



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

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### **Samson . . . shorn, shackled, sightless and subjugated or, Ulster Protestantism's present plight illustrated.**

**A sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on August 2nd by the Minister**

There is only one book to which we may turn as we search for an explanation for the working of God's providence in these evil days. That book is, of course, the BIBLE.

This blessed book shows how that God, amidst what we see as confusion and chaos, is accomplishing His grand purpose amongst men. In the Bible God explains that purpose to His people. *He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel*, Psalm 103:7.

God's people have recourse to a book wherein is stored the wisdom of eternity. When events around us puzzle and perplex, then turn to the Bible. That is what David did. *Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors . . . . I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts* , Psalm 119:24, 99-100. The Saviour's words in Matthew 24:15 underscore our need of consulting God's Word as the map of the ages, wherein God's people will find their path clearly laid down. In the day of Antichrist's manifestation, the directions given by the Saviour will benefit only those who study His words. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains* , Matthew 24:15-16. Peter too tells us of the benefits of God's Word in a day of darkness. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts* , 2 Peter 1:19.

The only source of illumination that can brighten our path in this dark day of apostasy and rebellion is the Bible, and it is to that book we turn tonight for instruction and enlightenment about events in our Province of late.

No one can gainsay the fact that setback after setback has marked the affairs of Protestantism in this land over the last decade and more. We could sum up our recent history in the words of Jeremiah: We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble! Jeremiah 8:15. Again and again we have seen those who have employed lies and terror gain favour with the world and with those in positions of government.

The events of July past, when Orangemen and their supporters gathered, in the vicinity of Drumcree Parish church, to demand the right to return from their annual Orange service by the main route back into Portadown, are well known to all with access to a newspaper! Those events seemed to epitomise the weakness and helplessness that have attended the efforts of those opposed to the advance of popery and republicanism. While many of us might have reservations about the character of the Orange Order and the turn of events during the nightly stand-off at Drumcree, few Protestants would not have desired to see the arrogant and wicked lies of resurgent Romanism, as embodied in the actions of the



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residents of Garvaghy Road in Portadown, faced down and defeated.

But as events turned out, international derision was heaped on those assembled at Drumcree. In the aftermath of the triple murder in Ballymoney of three little boys, the ranks of protest disintegrated and confusion reigned with open disputes breaking out amongst the protesters. The murders at Ballymoney had nothing to do with the protest at Portadown, but it seemed that many were ready to retreat at the first opportunity and so seized upon the fire-bombing of the Quinn home in Ballymoney as the opportunity they were eagerly looking for. The first to run were the ecumenical clerics in the ranks of the Orange Order. Then the Church of Ireland locked the Orange protesters out of the grounds of Drumcree church in which they had assembled.

During the Drumcree protest, the government showed a determination and a use of resources against the Orangemen, that was conspicuously absent in its fight against terrorism over the last 30 years. Had similar action been taken against the IRA a quarter of a century ago, then the lives of hundreds of innocent people would have been spared, and the vast expense that IRA terrorism incurred would have been avoided. But as ever, our government has once more shown its true colours by enthusiastically mustering its energies against Protestantism.

But these things are understood by you all here tonight. The question is: ***Why is the tide of providence running so fast against the Protestant people of Ulster?***

The answer to that can be found only in God's Word. Turn to the story of Samson and see if there is not a parallel there to our own situation.

Samson was a man who for a time exercised a powerful influence in Israel. His heaven-endued strength ensured that the enemies of God's people were defeated and subdued on many occasions. The character of Samson's influence may be gauged by the reference to him in Hebrews 11:32-34. *And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.* He was in good company. He did for a time triumph over the Philistines. But see him now in chapter 16 of Judges, the verses 20-21. Here he is shaven, shackled, sightless and subjugated. What was it that brought about this dreadful downfall? The answer to that question will help unlock the mystery of Ulster Protestantism's present plight.

### **I. THE SEEDS OF SAMSON'S DOWNFALL ARE FOUND WITHIN HIS CHARACTER**

Let me state immediately that I believe that Samson was a child of God. But he was a foolish child of God whose sinful activities brought about his downfall. Since he was a ruler of his people, he caused them to suffer also. There was much amiss in Samson's life and we should observe those things.

**1. He was prone to desire that which was forbidden to the child of God.** He had been raised up by God to chasten the Philistines yet we find him setting his love upon a



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Philistine woman, 14:1-4. Notice the self-willed nature of his demands. She pleased him well and therefore he ordered his parents to get her. It was how she looked that pleased him. He took no thought of how she lived! We are reminded of Eve in the Garden, seeing the forbidden fruit and wrongly desiring it. While God in His sovereignty furthered His own purpose by the incident (Judges 13:4), it does not excuse Samson. Here was the beginning of Samson's troubles and the troubles of all backsliders. His untamed desires were at work to the end of his life, 16:28.

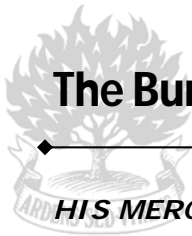
**2. Samson was beset by pride.** When he defeated the Philistines, using the jawbone of an ass, he sang a song glorifying his deed, 15:16. There is no mention of the Lord yet it was the Lord's victory, verse 14. Again, when he arose to meet the Philistines in that last fateful struggle, pride can be heard to speak. *I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him*, 16:20. How often men lose sight of the Lord and focus their eyes upon themselves and take to themselves the glory that belongs to God. That same foolish pride may be seen in Ulster's history. There has been an unseemly pride manifested amongst us. We felt we had but to flex our Protestant muscles and our enemies would fall off as they did in the past. But it was not the prowess of our forefathers that gained for them the deliverances of history. No! It was, as John Hunter, a defender of Derry, said after its deliverance in 1689, following the 105 days of siege by the forces of the Roman Catholic, King James II, "Indeed it was never the poor starved men that were in Derry that kept it, but the mighty God of Jacob, to Whom be praise for ever and ever!" (Dr. Thomas Hamilton's History of the Irish Presbyterian Church, page 94.) Where today is that humble dependence upon God?

**3. Samson gave way to lewdness and sin.** How sad and dreadful to see one, dedicated from his birth to God and brought up in a pious home, flinging himself away in the pursuit of sin and abandoning himself to the indulgence of unclean appetites and passions. The three recorded occasions of his sinful lapses show an increasingly base entanglement. The first occasion (14:2) was when he sought a forbidden marriage with a Philistine woman. The second occasion (15:1) was a short-lived liaison with a harlot. He probably regretted what he had done and left the house of the harlot earlier than his ambushers expected. The final lapse into sin is with Delilah and shows him sunk down in his sin and heedless of the signs of danger that should have been obvious to him (16:16).

The Bible rightly says of harlotry: *For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell*, Proverbs 5:3-5. Today, the land is filled with physical and spiritual harlotry. The seventh commandment is ignored and despised within the nation. The breaking of that commandment is accepted in public life and, worse still, within the pale of the professing Church of Christ.

Spiritual harlotry is what the ecumenical churches are engaged in. *Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD*, Jeremiah 3:1. The present ecumenical movement is the beginnings of that manifestation of evil termed the Mother of Harlots in Revelation 17:5.

### **II. LEARN THAT DISOBEYING GOD WILL COST US THE ENJOYMENT OF ALL THAT**



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### **HIS MERCY BESTOWED ON US**

**1. Samson lost his strength.** His God-given power to deliver Israel was taken from him as a result of his sin. Likewise, Protestantism in Ulster has lost its power over its enemies. Only those who *wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength*, Isaiah 40:31. Sin has rendered Protestantism weak before her enemies.

**2. Samson lost his sight.** The backslider always loses his sight. *But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins*, 2 Peter 1:9. *I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see*, Revelation 3:18. The backslider loses sight of himself, his sin and of the Saviour.

**3. Samson lost his freedom.** He became the slave and plaything of the Philistines, experiencing the terrible wages of sin. *And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us*, 16:24. The narrowing circle of liberty enjoyed by Protestantism in Ulster is the direct result of departure from God and His truth.

### **III. FROM SUCH DEPTHS OF DEFEAT THERE IS RECOVERY**

**1. The path of recovery.** Here are the steps -- humility, confession, repentance. Like the Prodigal in the midst of his afflictions, Samson came to himself. Have the afflictions of the last 30 years done anything to turn the people of God in Ulster from the downward path of worldliness and disobedience? Sadly, in the majority of cases, I think not.

**2. The price of recovery.** It was death of self. He was willing to die if only he might be strengthened. Here is illustrated the way of overcoming life and power. Paul declared it to be the secret of his life of victorious service. *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. . . . But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*, Gal 2:20; 6:14. As Samson cared for nothing but the recovery of God's power and was willing to give up all, even his life, to experience it, even so must we yield our all in order to obtain the power of the Holy Ghost.

*Have Thine own way, Lord, Have Thine own way; Thou art the Potter,*

*I am the clay. Mould me and make me After Thy will, While I am waiting Yielded and still.*

**3. The proof of recovery.** The breaking of the pillars in the Philistines' temple and the slaying of their leaders were clear evidences of the recovery of Samson's strength. The last we read of Samson he is back where he first enjoyed the power of God. He was buried in the place where God's power first came upon him. Compare 14:25 and 16:31. We will know that we have recovered our spiritual power, when we see the pillars of apostasy and false religion toppling before the preaching of the gospel and sinners swept into the kingdom of heaven.

This is what we witnessed in the 60s and 70s. The forward march of the gospel many of us



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witnessed then was not the result of superior preaching or superior men but of God's power upon the message that was proclaimed. The sinners saved and the Christians separated from the ecumenical churches and the new Free Presbyterian congregations formed was the working of God's power amongst us. Praise the Lord, that will happen again if we yield up ourselves to the Lord.

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land , 2 Chronicles 7:14.*