tribe among God's people, Judah, send three thousand men: not to join Samson in battle against the Philistines, but to hand Samson over in order to appease their Philistine overlords (Jdg. 15:11-12)! Both Samson and Israel were too self-centered to see God's larger plan at work.

Samson never led Israel against the enemy, nor did he seek to establish God's Kingdom according to his promise. The strongman killed a lion barehanded, but he did it on the way to take a Philistine wife in disobedience to God's law (Jdg. 14:6). He killed thirty men of Ashkelon, but he did so to collect their garments to pay off a wager (Jdg. 14:19). He wrenched the gates of Gaza from their sockets and carried them to a mountain top, but he performed that exploit to escape from a trap that had been set for him while he spent the night with a harlot in the Philistine city (Jdg. 16:3).

Ed Clowney, *Unfolding the Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*

Despite all these questionable exploits and disappointing motives on Samson's part, isn't it wonderful to see the verdict of Scripture on the life of Samson in Hebrews 11:32-34?

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson... who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered *justice* (the very definition of a judge) and gained what was promised... whose *weakness* (the definition of Samson's disappointing life) was turned to strength." Ah, what value God places on faith, which makes poor, sinful failures such as Samson in the end look up by faith to the Lord, away from all their sin and sorrows, gaining victory, and a fruitful life... even when the world gives them up as useless to God! "Who through faith... their weakness... turned to strength." Can there be any better verdict on our lives?

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank God that He places such importance on the saving grace of faith, which by its very nature empties its possessor of all merit or hope of salvation in himself, looking entirely to Another to be Savior. This is what makes the story of Samson in the end to be so glorious and makes us so glad that the writer of Judges used three carefully crafted chapters to explain the birth and rise of this amazing hero (yes, I will call Samson that) of the faith.

**Friday/Sat/Sun: Read Judges 16:23-31 and Luke 23:39-43****Long from Thee my Footsteps Straying**

The last prayer of faith from Samson was that God might restore to him the strength given miraculously in former days: “O Sovereign Lord, *remember* me. O God, please strengthen me just once more...” (Judges 16:28). Think of Samson's situation: blinded in both eyes, surrounded by godless foes who open their mouths wide against him and mock his God. Before answering his final prayer for the strength to carry out this last act of war against the Philistines, we know God had been humbling Samson. God had *already remembered* Samson by giving him a punishment at cruel Philistine hands which was sure to bring him back to His God in prayer and faith. Many commentators point out the irony of Samson's sufferings. For example, consider Judges 16:21ff:

- Samson's eyes which led him astray with Philistine women? Gone!
- Samson's appetites driving him to satisfy his own lusts by treating women as objects to satisfy his wants? Now he must grind food to satisfy the appetite of the Philistines – doing the work of the lowly female slave!
- Samson teased the Philistines with riddles and surprise attacks? Now he was the object of ridicule as the Philistines made sport of him (Jdg. 16:25).

In this way, God's chastisement went deep into Samson's soul, until all that mattered to him was opposing those who opposed His God – even to the point of dying in the very temple where the Philistines worshiped their vile god Dagon! Sounds very much like a New Testament hero who died with the same prayer on his lips: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke. 23:42). Did he not have a zeal like Samson to defend the honor of the Lord in the moments before his death?

**Meditate and Pray:** Praise God for His restoring work in our lives, in the thief on the Cross, and in the strong man Samson. Thank Him that He is determined to restore unto us the strength of former days of faith. He will enable us to die looking up to Him for strength, no matter how many wasted years there may be behind us. As the hymn writer Ray Palmer puts it (# 491 in our hymn book):

*Take me, O my Father, take me;  
Take me, save me, through Thy Son;  
That which Thou wouldst have me, make me,  
Let Thy will in me be done.  
Long from Thee my footsteps straying,  
Thorny proved the way I trod;  
Weary come I now, and praying,  
Take me to Thy love, my God.*

*Fruitless years with grief recalling,  
Humbly I confess my sin;  
At Thy feet, O Father, falling,  
To Thy household take me in.  
Freely now to Thee I proffer  
This relenting heart of mine;  
Freely life and love I offer,  
Gift unworthy love like Thine.*