



Correspondence

The enigma of Judas Iscariot

The articles under the above heading (Mar. 2004, p. 70; Apr. 2004, p. 106) made chilling reading. In these, no signs of compassion for Judas, nor any degree of understanding of him, appear. And yet the Lord showed a patience and compassion for Judas that continued right to the point of the betrayal kiss.

Some of the extrapolations and deductions from Scripture seemed to me to be made from scant evidence. For instance, can we establish from Scripture that “Judas became entrusted with larger sums of money” (p. 71)? Would we not rather imagine that the Lord would be against the accumulation of wealth, and that he would be using the money as it came in? Would not Jesus, knowing of Judas’s obsession with money, do as we all would in a similar situation—remove temptation from him as far as possible?

Surely the Lord did not *discover* Judas’s “secret sin” (p. 71) because he knew at the moment of his selection of Judas that he was a devil, as the author herself states later on the same page.

At the last supper, could the “Is it I” of the other disciples have been of the nature, “Could I betray the master?”, and the “Is it I?” of Judas Iscariot, more likely, “Does the master know that it is indeed I?”?

I wondered where the writer got the explicit information about Judas’s suicide: “When he got to his field, Judas placed a rope, hung from the limb of a tree, about his neck . . .” (p. 106).

It would be an interesting exercise to put oneself in the position of Judas Iscariot, or his representative, and argue his case, as if before the compassionate judge, the Lord Jesus Christ. Could we not find some misunderstandings, mitigating circumstances, misapprehensions, personality defects, or other excuses for his actions?

Many of us have ‘painted ourselves into a corner’ and become entangled in such a way that there seems to be no way out. For a time we forget that Yahweh is there, through the Lord Jesus, to rescue us, and bring us to repentance. Perhaps the example of Judas is there to arouse

in us the same compassion for sinners that the Lord Jesus and Stephen demonstrated at their death.

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In defence of Samson

Further to the article of Samson in the “By faith . . .” series ([Mar. 2004, p. 69](#)), I would like to offer some further comments. Samson must be the most misunderstood man in the Bible. He is dismissed as being a womaniser and a practical joker, but let us look at the facts.

A special birth

Only four people in the Bible had their births foretold by an angel: Isaac, Samson, John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ. The first three of these had mothers who had difficulty in conceiving because it was of paramount importance that their birth came at the right time. Isaac’s birth was delayed because he had to have the right wife in order to produce the promised seed. Consequently there is a generation’s difference between Isaac and Rebekah, Terah being Rebekah’s great-grandfather but Isaac’s grandfather. Samson had to come to fullness of strength at the right time of history. John was born at the right time to be the forerunner of Christ. In the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was born at the right time, without delay, because he is the centre of creation and all things are subordinate to that.

Samson, John and the Lord Jesus Christ were all Nazarites and served God for the whole of their lives from birth to death. (The only other person in the Bible who was possibly a Nazarite was Samuel.) All three were unmarried and died violent deaths in the service of God.

Samson is a type of Christ many times over. If he was the reprehensible character many suppose him to have been, does that mean that the Most High God, Who said of Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee” (Jer. 1:5), had got it all wrong in selecting Samson for His work? Is it not more likely that human prejudice

has got in the way of truth? Do we call David a womaniser, a man who had many wives, yet committed adultery and murdered the husband to cover up his indiscretion?

There seems to be such a dislike of Samson that even his physical appearance is commented on, with the suggestion being made that there was nothing unusual about him physically.* Common sense surely dictates that he must have been tall and physically powerful in order to fulfil the purpose of God as a one-man army.

The Philistine wife

Samson undoubtedly would have known his destiny, which is set out in Judges 13:5: “for, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines”.

Samson was not just an intelligent man, he also had great integrity. There were two reasons why he sought a wife from the Philistines instead of from his own people. The first reason we are given in Judges 14:4: “he sought an occasion against the Philistines”. The Bible is quite specific that this was “of the LORD”. Samson needed to get involved with the Philistines, and one way of doing this was to seek a Philistine wife and then to trust that God would supply the occasion.

The second reason was that he could never have sought a wife of his own people, for, once his work began, her life and the lives of any children would have been in great peril. To underline this one only has to look at the fate of the Philistine woman whom he sought in marriage: “the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire” (15:6). The marriage with the Philistine woman was never consummated, for she was given to someone else (v. 2). The war with the Philistines had begun.

Samson fought an unconventional war, for he had no weapons, the Philistines had banned them. This shows the quality of the man, for, instead of sitting back and complaining about the lack of tools for the job, he placed his trust in God and improvised with whatever came to hand.

The harlot

Samson judged Israel for twenty years (15:20), during which time he seems to have remained celibate, for there is no mention of a wife. It

would seem that the people were apathetic about the laws of God, quite content to remain a subject people under the hand of the Philistines. Samson, as the judge of Israel, had effectively been made redundant, shunned by his own people. Like the Lord Jesus, he was “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3).

The incident of the harlot in Gaza (Judg. 16:1-3) was an enacted parable, the same kind of thing as is shown with Hosea: “And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredoms, departing from the LORD” (1:2). If this incident in Samson’s life is just a sad tale about lust, why did Samson go all the way to Gaza openly, putting his very life at risk, when he could have found a harlot nearer home? There were no doubt plenty in Israel.

Surely Scripture interprets Scripture here. Taking away the doors, posts and bar of the city gate of Gaza was not an elaborate practical joke. People were judged at the gate of a city—see Genesis 19:1 regarding Lot and Ruth 4:1 regarding Boaz. Samson took the place of judgement upon his shoulder and carried it up toward Hebron where the cave of Machpelah is situated. Here Abraham is buried, to whom the promise was made, “thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” (Gen. 22:17).

Delilah

Samson’s affair with Delilah happened after the enacted parable at Gaza, which may have awakened latent desires. The name ‘Delilah’ means ‘languishing’, and she typifies the spiritual state of Israel at that time. It is usually thought that she was a Philistine, but the Bible does not say so, and her name is Hebrew. She was probably an Israelite, therefore. If that is correct then Samson was sold into the hands of his enemies by his own people in the same way as the Lord Jesus was sold for money by Judas.

Sometimes the whole point of a type lies in the differences and not the similarities, a good example of this being Jonah, who ran away from God. Samson’s fall from grace is given in detail, possibly to show to all the ease with which these things can happen, even to a man like Samson, whose loyalty to God was beyond question. The

* In fairness to those who say this of Samson, this is based on the idea that, as he was strong by the power of God, he would not have needed to be large and muscular.—*T.B.*

point of difference in this type is the fact that Samson betrayed his vows. The Lord Jesus kept his allegiance to God, even to the end. Like the Lord, Samson was tortured, humiliated and taunted by his enemies.

The spiritual quality of Samson shines brightest, not when he is at the zenith of his power, but when he is at his lowest, for he saw past the

anguish to the mercy of the Most High God. Just as his shame is written for all to see, so is his faith, in his naming in the roll of honour in Hebrews 11. We do not remember David for his sin, but for his faith. Let us accord the same honour to Samson.

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Goshen

The land where Israel became a nation*

Deborah Hurn

GOSHEN, OR THE land of Rameses, was the district in which the descendants of Jacob settled upon their migration to Egypt (Gen. 45:10; 47:11). From the description of Jacob and Joseph's reunion it is clear that Goshen lay between Egypt and southern Canaan along the nomads' route, the Way of Shur. As Jacob approached Egypt from Beersheva (46:5), Joseph went out to him from the palace, and they met each other in Goshen (v. 29). Goshen also lay at the end of the Way of the Wilderness of the Red Sea, from Sinai and Arabia (Ex. 13:18). The region is sometimes described as though it was separate from Egypt proper, as, for example, with the last seven plagues, which did not affect the habitations or possessions of the Hebrews.

The land of Goshen must, however, have bordered on the Egyptian royal precincts of that era (Gen. 45:10). Regular contact between the Israelites and the Egyptians is recorded from the time of Joseph, indicating a convenient proximity. During the oppression, Moses' mother placed the baby's ark in the river at the place where Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe, and returned home (a short distance) leaving Miriam to keep watch (Ex. 2:4,5). When Moses decided to visit his brethren and witness their toil, he came on successive days (vv. 11,13). During the time of the plagues, Moses went back and forth between the Hebrew district and Pharaoh's palace at short notice. When the last great plague had obtained their release, the Israelites had Egyptian neighbours (other than the mixed multitude) from whom they 'borrowed' valuable items (12:35).

Crops, flocks and herds

While in Egypt, the Israelites lived in houses with lintels and doorposts (Ex 12:22,23), indicating that they were now permanent residents and not nomads. They also practised agriculture in addition to their flock- and herd-rearing heritage (Num. 11:5; Deut. 11:10). Sheep may be adequately grazed on wilderness pastures, but cattle are kept close to agricultural settlements as there is generally not enough pasture in semi-arid regions. The primary use of cattle was the cultivation of the land: ploughing, sowing and transportation. They were indispensable to ancient agricultural societies and were much in evidence throughout the Nile delta, as they are today.

Generally, each farm or household would have had an ox or two to work the crops, and Pharaoh owned large herds (Gen. 47:6). As crops, sheep and cattle require quite different conditions, land suitable for all these uses could only be found at the interface of the fertile region and the wilderness.

To the Egyptians every shepherd was an "abomination", as Joseph warned his brethren (46:34). The Egyptians owned flocks (47:17; Ex. 9:3), so it was evidently not sheep they abhorred, but rather the work of the shepherd. This was a form of cultural elitism, and has varied according to the material development of societies in all eras. Whereas the nomadic Semites considered that possession of, and dependence upon,

* Quotations from the RSV unless stated otherwise.