



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: JUDGES 16:1-31**

To understand the redemptive arc in Samson's story.

## A Short Story

Samson's story continues into chapter 16, culminating with an affair with a woman named Delilah. Samson is aware of her tactics to betray him, but predictably plays with fire rather than using wisdom. However, prior to the Delilah account, we are given a small short story regarding Samson's time in Gaza. It's a simple, three-verse account that is fairly simple in form and more than anything reinforces about Samson what we already know. Samson goes to Gaza (a Philistine city), engages the services of a prostitute, and when the Gazites find out he is there, they surround the place and plan to kill him in the morning. However, Samson leaves at midnight, and in yet another superhuman feat of strength Samson picks up, "the doors of the city gate and the two posts, and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain" (Jg. 16:3).

The story reinforces a few important details. One, Samson is a user of women. He is self-indulgent and cares nothing about moral purity. Two, he is supernaturally strong. The demonstration of power is intentional. Who would attack someone who was capable of such raw acts of strength? Three, Samson shows no regard for consequences. We get the sense that he might even believe he is impervious to them. This short story predicts the behavior of Samson in the next sequence, only this time his recklessness will be his undoing.

## Delilah

Verse 4 introduces to us a new character in Samson's story: "After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah." The town in which Delilah lived is not specified, but the Valley of Sorek was the area where Samson spent more than half of his life. After his previous failed marriage and his womanizing behavior, we are surprised to find out that he has fallen in love. However, this love relationship is no ordinary one; Delilah means to destroy him! In verse 6, she asks Samson plainly: "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you." Thus begins a cycle of Samson deceptively answering her in a game of cat and mouse. One wonders why Samson didn't just rebuff Delilah, and instead gave her a series of incorrect answers. Perhaps it is because, out of love, he didn't want to risk running her off by simply denying her. The text doesn't indicate either way. Below is a breakdown of the false answers he gives, followed by the actual answer to her question.

### **SEVEN FRESH CORDS**

Samson first tells Delilah: "If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any other man" (Jg. 16:7). "Seven fresh cords" is a reference to animal sinew or guts that were stretched out and woven together to create a helpful tool. This was a common device used in the ancient world. Animals were hunted not just for food, but for a variety of tools and clothing as well. Nothing went to waste. Upon tying him up while he was sleeping, she awakened him by telling him the Philistines were surrounding them, and he easily snapped the cords (Jg. 16:9).

### **NEW ROPES**

Samson's second answer comes in verse 11: "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any other man." This time, Samson indicates that unused ropes that have suffered no wear and tear would weaken him, but again, he easily breaks them (Jg. 16:12).

### **FASTENED HAIR**

For Samson's third answer, he begins to move dangerously closer to the truth, thus compromising himself. But again, recall the short story and the two previous chapters; Samson does not believe anyone can harm him. This time he tells Delilah: "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man" (Jg. 16:13). He not only indicates that his hair is valuable to him, but specifies something about the form too. There are seven locks, a number of perfection in Hebrew culture. For a third time, Samson reveals this to be a lie. When Delilah cries out that the Philistines are surrounding them, he easily pulls the pin out of his hair.

### **A SHAVED HEAD**

The final act of Samson and Delilah finds Samson revealing the secret of his strength to her. We might be tempted to think that Samson can't bare the feeling of lying to the woman he loves any longer, and in an act of genuine care for her he finally reveals his secret. This is, however, not the case. Verse 16 tells us that it was simply Delilah's daily nagging that did him in: "It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death." He says to her in verse 17: "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man."

Samson acknowledges what we learned about him in the beginning of his story; he is a Nazirite for life. Thus, shaving his hair would break the vow. It begs the question, "Why now?" Why all of the sudden, after multiple acts of disobedience does Samson lose his strength and favor with the Lord? Perhaps it is as simple as the story indicates; his hair was uniquely special. While the Nazirite vow includes other commands, none of them

indicate that the consequences of disobedience would mean a loss of superhuman strength. After all, Samson wasn't strong because he was a Nazirite, but because he was a judge. Either way, this act does him in. He is immediately bound, his eyes are gouged out and he is imprisoned (Jg. 16:21). The story is bleak for the Jewish reader, but a shred of hope is given in verse 22: "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off."

## Halfway Redemption

The last portion of Samson's story is both redemptive and also discouraging. Below is a breakdown of both aspects.

### **THE REDEMPTIVE ASPECTS**

Most of Samson's finale is intended to be positive and redemptive. He is brought in before the lords of the Philistines "and he entertained them" (Jg. 16:25). This was a substantially large house or temple structure with "about 3,000 men and women" who "were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them" (Jg. 16:27). Samson, at this point blind, broken, and defeated, finally calls upon the LORD to "remember" him (Jg. 16:28). The word "remember" in Hebrew doesn't mean that God has forgotten Samson and that Samson is entreating Him to once again be reminded of him. It's a word that means, "consider my case." Samson is crying out for God to have mercy upon Him.

In one last heroic act, Samson pulled two of the supporting pillars, collapsing the structure and killing both himself and all of the Philistines that were in attendance. Verse 30 says, "The house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it, so the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whose he killed in his life." Samson's final act was a fulfillment of his purpose; he brought judgment upon the people who had imprisoned the Israelites. His story ends with his brothers and father's household coming to take him and bury him "between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father" (Jg. 16:31).

### **THE DISCOURAGING ASPECTS**

There are some discouraging aspects of this story, as well. Samson's disposition during his prayer seems humble, but upon further inspection there are some problems. For one, his focus is singular; he is only praying on behalf of himself. Samson's role as a judge was to vindicate the injustices being perpetrated against Israel, and yet Samson seems either unaware or uninterested in the national state of things. Secondly, it seems like the primary motivating reason for his prayer has little to do with God vindicating His name, but more to do with himself. He prays, "that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes" (Jg. 16:28). Never mind everything else that has happened; Samson only cares about getting even! Still, Samson served his purpose and judged Israel for twenty years (Jg. 16:31).

## What About Now?

One takeaway from this part of Samson's story is the certainty of consequences. Samson played with fire (proverbially speaking) one too many times and the consequences of those actions finally came to fruition. He believed he was invincible and learned he was not. Whenever we get too close to the line of sin over and over, we will eventually experience the consequences. A second takeaway is that a changed heart rarely means a fully changed heart. Samson is changed in the end. He humbles himself and prays out of dependence on God, and yet, his prayer isn't perfect. He is still selfish. He still wants revenge. He is still only really concerned with his situation. It's a step in the right direction, but not a fully mature change. This is often true for us as well. We want our changes to be completed immediately, but that is rarely the case.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Judges 16:1-3. Where did Samson go? Where is this city located? What events took place there? What did the men of the city attempt to do to Samson? How did Samson respond?
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2. Read Judges 16:4-9. Who did Samson love? Where was she from and what was her name? What proposition do the lords of the Philistines give her? Did she take the deal? What was the first response Samson gave to Delilah? Was he telling the truth?
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### Day Two

1. Read Judges 16:10-14. What was the second response Samson gave to Delilah? Was he telling the truth? What was the third response Samson gave to Delilah? Was he telling the truth?
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2. Read Judges 16:15-17. What was the final response Samson gave to Delilah? Was he telling the truth? Why was shaving Samson's hair a problem?
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### Day Three

1. Read Judges 16:18-22. When the Philistines came, what did they give Delilah? When Samson went out to meet them, what did they do to him? What sliver of hope is offered in verse 22?
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2. Read Judges 16:23-27. What did the lords of the Philistines do to celebrate? How many people were gathered there? What was Samson brought in to do in their presence?
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### Day Four

1. Read Judges 16:28-30. What did Samson pray? What was his final act and what was the result of it?
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2. Read Judges 16:31. Who came to collect Samson's body and where was he buried?
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## Week 14 Discussion: Playing with Fire

One theme throughout this week's study is the danger of acting as if consequences will never come. Samson continuously acts with indiscretion and a total lack of wisdom, thinking that nothing will harm him. He eventually is humbled by this careless way of living. Talk as a group about the danger of getting too comfortable with bad choices and where it can lead you.

1. Icebreaker: Do you believe that you are exempt from consequences?
2. Do you ever make unwise decisions because you think you are able to avoid the potential consequences?
3. Is wise counsel important in your life? If so, how often do you seek it? If not, why not?
4. Is accountability important in your life? If so, how often do you engage in it? If not, why not?
5. Consider the last major consequences you faced in your life. What could you have done differently that would have prevented the sin that led to those consequences?
6. How can the church foster a safe and practical way of engaging in wise counsel and accountability without shame?

### Takeaways:

1. Samson gives Delilah the secret to weakening him, and she betrays him to the Philistines.
2. Samson eventually fulfills his purpose by destroying the lords of the Philistines.

#### ***PRAYER REQUESTS:***