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**The New Things
Eschatology in Old Testament Prophecy**

Festschrift for Henk Leene

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Whichever approach(es) are chosen, it appears important to be aware that, if the new eon would indeed describe a situation which is entirely separate from the present (and past), the future, on balance, will become incomprehensible. It can also be formulated more positively: thanks to the continuity between the two eons, people can imagine the future. Maybe that the new world will eventually turn out to be – retroactively – a reality, totally diametrically opposed to the present. But mortal people, the author of Isaiah 26 among them, can so far only imagine the future with actants, actions and time categories which are known in the past and present.

SAMSON AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Some Remarks on a Painting by Lovis Corinth¹

Klaas Spronk

INTRODUCTION

The person of Samson and his deeds evoke different reactions. In the New Testament he is mentioned among those who are an example of the people who lived and acted out of faith (Heb 11:32-33). In the history of Christian exegesis he is portrayed as foreshadowing Jesus Christ. The story of Samson freeing himself from the closed city of Gaza by taking away the doors of the city gate (Judg 16:3) has been related to Jesus Christ removing the gates of the world of the dead.² Samson's death, by letting the Philistine temple of Dagon collapse together with about three thousand of Israel's enemies (Judg 16:28-30), has been related to the death of Jesus Christ as a means to freeing the faithful from the burden of sin.³ In modern exegesis interpreters tend to be less positive. Typical is the comment of Gerhard von Rad: 'So zeigen also auch die Simsongeschichten das Scheitern eines Charismatikers und das

¹ Part of this article was read at the 'Openingsconferentie' of the Vrije Universiteit, in the morning of 11th September 2001. I thank Henk Leene and others for their valuable remarks on that occasion.

² See, for instance, the *Biblia Pauperum* (Codex Palatinus Germanicus) of ca. 1400. A picture of Jesus' resurrection is surrounded by portraits of prophets who announced the resurrection and by pictures of Jonah spat out by the fish and by a picture of Samson carrying the doors of the gate of Gaza. In other paintings of this kind the two doors are lying 'cross'wise on his back. Cf. also D.M. Gunn, 'Samson of Sorrows: An Isaianic Gloss on Judges 13-16', in: D.N. Fewell (ed.), *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, Louisville 1992, 225-253, esp. 228 and 251-252.

³ Cf. the commentary of Matthew Henry (18th century): 'He sought not his own death, but Israel's deliverance, and the destruction of their enemies. Thus Samson died in bonds, and among the Philistines, as an awful rebuke for his sins; but he died repentant. The effects of his death typified those of the death of Christ, who, of his own will, laid down his life among transgressors, and thus overturned the foundation of Satan's kingdom, and provided for the deliverance of his people.' Similar views can be found with modern orthodox Christian exegetes; cf., e.g., H. de Jong, *Israël, de Filistijnen over u! Bijbellesing met de gemeente over de richter Simson*, Kampen 1992, and B. Webb, 'A Serious Reading of the Samson Story', *The Reformed Theological Review* 54 (1995), 110-120, who calls Samson 'forerunner of the greatest Saviour of all' (120).

Bild einer vertanen Gotteskraft'.⁴ Speaking of pictures, it will be difficult to associate the collapsing of the Philistine temple caused by Samson's tearing down the two pillars on which it rested with the results of the terrorist action in New York on September 11th, live on television. Even the number of victims is the same.

On the one hand, we see in Samson a man of extraordinary strength given by God to free his people; on the other hand, a man who was not able to use this strength in a deliberate and justified way but merely reacted, usually in anger, to the things happening to him. There is one aspect of Samson that generally remains in the background: the desolate, suffering human being, betrayed and mutilated. It comes to the fore in a gripping painting by Lovis Corinth of the blinded Samson. In this short contribution to the 'Festschrift' for Professor Leene I want to take this piece of art as a starting point for an attempt to describe some analogies between Samson and the Servant of the Lord in Second Isaiah. I present it to Henk Leene as a token of gratitude for his kind fellowship within the department of Old Testament studies of the Vrije Universiteit and as a tribute to someone who is known for his exegetical craftsmanship, especially concerning the Second Isaiah and its relations to other books of the Old Testament, and who also loves the work of Lovis Corinth.

LOVIS CORINTH'S 'BLINDED SAMSON'

The German artist Lovis Corinth (1858-1925)⁵ was and still is famous for his many paintings, first in an impressionist and later in a more expressionist style. Corinth himself would not agree with the labeling 'impressionist' and 'expressionist'. He was more inspired by the realism of Rembrandt, Rubens and Gustave Courbet, but he was also a child of his time and rightly regarded as one of the leaders of German Impressionism. In 1911 he suffered a severe stroke, which left him partially paralyzed. He quickly recovered, but not completely. Since then his style changed. His paintings became more expressionist in feeling. It is interesting to note that as Hitler rose to power, Corinth's works were left undisturbed but for those works executed after his stroke, which were considered 'Degenerate'.

The first great painting after his stroke was 'Der geblendete Simson' (1912).⁶ Compared to a sketch on the same subject he made twenty years earlier one notices that the artist now seems to have developed more affinity with bodily suffering. Corinth must have felt some kind of relationship with

⁴ G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* I, München 1962, 346.

⁵ Cf. P.-K. Schuster e.a. (ed.), *Lovis Corinth*, München 1996; S.W. Laux, *Der Fall Corinth*, München 1998.

⁶ Nationalgalerie Berlin, reproduced here in black and white, © Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz; cf. Schuster e.a., *Lovis Corinth*, 202-203. In the original painting the towel covering Samson's eye sockets is clearly stained with blood, which is also running down his cheek.

Samson. He was known for his physical strength, fully enjoyed life with his young wife and was very productive. This passionate artist then, at the prime of his life, experiences a cruel physical setback. His struggle in coping with all this returns in the subjects he now chose to paint and in the way he expressed pain and suffering. In the same period Corinth made a sketch of a tormented Job and his friends. There are a number of correspondences between the two works. For instance, in the striking groping bony hands. Another related work is his 'Ecce Homo', a water color drawing of the suffering Jesus, which he later also painted in oil. A detail found in both these paintings is the bright red blood dripping from the crown of thorns and the eye sockets respectively.



This picture of Samson clearly deviates from the traditional way in which he is rendered. One usually pictures him in the same way as classical heroes like Hercules, according to the ideals of one's time concerning the strong man. Seeing the painting of Corinth for the first time, one is shocked. It recalls the painting by Rembrandt of the Philistine soldiers gouging out his eyes with a treacherous Delilah in the background holding Samson's locks in one and the scissors in the other hand. Corinth has in the first place painted Samson here in his loneliness. He seems to be silently grinning with pain. There is no reference to his past, to his faults, nor any hint at a possible positive outcome.

In her beautiful essay on this painting J. Cheryl Exum goes one step further: Samson is represented here as abandoned by his God.

I see in this painting a Samson totally alone, with no resources left to him, a Samson dispensable in God's plan; in other words, a tragic Samson. This is not just a Samson who has been betrayed into the hands of his enemies by the woman he loved, as we have in numerous paintings, but much more: a Samson broken by mere mortals (Delilah and the Philistines are nowhere in sight) but by the forces of the universe – a Samson abandoned by his god.⁷

Cheryl Exum does not explicitly make the connection, but anyone familiar with the gospels will think here of what is said in the New Testament of Jesus Christ. Within the work of Corinth this was also indicated by the clear relation referred to above between his paintings of Samson and of Jesus.

In this study I do not want to go that far, but rather concentrate on another association evoked by Corinth's painting: the possible relation with the suffering Servant of the Lord, of which is said in Isaiah 53:3-4 that he was 'forsaken by men', 'a man of sorrows' and 'smitten by God'.⁸ Samson and the Servant of the Lord, as described in Deutero Isaiah, are clearly opposites. From his birth on, Samson is the promising and blossoming strong man. The Servant grew up 'like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or comeliness' (Isa 53:2). At the end the roles are reversed. It is possible now to conclude, with Von Rad, that the story of Samson is primarily a 'Geschichte des Scheiterns'. However, precisely the aspect expressed in the painting by Corinth may help to find a more positive way of interpreting this story and relating it to the later prophecies. The shocking view on the limits of human strength can function as an eyeopener for the right interpretation of the history of all powerful men in Israel.

HUMAN STRENGTH AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Within the framework of this modest study it would lead too far to start a diachronic survey of the use of the word 'strength' and related expressions.

⁷ J.C. Exum, 'Lovis Corinth's *Blinded Samson*', *BibInt* 6 (1998), 410-425, 418.

⁸ Gunn, 'Samson of Sorrows', 245, relates Judg 16:21 to Isa 53:7-8.

Moreover, a short look at the relevant lemmata in the theological dictionaries⁹ indicates that the result is predictable: ultimately all human strength and power fades into insignificance compared to the strength of God.¹⁰ One should only put one's trust, therefore, in the power of God.

In the book of Judges the limits of (male) human power appears to be one of the main themes. The first chapter indicates that the strength of the tribes is not sufficient to drive out all Canaanites. One of the exceptions is Caleb with his family (Judg 1:12-15), but this seems to be primarily a reminder of the good old days of Joshua, his former fellow spy. The following stories of the judges all testify of Israel not being able to free itself from the power of the enemies plundering them. God has to send judges to deliver the people of Israel, but the power of these judges does not remain unchallenged either.

In the story of Deborah and Barak (Judg 4) the traditional role patterns are turned around. The man with the heroic name Barak, 'lightning', only dares to go to the battlefield accompanied by the woman Deborah. Final victory is achieved by a woman, Jael, nursing the general of the Canaanite army, Sisera, like a mother and then killing him with a woman's weapon. Barak was not called a judge, but the way he is pictured is typical for the judges described in the next chapters. Gideon, hiding in fear for the Midianites, is called with biting irony 'mighty man of valor' (Judg 6:12). Time and again he proves to be a coward who only dares to act when he is certain of a positive result. His son Abimelech is more strong-minded, but he is obsessed with power and far from scrupulous in dealing with (possible) adversaries. He is stopped by a woman, crushing his skull with another woman's weapon: a millstone (Judg 10:53).

Samson perfectly fits into this sequence. His power is broken by a woman. The fact that the spirit of the Lord had come upon him (Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14; cf. also 13:25) appears to be no guarantee for lasting success. The gift of the spirit of the Lord is also reported of Othiel (Judg 3:10), Gideon (Judg 6:34) and Jephtah (Judg 11:29). The story of Jephtah shows how a man can make the fault of remaining to act in his own spirit: he starts negotiating with God, just like he did before with the elders of Israel and the king of Ammon. It cost him his daughter and with her his future. In Judges 14-16 it becomes clear that Samson is more inspired by his own anger than by the spirit of the Lord. His God-given power therefore hardly benefits his people.

In its present form the book of Judges has to be read as an introduction to the story of the kings. It is especially the final chapters which prepare the way for the installation of a king by blaming the reported crimes and chaos to the fact that 'there was no king in these days' (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Many details throughout the book of Judges can be related to parts of the books of Samuel and Kings.¹¹ When it comes to strength in combination

⁹ Cf. H. Eising, *הַיִּל hajil*, *ThWAT* II, 902-911; H. Ringgren, *כֹּחַ koah*, *ThWAT* IV, 130-137; S. Wagner, *עֹז 'oz*, *ThWAT* VI, 1-14.

¹⁰ Cf. Ringgren, *ThWAT* IV, 132f: 'Häufiger liegt aber der Nachdruck auf dem Fehlen der Kraft bzw. der Unzulänglichkeit physischer Stärke im Vergleich mit Gott.'

¹¹ Cf. P.J. van Midden, 'A Hidden Message? Judges as Foreword to the Books of

with the possession of the divine spirit, Saul, the first king of Israel, deserves our attention. In I Samuel 9:2 he is presented as someone who is at first sight fit for the function of king: 'handsome' and 'taller than any of the people'. His stature suggests that he is strong. This can be compared to what was said by the spies returning from Canaan reporting of the people living there: greater and stronger than the Israelites (Num 14:31-32). In I Samuel 16:14 we read that 'the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul'. Apparently it is assumed that this spirit had come upon him at the moment he was anointed king by Samuel, but now it is replaced: 'and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him'. David enters the scene as the one who is able to let this spirit depart (I Sam 16:23). Later the (good) spirit of God comes upon Saul again (I Sam 19:23), but his reaction to this is dubious. Saul starts acting like an ecstatic prophet; hardly fitting for a king. Thus, Saul can be compared to Samson as being strong and having received the spirit of the Lord, but not acting according to the possibilities thus offered, following his own impulses and not listening to God and abandoned, therefore, by God.

In many respects David is Saul's positive counterpart. Contrary to his predecessor, David fulfills as a king the promising words spoken of him when he first enters the royal court: 'a man of valor, a man of war ... and the Lord is with him' (I Sam 16:18). After him nearly all kings of Israel and Judah prove to be unable to escape from the danger of abusing their power. According to the prophets this trust in one's own power instead of listening to God caused the downfall of their states.

When a prophet announces a new beginning in Isaiah 40 he presents in the Servant of the Lord an alternative to the former kings. Although the Servant is not called king, he is described as such in the first song of the Servant, especially when it is told that the spirit of the Lord is upon him (Isa 42:1).¹² He shall bring salvation to the people, not by using his power, but by accepting his weakness and passively suffering oppression (Isa 53).

Following the line from the book of Judges as an introduction to the books of Samuel and Kings as a story of failing human power and lack of divine inspiration until the new beginning announced after the exile in the book of Isaiah, we can see in the picture of the desolate Samson an element of the later prophetic message. It would certainly lead too far to assume that the poet of the Songs of the Servant had this picture of Samson in mind, but for a modern reader the association of the painting by Lovis Corinth and the suffering Servant of Isaiah is not too far-fetched. One could say that it takes a prophetic mind to see that the essence of Judges 16 lies not in the ruins of the temple of Dagon, but in the ruined life of the strong man who trusted only in his own strength. The prophetic message is that this and not the following 'terrorist' action is the basis on which God makes a new beginning. This may be the best comfort for those mourning for the nearly three thousand victims.

Kings', in: J.W. Dyk e.a. (ed.), *Unless Someone Guide Me ...* (Fs K.A. Deurloo; ACEBTSup 2), Maastricht 2001, 77-85.

¹² Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja IIA* (POT), Nijkerk 1979, 107, 110.

SECOND ISAIAH AND QOHELET

Could one get them on speaking terms?

Eep Talstra

THE ART OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Imagine a small colloquium about the theme 'Anything New in History?'. Further assume that both Second Isaiah and Qohelet have been invited as speakers to this colloquium and that Professor Leene has been chosen to preside the session. What would happen? For the moment I skip the postmodern, scholarly objection that implied authors or books cannot be invited to symposia. Since the prophet and the teacher of wisdom happen to be part of one volume, the Old Testament, a debate between the two cannot be avoided. One is reminded that in daily life readers of the Bible repeatedly organize similar small colloquia in their own minds. What about the future? Is there anything new to expect in history? What makes these biblical writers differ of opinion so strongly on this point? The answers provided by our two speakers are clear enough. Isaiah quotes the words of the Lord, who is prepared to change the course of history for the benefit of his people Israel. He has started to create something new.

Do not think of former things

Look, I am making something new. (Isa 43:18)

Qohelet observes the opposite happening: God's universe consists of regularity and repetition, nothing new can ever be found there.

What has been is what will be

So, nothing new exists under the sun. (Qoh 1:9)

World Order and History of Israel. Do they have something in common? If Second Isaiah's answer is 'yes' and Qohelet's answer is 'no', what do we do? Do biblical writers always have to agree? Do I as a reader need to be in favour of one of them? Listening to our keynote speakers, Second Isaiah and Qohelet, entails a challenge to determine the proper domain of Biblical Theology. And in trying to do so, in my view, we will also discover more of the important contribution Professor Leene in his exegetical work has made to the art of Biblical Theology.