

The Book of Judges

Lesson 12: Samson and Delilah; Strength Restored -- Judges 16:1-31

Watch a strong man and you can convince yourself nothing will ever bring him down. Samson has snapped new ropes like burnt threads, carried off the gates of Gaza in the dark, and torn a lion apart with his bare hands. By the time you reach Judges 16, he walks through life like a man who believes his strength belongs to him, like a wallet he can spend however he pleases. But strength was never the gift. The gift was the LORD, who chose this child before his birth and set him apart with a single quiet sign, the unshorn hair of a Nazirite. Watch closely in this chapter, because the hands stay strong for a long time after the heart has already begun to leak.

This is the saddest chapter in the book of Judges, and it is sad in a particular way. It is not the sadness of a sudden fall. It is the slow sadness of erosion, the kind you barely notice until the cliff gives way under your feet. Samson goes in to a prostitute in Gaza, slips away at midnight, and goes right back to the same kind of woman in the valley of Sorek. Delilah is hired by the lords of the Philistines, and she sets to work on him the way water works on stone, day after day, question after question, until, as the text says with terrible honesty, his soul was vexed to death. He plays games with the secret of his consecration. He thinks he is teasing. He is dying.

Then comes a verse that ought to make every one of us go quiet. The Philistines come, and Samson rises as at other times, and shakes himself, and he does not know that the LORD has left him. Read that again. He did not know. He had presumed on the presence of God so long that he could not feel its absence. The hair was gone, the Spirit was gone, and the man went on as if nothing had changed, until the enemies were upon him. They put out his eyes. They bind him with bronze. They set him grinding grain in a prison house, a blind champion turning a mill like an ox. This is what sin always promised it would never do.

But God does not write Samson off, and that is the second half of the chapter, and we dare not skip it. Quietly, almost as a whisper in the text, we read that the hair of his head began to grow again. In the temple of Dagon, with thousands mocking the God of Israel, a broken and humbled Samson prays as he has not prayed in the whole book, and asks the LORD to remember him. And God, who is rich in mercy, answers a ruined man one last time. There is warning in this chapter, sharp and serious, and there is mercy in it, deep and undeserved. We must hold both, because you and I are somewhere in this story right now, and we had better know which way we are drifting.

Group Discussion: Where in this chapter do you see the difference between still being strong and still having the LORD? How does Samson's confidence (16:20, he rose 'as at other times') expose the danger of measuring our spiritual condition by whether life still feels normal?

Personal Reflection: Name one specific area of your life right now (a habit, a relationship, a hidden compromise) where you have been 'playing games' with sin the way Samson played

games with Delilah, telling yourself you are still in control. What would it take to stop teasing the thing that is quietly trying to kill you?

Read Judges 16:1–31

Study Questions

1. According to Judges 16:1–3, Samson goes in to a prostitute in Gaza and yet still tears the city gates loose and carries them up a hill. What does this teach us about the difference between God using a person's gifts and God approving a person's life? Why is it dangerous to treat continued ability or success as evidence of God's approval?
2. Samson keeps returning to the same kind of sin, first in Gaza and then in the valley of Sorek (16:1, 16:4). What is one pattern in your own life that you keep returning to, and what have you been telling yourself to excuse going back?
3. In Judges 16:4–17 Delilah wears Samson down 'day after day' until 'his soul was vexed to death' (16:16), and he finally tells her everything. What does this passage teach about how temptation actually works, not usually as one great assault but as steady, patient pressure? How should that change the way we guard ourselves?
4. Samson treated the secret of his consecration as a toy, hinting and lying and flirting with what was holy (16:7, 16:11, 16:13). What is something genuinely sacred in your walk with God (your purity, your conscience, your honesty) that you have started to handle carelessly?
5. Judges 16:17 ties Samson's strength to his Nazirite consecration to God, the unshorn hair being the outward sign. What does this teach about the relationship between the outward

sign and the inward reality of being set apart for God? Why was the hair never the true source of his strength?

6. The text says Samson rose and shook himself 'as at other times' and 'did not know that the LORD had departed from him' (16:20). When has your spiritual life felt 'as at other times' on the surface while something had quietly gone wrong underneath, and how would you even know?
7. Judges 16:20 says, 'he knew not that the LORD was departed from him.' What does this verse teach about the danger of presuming on God's presence? How can a person who once served God lose that nearness without realizing it, and what does Scripture say about how we keep from drifting (Hebrews 2:1, James 4:8)?
8. After his eyes are put out, Samson is bound and set grinding in the prison house (16:21). Where has sin in your own life cost you something it promised it never would, and what 'grinding' have you found yourself doing that you never meant to do?
9. Judges 16:22 says, 'the hair of his head began to grow again,' and at the temple Samson prays, 'O Lord GOD, remember me' (16:28), and God grants strength for a final act of faith, so that Samson is later named among the faithful (Hebrews 11:32). Hold two truths together from this chapter. First, the sober warning: a man God genuinely used drifted, presumed on grace, lost the LORD's presence, and reaped blindness, bondage, and death, which is why the New Testament warns the saved 'let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall' (1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 3:12-14; 2 Peter 2:20-22). Second, the deep mercy: God answered a broken, repentant man one last time. How does Samson's story refute the idea that once a person is saved he can never fall away, while still magnifying the mercy of God toward the penitent?

10. Samson's hair grew back, but more than that, his heart finally bowed in prayer (16:28).

Name one specific area of slow, quiet drift in your own life where Jesus is calling you back now, before 'the LORD has departed' goes unnoticed. What is the one step of return He is forming in you through this chapter?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 10:12, take heed lest you fall, written so we would not presume; Hebrews 3:12-14, exhorting one another daily lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; 2 Peter 2:20-22, the danger of being entangled again after escaping; James 4:7-10, draw near to God and He will draw near to you; Hebrews 11:32-34, Samson named among the faithful who out of weakness were made strong; Galatians 6:7-8, a man reaps what he sows

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com