

REASON TOGETHER STUDY

SAMSON'S HAIR

— JUDGES 16:20 —

The Hair Was the Sign. The LORD Was the Source.



REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

SAMSON'S HAIR

Reason Together Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Aloha,
and welcome to Reason Together Church.
Bring your questions.
Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.
I am grateful that you are here today.
If you are visiting with us, you are our honored guest.
You do not have to know all the answers before you walk through these doors.
You do not even have to know all the questions yet.
This is a place where we can open the Bible together, read what it actually says and reason through it one verse at a time.
If this is your first time with us, we would love for you to fill out a guest card with just your first name and email address so we can stay in touch.
And after the service, please join us at the Reason Together Café.
The coffee is free.
The conversations are free.
And the refills on conversations are always free.
Before we begin, I also want to say a word about giving.
If you are our guest today, there is absolutely no expectation that you give anything.
If you are a member of another church, please continue supporting your home church.
For those who are part of Reason Together Church and want to give as the Lord leads, there is a giving box in the back and there are also ways to give online.
There is no pressure and no compulsion.
The Bible says that God loveth a cheerful giver.
So give only as the Lord leads you.
Let us pray.
Father, thank You for allowing us to gather together today.
Thank You for Your Word.
Thank You that we do not have to depend upon traditions, assumptions or childhood memories of Bible stories.
We can open the Scriptures and see what You actually said.
As we look today at the life of Samson, help us see beyond the familiar picture.
Help us understand what it meant for him to be a Nazarite unto God.

Help us understand the difference between a sign and the Source.

And most of all, help us leave here looking not at Samson's hair, but at the God who gave Samson strength.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Most people know something about Samson.

Even people who have never read the book of Judges have probably heard his name.

If I ask you what made Samson strong, there is a very good chance that the first thing that comes to mind is his hair.

Samson had long hair.

Delilah cut it.

Samson became weak.

That is the version many of us learned as children.

And it is not completely wrong.

His hair really did matter.

Delilah really did have his hair cut.

And afterward Samson really did lose the supernatural strength he had displayed before.

But there is a problem with saying that Samson's strength was in his hair.

The Bible never tells us that hair fibers contained supernatural power.

There was nothing magical about Samson's hair.

So today I want to ask a very simple question that becomes much less simple when we open the Bible.

Was Samson's strength really in his hair?

And if it was not, why did cutting his hair make such a difference?

Before we go to Delilah, before we go to the seven locks and before we go to Judges chapter 16, we need to go somewhere else.

We need to go all the way back to Numbers chapter 6.

Because if we do not understand the Nazarite vow, we will never fully understand Samson's hair.

Numbers chapter 6 begins this way:

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD.”

Notice the purpose before you notice the rules.

“To separate themselves unto the LORD.”

That is the heart of the Nazarite vow.

The word should make us think about separation, dedication and consecration unto God.

The Nazarite was not simply somebody with unusual hair.

The hair was part of something larger.

The person was setting apart a period of life unto the LORD.

Numbers 6 then gives several restrictions.

The Nazarite was to separate himself from wine and strong drink.

In fact, the restriction went farther than simply avoiding intoxication.

Numbers 6:3 says:

“He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.”

Verse 4 continues:

“All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.”

Then comes the restriction everybody remembers.

Numbers 6:5 says:

“All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head.”

There is the hair.

But keep reading.

“Until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.”

Do you see something important in that verse?

There is an ending anticipated.

“Until the days be fulfilled.”

The ordinary Nazarite vow was not necessarily for life.

It was a period of special separation unto the LORD.

And when that period was completed, Numbers 6 gives instructions for what happened next.

Verse 13 says:

“And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled.”

Then after the prescribed offerings, verse 18 says:

“And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Think about that.

For the ordinary Nazarite, there was a right time to cut the hair.

The uncut hair marked the continuing period of separation.

When the period was properly completed, the hair could be shaved as part of completing the vow.

So the hair mattered.

But the hair was a sign of something.

It was connected to a period of separation unto God.

Numbers 6 also says the Nazarite was not to come near a dead body.

Verse 6 says:

“All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body.”

And the following verse specifically mentions father, mother, brother and sister.

I want us to remember that because people sometimes say Samson broke the Nazarite vow when he touched the carcass of the lion.

The lion certainly raises questions about ceremonial uncleanness elsewhere in the Law.

But Numbers 6 is speaking specifically in the context of death and human corpses, even the death of the closest family member.

So we should be careful not to say more than the Bible says.

That is part of reasoning together.

If something is certain, say it is certain.

If something is possible, say it is possible.

If Scripture does not tell us, do not turn our assumption into a verse that God never wrote.

The same thing applies when people say Samson must have drunk wine at his wedding feast.

Maybe he did.

The setting certainly raises the question.

But Judges never gives us a verse that says, “And Samson drank wine.”

So we do not need to build the sermon upon something the text does not prove.

There is plenty that the Bible does tell us about Samson.

Now move from Numbers chapter 6 to Judges chapter 13.

Israel has again done evil in the sight of the LORD.

The LORD has delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

And an angel of the LORD appears to a woman who has been unable to have children.

The angel tells her she is going to conceive and bear a son.

Judges 13:5 says:

“For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head.”

That sounds like Numbers 6.

But now listen to what follows.

“For the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb.”

And the verse continues:

“And he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”

Later the woman reports the message to her husband, and in Judges 13:7 she says the child is to be:

“A Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.”

Now we have discovered something that changes the way we should talk about Samson.

Samson did not wake up one morning as an adult and decide to take a Nazarite vow.

Samson did not choose a thirty-day period, a sixty-day period or some other period of separation.

Before Samson could choose anything, God had already chosen something for Samson.

Before he was born, before he could speak, before he could understand a vow, God appointed him to this lifelong consecration.

So I want to use careful language today.

It is common to say that Samson “took the Nazarite vow.”

But that can leave the wrong impression.

Samson was appointed by God to be a Nazarite from the womb to the day of his death.

His case was extraordinary.

For the ordinary Nazarite there came a day when the period of separation was fulfilled.

There came a day when the hair could properly be shaved.

For Samson there was no such day during his lifetime.

There was never supposed to be a legitimate haircut ending his period of separation.

His consecration was for life.

That means his uncut hair was a continuing visible reminder of something God had declared over him before he was born.

It was not a fashion statement.

It was not a source of vanity.

It was not a magical object.

It was a God-appointed sign connected to a lifelong calling.

Now let us ask the next question.

If the hair was not the source of the strength, what was?

Judges answers that question before Delilah ever enters the story.

In Judges chapter 14, Samson encounters a young lion.

Verse 6 says:

“And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid.”

The Bible does not say, “And Samson’s hair activated.”

It says:

“The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him.”

Later in the same chapter, verse 19 says:

“And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon.”

Again, the text points us toward God.

Then in Judges 15:14, when Samson is bound and delivered to the Philistines, the Bible says:

“And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him.”

The cords on his arms become as flax burned with fire.

His bands loose from his hands.

He takes the jawbone of an ass and defeats a thousand men.

Again, who receives the credit in the text?

The Spirit of the LORD.

This matters because we often picture Samson as though he were simply the strongest naturally muscular man who ever lived.

Maybe he looked physically impressive.

Maybe he did not.

The Bible does not give us his measurements.

It does not tell us the size of his arms.

What it tells us is where his extraordinary strength came from.

God empowered him.

The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him.

That is our first major answer.

Samson’s strength came from God.

But that creates the question that makes this study interesting.

If his strength came from God, why did cutting his hair matter?

Before we answer that, we need to look honestly at the man who wore that hair.

Samson was not an easy man to admire in every part of his life.

He was called by God.

He was gifted by God.

He was used by God.

And he was also deeply flawed.

He was impulsive.

He was drawn repeatedly toward Philistine women.

He acted in anger.

He sought revenge.

He visited a harlot in Gaza.

He played games with danger.

And perhaps most tragically, he treated a holy calling as though he could keep moving closer and closer to the edge without consequences.

That creates another difficult question.

If Samson lived so carelessly, why did God keep using him?

Why did the Spirit of the LORD come upon him when his life was obviously not a model of consistent obedience?

That question matters far beyond Samson.

Sometimes we make a dangerous assumption.

We assume that if God is using somebody, God must approve of everything that person is doing.

But the Bible does not teach that.

God's ability to accomplish His purpose through a flawed person is evidence of God's power and grace.

It is not a certificate declaring every choice of that person righteous.

Samson could be used by God and still need correction.

Samson could possess a divine calling and still make sinful choices.

Samson could experience supernatural power and still be spiritually careless.

And that should make every one of us cautious about using usefulness as the measure of faithfulness.

A preacher can preach a true sermon and still need to repent of something in his own life.

A singer can sing a beautiful song and still need to walk closer to God.

A church can grow and still have areas where it needs correction.

A Christian can be gifted and still be immature.

God's patience should never be interpreted as God's permission.

Grace is not approval of sin.

It is grace.

And Samson received a great deal of it.

Now we arrive at Judges chapter 16.

Samson loves a woman in the valley of Sorek whose name is Delilah.

The lords of the Philistines come to her with a proposition.

They want her to discover where Samson's great strength lies and how he can be overcome.

They promise her an enormous reward.

So Delilah begins asking the question.

"Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth."

Samson lies to her.

He says that if they bind him with seven green withs that were never dried, he will become weak like another man.

They try it.

It fails.

Then he tells her new ropes.

That fails.

Then he tells her to weave the seven locks of his head with the web.

Do you notice what is happening?

The first answers are false.

But Samson is getting closer to the truth.

Now the hair has entered his game.

That should trouble us.

He is playing with the very sign connected to his lifelong consecration.

Delilah keeps pressing him.

Judges 16:16 says:

"And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death."

Then verse 17 says:

"That he told her all his heart."

Those words matter.

He told her all his heart.

And now Samson says:

“There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother’s womb.”

Samson knew what the hair represented.

He connected it directly to his Nazarite identity.

Then he says:

“If I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.”

Now we have to ask a careful question.

Did Samson believe his hair was magical?

I do not think we have to conclude that.

Samson knew the history of his calling.

He knew no razor was to come upon his head.

He knew he had been a Nazarite unto God from his mother’s womb.

He knew that shaving his head would destroy the visible sign God had attached to that lifelong consecration.

But Samson has now done something he had never done before.

He has handed the truth of his calling to a woman who has repeatedly demonstrated that she is trying to use it against him.

Think about how reckless that is.

Every previous time he gave Delilah an answer, the thing he described happened.

He said green withs.

He woke up bound with green withs.

He said new ropes.

He woke up bound with new ropes.

He mentioned weaving his hair.

His hair was woven.

At some point Samson should have realized that Delilah was not asking out of innocent curiosity.

And yet he stays.

He keeps playing.

He keeps moving closer.

Until finally he tells her all his heart.

There is a warning here that does not require us to turn Samson into a simple moral tale.

Sin often works by moving the line a little at a time.

We tell ourselves we are still in control.

We tell ourselves we have gotten away with it before.

We tell ourselves we can go just a little closer.

We tell ourselves we can always pull back later.

Samson had escaped before.

He had broken the bindings before.

He had awakened and overcome the trap before.

And perhaps that is why Judges 16:20 is one of the most frightening verses in his story.

Delilah makes Samson sleep upon her knees.

She calls for a man.

The seven locks of Samson's head are shaved off.

Then she says:

"The Philistines be upon thee, Samson."

And Samson wakes up.

Listen carefully to what he says.

"I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself."

As at other times before.

That sentence could preach all by itself.

Samson assumes that what happened yesterday will happen today.

He assumes that because God empowered him before, he can simply get up and do what he has always done.

He assumes the strength will be there.

"I will go out as at other times before."

Then the Bible gives us the sentence that explains the whole thing.

"And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him."

There it is.

Not, "And he wist not that the magic had left his hair."

Not, "And he wist not that his hair contained insufficient power."

The LORD was departed from him.

The sign had been removed.

But the ultimate loss was not hair.

It was the empowering presence of God.

That is why I do not want us to say the hair did not matter.

The hair mattered because God said it mattered.

The hair was the visible sign of a consecration that was supposed to last from the womb to the day of his death.

But the sign was not the Source.

The LORD was the Source.

There is an enormous difference between those two statements.

A wedding ring matters.

But the metal in the ring does not create the marriage.

The ring points to a covenant.

A diploma matters.

But the paper itself does not contain the education.

A flag matters.

But the fabric is not the nation.

In the same way, Samson's hair mattered because of what God had attached to it.

But the power was not keratin growing from his scalp.

The power came from God.

And now the consequences come quickly.

The Philistines take Samson.

They put out his eyes.

They bring him down to Gaza.

They bind him with fetters of brass.

And the man who had once torn cords from his arms now grinds in the prison house.

There is no reason to make that pretty.

Sin has consequences.

Samson's calling did not make him immune from them.

God's previous grace did not make him immune from them.

His past victories did not make him immune from them.

He loses his freedom.

He loses his sight.

He becomes entertainment for the very people he had been raised up to begin delivering Israel from.

But then Judges 16:22 gives us one quiet sentence.

“Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.”

Why tell us that?

Of course hair grows.

That is what hair does.

The narrator did not need to explain biology to us.

So the detail is there for a reason.

The visible sign associated with Samson’s consecration is appearing again.

But notice what the Bible does not say.

It does not say, “And when his hair reached a certain length, his strength automatically returned.”

It does not give us a measurement.

It does not tell us the seven locks recharged.

The hair begins to grow.

But the climax comes somewhere else.

The lords of the Philistines gather together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god.

They rejoice because they believe their god has delivered Samson into their hands.

They call Samson out of the prison house so they can make sport of him.

The temple is full.

The rulers are there.

Thousands are watching.

And Samson asks the young man holding his hand to let him feel the pillars upon which the house stands.

Then Judges 16:28 records a prayer.

This may be the most important thing Samson says in the entire account.

“O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee.”

Listen to the next words.

“And strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God.”

What does Samson ask for?

Strength.

Who does Samson ask?

God.

He does not say, "My hair has grown back, so I am ready."

He does not say, "I can feel the power in my locks again."

He prays.

"Strengthen me."

That prayer tells us where the strength came from.

The same man who once said, "I will go out as at other times before," is now saying, in effect, "I cannot do this unless You strengthen me."

That is a very different posture.

Earlier Samson assumed.

Now Samson asks.

Earlier Samson relied on what had happened before.

Now Samson acknowledges dependence upon God in the present moment.

And God answers him.

Samson takes hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stands.

He bows himself with all his might.

The house falls upon the lords and upon the people inside.

Judges 16:30 says:

"So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

Samson's story ends in death.

The consequences of his choices were real.

His eyes did not grow back.

His years of reckless living were not erased.

The scars did not disappear.

Grace does not mean consequences never happened.

But neither does failure mean that God is incapable of hearing a broken man who finally cries out to Him.

That matters.

Because if Judges were the only place Samson appeared, we might be tempted to summarize his whole life with one word.

Failure.

But the Bible surprises us again.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 11.

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter of faith.

It speaks of Abel.

Enoch.

Noah.

Abraham.

Sarah.

Isaac.

Jacob.

Joseph.

Moses.

And then in verse 32 the writer says:

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson.”

Samson.

There he is.

The man who made so many bad choices is named in Hebrews 11.

The chapter goes on to speak of those:

“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.”

Out of weakness were made strong.

That phrase certainly fits the final scene of Samson’s life.

A blind prisoner standing between two pillars had no reason to boast in himself.

He knew enough to pray:

“Strengthen me, I pray thee.”

And that is why Samson’s story is more than the story of a haircut.

It is the story of calling.

It is the story of consecration.

It is the story of gifts.

It is the story of recklessness.

It is the story of consequences.

It is the story of grace.

And ultimately it is the story of where strength really comes from.

Now bring the question home.

We do not take Samson's Nazarite appointment and apply its specific rules directly to Christians today.

God has not commanded every Christian to grow uncut hair.

That would miss the point.

But we can make the same mistake Samson made in another form.

We can confuse signs with the Source.

I can own ten Bibles and never open one.

I can sit in a church building every Sunday and keep my heart far from God.

I can wear a cross around my neck and refuse to take up my cross in life.

I can know Christian vocabulary, sing Christian songs and recognize every hymn without depending upon Christ.

I can have the outward things and miss the One to whom the outward things are supposed to point.

Even good things can become dangerous when we begin treating them as though they possess power by themselves.

Our church does not save us.

Our denomination does not save us.

Our family history does not save us.

Our baptism does not save us.

Our Bible translation does not save us.

Our good works do not save us.

Our pastor does not save us.

Jesus saves.

The signs can matter.

Obedience matters.

Biblical practices matter.

But never confuse the sign with the Source.

Samson's hair mattered.

God had said no razor was to come upon his head.

The hair was tied to a lifelong consecration established before his birth.

But when Samson needed strength one final time, he did not pray to his hair.

He prayed to God.

There is another lesson here.

Do not mistake God's patience for God's approval.

Samson got away with things for a long time.

At least that is how it may have looked to Samson.

He escaped the traps.

He broke the ropes.

He defeated enemies.

He walked away again and again.

And then one day he said:

"I will go out as at other times before."

But it was not as at other times before.

One of the most dangerous sentences a Christian can say is:

"I have done this before and nothing happened."

That is not evidence that God approves.

It may only be evidence that God has been patient.

Do not build a theology of permission out of the patience of God.

If the Holy Spirit is convicting you about something, do not keep moving the line.

Do not keep seeing how close you can get.

Do not keep saying, "One more time."

Samson kept getting closer to the truth with Delilah until eventually he told her all his heart.

The safest place is not as close to disobedience as we can get without falling over the edge.

The safest place is close to God.

And there is one more lesson I do not want us to miss.

Your worst failure does not make God incapable of hearing you.

That does not mean consequences vanish.

Sometimes consequences remain.

Samson still had no eyes.

He was still in the Philistine temple.

He was still living with what his choices had produced.

But he could still pray.

"O Lord GOD, remember me."

There may be someone listening today who thinks, "I have gone too far."

Maybe you have made decisions you cannot undo.

Maybe there are consequences you cannot erase.

Maybe there are years you cannot get back.

The answer is not to pretend none of it matters.

The answer is to turn toward God from where you are.

Samson could not go back to Judges chapter 13 and relive his childhood.

He could not undo Delilah.

He could not put his eyes back in their sockets.

But standing where he was, he could say:

“O Lord GOD, remember me.”

And God heard him.

Now, I want to be careful here.

Samson is not our Savior.

Samson needed grace just as surely as we do.

The ultimate answer to our sin is not that we become stronger versions of ourselves.

The answer is Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

That includes Samson.

That includes me.

That includes you.

None of us is saved because we kept every outward sign perfectly.

None of us is saved because we were strong enough.

We are saved because Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again.

He did what we could never do for ourselves.

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can do that today.

Salvation is not found in joining Reason Together Church.

It is not found in giving money.

It is not found in trying to clean yourself up enough for God to accept you.

It is found in Christ.

The Bible says in Romans 10:9:

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

And verse 13 says:

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

If you are ready to trust Christ, you can pray to Him right where you are.

The words themselves do not save you.

Jesus saves.

But you can express your faith to Him in a prayer like this:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that You died on the cross for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and that You rose again.

I ask You to forgive me.

I receive You as my Savior.

Help me to follow You from this day forward.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer from your heart and trusted Christ today, please tell me before you leave.

I would love to talk with you, pray with you and help you begin understanding what the Bible says about the life you now have in Christ.

And for those of us who already know Christ, I want to leave you with a question.

What have you mistaken for the Source?

Is there something good in your Christian life that has quietly become a substitute for dependence upon God?

Maybe it is your knowledge.

Maybe it is your experience.

Maybe it is a position.

Maybe it is a routine.

Maybe it is something God used powerfully in the past, and you simply assume you can go out "as at other times before."

Do not depend upon yesterday's strength for today's obedience.

Depend upon the Lord today.

Samson's story teaches us that a sign can matter deeply without becoming the Source.

His hair mattered because God gave it meaning.

His consecration mattered because God had called him.

His disobedience mattered because choices have consequences.

His prayer mattered because he finally acknowledged where strength came from.
And God's grace mattered because the final word over Samson's life was not simply Delilah,
blindness or prison.
Hebrews still remembers his faith.
So when somebody asks you this week,
"Was Samson's strength really in his hair?"
You can say:
"No.
The hair was the sign.
The LORD was the Source."
And then open the Bible and show them.
Start in Numbers 6.
Show them that the ordinary Nazarite vow had a period of separation and an expected
completion.
Then go to Judges 13.
Show them that Samson was different.
He was appointed a Nazarite from the womb to the day of his death.
Then go to the places where the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him.
Then go to Judges 16:20.
Show them the words:
"The LORD was departed from him."
Then go to Judges 16:28.
Show them Samson praying:
"Strengthen me, I pray thee."
And finally go to Hebrews 11.
Let them see Samson's name there for themselves.
That is how we Reason Together.
We do not stop at the version we remember from childhood.
We open the Bible.
We ask the question.
We follow the evidence.
And we let the Word of God correct, deepen or even overturn our assumptions.
This week, share this study with somebody who thinks Samson's hair was magical.

Do not just tell them they are wrong.

Ask them the question.

“If the strength was in the hair, why does Judges say the LORD departed from him?”

Then reason through the Scriptures together.

That conversation may begin with Samson’s hair, but it can end with something far more important.

It can end with a conversation about the God who is the true Source of strength and the Savior who offers grace to sinners.

Let us pray.

Father, thank You for Your Word.

Thank You for letting us see Samson as the Bible presents him, gifted and flawed, called and careless, disciplined and yet not beyond Your grace.

Help us never confuse the signs You give with the God who gives them.

Help us never take Your patience as permission to disobey.

Help us never assume that yesterday’s strength is ours to command today.

Teach us to depend upon You.

And when we fail, teach us to turn toward You rather than run farther away.

Thank You most of all for Jesus Christ, who did not merely show us strength but became the perfect Savior for weak and sinful people like us.

May everything we do point people to Him.

In Jesus’ name.

Amen.

As you leave today, remember this simple sentence:

The sign mattered.

But the sign was never the Source.

If this study helped you see Samson differently, share it with somebody this week and invite them to open their Bible with you.

And if you still have questions about the Nazarite vow, Samson, Judges or anything else we discussed today, bring those questions with you.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let’s Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

SAMSON'S HAIR

Was Samson's Strength Really in His Hair?

Numbers 6:1–21; Judges 13–16; Hebrews 11:32–34

And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him. Judges 16:20

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Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION Samson's hair was not a supernatural battery. Judges repeatedly identifies the Spirit of the LORD as the power behind Samson's extraordinary strength, and Judges 16:20 explains his collapse by saying that the LORD had departed from him. Yet the hair was not meaningless. It was the God-appointed visible sign of a lifelong consecration that, unlike the ordinary Numbers 6 vow, was never supposed to reach an obedient end during Samson's lifetime. The sign mattered because God gave it meaning. The LORD remained the Source. This Commentary supports the sermon "Samson's Hair" by separating the familiar children's-story version from the details the Biblical text actually supplies. The study begins in Numbers 6 because the meaning of Samson's uncut hair cannot be understood until the ordinary Nazarite institution is understood.

Numbers 6 describes a voluntary period of separation unto the LORD. The chapter anticipates that the days of separation will be fulfilled, at which point the Nazarite brings the prescribed offerings and shaves the head. Scripture does not assign a universal thirty-day term. The later thirty-day rule belongs to Jewish tradition, not to the Mosaic text itself.

Samson is an extraordinary case. He does not volunteer for an ordinary vow. Before his birth, God declares that no razor is to come upon his head and that he will be a Nazarite unto God from the womb to the day of his death. His consecration is therefore lifelong and divinely imposed rather than personally initiated.

The Commentary also protects the sermon from common overstatements. Judges does not explicitly say Samson drank wine at his wedding feast. His contact with the lion carcass certainly raises ceremonial-uncleanness concerns, but whether that act by itself violated the precise Nazarite corpse restriction of Numbers 6 is debated. The study should not claim certainty where the text does not supply it.

The theological tension is deliberate. Samson is morally compromised, yet God repeatedly uses him. Divine use is not the same thing as divine approval. God's patience and sovereign purpose do not convert Samson's sins into virtues, nor do Samson's failures erase the reality of faith that Hebrews 11 later recognizes.

The final scene supplies the interpretive key. Samson's hair has begun to grow again, but he does not trust the hair to restore him. He prays, "O Lord GOD, remember me... and strengthen me."

The man who once expected to go out “as at other times before” ends by acknowledging his dependence upon God.

1. The Title and the Popular Version

“Samson’s Hair” is intentionally simple. Most listeners already know the popular sequence: Samson was strong, Delilah discovered his secret, his hair was cut and he became weak. That summary contains facts from Judges, but it can easily leave the impression that the hair itself contained supernatural force.

The governing question therefore asks more than whether the haircut occurred. It asks what relationship existed among Samson’s hair, his Nazarite identity, the Spirit of the LORD and the loss of strength. The sermon should permit the familiar story to create the question, then allow the Biblical text to correct the explanation.

The public title does not contain the internal RTS number. The study number remains an archival designation, while “Samson’s Hair” is the short title readers and viewers encounter publicly.

2. Begin with Numbers 6, Not Delilah

Starting with Delilah makes the haircut appear to be an isolated magical event. Starting with Numbers 6 makes it a covenantal and consecrational event. The audience first needs to know what uncut hair meant before it can understand why its removal mattered.

Numbers 6:2 describes a man or woman who separates himself or herself “unto the LORD.” That phrase controls the entire institution. The restrictions involving the vine, the razor and death are expressions of separation. They are not independent superstitions.

The Commentary should therefore resist reducing Nazarite identity to hairstyle. Hair is the most visible feature, but the theological center is consecration unto God.

3. Nazarite, Nazirite and the Meaning of Separation

The King James Version consistently uses the spelling “Nazarite.” Many modern reference works use “Nazirite.” The difference is English spelling, not a different Biblical office. Because Reason Together studies use the KJV as the controlling translation, “Nazarite” should remain the normal wording in the sermon and public materials.

The Hebrew terminology is built around the idea of separating, dedicating or consecrating. This is important because it keeps the listener from thinking that the Nazarite was simply a person who refused haircuts. The outward disciplines announced that a person had been specially set apart unto the LORD for the period of the vow.

4. The Ordinary Numbers 6 Pattern Was Completable

Numbers 6 repeatedly speaks of “the days of his separation” and later gives instructions for “when the days of his separation are fulfilled.” That language shows that the ordinary institution anticipates a period with a completion point.

At the conclusion, the Nazarite appears at the door of the tabernacle, presents the required offerings and shaves the head of separation. Shaving is therefore not inherently an act of rebellion against Nazarite consecration. In the ordinary case, there is a proper and obedient time for it.

This becomes one of the study’s strongest contrasts. The ordinary Nazarite can reach the appointed end of the vow. Samson’s stated end is death.

5. Scripture Does Not Give the Ordinary Vow a Universal Thirty-Day Length

The Mosaic text never says that every ordinary Nazarite vow lasts thirty days. Numbers 6 permits a period of separation and describes its completion, but it does not establish one universal number of days.

Later Jewish tradition did develop a thirty-day rule when the duration was unspecified. That tradition is historically useful because it demonstrates how later Jewish interpreters understood the institution, but it must not be preached as though Moses wrote “thirty days” into Numbers 6. The pastoral rule is straightforward: Biblical law should be identified as Biblical law, while later Jewish practice should be identified as later Jewish practice.

6. The Three Major Restrictions

Numbers 6 places three especially visible boundaries around the ordinary Nazarite’s period of separation.

- Products of the vine: abstinence extends beyond intoxicating wine to the produce of the vine during the separation.
- Hair: no razor comes upon the head during the days of separation; the growing hair visibly marks the continuing consecration.
- Death/defilement: the Nazarite is specially restricted in relation to death, even when close family relationships would normally create strong obligations.

7. Products of the Vine

Numbers 6:3–4 goes well beyond drunkenness. The Nazarite abstains from wine, strong drink, vinegar derived from them, liquor of grapes, fresh grapes and dried grapes. The separation reaches even to the kernels and husks of the vine.

This breadth matters when Samson's wedding feast is discussed. The Hebrew word used for the feast can carry drinking associations, so the setting naturally raises a question. But Judges never gives the sentence we would need in order to say with certainty, "Samson drank wine." A setting associated with drinking is not proof that one named participant drank.

A strong sermon does not need to strengthen the case by adding an unrecorded drink to Samson's hand. His moral failures are clear enough without inventing evidence.

8. The Uncut Hair

Numbers 6:5 says that no razor is to come upon the Nazarite's head during the days of separation. The hair grows because the period of consecration continues. The hair therefore becomes a visible marker of an invisible commitment.

The important theological point is not that keratin acquires spiritual electricity. The hair has meaning because God assigned it meaning inside the vow. Biblical symbols are capable of being genuinely important without becoming independent sources of supernatural power.

9. Death and Defilement

Numbers 6:6–7 prohibits the Nazarite from coming at a dead body and then immediately names father, mother, brother and sister. The emphasis unquestionably includes human death, especially the emotionally powerful situation of a close relative dying during the vow.

The wording has generated discussion about how broadly the restriction should be applied. That becomes relevant when Samson later returns to the carcass of the lion. The lion certainly involves ceremonial uncleanness under the Law. Whether that contact should also be presented as an unquestionable violation of this specific Nazarite restriction is less certain.

The Commentary therefore recommends qualified language. The lion episode can be discussed as evidence of Samson's casual relationship with uncleanness and danger, but the sermon should not make its central argument depend upon a disputed lexical application.

10. Samson Is Not the Ordinary Numbers 6 Case

Judges 13 deliberately introduces Samson before he is conceived. Israel is again under Philistine oppression, and the angel of the LORD announces the birth of a child who will begin to deliver Israel.

The mother receives restrictions connected to the coming child, and the child himself is identified as “a Nazarite unto God from the womb.” Judges 13:7 adds the extraordinary duration: “from the womb to the day of his death.”

This is not merely a very long voluntary vow. The initiative belongs to God. Samson does not request the consecration, select its terms or choose its duration. His calling precedes his ability to consent to it.

11. Did Samson Ever “Take” the Nazarite Vow?

The common phrase “Samson took a Nazarite vow” is understandable but imprecise. Numbers 6 portrays a person separating himself or herself by vow. Judges portrays God appointing Samson before birth.

The better language is that Samson was appointed a lifelong Nazarite unto God. He lived under a Nazarite consecration, but the narrative does not show him initiating that status through the ordinary voluntary procedure.

This distinction is not wordplay. It explains why Samson cannot simply decide that his term has been long enough and perform an ordinary completion ceremony. The duration was specified by God: to the day of his death.

12. Why Samson's Hair Was Different

For an ordinary Nazirite, an eventual haircut can mark faithful completion. For Samson, no such legitimate endpoint exists before death. His uncut hair therefore serves as the continuing visible sign of a consecration that is supposed to last his entire life.

That fact helps explain why the final shaving is more serious than an accidental haircut. The removal of the hair represents the removal of the defining visible sign attached to the particular lifelong calling God had placed upon Samson.

13. Where the Strength Actually Came From

Judges tells the reader where Samson's extraordinary strength comes from before the reader ever reaches Delilah. This is one of the strongest reasons to reject a magical-hair interpretation.

14. The Spirit of the LORD Comes Mightily Upon Him

Judges 14:6 says that "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him" when Samson tore the young lion. Judges 14:19 uses the same divine explanation when he goes to Ashkelon. Judges 15:14 again says that the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him as the Philistines shouted against him.

The repetition is interpretive instruction. The narrator is teaching the reader not to search Samson's physiology for the ultimate explanation. The extraordinary ability is divine empowerment.

Samson may have been naturally strong, average in appearance or physically impressive. Judges does not tell us. The text does tell us what matters: when the extraordinary feats occur, the Spirit of the LORD is repeatedly named.

15. Samson's Character and God's Use of a Flawed Man

The story becomes uncomfortable because Samson is not a tidy hero. He is impulsive, sexually reckless, vindictive and repeatedly drawn toward Philistine women. His calling is extraordinary, but his conduct is frequently unworthy of it.

The temptation for a preacher is either to sanitize Samson because God used him or to erase every evidence of faith because Samson sinned. Judges and Hebrews permit neither simplification.

God's use of a person is not proof that God approves every choice that person makes. Divine sovereignty can accomplish God's purposes through a deeply flawed servant while still exposing that servant's sin and imposing real consequences.

16. Why Did God Keep Giving Samson Strength?

This question is more useful than trying to construct an unprovable chronology of vow violations. Samson's moral compromise is obvious long before Judges 16, yet the Spirit of the LORD continues to empower him at key moments.

The safest answer is that God is sovereignly carrying forward the purpose announced before Samson's birth: he will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. God's faithfulness to His purpose is not a certificate of Samson's moral faithfulness.

Pastors should apply this carefully. Ministry fruit, gifting or usefulness cannot be treated as proof that every private choice is acceptable before God. Grace is not endorsement, and usefulness is not immunity from discipline.

17. Delilah and the Progressive Surrender of the Secret

Judges 16 slows the narrative down. Delilah repeatedly asks wherein Samson's great strength lies. Samson gives false answers, but the answers move progressively toward the true area of vulnerability.

The danger is not that Delilah possesses mystical knowledge. The danger is that Samson repeatedly treats the secret connected to his consecration as something that can be played with. He remains in the situation even after Delilah has demonstrated what she intends to do with every answer he gives.

Eventually Judges says that "he told her all his heart." At that point he explicitly connects the uncut hair with being "a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb." The hair matters in Samson's own explanation because it is inseparable from his identity and calling.

18. Did Samson Think His Hair Was Magical?

Samson says, “if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me.” It is possible to read that sentence as superstition, but the text does not require us to diagnose Samson as believing that his hair physically generated power.

He may simply understand that shaving would violate the defining sign attached to the consecration under which God had empowered him. The narrator then supplies the deeper theological explanation in verse 20.

The Commentary therefore avoids claiming certainty about Samson’s private theory of how the power worked. It is enough to observe that Samson knew the shaving was decisive and that the narrator knew why.

19. Judges 16:20 Is the Interpretive Center

After the hair is shaved, Samson awakens and says, “I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself.” That sentence reveals presumption. He expects yesterday’s experience to be available today.

Then the narrator adds the devastating explanation: “And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.” This is more important than saying merely that Samson’s strength left him. The loss of strength is the visible consequence; the withdrawal of divine empowerment is the spiritual reality described by the text.

This verse should control the sermon’s answer. If the hair itself were the independent source, the narrator would not need to explain the event in terms of the LORD.

20. What “The LORD Was Departed from Him” Does Not Mean

The phrase belongs to Samson’s Old Testament calling and empowerment. It should not be turned into a formula teaching that a New Testament believer loses eternal salvation when he sins.

The immediate question is whether the supernatural empowerment attached to Samson’s calling remains operative. The narrative answer is no. He goes out expecting the old strength, but God is no longer empowering him in the former manner.

The application is still sobering. Past experiences of God's usefulness do not authorize present presumption. A servant must not treat yesterday's grace as though it were a personal possession independent of present dependence upon God.

21. Consequences After the Shaving

The Philistines seize Samson, put out his eyes, take him to Gaza and make him grind in the prison house. The consequences are physical, humiliating and irreversible in important respects. Grace later appears, but grace does not pretend that nothing happened. Samson's eyes are not restored. His captivity is real. His choices carried consequences even though God had not finished with him.

This is a useful pastoral balance. Restoration should never be preached as though repentance erases every earthly result of sin. God can still work while consequences remain.

22. "Howbeit the Hair of His Head Began to Grow Again"

Judges 16:22 is one of the most suggestive sentences in the narrative: "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven." The narrator wants the reader to notice the returning sign.

The verse should not be converted into a mechanical recharge theory. It does not say that each inch of hair restored a corresponding amount of strength. It says only that the hair began to grow again.

Narratively, the line tells us that the visible mark associated with Samson's lifelong consecration is returning and that his story is not over. The exact symbolic weight should be stated with modesty, but the placement is clearly meaningful.

23. Samson's Final Prayer Identifies the Source

The most important evidence against magical hair comes from Samson himself at the end. Standing between the pillars, he does not calculate whether his hair has reached the necessary length. He prays.

Judges 16:28 records: "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once." The request is explicit. Strength must come from God.

The contrast with verse 20 is powerful. Earlier Samson says, in effect, I will go out as before. At the end he says, Lord, strengthen me. Presumption has given way to dependence.

24. Was Samson Restored?

The word “restored” requires care. Scripture does not narrate a formal Numbers 6 restoration ceremony for Samson, nor does it say that every aspect of his life is repaired. It does, however, show Samson turning to the LORD in prayer and receiving the strength for his final act.

His final prayer is not proof that every motive in the prayer is ideal. The desire for vengeance remains present in the verse. Yet the prayer unmistakably acknowledges dependence upon the Lord, and God acts through Samson once more.

The appropriate conclusion is therefore neither sentimental rehabilitation nor total rejection. Samson dies under severe consequences, but he also dies as a man who calls upon God and is still used within God’s purpose against the Philistines.

25. Why Hebrews 11 Matters

Hebrews 11:32 explicitly names Samson among Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David and Samuel in a chapter centered on faith. The inspired New Testament therefore prevents us from making Samson’s failures the whole verdict on his life.

Hebrews does not declare every act of these people faithful. The chapter celebrates what was accomplished through faith while the Old Testament records sins and failures with equal honesty.

Samson’s inclusion means that genuine faith and grievous failure can exist in the history of the same person. That truth magnifies grace without excusing sin.

26. The Sign and the Source

The study should avoid two opposite errors. The first says, “Samson’s hair had magical power.” The second reacts by saying, “The hair did not matter at all.” Both are too simple.

The hair mattered because God had assigned it meaning within Samson’s lifelong consecration. Removing it was not spiritually neutral. But the hair never became a second deity, an energy source or a substitute for the Spirit of the LORD.

The most accurate summary remains: The hair was the sign. The LORD was the Source.

27. Questions and Clarifications

Was the normal Nazarite vow always temporary?

Numbers 6 clearly anticipates that the days of an ordinary vow can be fulfilled and formally completed. The text also allows for unusual situations, and later Jewish tradition discussed permanent forms. The important contrast for this study is that Samson's own duration is explicitly lifelong.

Did Samson choose to become a Nazarite?

Not in the ordinary Numbers 6 sense. Judges presents God appointing him before birth. It is more precise to say that Samson was appointed a lifelong Nazarite unto God.

Was Samson strong because he never cut his hair?

His uncut hair was the God-appointed sign of his consecration, but Judges repeatedly attributes his extraordinary strength to the Spirit of the LORD.

Did Samson definitely drink wine at his wedding?

The feast setting can carry drinking associations, but Judges never explicitly says that Samson drank. Do not turn a plausible possibility into a stated fact.

Did touching the dead lion definitely break the Nazarite vow?

The contact certainly involved ceremonial uncleanness. Whether the precise Numbers 6 corpse restriction should be applied to the animal carcass in exactly the same way is debated. The sermon should preserve that uncertainty.

Why did the haircut matter if the hair had no magic?

Because God had attached the uncut hair to Samson's lifelong consecration. The haircut was the removal of the defining visible sign of a calling that was not supposed to end before death.

Did his strength return simply because his hair grew back?

Judges does not say that. The hair begins growing again, but at the decisive moment Samson asks God to strengthen him.

Does Hebrews 11 mean Samson's sins did not matter?

No. Judges records the sins and consequences plainly. Hebrews adds that failure was not the whole inspired verdict: Samson also belongs within the chapter's witness concerning faith.

28. Pastoral Guardrails

- Do not say that Samson's hair itself contained supernatural power.
- Do not say that the hair was irrelevant. It was the God-appointed sign of his lifelong consecration.
- Do not casually say "Samson took a Nazarite vow" without explaining that Judges portrays God appointing him before birth.
- Do not preach a thirty-day Nazarite vow as a Mosaic rule. Thirty days belongs to later Jewish tradition for an unspecified term.
- Do not state as fact that Samson drank wine at the wedding feast.
- Do not make the lion carcass an unquestionable proof of a specific Numbers 6 violation. State the ceremonial uncleanness clearly and the Nazarite-specific application cautiously.
- Do not confuse God's continued use of Samson with divine approval of Samson's conduct.
- Do not use "the LORD was departed from him" as a proof text for loss of New Testament salvation.
- Do not interpret the regrowth of hair as a mechanical restoration of supernatural energy.
- Do allow Hebrews 11 to complicate a simplistic verdict that Samson was nothing more than a failed apostate.
- Keep the controlling line visible: The hair was the sign. The LORD was the Source.

29. Gospel and Ministry Application

The sermon's application should move from Samson toward the listener without creating false one-to-one equations. Christians are not commanded to take Samson's lifelong Nazarite appointment upon themselves, and long hair is not a New Testament method of obtaining spiritual power.

The transferable principle concerns dependence. Religious signs, offices, habits and traditions can be meaningful, but none is the Source. A church building is not Christ. A Bible carried under the arm is not obedience to the Bible. Baptism is not a license to live independently of the One confessed in baptism. Ministry gifting is not personal ownership of God's power.

Samson also warns against presumption. “I will go out as at other times before” is dangerous language for anyone who assumes that past usefulness guarantees present fellowship, faithfulness or power.

Yet Samson’s final prayer offers hope. Failure carries consequences, sometimes permanent ones, but the proper response is still to turn toward God rather than away from Him. Samson did not ask his hair to save him. He cried to the Lord.

The Gospel conclusion must finally go beyond Samson. No act of consecration, no outward sign and no personal strength can reconcile a sinner to God. Salvation rests in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried and rose again. The invitation is not to imitate Samson’s hair. It is to trust Christ and live in dependence upon the God who alone is the Source of life and strength.

Reference Notes for the Pastor

Controlling Biblical texts: Numbers 6:1–21; Judges 13:1–25; Judges 14:1–20; Judges 15:1–20; Judges 16:1–31; Hebrews 11:32–34 KJV. Leviticus 11:24–28 and 39–40 is relevant to the lion-carcass uncleanness discussion.

Historical background retained in the Vault includes Mishnah Nazir 1:2–3 and later rabbinic discussion distinguishing ordinary, permanent and Samson-like forms of Nazarite practice. These materials are historical witnesses only. They do not possess the authority of Scripture and should never be allowed to rewrite Numbers 6 or Judges.

For preaching, the safest hierarchy is: state the Biblical text directly, identify reasonable inference as inference, identify later tradition as later tradition and leave disputed details disputed when the sermon does not require a dogmatic answer.