

# THE DAVIDIC THEOLOGY OF SAMSON'S CHARISMA

John Roskoski

## INTRODUCTION

The Samson Narratives, Judges 13-16, provide great interest and great challenges to the modern Biblical interpreter, from the casual reader to the serious academic. Herein we see an account of a powerful Danite, Samson. His story told in rustic terms combined with high theology. The narratives contain features and combine elements in ways not seen in any other Biblical narrative. The narratives are unique, which is why there is such a wide array of interpretations of the man and the accounts which tell of his war against the Philistines.

Of the four major schools of Biblical criticism, Source Criticism, and the Wellhausen "Documentary Hypothesis" which originated in the late 1800's, has been the favored method of trying to understand the Samson narratives.<sup>1</sup> Source Criticism argues that Biblical texts are the products of different writing traditions, or documents. Source Criticism has introduced four writing traditions; Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), Priestly (P), and Deuteronomistic (D). Scholars in succeeding generations have introduced other possible traditions, but these writing traditions have remained at the foundation of this type of interpretation. This study, as well, will use the 4-strand Documentary Hypothesis as its foundation because the Samson Narratives, possibly more so than other Biblical narratives, illustrates the combining of traditions in the development of Biblical texts. Other methods look to the development of individual traditions or treat passages as a unified entity. In the Samson narratives we see how accounts, often unedited, were combined with later additions, to produce a purposeful work.

The Samson narratives have a singular place in the theological history of Israel. The narratives recount the exploits of an invincibly powerful man. At some points in the narratives, his strength is attributed to his nazirite consecration (Judges 13:5 and 16:17-22). However, throughout the "middle chapters" of the narratives, Judges 14-15, which recount an escalating series of hostile exchanges between Samson and the Philistines, his invincible power is attributed to the onrushes of the "Spirit of the Lord" or YHWH Spirit (Judges 14:6, 19, and 15:14). These onrushes of the YHWH Spirit place Samson among the "Charismatic Leaders".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The other three schools, Form, Tradition, and Rhetorical, are not sufficient in and of themselves to properly evaluate the combination of literary aspects found in the Samson narrative. However, it would be a mistake to dismiss their contributions from any understanding of the narratives because their methodologies have shed light on many misunderstood aspects of the narratives.

<sup>2</sup> The term "Charismatic Leader" was introduced by Max Weber(1864-1929), a landmark scholar in the field of sociology of religion. It is contained in his book *Ancient Judaism* (1917, 1921, 1952)

## The Charismatic Leaders

While Biblical scholarship has expanded the realm of charismatic leadership, the original connotation referred to a person's rise to leadership through the endowment of the YHWH Spirit. This theological event is most prominent in the book of Judges. The YHWH Spirit comes down upon Othniel (3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29) and Samson (Judges 13:25, 14:6, 19, 15:14). Saul is depicted as a Charismatic Leader, though not quite of the same type as the Judges. (1 Samuel 11:6). The nature of the Charisma will change with David (1 Samuel 16:13). The period of the Judges constitutes the closest thing to a "Heroic Age" that Israel ever experienced. It reflects an era of settlement in Israelite history, before the establishment of the Monarchy and extensive writing. For this reason, many scholars dismiss the Judges' accounts as being of low historical value and quality. However, in the stories of these great heroes, the YHWH Spirit is a dominant factor. As J.L. McKenzie states; "The heroes of Israel are . . . simple peasants. They are not heroes and warriors by profession; they become heroes because the Spirit of YHWH seizes them".<sup>3</sup> In the original stories and the later redactions, YHWH raises up saviors by conferring the Spirit to preserve His people and the land. The Spirit, according to McKenzie, moves these men to deeds above and beyond their normal capacities, powers, and attainments. It is a Divine impulse that is unpredictable and uncontrollable. McKenzie continues:

"The Spirit becomes the moving force of history in the stories of the Judges. It plays the role here which the Word of YHWH assumes in the books of the Prophets and the history of the Monarchy. . . The Charisma comes to equip them for their mission of deliverance and then leaves them. The concept of the Charismatic Leader becomes highly important in subsequent development of Israelite belief, for the King is the one upon whom the Spirit rests permanently, and the King in turn is the type of the Messiah. Thus the power of YHWH to save is affirmed in the stories of the Judges."<sup>4</sup>

McKenzie turns his attention to Samson. He writes;

"Samson in the list of Judges. . . clarifies the Israelite idea of the Charismatic hero. The hero as such is morally neutral: he is neither good nor bad, he is neither better nor worse than other men. He is simply the instrument through which YHWH works his deliverance. He need not be apt; YHWH does not have to seek aptness- He confers it. When the Spirit of YHWH moves, it makes the person apt to execute His will."<sup>5</sup>

Our point of focus, in this study, will be the passages that recount Samson's charisma, moments when the "Spirit of the Lord" or the "YHWH Spirit" rushed upon him. We contend that the references to the YHWH Spirit point to the origins and early stages of compilation of the Samson narratives. The multiple references and uneven distribution of the references indicate the scope of his exploits, not the hand of a redactor (editor) centuries removed from the period

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<sup>3</sup> J.L. McKenzie, *The World of the Judges* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. McKenzie is a strong detractor of Samson, as his words indicate. However, he is valuable to our study because of his extensive writing and understanding of OT Charisma.

of the Judges. The Hebrew construction of the references indicate a time and place of composition within the Davidic Kingship.

## **SAMSON AND THE BOOK OF JUDGES**

Scholars have long debated on the way the Samson narratives fit with the rest of the book of Judges, if they fit at all. As a Judge, Samson is unique. He leads no army; instead he carries on private war with the Philistines. Whereas the other Judges' accounts are marked by one endowment of the YHWH Spirit, the Samson narratives make four references to the Charisma. There are signs of later redactional activity, yet they are inconsistent with the structure of the rest of the Judges' accounts. For these reasons, and many others, scholars have not come to a consensus on the place of significance of the Samson narratives.

Traditionally, scholars have placed the Samson narratives within the "Deuteronomistic History".<sup>6</sup> This redactional construct is characterized by cyclic depiction of early Israelite, called the "Deuteronomistic Framework". This framework, imposed upon the circulating traditions of heroes, contained several parts: The Israelites commit apostasy (Judges 2:10-12), YHWH is angered and allows Israel to be oppressed by another nation (Judges 2: 13-14), Israel suffers and repents (2:15-16), YHWH sends a deliverer to save Israel from oppression (2:17), After the death of the Judge, Israel relapses into worse apostasy (2:19).

McKenzie, following Noth, offers an explanation of the historical construct:

"Joshua-Kings represent the 'Deuteronomistic History' of Israel. . . prepared after the fall of the kingdom of Judah in 587BC. Joshua-Kings. . . were a justification from the history of Israel of the judgment of YHWH upon the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Hence the history emphasized the saving acts of YHWH and the infidelity of Israel to His Covenant. The progressive judgments of YHWH were recounted . . . until they reached a climax in the destruction of the Israelite kingdoms. Deuteronomy was the preface to this historical work. [The construct] is supported by the presence of frequently repeated phrases in the style of Deuteronomy. Although the phrases are not uniform, indicating the work of a school and not a single writer, the history reflects the Deuteronomistic Theology."<sup>7</sup>

McKenzie, who typifies this argument, points out that the framework is seen most clearly in the Prologue of the book of Judges (Judges 2:6-3:6) and, at least in part, in the introductions and conclusions of the individual accounts of the Judges. McKenzie argues that "the entire history of the Judges has been organized by these historians. But within the separate stories the historians have left the material untouched". They are popular narratives and local traditions,

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<sup>6</sup> This is a construct credited to Martin Noth. Noth, basing it on Wellhausen's "Documentary Hypothesis" and the "D" tradition, argued that the theology of the book of Deuteronomy was imposed upon the books of Joshua-Kings by an editorial school which began no earlier than the 600's and, probably, finished during the Exile as the fall of Jerusalem was an interpretative tool for the editors.

<sup>7</sup> McKenzie, "World", 3

but through the framework the historians made them stories of “all Israel”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the book of Judges became a recital of the saving acts of YHWH. The Charisma was a major element in this recital.

The theory which advanced the idea of a historical framework imposed over circulating heroic accounts gained a large following among scholars. Yet, the importance and compilation of the Samson narratives remained a debated topic. Many scholars were, and are, content to present simplified histories of this compilation process within the model of the Deuteronomic History. These theories usually state that the narratives began as profane stories with the theological elements imposed by a later, usually Deuteronomic, editor. On the other hand, some authors will attribute great importance to the narratives.

G.F. Moore argues that the book of Judges was meant to reflect a history of Israel during the generation immediately after Joshua, when Israel fell to paganism. Moore argues that the cyclic nature of Judges 2:6-16:31 was imposed by the Deuteronomic editors. He points out that the writing has an affinity to that of the end of 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, so the writing cannot be dated before the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. He proposes a very complex compilation process of the book, beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and lasting to 5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The basis for his theory of heroic narratives having a theological framework imposed and religious elements inserted into them was the Samson stories. Moore argues that, based on the nature of the stories, Samson was of little importance to the completed book of Judges, but was found in the earlier sources and kept because, presumably, of his popularity. Moore continues to argue that varied viewpoints, repetition and duplications, and other anomalies are the result of using earlier sources, or untouched pre-Deuteronomic histories, and imposing a framework upon them.<sup>9</sup>

R.K. Harrison argues along the same lines as Moore. His overall model of construction for Judges follows traditional thinking. However, he sees the Samson narratives as an important piece of the history. Harrison argues that the “middle chapters” (Judges 14-15) illustrate the Greek concept of “*menis*” or wrath. Simply put, this social theory depicts an original affront which brings about retaliation. A series of retaliatory acts ensues and the climactic action is, almost ridiculously, out of proportion to the original affront. In the Samson narratives, the cheating on a wager ultimately resulting in the massacre of 1000 men is seen as an example of “*menis*”. Therefore, the Samson narratives were kept throughout the redactional history of Judges because of their popular nature and the affinity with ancient eastern Mediterranean heroic concepts.<sup>10</sup>

The romantic idea that the Samson narratives were kept through a lengthy redaction process because of Samson’s heroic nature is compelling, but overly simplistic. Later writers, as will be argued, would have little interest in this hero. Furthermore, the narratives placement in the book

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

<sup>9</sup> G. F. Moore, *Judges*. ICC. (New York: Scribner’s, 1903), xxxv.

<sup>10</sup> R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 690.

of Judges and the grammatical construction of the passages which mention his Charisma reveal a purposeful editorial hand, that cannot be attributed to popularity alone. Therefore, while scholars such as Moore and Harrison imply the importance of the Samson narratives, this study intends to build upon their theories and show how the Samson narratives indicate that the Deuteronomistic Historian received work that was already edited. There is little doubt that a theological framework was imposed on these received works. The introductory verse, Judges 13:1, is strong evidence of this framework. However, this editing began as early as the court of King David.

## DAVIDIC COMPILATION OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

While there is no denying the powerful influence of the D writer on the historical books of the Old Testament, to understand the Samson narratives one has to look to the Yahwist, or J, writer. The writing of the Yahwist is characterized by a rustic and realistic tone, fast-paced action, and vivid details. This is not say that the Samson accounts originated with the J writer, but that he is, possibly, the author most comfortable working with this type of narrative. Martin Noth was the first to argue for the origin of the J source dating to the early monarchy. He writes, "as far as I can see, there is nothing in the original material of the J narrative which would force one to place its composition later than the Davidic-Solomonic period."<sup>11</sup>

McKenzie is the most powerful voice for looking to the Davidic Court as the origin of the J tradition. McKenzie writes;

"It is most probable that the J of the Pentateuch was also a scribe of David's court. The history of early Israel and the history of the early monarchy were produced by the same school of writers. One may probably attribute the institution and intention of 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 single tradition which would identify as one the nation which he had created and merge its dangerous diversities."<sup>12</sup>

Elsewhere McKenzie argues "if, as seems very likely, the political unification of Israel under David and Solomon was accompanied by a literary unification of tribal traditions, then the first edition of Judges should be placed here."<sup>13</sup> The earliest edition of Judges, according to McKenzie, contained nothing of chapter 1, D Framework, or appendices. It was a collection of individual accounts of "heroes whom the king had replaced."<sup>14</sup> In these tales is "the authentic voice of the men of early Israel. We learn their manner of speech and their habits of thought and the details of their daily life."<sup>15</sup> While McKenzie presents a strong hypothesis, this study will contend that the Samson narratives, with the exception of the undeniable D influences, should be dated no later than the Davidic kingship

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<sup>11</sup> M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* B. Anderson, trans. (Chico:Scholars' Press, 1981), 230,

<sup>12</sup> J.L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Chicago: Bruce, 1965), 770.

<sup>13</sup> McKenzie, *World*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Essentially, the J document consisted of early tribal traditions cast in a Davidic context. These traditions recounted history beginning with the Fall of Man, moving through the Patriarchs and the Mosaic Covenant, the possession of the land and its settlement under the Judges. Its aim was to validate the Davidic Kingship by showing it to be the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.<sup>16</sup> The J document reflected the political theology of David. It justifies the presence of a King, for Israel was to be a theocracy ruled by YHWH (Judges 8:2-23). It provided a polemic for the primacy of Judah, the new religious and political center of Israel. Throughout the J document, Judah is often in the center of the narrative. Judah is a powerful factor in the book of Judges and the Samson narratives.<sup>17</sup>

## **SAMSON AND THE YHWH SPIRIT**

It is the references to Samson's Charisma which indicate that the origins of the narratives were in the settlement period of Israel and forms a powerful link to the Davidic Kingship. Traditionally, scholarship has argued that the Samson narratives began as profane stories about a powerful Danite, possibly a resistance fighter, who conducted a single-handed war with the Philistines. While most, if not all, scholars subscribe to some form of this construct, the debate quickly turns to the religious elements contained in the Samson narratives. More specifically, the question of dating has produced a wide range of conjectures and theories, particularly regarding the "Spirit" passages. Most scholars argue that the religious elements were later redactions introduced at some point during the Monarchy, possibly dating to the Deuteronomic Redaction.

Among the first to advance this type of argument was A. van Doorninck. Van Doorninck attempted to find the original Samson stories by relegating all religious elements to later editorial amplifications. The basis for this argument was Judges 14:19a, the reference to the Spirit in narrating an unjustly lost wager. He argues that this verse, and the other references to the Spirit in 14:6 and 15:14, amounts to an awkward insertion that can be excluded without doing harm to the story.<sup>18</sup>

J. Wellhausen argued, similarly to Van Doorninck, that the narratives were originally a group of profane stories about a hero who fought the Philistines. However, he looks to the motives of the assumed insertions. Wellhausen argued that the profane stories were transformed by a later editor, possibly in the early kingship, into a religious tragedy by infusing a religious-national element into them. Features such as the Charisma were part of this religious-national element.<sup>19</sup>

O. Eissfeldt, in an argument similar to M.-J. LaGrange and V. Zapletal, places the references to the Spirit in the Davidic-Solomonic era. He argues that these references are so typical of the J

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<sup>16</sup> For an argument typifying this position read, Rendsburg, G. "Reading David in Genesis," *BR* (February 2001), 20-33, 46

<sup>17</sup> For further readings on the Davidic polemic read, O'Connell, R. *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*. (VT sup 63) Leiden: Brill, 1996 and Sweeney, M. "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," *VT* 116 (1997) 517-529.

<sup>18</sup> A. van Doorninck, "Die Simsonsagen: Kritische Studien Over Richteren 14-16 *ThT* (1894, 14-32) 17-19.

<sup>19</sup> J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuches und der Historischen Bücher des Altern Testaments* 3. (Auf: Berlin 1899) 225-227.

material that there is no justification to argue that they are later expansions.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Eissfeldt does not argue for the Spirit passages being original to the story, but, like Wellhausen, suggests that the window of time between the historical Samson and the writing of his accounts is considerably closer than other scholars theorize.

R. Bartelmus presents a powerful theory of the editorial process. He, like others, sees the narratives as beginning as a group of heroic tales. However, he argues that, due to their profane nature, they needed to be adapted to Yahwism. He appeals to the theology which states that YHWH is the only true warrior and hero of Israel. Bartelmus argues for an adaptation process, which can be translated as the “Principle of the Intersection of Motifs”. This adaptation construct states that when a feature in the original saga can be used as a point of contact with Yahwism, the redactor incorporates all related motifs and themes into the original saga in order to make it more acceptable to the principles of the Yahwistic faith. Therefore, Bartelmus argues, all religious elements, particularly the references to the Spirit, are the results of editorial insertions.<sup>21</sup>

## **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF THE “SPIRIT” PASSAGES**

The aforementioned conjectures are all valuable and contribute to Samson studies, but none are complete enough to be seen as ends to themselves. Any theory must contain several elements; the two types of “Spirit” passages, the uneven distribution of the passages, the dating and reasoning for the inclusion of the passages. We contend that there are two distinct levels of development in the passages which narrate Samson’s charisma.

### **The First Level of Development**

There is no reason to doubt the historical reality of Samson or the private war he conducted against the Philistines. For our present purposes it is irrelevant to theorize whether it was a war fought for personal, lusty, reasons or he was an Israelite champion who was a guerilla resistance fighter. However, it is this series of events, in which the Spirit figures prominently, that made Samson a national hero for Israel and a national enemy of the Philistines.

The first level of development is, probably, illustrated in Judges 13:25. Here is the reference to Samson’s first encounter with the Spirit. The grammatical construction is very different than the later references. It is an unusual construction and does not translate well into English. Therefore, it seems that the best rendering would be in an abstract sense which connotes that the Spirit, “began to impel” Samson in a Camp of Dan. The phrase seems to have a repetitive connotation to it, entailing regularity like a marched step or blacksmith’s hammer.

This seems to be an early version of the Spirit passages which, to paraphrase McKenzie, reflects the authentic voice of early Israel. There is no stylized construction in the passage. It seems to be an explanation of, presumably, the physical prowess of Samson. This prowess is attributed to YHWH, as the verse connects the Charisma with being blessed. H.M. Niemann, in a related argument, sees this verse as part of the *volksüberlieferung*, a popular folk tale, and

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<sup>20</sup> O. Eissfeldt, *Die Quellen des Richterbuches* (Leipzig, 1925), 85-86.

<sup>21</sup> R. Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und Seiner Umwelt*. (Zurich, 1979) 83-88.

argues that it should be seen as part of the oldest traditions regarding Samson.<sup>22</sup> Quite possibly, following McKenzie and Niemann, this is a depiction of the storytellers' art. There is little reason to argue, as many scholars attempt, that this verse is an incomplete reference and introduces some lost exploit of Samson. More likely, the reference acts as an introduction to the body of Samson accounts, placing all subsequent actions under the authority of the Spirit. This implication of permanence will serve the Davidic Theology, as we will argue later.

This passage referring to Samson's Charisma in a Camp of Dan serves another, perhaps more important, function. It establishes a standard of charismatic activity in Samson, Scripture is silent as to what level of actions it referred. However, as McKenzie has repeatedly argued, the YHWH Spirit prompted men to move beyond their normal habits and attainments. Therefore, the later Spirit passages in the narratives reflect actions that were seen, or remembered, as moving past Samson's habitual actions, as established by the reference in Judges 13:25. This would account for the uneven distribution of Spirit passages. Killing a lion, despoiling 30 men, and striking 1000 Philistines move beyond his usual attacks or exploits against the Philistines.<sup>23</sup>

The grammatical construction of the first level of development of the other Spirit passages cannot be determined. However, these dramatic moments captured the popular imagination and were kept in the oral tradition. Not only do they establish Samson as Charismatic Leader, the onrushes of Spirit act as a dynamic mover to the accounts, helping to bind them together. The killing of the lion begins the middle chapters which recount Samson's Charisma. The settling of the wager renews the story and reminds the listener of the influence of YHWH. The battle at Ramath-Lehi acts as a climax to the narratives which recount this escalation of actions. These were, popular and treasured, tribal memories and traditions of Samson and, if David wanted to unify the tribes, there would little reason to excise them from the narratives. David will use the popularity of Samson in his political theology. To this end, David will impose a conformity, or formulaic construction, to these passages.

## The Second Level of Development

The phrase that characterizes the Spirit passages is ותצלח עליו רוח יהוה, "and the Spirit of the Lord rushed mightily..." This phrase occurs in exactly the same construction in Judges 14:6, 14:19, and 15:14. The key root in this phrase is צלח. Early lexicons and dictionaries made a distinction in denotations of this root; "To penetrate, onrush" and "to succeed". Currently, scholars have accepted unified denotation of this term; "To force in" → "To penetrate" → "To succeed".<sup>24</sup> In Judges, particularly the Samson narratives, and the book of Samuel the concrete meaning of "penetration/onrush" dominates. However, the figurative and causative

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<sup>22</sup> H.M. Niemann, *Die Daniten: Studien zur Geschichte eines Altisraelitischen Stammes* (Göttingen, 1985) 191-192. While we may not agree with his full theory, his point which sees this as one of the oldest parts of the narratives must, and is by scholars, be noted as significant. He is often criticized for offering little evidence for his distinctions and categorizations.

<sup>23</sup> To support our view, one must note that there is no reference to the Spirit in Judges 15: 3-5, the burning of the crops, and 15:8, his repeated blows against the Philistines. Although these acts, as placed in the text, moved him from being a local problem to a national enemy there is no indication that these exploits were outside of his normal actions.

<sup>24</sup> M. Saebo, "to succeed" *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 3:1077.

sense, “to succeed”, may be seen in Psalm 45:5 (a Psalm of the Davidic King, possibly Solomon) and in Genesis 24:21, 40, 42, and 56. Significantly, these passages in Psalms and Genesis could be attributed to King David’s court. Both the concrete and figurative senses each connote a forward orientation or movement toward a goal. Since this Spirit is from YHWH, it is his goal that will be attained. M. Saebo comments that the use of נָצַח in the OT “bears a marked theological imprint in the vast majority of its occurrences. It may be generally and somewhat unproblematically stated that the ‘success’ comes – directly or indirectly- from God, in particular when God is ‘with’ someone,[as] an expression of his blessing”.<sup>25</sup> The unified meaning of this word has an enormous influence on the Spirit passages in the Samson narratives and supports McKenzie’s early understanding of the Charismatic event. The Spirit rushes upon Samson, forcing itself upon and in him, equipping him for the task which is immediately ahead of him, and guaranteeing his success in the mission given to him (Judges 13:5, the beginning of the liberation of Israel from the Philistines). This gives further theological explanation to the notice of “blessing” in Judges 13:25, wherein the Charisma was connected to blessing.

### Samson and David

This grammatical and theological construct is found in the Davidic accounts; 1 Samuel 16:13.<sup>26</sup> It is significant to note that the connection between נָצַח and the YHWH Spirit is found only in the accounts of Samson, Saul, and David. This seems to be a strong indicator of the same origin; the court historian, or redactor, of David. This connection also seems to place Samson and Saul in preparatory roles which make way for the Davidic Kingship. There are several aspects of this connection that bear consideration.

Historically, Samson began the war with the Philistines which David finished.<sup>27</sup> Samson halted the first period of ascendancy to power of the Philistines which, due to their subsequent weakness, allowed Israel time to fortify herself. This fortification was done under Saul. Admittedly, Saul had victories over the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:16-23), but these were not decisive. More importantly, Saul introduced the throne to Israel and acted as a transition between the Judges and the Kingship. During the Saulide kingship, the distinction between the role of king and prophet was demarcated (1 Samuel 15). In these respects, David’s reign rested on the foundation of the Saulide kingship.

Theologically, Samson forms a stronger connection with David than does Saul through the Spirit passages. David was the king on whom the Spirit came to rest permanently. Saul’s Charisma was still of the transient nature of most of the Judges. However, the reference in Judges 13:25 introduces the concept of a permanent, or long-term, Charisma. This permanent Blessing may

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 3:1079.

<sup>26</sup> We will see a similar construct in the Saulide accounts; 1 Samuel 10:6,10 and 11:6. However, only in 10:6 do we see the YHWH Spirit, the other references are to the Spirit of God. All references seem to connect Saul to a prophetic context. But, the term נָצַח is present and Saul’s kingship still bears the same theological imprint.

<sup>27</sup> The importance of David breaking the Philistines’ power is seen in 1 Samuel 5. The defeat of the Philistines is placed in the climactic position (5:17-25). A close reading indicates that v.17 should follow v.5, as this is the response to David being anointed king. Moreover, the capture of Zion is subordinated to the defeat of the Philistines. Yet, the establishment of Jerusalem was foundational to David’s reign and Eternal Kingship.

be the reason for Samson dying in triumph, although in a Philistine temple, and Saul dying in disgrace in battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 31).

Significantly, the tribal memories of Samson's Charisma belong to Judah and not Dan, Samson's tribe. According to Judges 1:34 and a further account in Judges 18, the Danites had migrated northward. This is substantiated by Judges 13:2, wherein the Danites are still in the core area of the tribal allotment of Zorah and Eshtaol but are referred to as a clan, no longer the tribe that was to occupy that territory. It is generally agreed upon by scholars that the migration took place early in the period of the Judges and the placement of the appendix, Judges 18, was done as to continue the Danite theme in this section of the book. Originally, the Danite allotment abutted Philistia and, many scholars believe, it is possible that the pressure from the Philistines, as well as the Amorites, on the coast was a major factor for their migration. With the Danites moving northward, the territory of Dan became a frontier area between the tribe of Judah and Philistia. Samson's charismatic exploits were performed in this contested region.

In addition to the Danite Migration, the actions narrated in Judges 15 support the idea that the charismatic exploits of Samson were a Judahite memory. In Judges 15:9-13 we read that the Judahites, not Danites, were pressed into service by Philistines. The Judahites, by their own admission, were dominated by the Philistines. This suggests close contact between Judah and Philistia in the aftermath of the migration of Dan.

Samson's first two exploits done under the influence of the Spirit's onrush; the killing of the lion (Judges 14:6) and the settling of the wager (Judges 14:19), were done in the area of Timnah. According to the text of Joshua 19:43, which records the original allotment of territories, Timnah was originally a town given to the Danites. However, according to Joshua 15:57, Timnah was a city of Judah. It is generally agreed that this chapter is an administrative list, or catalog of the territories in the southern region of Judah. It has been argued, by A. Alt and others, that this list originates in the time of the Judges and was redacted during the monarchy. Most scholars place this redaction after the reign of Solomon, when Israel was divided. We, also, would suggest dating this list to the Davidic reign. Evidence for this dating would include the detailed summary of Judah's holdings, the primary role Judah assumes, the presence of the Judge Othniel, and the assumption of towns from other tribes. Along with Timnah, the Danite towns of Zorah and Eshtaol also appear on the list of Judahite cities. Therefore, following Alt's dating of the list's origin, this should be seen as a Davidic list that represents the shifting Judahite boundaries that occurred in the time of Judges that resulted from the Danite Migration. The list is an administrative validation of territories and towns absorbed by the tribe of Judah that was expanding its borders.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, by the time Samson reached maturity Timnah was claimed by Judah. However, it seems to have fallen into Philistine control (Judges 14:3). Manoah refers to the town with the derogatory title, "uncircumcised". This episode depicts that Timnah was in the frontier territory and the unencumbered movement that, sometimes, occurred between Israel and Philistia.

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<sup>28</sup> It is recognized that the absorbing of smaller or weaker tribes by large and stronger was a known phenomenon in tribal Israel, as occurred with Judah and Simeon. To assume vacated land, as the original allotment of Dan, is entirely consistent with this mindset.

Therefore, the killing of the lion and the settling of the wager were Judahite/Philistine memories of Samson.

The battle at Ramath-Lehi, “heights of the jawbone”, adds another dimension to our argument. The Hebrew term, “*lehi*”, means cheek or jawbone. The account of Samson smiting 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass at the place of Lehi seems to be an exaggerated word-play. However, a closer look at the word reveals much more than narrative games. It is universally agreed upon by scholars that Lehi refers to a geographical location. Some try to identify the actual place while others have suggested that it refers to a landmark that resembles a jawbone. These attempts have proven unpersuasive and inconclusive. However, there is a growing opinion among scholars that suggests that this term, following Akkadian cognates, has connotations of “limits”, “circumference”, or “border”. In the context of the Samson account, this would mean that the battle occurred in the border region, or frontier, of Judah and Philistia. Therefore, once again, we must place the point of Charisma in the vicinity of Timnah, in the contested region that was once the Danite Territory.<sup>29</sup>

The importance of Timnah should be noted. Archaeological excavations, headed by George Kelm and Amihai Mazar, have identified the site of Biblical Timnah; Tel Batash. Their findings have a direct impact on our understanding of the Samson accounts. According to the findings, Timnah was a very diverse and cosmopolitan city, not a small town in the hill country of the Shephelah. Its location and, apparent, wealth would make it valuable for Israel and Philistia. This mix of cultures and influences would also explain the wide spread of Samson’s exploits, as stories of his power would be shared among travelers moving in and out of the region. It also suggests that the Philistines may have kept a memory of Samson.<sup>30</sup> Quite possibly, David became familiar with these stories in his days among the Philistines (1 Samuel 27-29). The popularity of Samson among Israelites and hatred of Samson among the Philistines would be of great value to his “court history.”

#### David: The Fulfillment of Samson’s Work

We have noted to powerful connection between Samson and David; similar construction of charismatic onrush phrases, the territory of Judah, and triumph over the Philistines. However, David needed to set himself apart from the Judges, and Saul. David needed to show that the Judges, in particular Samson, pointed to his kingship and that Israelite history moved toward his reign.

While not demeaning the power of Samson, which would also hurt the popularity of the Danite hero, the Davidic accounts show David as performing deeds that equal or surpass those of Samson. Samson’s first charismatic experience prompted him to slay a lion. According to his comments to Saul, David killed lions and bears (1 Samuel 17: 34-36). It is unclear if these actions were done under the power of the Spirit. However, the point of David’s physical prowess and dexterity is made. Samson killed 30 men of Ashkelon in settling the wager, which

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<sup>29</sup> M. Lubetski, “Lehi” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (NY: Doubleday, 1992), 4:275

<sup>30</sup> This would account for the Philistine perspective of Judges 16, wherein we read about Samson’s exploits in Gaza and with Delilah

was lost by unfair means. David kills Goliath. While the numbers in Samson depict uneven odds against the hero, the size of Goliath depicts overwhelming odds against David (1 Samuel 17:41-51). Samson defeats 1000 Philistines at Ramath-Lehi. In songs, it is said that David killed “tens of thousands” (1 Samuel 18: 7, 29:5). In light of these accounts, with the texts showing that he completed the battle which Samson began, David is depicted as the culmination of Samson’s mission against the Philistines.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps, the most overt example of David completing the work of Samson is found in the description of how the Spirit approached, or rushed upon, the men. The Samson, and Saulide, accounts use the term  $\text{לע}$ , while the Davidic reference to the Spirit uses the term  $\text{לא}$ . Both terms connotes a downward rushing upon something or someone. They also imply an aspect of speed, as downward motions are, usually, more rapid than upward movements. Therefore there is some overlap in meanings with the two words. However, early dictionaries and lexicons, most notably Gesenius, demonstrate that, although both words suggest motion,  $\text{לע}$  only “approaches to the force of the particle  $\text{לא}$ .”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the use of this word would be entirely consistent with David’s history and theology. In this instance, it is written that David’s charisma has now surpassed that of the popular Samson, the only leader to have had any significant success against the Philistines.

### **Dating the Charisma**

This study contends that the presence of the Spirit passages in the Samson narratives, in this particular construction, is a key reason to date them to the Davidic reign. Charisma, as modern interpreters call it, was a hallmark of leadership in the Settlement Period of Israel and the early Monarchy. However, with the advent of Solomon the focus of kingly authority shifted to dynastic succession. The narrative of 2 Samuel 9- 1 Kings 2 is often called the “Succession Narrative” and is read as a single unit of text, which encompasses several smaller themes and texts. This recounts the accession of Solomon to the Davidic Throne. The authority of succession is most prevalent in 1 Kings 1-2. The dynasty is affirmed by the Oracle of Nathan (2 Samuel 7:8-16 and Psalm 89: 20-38), which is regarded by most scholars as having originated in the time of David. With the authority of dynastic succession and the promise of the eternal kingship, the aspect of Charisma was relegated to part of the trappings of the kingly office. It was never forsaken or forgotten, but the Davidic lineage rose to primacy. Therefore, it seems unlikely that post-Davidic redactors, who were concerned with the exaltation of the line of David, would stress the Charisma of Samson.

The age of the prophetic word also indicates that the dating of the Spirit passages should be no later than King David. Samuel introduced the image of the “classical” prophet. However, the age

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<sup>31</sup> This practice, of a king absorbing and surpassing feats of his subjects or precursors, seems to be somewhat common in the ancient Near East. B. Halpern gives a detailed rendering of this phenomenon, calling it the “Tiglath-Pileser Principle” in his work *David’s Secret Demons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> W. Gesenius, “לע” *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885 ), 781.

of prophecy commenced under Nathan, David's prophet. In the age of the Judges and early kingship, the authority and power of YHWH was seen through the manifestations of the Spirit in the chosen leaders. In the prophetic period, the Word of YHWH (*dbr YHWH*) conveyed the authority of YHWH. This reflects a powerful shift in Yahwistic theology. The charismatic Spirit of the Judges inspired violent and eruptive actions. Until David, the trajectory, the length of time of the actions under the Spirit's influence, was short; the time it took for the immediate crisis to be resolved. However, the trajectory of the Word of YHWH was much longer and had a much broader scope than the results of the Spirit. In ancient Israel, the concept of "word" entailed a dynamic aspect. The word was understood as a living entity that reflected the power of the speaker. The word kept its dynamic aspect, or trajectory, until it found complete fulfillment. The word was the Charisma of the Prophets. This Charisma supplanted that of Samson, the Judges, and even the early Kings. Therefore, with the rise of the Prophetic Word, which revealed the will of YHWH, the role of the Spirit would fade into relative obscurity. Again, the Spirit was never forgotten and it would rise to prominence, once again, during the time of Jesus. Furthermore, with the rise of the authority of the word beginning in the lifetime of David, it seems unlikely that post-Davidic redactors would place any emphasis on the actions done under the influence of the Spirit.

Possibly the strongest evidence suggesting a dating to the Davidic reign is the overarching span of Philistine history.<sup>33</sup> The Philistines were one of the invading "Sea Peoples" that were fought off by Ramses III of Egypt (1196-1165 BC), in a battle which weakened both Egypt and the Philistines. Due to their military and political organization and power, the Philistines enjoyed a long period of ascendancy, which was ended by Samson. The dating of Samson is unclear, but it seems likely that he lived toward the end of the Judges Period, in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century BC. Most scholars date David to c. 1000 BC. As already noted, David broke the Philistine power. It is generally agreed upon by scholars that the Philistine Pentapolis was broken and they never again formed a unified threat against Israel. They may have been reduced to a vassal state or territory of Israel under David. But, this status does not seem to have lasted long, as Biblical and historical records suggest that they enjoyed relative independence from Israel, at least eventually. From archaeological and historical records, it seems likely that individual cities of the former Pentapolis had brief surges in power and mounted minor incursions into Israel. Although the hatred for the Philistines endured for centuries, as the many prophetic oracles attest, after David they never matched the domination they enjoyed in the periods of the Judges and early Kingship. The memory of this domination is the key factor in making them the climax in the account of David rising to the Jerusalem Throne.

However, after David the oppression by Philistines would be forgotten. Wellhausen and McKenzie, among other later scholars, have suggested that Samson's popularity was based, in part, on the uplifting message of a single Israelite, by the power of YHWH, defeating the overwhelmingly powerful Philistines. The stories represented the voice of the oppressed and that they infused a powerful religious-national spirit into the beaten Israelites. While the uplifting message remains, the waning voice of the oppressed element is gone. Post-Davidic redactors

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<sup>33</sup> We can only give a brief detail herein, as the full history of this interesting people would take us far afield from our scope of study.

would have little reason to emphasize the charismatic exploits performed by Samson against the Philistines. As we have seen, the Spirit was no longer the hallmark of Israelite leadership nor the revelation of the will of YHWH. The Philistines were now a memory and their defeat would not command the attention and significance it would garner during the reign of David.

Therefore, based on the establishment of the reign of David and the history of the Philistines, we contend that the “Spirit passages” in Samson should be dated to the Davidic Court. Herein we see the beginnings of Biblical redaction, a presentation of Israelite history, and the legitimation of the Davidic Throne. While later Biblical redactors wrote favorably of David, the accounts of Samson’s triumph would not be of great importance to them. Moreover, the later writers, according to Wellhausen’s school of thought, presented very stylized writing with definite characteristics and recurring themes. The two forms of references to Samson’s Charisma and their uneven distribution is not congruous with the writing styles of the later redactors. However, the Samson Spirit passages are congruous with the oral accounts of the days before the Davidic writing and with the rustic J writing style, whose origin has been placed in the Davidic reign.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Samson narratives are a reflection of a historical period, but to be understood correctly they must be seen in a theological context. This is the context David placed upon them. With this understanding, it must be acknowledged the scholars such as Wellhausen and McKenzie were correct in pointing to the uplifting themes in the narratives. These accounts depict the authentic voice of early Israel. However, these were popular tribal memories. Herein is where Wellhausen and McKenzie, and the scholars who relegate the Samson narratives to hyperbole and folk tales, do not understand the importance of the narratives and, in their final conclusion, do not assess the narratives’ importance. Because of their popular and rustic nature, many scholars have criticized the Samson for their poor historical quality and lack of theological importance. This connection leads to the flawed conclusion that equates popular narratives with embellished or fictitious stories. Admittedly, the Samson narratives do not demonstrate the highly stylized writings of later redactors or answer historical questions that would be posed by modern scholars. Also, the accounts are dramatic and are built on high adventure. On the other hand, even McKenzie is compelled to state that the narratives “illustrate better than any other OT narratives the relations between Israelites and Philistines. . . The realism of the background of the stories shows that they come from the time and place of Samson’s feats.” He goes on to say that “popular tradition” has magnified the feats.<sup>34</sup> This broad statement neglects the idea that the Samson narratives were not meant to be a biography or chronicle of the life and exploits of

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<sup>34</sup> McKenzie DOB 767. This sentence is problematic as he is a comment regarding realism with a comment on embellishments. Moreover, recent language and archaeological studies have been validating the exploits in the narratives. For instance, excavations have uncovered Philistine temples, possibly renovated from Canaanite temples, that have inner rooms supported by only 2 pillars. These findings give credibility to the famous death scene of Samson (Judges 16) and point to the conclusion that the modern interpreter must find the true meaning of the words of the Biblical authors and not be quick to dismiss the authority of texts based on perceived flaws or moral assessment, as McKenzie repeatedly does with Samson in many of his works.

Samson. Samson was depicted as a historical and theological precursor to David. For this purpose, popular success would surpass precision and accuracy of detail for the Davidic editor.

David made the defeat of the Philistines a key factor in his Court History. After David, with the advent of kingly authority resting on dynastic succession, emphasis on the Word of the Lord, and the ascendancy of other, powerful and conquering, nations Samson's defeat of the Philistines would be of little importance to the Biblical authors and editors. Samson would always remain a treasured memory of the Jewish people, as evidenced in Hebrews 11:32. However, the significance of the Philistines, the most advanced people of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, pales with the glory attained by Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The Philistines were the first people that were able to threaten the existence of Israel; later conquerors destroyed Israel and Judah. In these post-Davidic historical circumstances it seems unlikely that the defeat of the Philistines would produce editorial activity, as some scholars have argued. These later authors were struggling to explain the anger of YHWH and why the Chosen People were conquered and removed from the Promised Land of Israel. The Charismatic defeat of the Philistines would have little meaning to a conquered people. Therefore, it can be concluded that the defeat of the Philistines held the most importance and the most advantages for David. Furthermore, it would be the Davidic editors of the royal court that would take the time to redact the Samson narratives. In this redaction, the pressing answers to questions regarding David's throne are addressed.

The construction of the Samson narratives, particularly the charismatic passages, illustrate that Samson led the way, historically and theologically, for King David. While all Judahite kings could use the Judges as foundational to their reigns, no other king approximates the ties between David and Samson. As we have said, Samson began the war with the Philistines which David completed. Samson's mission, the beginning of the liberation of Israel from Philistine hands (Judges 13:5), reflects this historical link regardless of the passage being interpreted as a prophetic visit to Manoah or a later insertion. Paring away all theological and political aspects, the ascendancy and descendancy of the power of Philistia and Israel attests to this historical continuum. It is generally agreed upon by scholars that the Philistines were a formidable people who easily overpowered the Israelites. Their rapid rise to domination in this area was halted by Samson. His triumphs over the Philistines made him a national enemy. Moreover, his death (Judges 16) in the temple of Dagon would throw the Philistines into disarray. While popular imagination has enlarged the temple to incredible size, it is altogether probable that key leaders would be in attendance to witness the death of this enemy. Therefore, at least some of the military or political leaders of Philistia were killed. History has told us, repeatedly, that confusion reigns when key leaders fall. These deaths would cripple the Philistine organization. Also, these deaths allowed Samuel and Saul to withstand the Philistine resurgence and attain some, indecisive, victories. Therefore, it seems that David engaged the Philistines when they were only returning to their former power. We can only conjecture as to the changes in Israelite history if the Philistines power had gone unchecked by Samson.

Through the charismatic passages found in the Samson narratives, David was able to introduce the concept of permanent charisma. In the "middle chapters" (Judges 14-15) the YHWH Spirit

manifests multiple times, unlike with Saul in whom the “YHWH Spirit” only manifests once.<sup>35</sup> The text of Judges 13:25, an introduction to the middle chapters, suggests a permanent Charisma that sustained Samson throughout his life. Therefore, by building on Samson’s charismatic foundation and adding a more forceful grammatical particle to the narration of his own Charismatic endowment, David could affirm his rightful Kingship.

Therefore, the glorious Davidic Kingship, and the promise of the Eternal Kingship, rested on the charismatic power of Samson.

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<sup>35</sup> Although the Spirit is mentioned three times; one is simply foretelling it, one is the “Spirit of God” - a different force- and one is the actual onrush of the YHWH Spirit.

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