

'A dangerous and powerful woman?' – A feminist reading of an old story with new cultural eyes

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This article explores the text of Judges 14, which describes the life of a so-called 'hyper-masculine' Israelite hero, Samson. However, a careful feminist and socio-historical interpretation of Samson's character reflects a rather bleak version of an anti-hero. This is based on his behaviour, which was the antithesis to the Israelite ideal of masculinity. When the text is firmly interrogated from a post-modernist (hermeneutic of suspicion) and feminist deconstruction of power texts, it becomes evident that women are not the dangerous betrayers they appear to be. Rather, when this text is read, questions such as who holds actual power and how destructive hyper-masculinity was in patriarchal societies such as ancient Israel emerge. The questions relating to the texts of terror can be useful to critically engage with contemporary society, where personal and social change in treating women equally and justly is sorely needed.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article brings theological discourse into discussion with biblical and feminist studies, hermeneutic studies, ethical studies and practical theology. It also explores the intersections between the texts in the book of Judges from a contemporary cultural context with regard to masculinity oppressing women.

Keywords: culture; Judges 14; heroic literature; post-modernist and feminist deconstruction; modern reading; 'hyper-masculinity'.

Introduction

The book of Judges is a collection of hero and heroine stories, involving both negative and positive characters (Spronk 2014:197). Judges 14 displays God's messenger Samson who is appointed to deliver his people from oppression. However, I would like to align myself with the affirmation that actually 'Samson can be seen as more of an anti-hero because much of his behaviour is the antithesis to the Israelite ideal of right masculinity' (Wilson 2014:43–60). In this article, I will focus on the contrast between Samson's hyper-masculine, heroic behaviour and his Philistine wife's feminine, less-than-heroic behaviour from a socio-historical point of view (Smith 1997:45–46).

In order to achieve this, I will analyse the author's use of various narrative techniques to better understand the meaning and purpose of this text. A study of the historical background and literary context will be undertaken to understand the purpose of this book. The structure will be analysed to see how the contrasting views of 'hyper-masculinity and less able femininity' are expressed in this passage. Finally, by using an exegetical study, I will examine the passage's meaning to its original readers and to today's readers. This article will also highlight cultural and theological issues raised in this passage and draw conclusions from it using extensive textual evidence.

Methodology

The book of Judges would appear to be heroic literature.¹ However, it deliberately frames a woman to be the downfall of a man. This is due to the fact that the author is compiling stories about heroes and less heroic characters in ancient Israel during the time of the judges (Le Roux 2020:2). Moreover, conservative interpretations of Samson (Jdg 14–16) depict him as a 'strong, but stupid and gullible man' who seemingly becomes unhinged by Delilah's 'conniving and feminine wiles' or that 'women are dangerous and a hero can be undone by his lust'. In short, this view can be summarised as: 'Loose lips sink ships'.² According to Rosemary Radford Ruether (1999) this frames the kind of stereotyping of women that masculinity encourages, when she says:

1. According to Bremmer (2005) the phrase 'heroic literature' means 'having the qualities of a warrior'. However, the use of this phrase is deliberately setting up the false security reflected in masculinity.

2. See *Sex and Samson: Reading Old Texts with Modern Eyes* by Dave Barnhart.

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The classical justifications of women's subordination as due to natural inferiority, subordination in the order of creation and punishment for sin are assumed to be false ideologies constructed to justify injustice. The domination of men over women is sinful and patriarchy a sinful social system. Far from reflecting the true will of God and the nature of women, such theological constructions subvert God's creation and distort human nature. Feminist theology is about the deconstruction of these ideological justifications of male domination and the vindication of women's equality as the true will of God, human nature and Christ's redemptive intention. (pp. 104–105)

However, I would like to inspire a more creative reading that marks a radical shift in fundamental and stereotypical views. Schroer (2003) pronounces on this by reflecting on the feminist debate:

[A]ccording to Schüssler Fiorenza, feminism strives to expose veiled and open discrimination of women within the patriarchal pyramid, as well as in the intrinsic ideologies that sustain it, and fights for the recognition of the complete rights of half of humanity. (p. 2)

More poignantly put by Schüssler-Fiorenza (2001) herself:

Scripture's patriarchal authors should be analysed with critical response thereto a hermeneutics of remembrance – to reconstruct women's history in Scripture that was concealed by male historical consciousness, a hermeneutics of proclamation – to assess and to evaluate Scripture theologically in order to point out its oppressive effect on women, and a hermeneutics of actualization to recall, to embody and to celebrate women in the Bible's achievements, suffering and struggles. (pp. 174–190)

It could be argued that for the longest time, attempts have been made to eliminate the domineering discourse of the Old Testament that extended to every civilisation in the Ancient Near East (ANE). Stanton (1895) from her long-standing work, discussing the slow progress in empowering women, posits that:

The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. Here is the Bible position of woman briefly summed up. (n.p.)

Just like scholars such as Stanton to very recent scholars such as Claassens, Shaikh and Swartz (2019), they also speak to the urgency of women's plight in religion because women are actually very central in society:

The tension between concern about religion being potentially complicit in the oppression of people with disabilities on the one hand and the lived reality of religion actually providing support, meaning, access, and opportunities. (p. 149)

As a *femme fatale*, '[Delilah] initiated the process that led to the demise of humankind' (Coleman 2021:4). Yet even with a

conservative and uninspired reading of this text, many critics conclude that women did not intentionally lure men into sin.

Hyper-masculinity portrayed as powerful

The book of Judges is set during the time when the Israelites were settling into Canaan after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Foster 2012:295). The Israelites encountered social and national issues; they were under the dominating power of the Philistines and had to adjust to a way style of living because they were no longer nomads (Rust 1962:7). Due to the change in lifestyle, the Israelites faced a gradual integration in the way they lived. We see an example in Judges 14 of intermarriages: Samson throws off the constraints of his religion to openly marry a woman who was not an Israelite (Bolinger 2020). The assimilation was not limited to social practices but extended to religion. It is inevitable that by forsaking Yahweh and his laws, the Israelites would follow the ways of their neighbours (Rust 1962:9). Judges describes the attempts of different Israelites to wrest political and geographical control of the land that God had promised them (Niditch 2008:1). In these attempts, God uses individuals to achieve his purposes, as Samson's story illustrates.

Judges could be considered as a historical narrative, which has been passed down through written and even oral traditions. However, it was received, as Rust (1962:9) describes, 'in a framework of sin, judgement, repentance and deliverance'. The stories in Judges 14 serve as instructional; they contain warnings for God's people (Rust 1962:9). In Judges 13, Samson was born as the prophesied deliverer of Israel. Would he be the one to deliver Israel? In chapter 14, we learn that Samson is not the anticipated hero we thought he would be. Instead, as Wilson (2014) points, he proves to be somewhat disappointing:

Samson, the once masculine and mighty warrior, is effectively feminised by the Philistines when they capture him (Jdg 16:21–25), but later this feminisation is overturned by [Delilah's] reassertion of her manly might in causing destruction. (p. 44)

We know that he will not be the one to deliver Israel and we begin to question the purpose of this episode, as well as what the author intended to communicate. Knowing Samson's fate, this passage illustrates that a nuanced feminist reading of Samson challenges the idea of his Herculean perception of masculinity. If anything, the text almost proves the point that the all-powerful Samson was made weak by a woman, with God having something to do with it. This turns the modern understanding of masculinity on its head.

Therefore, as modern readers of this text, we are forced to interrogate the false idea that Samson's masculinity could save the day. Rather, the point of the story can be expressed in two different ways: firstly, as Crowell (2013) puts it:

[T]he authors developed this scheme within a culture that had become highly suspicious of foreignness and applied that suspicion to the women whom they portrayed in a colonial manner as dangerous, manipulative, and undermining of the authors' Yahwistic project. This construction of foreign women not only served to solidify the suspicion of foreignness but also aided in the formation of an identity that promoted during these authors' time the Deuteronomistic ideals of loyalty to Yahweh and to Jerusalem as the centre of cult and governance. (p. 16)

The second point to be emphasised is expressed by Barnhart (2015):

[Samson's] lack of self-knowledge and his failure to recognise the difference between his performance [*as a man*] and reality. His defining trait is his mistrust of others. From this perspective, his failure is not that he trusts Delilah, but that he doesn't actually take her seriously. Isn't this a typical male (masculinity) problem? (n.p.)

When considering 'authorial intent', most readers will only want to take the story of Samson and Delilah to be a tale that explores sexual morality. This notion may expose our fundamentalist, discriminatory and boring lenses of looking at Judges 14, a text that is almost livelier than *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It addresses the actual shortcomings of a powerful, masculine man versus the seemingly tame and less powerful woman.

Less-abled femininity portrayed as weak?

Both the feminist and socio-historical approaches necessitate that this episode is carefully framed around a chiasmic structure to highlight the seemingly 'less-abled' woman against the 'powerful and hyper-superhero' man (Coleman 2021:7). These patterns can be expressed as shown in Box 1.

BOX 1: Divine and hu(man) masculinity structure unfolding.

vv. 1–4:	Serves as a preamble, Samson sees a woman from Philistine and intends to marry her. He then sets off on a journey with his parents to fulfil this (A).
vv. 5–9:	On the journey, he has an encounter with a lion. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, enabling him to defeat it (B).
vv. 10–18:	Samson hosts a feast during which his wife betrays him (C).
v. 19:	The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson again and he single handedly kills 30 men (B1).
v. 20:	His wife is given away to one of his companions (A1).

From a feminist and post-modernist perspective, particularly from a hermeneutic of suspicion lens, it would seem that the principal notion at play in the text is 'power relationships' (Foster 2012:295–296). This 'power play' framework is foundational to what Foucault (1980:113) penned as 'this problem of the "discursive regime," of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statement [by men to control society]'.

The narrative reflects the values of a patriarchal society, yet it may be opening up to the possibility that those ideals may be questioned, rather than reinforcing them. For instance, there are many instances in the narrative where men are portrayed as ineffectual. This is another gender construction that only underpins negative gender constructs because it gives the impression of men suffering very superficially when they are not.

The man and the woman: 'Hyper-masculinity' versus 'less-abled femininity'

In chapter 13 we read of the foretold deliverer of Israel. Before we have even seen him, we already have high hopes for him:

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah, he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, 'I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah'. Now get her for me as my wife. But his father and mother said to him, 'Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes'. His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. (Jdg 14:1–3)

We start this story in chapter 14 with Samson going down to Timnah; this trip marks the first of many that form an up–down theme throughout the episode (vv. 1, 2, 5, 7). The passage is unclear as to where Samson was going down from. Seen on a map of Canaan, Timnah seems to be the highest, most north-eastern point found in Sorek Valley, which then raises the question as to why the author would tell us Samson went 'down', allowing me as a reader to conclude that the author's use of the word is far more significant than geographic (Mbuvi 2021:395).

This theme of going up and down could carry some connotation of Samson being an Israelite going down a level in terms of moving into a place that had lower moral characteristics, a land of people who did not worship God. Samson had gone down to Timnah and seen a woman that he intended to marry. D'Avalon (2020) notes:

The author focuses mainly on the dangers of mixing with non-Israelite cultures and depicts this through Samson's interactions with foreign women. He marries or intends to marry a Philistine woman from Timnah (Jdg 14:3), has sex with a Philistine prostitute in Gaza (Jdg 16:1–3) and gives up the secret to his strength to his lover and betrayer Delilah who is a woman from the 'Valley of Sorek' (Jdg 16:4). All three encounters end in violence. (p. 3)

With the up–down theme in mind, it becomes clear as to why Samson's parents seemed rather disappointed in verse 3 that he had intentions of marrying a woman who wasn't from his own people, but rather a people who worshipped Baal. Samson says that she is 'right in his eyes'. Is he deliberately going against the laws that prohibit him from marrying a pagan people woman? At this point, we haven't seen how God is included in this plan. We see Samson going to great lengths to marry this woman that he desires. This verse holds that something should be anticipated to happen to make sense of Samson's decision. If one considers the feminist lens here, it might even look as though Samson's desire is a form of 'toxic masculinity' (Derks 2015:564). In other words,

according to a stereotypical, patriarchal conception, it is almost always a less powerful woman who will bring a man maximum pleasure and satisfaction.

Verse 4 fulfils the expectation in verse 3, providing the reason as to why Samson was so adamant about his ambition to marry a Philistine woman, although there is no mention that Samson himself knew that this was part of God's plan for his life (Webb 2012:366). God wanted his people to experience victory through Samson against the Philistines, who at that time had dominion over Israel (Assis & Zvi 2007:9). Could this not be God indirectly acting against Baal, with the intention of showing his power and sovereignty or perhaps even a means for God to fulfil his promises to his people concerning the promised land:

Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes. After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion. (Jdg 14:5-9)

Again, in verse 5, we see how Samson, now with his father and mother, go 'down' to Timnah. To his surprise, a young lion attacks him in the vineyard. Was it common for a vineyard to contain wandering lions? In this verse, the author tells us that the lion is roaring at Samson alone and not at his parents. It makes one wonder about a symbolic explanation, thus anticipating some later attack on Samson.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson in power. Without God's Spirit, Samson would not have been able to tear the lion apart. It was clear that the lion's death was because of God, for Samson had nothing in his hand. He couldn't have done it apart from God's Spirit, affirming that indeed it was God's plan for Samson to go to Timnah. It is interesting why Samson would have kept something like this from his parents. The fact that the author mentions this suggests that it would be normal for Samson to tell his parents; he has no real reason to keep this from them. Does this tell us something about Samson, that he is secretive?

The word 'down' is used again in connection with the Philistine woman. The author reminds us that this woman pleased Samson well, revealing more of Samson's character. Samson appears to have an obvious attraction to beautiful women.

After some time, he returns to marry her. Samson sees the lion's carcass is swarming with bees and that there is honey. Interestingly enough, in this verse the author doesn't mention that Samson went 'down', but instead says he returned to get

her. Does the author now consider Samson to have given into the pagan religion?

Perhaps his secretive behaviour can be explained by his eating honey from the lion. This was considered sinful because being a Nazarite, it was forbidden to eat from a dead carcass (Webb 2012). Samson's reason for hiding this fact could be that he knew it was wrong, but did not want his parents to sin:

His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. And Samson said to them, Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes. And they said to him, Put your riddle, that we may hear it. And he said to them, Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet. And in three days they could not solve the riddle. On the fourth day, they said to Samson's wife, Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us? (p. 368)

The progression in this text reveals a narrative that is carefully constructed to suggest an anti-feminist outlook (Exum 1980:46). To demonstrate this the author says:

And Samson's wife wept over him and said, You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is. And he said to her, Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you? She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion? And he said to them, If you had not ploughed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle. (Jdg 13:10-18)

In verse 10, the author mentions that Samson's father went 'down'. Then in verses 12 to 13, Samson tells his companions a riddle and challenges them to solve it. This seems to be an innocent gesture to entertain his guests. But the idea of Samson speaking in riddles affirms his secretive nature. When Samson, in his position of power (Snyman 2021:12), eventually tells them the riddle concerning his earlier encounter with the lion, it becomes apparent why he has kept it a secret. *Out of the eater (lion) came something to eat (food) and out of the strong (the lion is considered to be the king of the beasts) came something sweet (honey)*. This riddle implies supposed power and strength for it to be true. Not only that, but it can be argued that Samson's riddle of entertainment is a demonstration of using his powerful masculinity in the form of clever word plays, poetry and riddle to go about his desirable pursuits. However, a careful feminist lens shows that he is outwitted by ostensibly a 'less-abled' woman who proves that she represents more than his nation's enemy. She is indeed far more dangerous than he thought.

Samson's weakness becomes evident. They ask his wife to entice him in order that he may tell her the riddle to tell them. At this point, the reader ought not to glance over the actual power and agency that Delilah has to be the demise of Samson and to many scholars this notion is wanted by many women. This can be summarised in the words of D'Avalon (2020) who asserts:

Samson's stereotypical conception of women that we see in his previous romantic encounters is deconstructed in his relationship with Delilah. The first example of this is that Delilah has a name; this gives her an agency and subjectivity that the previous women mentioned in the text lack. Delilah also seems to have a more independent position in society than Samson's previous would-be bride (the bride was pressured to discover the solution to Samson's riddle under threat of death, where Delilah was bribed with rewards). While the woman from Timnah was marriageable and the woman from Gaza was available for extramarital sex (both without names), Delilah is not treated as a nameless object to be owned or used for either purpose. She is neither portrayed in the typical way women are in the text nor is she portrayed as masculine. In this way, Delilah may represent an alternative gender identity. Delilah also has a different impact on Samson than his previous two sexual interests. Where he seems only concerned with owning them as beautiful things that he covets, he falls in love with Delilah. He seems to be more open and vulnerable with her and actually converses with her. (p. 3)

However, compared with Delilah who appears later in the narrative, Samson's first bride lacks agency. From verse 16, she manipulates him into telling her the answer to his riddle, saying that he does not love her. Some critics might suggest that perhaps she could have been upfront with him and told him that the Philistines have threatened her family, instead of using her beauty, emotions and feminine power to persuade him. Others would argue that using her femininity in this way displays her real power over her actually powerless husband and shows that masculinity can be made weak, a challenge to his concept of heroic hyper masculinity.

The Philistine guests pose a riddle answering his riddle, but this one speaks of Samson's love for women. What is stronger than a lion? They are referring implicitly to Samson's weakness for women, masculinity's soft spot from which one may argue 'useless power' can be derived. The two riddles in some ways interpret each another. In the first, Samson elevates himself and in the second, the Philistines speak of Samson's downfall. In this way, Samson's success and failure are juxtaposed (Pietersen 2018:20). At the end of verse 18, we see a hint of irony in Samson's response to his guests. He doesn't really mean they have made a heifer out of his wife: he means that they have played him unfairly. Here it would seem that his masculinity has let him down, dependent as he is for external help to pay his guests the reward for solving the riddle:

And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger, he went back to his father's house. (Jdg 14:19)

The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson and he kills 30 men, something that could not ordinarily have been done by a single man. This is Samson being an ambassador of sorts for his God. He might not be aware of God, but God still uses him to humiliate the Philistines and display His power. Samson then gives the garments of the men he killed to those who solved the riddle. Again, the author tells us of Samson's isolation. He goes on to kill 30 men all by himself. This emphasises the mighty power of the Lord's Spirit (Martin 2008:21).

In contrast to the beginning, the story ends ironically. Samson does not punish his wife for betraying him because he perceives himself as being weak and almost projects his weakness as a way of giving into his lustful desires again (toxic masculinity). This verse summarises the irony of the story: initially Samson gets what he wants – he marries his Philistine bride – and yet in the end, he doesn't get what he wants because the Philistines outwit him. In verse 20, Samson gives his wife away to the man who was best man at his wedding. The story illustrates how masculinity that is unchecked can cause destruction, but that God will use all things to fulfil his purposes. Bowman (2007) affirms this idea by saying:

It appears that divine power is constrained by the exercise of human freedom... Divine success appears contingent upon an appropriate human response ... (p. 38)

In this passage, Samson is expected to appear as a hero, but instead we see a different side to him. A false sense of heroism is ascribed to him and his weak masculinity is shown up by a powerful femininity. He is not as devoted to God as he should be; he deliberately defies God's laws so that he can get what he desires. Even after his parents express disappointment about his wishes to marry a Gentile, he remains headstrong. Samson's hyper-masculine life represents weakness in the form of his affection for prohibited women, as explained by the riddle posed by the Philistines in verse 18. Ultimately, it is this same weakness that results in his downfall.

In verse 6, Samson appears almost ungrateful for God's provision of strength. Later he takes credit for killing the lion, implying that his own muscles were able to overpower it. He neither regards himself to be critical nor can he fathom the unjust social system of which he forms a part, as Johnson (1997) so succinctly puts it:

What drives patriarchy [*and similarly misplaced masculinity*] as a system – what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression – is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status and other rewards through control; to fear other men's ability to control and harm them; and to identify being in control as both their best defence against loss and humiliation and the surest route to what they need and desire. In this sense, although we usually think of patriarchy in terms of women and men, it is more about what goes on among men. The oppression of women is certainly an important part of patriarchy, but, paradoxically, it may not be the point of patriarchy. (p. 26)

Could the author have described Samson in such a way in order to reveal something about God? God uses Samson even in his weakness and sinfulness to deliver his people from oppression (as shown in chapter 15). Samson's character in these stories is in stark contrast to that of God's, showing how even in weakness, God can still use sinful man. The purpose behind these accounts is to validate God's strength and His ability to bring about His plans in spite of humankind's frailty.

Cultural significance as a means of misplaced masculinity

This passage clearly highlights through the character of Samson that God is sufficient in himself to bring into existence the plans and purposes He has for his people, not masculinity or hyper-masculinity. To borrow from the words of Barnhart (2015):

What do we really know about Samson? Conventional depictions of him are of a hyper-masculine Hercules, with bulging muscles and long (but never long enough) hair on his head and face. But why should he have bulging muscles? His strength comes from God, not from pumping iron; it is supernatural in origin. Samson may not be a man mountain at all, but a 5-foot, 150-pound guy wearing a turban (the best way to manage that much hair in a combat situation). Samson's body may look less like a wrestler's and more like Danny DeVito's. (n.p)

The modern perception of masculinity has significantly changed and the conventional reading of Samson's story ought to be continuously challenged if we want femininity to flourish in our culture despite 'hyper-masculine' stereotypes. Although these images can hardly be ignored, we cannot deny the obvious charge of empowering and protecting women from unhealthy and toxic masculinity.

To continually resist the dehumanising effects of toxic masculinity Charlene van der Walt (2018) argues that we need to collectively challenge the aforementioned stereotypes because:

... gender inequality and high rates of [*very often result into high levels of*] violence. We need to create spaces where youth can confront rape culture and toxic masculinity. (n.p.)

Furthermore, in arguing for the acceptance of femininity, I would like to underscore God's faithfulness despite man's frailty. Even what others perceive as weakness, in this case, woman's femininity, can be used powerfully to bring about his will. In Judges 14, the hope of the Israelites' liberty lies in a man who appears stubborn and rather isolated. Despite this, God uses him. God is able to use whom he pleases. This passage does not give an account of a direct interaction between Samson and God. Yet even so, we see God's plans coming to fulfilment. He is at work in spite of humankind's folly. Lastly, 'Samson represents the comic because his story moves in a different direction, away from the irreversible, sombre ending of a tragedy' (Lackowski 2021:80).

Conclusion

This passage demonstrates how hyper-masculinity as evidenced in Samson is deeply flawed; indeed, his character is childish and based on an unhealthy desire for power and control. He believes his own strength can save the day and downplays his wife's seemingly powerless femininity. Despite the disastrous consequences of Samson's behaviour, God turns the situation around for his glory, defeating his enemies, the Philistines. Samson exudes an impression of success in all his conquests, but it is ironic how the story ends in his humiliation.

From a fundamentalist³ reading, it may be argued that Samson was a hero. However, we learn that it is not in his own power (masculinity) that he can accomplish things, but rather God's power (in this case, achieved through feminine means) and his alone (Roberts 1993:678). Samson is indeed used by God to deliver his people, but he is not the ultimate deliverer. Samson's failed masculinity should be a sign that false power will always hand success over to another. We can trust that God will be our faithful deliverer, not 'hyper-masculinity' or seemingly 'dangerous' women.

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Disclaimer

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³According to Narain (2012:7), fundamentalism in its conservative evangelical and conservative orthodox forms has enjoyed obscurity in the past and this has been its protection. The effects of its devastating work, the consequences of its ideology for humanity, especially on the suffering in the world, namely among women, gays, lesbians, the poor, the hungry, the sick, and so on, is now in the public gaze of the entire alert.

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