

## **Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 28, Judges 13-16 Samson**

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 28, Judges 13-16, Samson.

Greetings again, we're continuing in the book of Judges, and in this segment we're going to complete the survey of the 12 judges mentioned in the book, the story of Samson.

His story is told in great length and great depth, great detail in chapters 13 to 16. And in contrast to all the other judges, we have an extended story about his birth in chapter 13 and then the story of his life in chapters 14 through 16, including his death. And his death is much more dramatic than the deaths of the others that we've learned about so far.

Samson is maybe the most famous of the judges to outsiders or just in the general culture if people know of anybody from the book of Judges, it's probably Samson. He is symbolic. His name is synonymous with great strength because God gave him this strength and so we'll work through his stories.

He's the 12th judge. He's the last one. He lived at the end of the 11th century BC, probably about 50 years before Samuel became king, actually at the end of the 12th century, the 1100s, maybe around 1100, and about 50 years before Saul became king in 1050 BC.

So chronologically he is toward the end. I mentioned in the introductory comments on the book of Judges that the chapters after this, 17 to 21, there's a good chance that they were actually chronologically took place earlier in the book, but the organization of the book, the author wanted to tell the stories of the judges in somewhat roughly chronological order and then these final ones for some literary reasons that we'll talk about in another segment. He was unique in many ways.

His strength was unparalleled. He did not lead an army the way some of the other judges had, but essentially he defeated the Philistines single-handedly. He was a deeply flawed hero whose life was unduly entangled with the people against whom he was fighting.

So he was, as opposed to some of these judges who fought the enemy and never had any real contact, Samson's life was intertwined with them. He was involved in so many ways with Philistine women, of different types, and he violated a number of

the Ten Commandments, as well as the Nazirite vow that was taken on his behalf by his parents. So, we'll talk about that in a minute.

But in a sense, it's fitting that we see his story and we see the extended story of his because his life in a sense embodied the tragic aspects of the life of the nation as a whole. He was used by God for deliverance. The nation turned to God now and then and confessed sin.

He even called upon God on occasion to help him. But his life was, for the most part, one of continued apostasy. Sadly, just like the nation that he was a leader of.

Chapter 13 is the chapter about the birth of Samson. And again, as with most of the other major judges, it begins with a statement that the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. It tells of the encounter between Samson's parents and the angel of the Lord who announced his birth and also his mission.

Again, there's much more involvement of God and his angel on his behalf with Samson's calling as a leader than with any of the other judges before. So, in chapter 3, verse 3, it mentions the angel of the Lord appearing to Samson's mother. And she's barren and yet the appearance was rather awesome.

In verse 6, it tells us she comes back and tells her husband that a man of God has come to me and his appearance was like the appearance of an angel. Very awesome. I did not ask him where he'd come from and he did not tell me his name, but he said to me, you shall conceive and bear a son.

So, that's an important thing that we see in the introduction to Samson's birth here. Now, in verse 5, at the end of the verse, well, in verse 5, we have the angels instructing Samson's mother, telling her that she's going to conceive and bear a son. And then she says several things.

She says that no razor shall come upon his head because the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb. And he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistine. So, clearly Samson's mission is to deliver people.

It's from the Lord. But he is being dedicated as a Nazarite, even before he was born, and in a sense without his own agreement to this or choice. Now, who or what is a Nazirite? Well, to understand this whole context here, we need to see what the Nazirite vow is all about.

And that's back in the book of Numbers. So, I think we'll take an excursus here and look at the book of Numbers chapter 6, which is where that vow is told of. The entire chapter tells us about this Nazirite vow, except for the very end where we have a blessing given.

It's called the blessing of Aaron. But otherwise, the whole chapter in Numbers 6 are involved in telling us about what the Nazarite vow is. And just to begin, in Numbers 6 verses 1 and 2, God speaks to Moses and says, Speak to the people of Israel, say to them, when either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazarite, to separate himself to the Lord, then it goes on to tell the criteria for what they're supposed to do.

But let's notice a couple of things here at the beginning. First of all, it's something that anyone could do, man or woman. It was not reserved for the priesthood or for the Levites in general.

Anybody could take this vow. Notice it says that it's a special vow. Now, there's no legislation earlier that says here are the vows you're supposed to do.

Earlier in the book of Leviticus, in the first seven chapters, we have the various offerings and sacrifices that Israel was commanded to observe. There were festivals they were commanded to observe, Passover, Sabbath day, new moon, harvest, and so on. The Nazarite vow is not something that was commanded to anyone.

It was voluntary. And so, it says whenever somebody does this, then here's how they're to keep it. But it doesn't say everybody has to do it.

I think that's an important distinction to keep in mind as we consider this. The word Nazarite, N-A-Z-I-R-I-T-E, Nazir means the idea of something separated out or consecrated, something to that effect. And so that's stated in the text here at the end of verse two.

It's the vow of the Nazirite to separate himself to the Lord. Sometimes the analogy is made to in the New Testament era, something that actually we find in both the Old and New Testaments, namely the idea of fasting. God does not command fasting for all his people or believers.

People voluntarily would fast and pray. But fasting would typically take them away from the flow of normal life. They're not involved in the preparation of food or consumption of food.

It gives them a sense of being alone with God in a separate kind of way. Same thing with the Nazarite. And the Nazirite, there were three requirements.

If you're going to do this, here are the things you need to do. And so, starting in verse three, number one, it says, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. Essentially, no alcohol.

He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink. Shall not drink any of the juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. So don't even get close to alcohol.

Don't cheat and get some hard cider, let's say. Just stay away from it completely. All the days of separation, he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine or even the seeds or the skins.

So again, just stay away. Secondly, in verse five, all the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. So don't cut your hair.

Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long. Luke of Acts says the reference to somebody getting their hair cut because they were fulfilling a vow.

And chances are that that's somebody doing that as a part of the Nazarite vow. And then third, verse six, all the days that he separates himself to the Lord, he shall not go near a dead body. Not even for his father or his mother, brother or sister.

If they die, which is kind of a big thing. The death of a close relative loved one, stay away from them even. Because if they do, they shall make himself unclean because the separation to God is on his head.

All the days of separation, he is holy to the Lord. So, the idea of holiness is the idea of separation out and away. And that's the core, out and away from the sacred and the profane, the clean and the unclean, and holy, unholy.

All that's the essence of the Nazarite vow. And then it goes on to give a lot more details of that. Ends up, verse 21, this is the law of the Nazarite.

And that's pretty much it. So that's the backdrop to what we read about here in Judges chapter six, when the angel, I'm sorry, Judges 16, sorry again, Judges 13. Markers in the wrong place.

So, the angel tells Samson's mother in verse seven, behold, you shall conceive a bear of a son. He shall drink no wine or strong drink and eat nothing unclean for the child to be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. Now in Numbers, it does not tell the time length of a Nazarite vow.

And the book of Acts example would indicate that maybe there was an ending time. It didn't have to be perpetual to the rest of life. Certainly, Numbers doesn't specify that.

But here, Samson is being dedicated from the very birth to his death. I suppose on one level, we might say that Samson is a somewhat sympathetic figure because he

did not enter into this vow on his own. It was done for him by the angel and by his parents.

But regardless, we find, we will see that Samson essentially violated all three of the main tenets of the vow in his life. So, after this, his father prays and has some back and forth. And they meet the man of God and have prepared some food there for him.

But I want to highlight in verse 18 that when they want to ask, they want to find out who this is. In verse 17, Manoah, Samson's father says to the angel, Lord, what is your name? So that when your words come true, we may honor you. And the angel of the Lord said to him, why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful? And the question here is, what is happening here? I think some Bible versions capitalize the word wonderful.

Some do not. In the English Standard Version, it does not. Is that the name of the angel? This is related to the word *niflaot*, which we've talked about in the book of Joshua, chapter three when it says God is going to begin to do wonderful things.

*Niflaot* is the closest word in Hebrew to miracles. And so, it seems to me and many scholars that the idea here is that the angel of the Lord is saying, my name is too wonderful. It's a mystery.

And you cannot grasp who I am by trying to know my name. Sometimes there was an idea in the ancient world that if you knew someone's name, you had some sort of power over them, or you could have some sort of control over them. So, the angel is in a sense refusing to say, I'm way beyond who you are, and you do not deserve to know what my name is.

And so, Manoah offers a rain offering. The flame goes up, and they fell down their faces and worshipped the angel. So, the woman bears a son, verse 24, names his name Samson.

And the young man grew, the Lord blessed him, and the spirit of the Lord began to stir him. Last verse of chapter 13, in the land here, sort of toward the Philistine territories. In our map here, this would be the hill country, down here in the red area is the southwest, and this is the territory of the Philistines more in the flat coastal plain.

So, in chapters 14 through 16, we have the actual exploits of Samson as he is now a young man and an adult. They fall into two segments, chapters 14 and 15 are a whole grouping. Chapter 16 is the second segment.

Each of the segments ends with a mass destruction of the Philistines, followed by a note about his judging. And if you count them up, you'll find in the first segment there are five exploits that he accomplishes. Chapter 14, he kills a lion, then he kills 30 Philistines, he burns Philistine fields, there's another slaughter of Philistines, then he escapes from ropes that they had bound him up with, and he kills a thousand Philistines at that point.

So, five events and the killing of a thousand Philistines in chapters 14 and 15. And then in 16, there's an incident where he's in Gaza, the city of Gaza, and he escapes carrying the gates of Gaza with him for miles and miles. Then with Delilah, she binds him up in bowstrings and he escapes from those.

She binds him up with new ropes, she escapes from those. She binds him up with a loom on his hair and escapes from that. And then finally at the end of his life, he brings down the temple of Dagon and kills 3,000 Philistines there.

So, there's kind of a symmetry between the events in chapters 14 and 15. Five great feats of strength ended by the killing of a thousand Philistines. Chapter 16, five other feats of strength killing 3,000 Philistines at that point.

So, let's look at chapters 14 and 15 first. The episodes here deal with Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman and the resulting cycle of offense and retaliation, back and forth. And right away, it's a problem because marriage with foreigners is prohibited unambiguously and repeatedly by God's people.

We have that in Exodus 34, Deuteronomy 7, back in Genesis as well. They are not to marry foreigners and yet Samson, chapter 14, verse 1, goes down to Timnah, part of the Philistine territory, and sees one of the daughters of the Philistines. He came up to his parents and said that he saw this woman and he demanded that they get her for him as a wife.

Right, there also is kind of a departure from tradition because usually, it's the parents who arrange to find the wife for the son. In Genesis, we see Abraham sending a servant to get a wife for Isaac and so on. Samson here is demanding it himself, demanding that his parents find him, not find him a wife, but get him the wife that he wants.

So right there, he's kind of sitting off on the wrong foot. So, he's not violating, here he's not violating one of the provisions of the Nazarite vow, but he's violating another one of the commandments of God from early on. Ironically, we are told, in spite of this, we are told in verse 4 that God was going to be using Samson.

So, verse 4 says, that his father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord because he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time, the Philistines ruled over Israel. So, they were dominating Israel.

God was going to use Samson to do this. And so, God uses Samson's perverse desires to open doors to the conflicts that we see with the Philistines. So, in verses 5 to 20, we have Samson at his wedding feast.

And as he's getting ready to go down, verse 5, chapter 14, he sees a young lion coming at him. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, verse 6, and he tears the lion in pieces and goes down and talks to the woman. She's right in his own eyes.

Some days later, he comes back and finds the carcass of the lion there. And bees have set up a hive there and made some honey. He reaches in there, drinks the honey, eats the honey, and goes on his way.

Right there, we see him violating part of the Nazirite vows because he's sticking his hand into a dead animal. He's supposed to stay away from the dead. So, his father goes back, verse 10, to the woman, and it says that Samson prepared a feast because so young men were supposed to do.

Well, there are several different words in Hebrew for feasts or festivals, and this one is the kind of feast that is related to the word for drinking. It's *mishteh*. And so, we have Samson preparing a drinking banquet.

And again, the second violation of the Nazirite vow, preparing a banquet with alcohol in it. So, in the banquet, as we all know, this is a famous part of Samson's story as well. He has this riddle, and he proposes the riddle to the people there and says that if you can't solve the riddle, then you owe me some linen garments, and if not, I'll owe you the linen garments.

And so, the riddle is in verse 14. Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.

And of course, he's referring to the lion that he'd killed and the honey that he'd gotten. Nobody can figure out the riddle, and the men are afraid of losing the contest. And so, they go to an end around Samson.

They come to his wife and tell her that she needs to get the answer from Samson. She comes in and weeps before him, verse 17. It was a long time, apparently.

Weeps before him the seven days that the feast lasted. And finally, he's worn down. He tells her the answer.

And so, when the time comes, they have solved the riddle, and he's not happy with that. So, in the middle of verse 18, he said, if you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found my riddle. If you had not violated trust with coming to my wife and going to an end round about me, then you wouldn't have done this.

And so, God's spirit rushes on him, and he goes down to Ashkelon along the seacoast and strikes down 30 men of the town, takes their garments, and uses those as the payment for what he owed them. Ironically, I don't know if I have much sympathy for Samson, but while he's gone, the last verse in the chapter, verse 20, says that Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his best man. I was married many years ago, and it's been a happy marriage, I had a best man who was still my best friend.

My best man never would have betrayed me like that. But anyway, Samson's wife is given to this other man. So that's the beginning of his public life and his being known in society.

And he's a rather contentious figure and a rather polarizing figure here. He is doing business with the Philistines. He wants to marry a Philistine woman.

He's killing people right and left, it seems like already, engaged in a drinking festival. So, it's not going well. Chapter 15 now continues his conflicts with the Philistines, but it's still part of this cycle of retaliation, offense, and reaction to the response to that.

So next, in the first five verses, he burns the fields of the Philistines by using 300 foxes. He caught 300 foxes, took torches, turned them tail to tail, put torches between their tails, and they set off through the fields. It lights all the fields up and burns all the grains.

And I have no idea how he accomplished that. As a kid, knowing this story, I imagined him holding 300 tails of foxes in his hands and bringing them all together. But I probably had cages to put.

We just don't know. But anyway, that was a lot of foxes and a lot of destruction that he accomplished that way. So, they responded in verses six to eight by burning... Well, first of all, just look at the beginning of verse six.

They say, who has done this? And they said, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnahite because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion. That's a little different picture than we have at the end of chapter 14. Chapter 14 sounds like the wife was given to the best man against his will or without his knowledge.

Here, it sounds like he's done it. But this is in the words of the Philistines. It may not be that they were accurately stating what happened.



So, the Philistines came up and burned her, Samson's wife, who was with his best man, and her father. And so, Samson sees that and he decides he's going to be avenged again. So, the cycle of retaliation responds with more killing, in verses six to eight.

He strikes them hip and thigh with a great blow. There's been discussion about what exactly that means, hip and thigh. Some scholars think that hip might be better rendered as leg, the leg, and the thigh.

I'm not sure exactly. But the idea seems to be, or some scholars have suggested, that sort of the imagery of a great conflict of wrestling, that they're all tangled up with each other and he's smiting them every which way possible. Whereas his brute strength would clearly be coming through in this context.

So as a result of that, the Philistines begin their own retaliation in verses nine and following. And they raid Judah on verses nine and ten. And verses 11 to 13, we have the men of Judah delivering Samson to the Philistines.

And it took 3,000 men to go get Samson. Verse 11, 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock where Samson was. And they eventually try to deliver him to the Philistines.

So, they bind him up in these two new ropes in verse 13, which is ironic because later when you see him with Delilah, he suggests that they should bind him with new ropes. And that's the same word found here. So, we find when they bring him, the Philistines come out to meet him in verse 14.

The Spirit of the Lord rushes on him again and he breaks the ropes as if it was nothing. He takes the fresh jawbone of a donkey and uses that to kill 1,000 men at this point. A fresh jawbone would have been one that was still moist and fresh.

It would not be old and brittle. So, it would have been a very effective kind of weapon here. And so, Samson seems to like these little poems, riddles.

He has another little poem here. Verse 16, with the jawbone of a donkey, heap upon heaps with the jawbone of a donkey, how I struck down a thousand men. And when he's finished, he throws away the jawbone.

They call that place Ramat Lahi, which means the hill of the jawbone. And so, there's kind of a wordplay there. We see for the first time at the end of the chapter, Joshua calling upon the Lord.

He finds himself very thirsty now. It's the first indicator in the storyline of Samson's vulnerability of some type. And so, he calls upon the Lord and says, you've granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and now shall I die of thirst? So, he's calling on God, but the request is not to praise God or to thank God.

It's much more self-centered. It's just, you know, what have you done for me lately, God? You delivered me, yeah, but I'm still thirsty. I need some help.

So again, graciously, God opens the earth in some way and water comes out and he is refreshed. And it says in the last verse of verse 15 that he judged Israel in those days for 20 years. So that ends the first series of events that happens in Samson's life that all stems out of his desire for a Philistine woman and then the cycle of retaliation and response.

But Samson's entanglement with the Philistines is not yet finished because now we see more of it in chapter 16. So, let's look at chapter 16 and this whole chapter tells about his fateful involvement with two more Philistine women. So, he's had a wife already, or at least someone that he wanted to marry.

Now in verses one to three, he's involved with the prostitute in the city of Gaza down near the coast. And then verses four and following, very famous woman, Delilah. Again, not what God would have wanted from him.

And then the chapter ends with his final revenge on the Philistines and their God. Interestingly enough, in this chapter, we don't have the spirit of God, the spirit of the Lord mentioned at all. So, it appears that now Samson is really mainly relying on his own strength.

He's kind of ends up as a tragic figure. So let's look at the episodes verses one to three. We have Samson down in Gaza and he sees a prostitute, and goes into her.

And the citizens of Gaza hear about this and they surround the place at an ambush for him at the gate of the city. Kept quiet all night, but Samson lies there till midnight, verse three. And at midnight, he rose up and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city, pulled them up, walks away up to Hebron, a good 15 miles or more.

How the man didn't wake up or how he got away with this, we're not sure. But it's a rather impressive feat of strength to carry the gates of this city, which is a walled city, back at that time. And to do that in a night journey was rather impressive.

And that the hill, the terrain goes from the coastal lowlands up into the mountain, into the hill country. It's quite a steep, quite a steep thing. If you've ever been in Israel, driven from the coastal part up into the mountains, that's where Samson was walking with these gates on his back.

So, in verses four to 22, we have his involvement with the second Philistine woman here, and her name was Delilah. She was the third Philistine woman that he had been involved in, as we've said. And she's very carefully coordinating her actions with the lords of the Philistines.

We've mentioned earlier that the Philistines' society and culture were organized around five major cities and five lords, chieftains of each of the cities, and she's coordinating with them to bring down Samson. She persists, and he keeps putting her off, but she persists and finally succeeds in persuading him to reveal his source of strength. In that climactic point, verse 20, he allows his hair to be cut, which is the third of the Nazirite provisions that he is violating, so it results in his capture.

So, the first thing we have in verse seven is that she is asking him how, where does his great strength lie in verse six, and the reason is because the Philistine lords have come and, in a sense, offered her a bribe saying, in verse five, if you tell us, we'll each give you 1,100 pieces of silver, which would have been a very impressive amount then. So, Samson teases her by saying, bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I'll be weak like any other man, verse seven. And so, they do this, and she had men lying in wait to do it, to capture him, but he snapped the bowstrings, verse nine, and that plan was defeated.

She comes back to him, verse 10, and scolds him saying, you've mocked me, tell me now what it is. And so, he tells her, take some new ropes, and that's the same word of the ropes that he's burst back earlier, so he's kind of jerking her chain in a sense, but he tells them to do that, they do that, try to lie in wait to ambush him, doesn't work, he breaks the ropes easily. In the next one, in verse 13 and following, she now becomes more insistent and says, up to now you've mocked me, told me lies, so tell me how you'll be bound.

So, he says, well, if you weave my locks into the loom, I'll be rendered helpless. Here we're getting closer to the real source of strength, because now we have his hair involved, when the time comes and the ambush comes, he still jumps up and is able to run away with the loom attached to his head apparently, so that didn't work as well. So, she finally tugs on his heartstrings in verses 15 and following, and says, how can you say I love you when your heart's not with me, you've mocked me, so on and so forth.

She pressed him hard day after day, and eventually, he's so upset that he finally told her the secret of his strength. In verse 17, a razor shall never come to my head, I've been a Nazirite. So we see here that he's aware that he has been a Nazirite since his birth, and he apparently has been jealously guarding his hair, this seems to be the first time his hair has been cut, but notice that he has been dismissive of the other provisions of the Nazirite vow, he has touched the dead, he has been involved in the

drinking feast, so he's kind of this ambivalent character about the vow that was placed upon him, he's not been really faithful to that, but now he's finally giving in and revealing the secret of this, and abandoning the third tenet of the vow.

In verse 19, I'm sorry, verse 18, Delilah sees that he finally now is sincere, and so she tells the men to come, and they bring the money to give to her, and she puts him to sleep, and when the time comes, she wakes him up, says the Philistines are here, he thinks he's still strong, he jumps up, tries to get away, and he's not a tragic thing, in verse 20, at the end of verse 20, it says he did not know that the Lord had left him. So in chapter 14, we see that God had been involved in his life, it says his father and mother did not know that this was from the Lord, God was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines, but now God had left him completely, and he was basically on his own, and so the Philistines seized him, put out his eyes, took him prisoner, and that's a sad thing for him at this point. But we have good news, at least for Samson, because as in his captivity, verse 22 tells us that his hair began to grow, and so this is an ominous sign for the Philistines, at least.

So, they gather together, and they're going to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their God, and they bring Samson out as a showcase, and to mock him, and so on, and they bring him out, there's about 3,000 men and women there in verse 27. So at this point, Samson speaks to the Lord again, and this time it seems like his prayer is less self-serving, it's more sincere, and so in verse 29, I'm sorry, 28, Samson calls out to the Lord and says, oh Lord God, please remember me, please strengthen me only this once, oh God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes. He grasps the two middle pillars upon which the house rested, and rested his weight against it, essentially bringing the house down.

Excavations have been done in Philistine territories, and some of the temples and sanctuaries have been found, they do have two pillars right out in front that seem to have borne the weight of the buildings, and that would seem to be confirmed here. So, he's taken and buried away, and it says he had judged Israel for 20 years, but it says also in the next to last verse, verse 30, that the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed during his life. So, Samson's life was a mixture of tragedy and triumph.

Clearly, on the human level, he triumphed a lot, and God used him to sort of loosen the Philistine hold on people, although the Philistines continued to be a thorn in the side of Israel in the early days of Samuel, in the next book, and Saul and David, he certainly broke the back of the Philistines at this time. Yet he was a tragic figure as well. There are lessons we can learn from that, I would say.

This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 28, Judges 13-16, Samson.