

# The Nazarite, Samson, and the Beatitudes

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## The Nazarite Vow — Three Moral Requirements

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Numbers 6 describes the Nazarite vow in three requirements: no wine or strong drink, no razor upon the head, and no contact with a dead body. These were outward marks with moral significance. Wine speaks of earthly pleasure — that which man derives from the things around him. Long hair on a man in 1 Corinthians speaks of giving up the place of headship — the Nazarite was someone entirely subject to God, having no authority of his own, taking as it were the woman's place of dependence before Him. And the dead body speaks of the defilement of sin — death is what sin hath wrought, the wages of sin, the end of its working out in a life. To touch it was to be contaminated by what sin produces.

The question then follows: are there Christian Nazarites today? It is a trick question. We are all to be spiritual Nazarites, every one of us who knows the Lord as Saviour. We are to refrain from the pleasures of this world. We are to be entirely subject to God, not thinking of ourselves above what we ought to think, as Romans puts it. And we are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world — separate from the sin and defilement that surrounds us. James 1:27 and the whole tenor of the New Testament make this plain.

## The Philistines — Inside the Land Without Jordan

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The Philistines were in the land of Canaan when Israel arrived, but they had gotten there without going through the Jordan. Israel entered the promised land

through the Jordan, and those stones of witness were raised there — always to call back the fact that the way they arrived was through identification with the death and resurrection of the Lord. The Lord's Supper, which we had before us this morning, is bound up with that Jordan-crossing. It is a memorial of the death of the Lord.

The Philistines came in without any reference to that Jordan. They had no identification with redemption. And what that means is a pretension to be in the good of God's promises without actually having the reality — having crossed no Jordan, undergone no identification with death and resurrection. This does not picture the drunkard in the street. It pictures those who have the appearance of godliness — professing Christians, or those with some religious interest — who are in fact the implacable enemies of God and of His people. That is the danger of the Philistines. The mafia does not seduce the believer. The moral and religious world can. It has an appearance. The Philistines were Israel's most constant and dangerous adversary precisely because they looked similar.

## **Samson — Going Down**

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Samson was a Nazarite from birth, appointed by God before he was born. And almost everything in his story is a lesson in how not to be a Nazarite. The first thing we read in Judges 14 is: Samson went down. In Scripture, down is almost never a good direction. He went down to Timnath, he saw a Philistine woman, and she pleased him well. His parents remonstrated: is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren? He said: take her, for she pleases me. That is the Nazarite who was supposed to abstain from what wine represents — earthly pleasure, what pleases the self — showing us exactly where his heart was.

On the way he encountered a young lion. The lion roaring in the pathway speaks of Satan going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. But it has been observed that when a believer is walking in a path of righteousness doing

what the Lord has called him to do, the lion will not be in the way. It may roar on the sides, as in Pilgrim's Progress, but it cannot block the path. The old prophet of Bethel carried out his mission to the wicked king without a lion in his way — but when he turned back and disobeyed, the lion met him on the return journey. A lion in the pathway is a signal worth heeding. Samson apparently did not pause to ask why.

He killed the lion — the Spirit of God came upon him and gave him the strength for it. But then he came back and found honey in the carcass, and ate it. Proverbs says: hast thou found honey? Eat only so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be surfeited with it and vomit. The enemy does not quit when one tactic fails. If the roaring lion does not stop you, he tries the honey — something that seems entirely pleasant, sweet, harmless. The same carcass that was the lion is now offering sweetness. Samson went down again.

*Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth  
sweetness. — Judges 14:14*

The riddle and the feast that followed show the final stage: thirty Philistine companions come with the woman Samson wanted, and what is their character? They come to his betrothed and say: persuade your husband to reveal the riddle, or we will burn you and your father with fire. That is who comes along with the one association that seemed innocent and pleasant. The betrothed woman then becomes the instrument of the enemy to extract from Samson the secret of his strength. And the secret of his strength was his Nazarite separation to the Lord — not the hair in itself, but the Nazarite vow that the hair was the outward sign of. When that separation was compromised, the strength was gone.

The warning is plain. There is a natural tendency in the heart toward Samson's pattern — to go down, to be drawn by what pleases, to make friendships in the professing world, to miss the lions in the pathway, and to mistake honey for blessing. When we mingle with the Philistines, the strength that depends on

separation to the Lord goes with it.

## **The Beatitudes — The Character of the Eternal Purpose**

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Ephesians 3:11 speaks of the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Everything in the believer's life is part of that eternal purpose — God displaying through the church the manifold wisdom of God to principalities and powers in the heavenlies. This is not abstract. What is displayed in the church is the character of its members. And the character that is to be displayed is not Samson's character.

Matthew 5 gives us the character of those who are the Lord's: poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers. Each of these is the opposite of Samson's course. He was not poor in spirit — he acted entirely on what pleased himself. He did not mourn — he feasted with the Philistines. He was not meek — he used his strength for personal vengeance. He was not pure in heart — his heart was divided between what the Lord required and what Delilah desired.

Poor in spirit is to own our own nothingness and that Christ is everything. The apostle Paul learned this — led into Damascus by the hand when he expected to arrive in triumph, let down in a basket through a wall when he expected to leave with authority. Both entries and exits were humbling. And that stood him in good stead all his life. Blessed are they that mourn — do we mourn over the Samson-like character of the church in the world, that should be displaying the manifold wisdom of God? Meekness has been put this way: a meek person can do something but doesn't, because they know it would not honor the Lord. Blessed are the pure in heart — this one thing I do, the apostle said. One object. Not divided between the Philistines and the Lord.

Ye are the salt of the earth — ye are the light of the world. This follows directly from the Beatitudes. If we walk in the good of those things, the salt will have its

savour and the light will shine. If we are Samson among the Philistines, the salt has lost its savour, and it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot. The Lord has not dimmed the light. He waits for His people to stop putting it under a bushel.

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