Judges 16:16–31 Study Guide

“Samson: Strength Lost, Mercy Remembered”

Samson is one of the most tragic judges. He was set apart from birth as a Nazirite, and the angel of the Lord said he would “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5). Yet Samson often lived by appetite, impulse, and self-confidence. His strength was real, but it was never meant to be separated from his calling and dependence on the Lord.

Judges 16:16–31 shows Samson at his lowest point: deceived by Delilah, stripped of strength, captured by the Philistines, blinded, imprisoned, and mocked. But the passage also shows that God’s mercy can reach a person even after devastating failure. Samson’s final prayer is not a model of perfect maturity, but it is a real cry to the Lord — and God uses even Samson’s broken end to accomplish deliverance.

1. What does Delilah’s pressure reveal about the danger of persistent temptation? (Judges 16:16–17)

Delilah presses Samson “daily with her words” until “his soul was vexed to death” (Judges 16:16). Samson had already seen that Delilah was trying to betray him, yet he remained in the relationship and eventually gave away the secret connected to his Nazirite calling.

This shows that temptation often wins through persistence, not just sudden force. Samson was not defeated in one moment only; he was worn down over time. Proverbs warns that seductive speech can lead a person toward destruction (Proverbs 7:21–23). James also describes temptation as desire that conceives and gives birth to sin (James 1:14–15).

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus faced temptation directly but did not yield. In the wilderness, He answered Satan with the Word of God each time (Matthew 4:1–11). Where Samson gives in under pressure, Jesus remains faithful under pressure.

Everyday Application: Temptation becomes more dangerous when we keep giving it access. Wisdom sometimes means leaving the situation before our resistance wears down.

2. Why was Samson’s hair so significant? (Judges 16:17)

Samson says, “No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb” (Judges 16:17). His hair was not magic. It was the outward sign of his Nazirite consecration. Before Samson was born, the angel told his mother that no razor should come upon his head because he would be a Nazirite to God and would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines (Judges 13:5).

The deeper issue is that Samson treats his calling lightly. He reveals what should have remained sacred. His strength was connected to the Lord’s calling, not to personal pride.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus was fully consecrated to the Father's will. He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (John 4:34), and "I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

Everyday Application: God's gifts should never be treated casually. Talent, strength, influence, opportunity, and calling are not toys for self-expression; they are trusts from God.

3. What is so tragic about Samson saying, "I will go out as before"? (Judges 16:18–20)

After Delilah has Samson's hair shaved, she says, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" Samson assumes he can escape "as at other times before" (Judges 16:20). But the text says, "He did not know that the LORD had departed from him" (Judges 16:20).

This is one of the saddest lines in Judges. Samson still expects old strength while ignoring the spiritual reality. His confidence has become presumption. Earlier, the Spirit of the Lord had come mightily upon him (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14), but now he acts as though God's power can be used without God's presence.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus warns that people can have religious confidence while lacking true relationship with Him: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:21–23).

Everyday Application: Yesterday's strength does not guarantee today's faithfulness. We should not presume on past experiences with God while neglecting present obedience.

4. What does Samson's capture show about the consequences of sin? (Judges 16:21)

The Philistines seize Samson, put out his eyes, bring him down to Gaza, bind him with bronze fetters, and make him grind in prison. The man who followed his eyes in desire now loses his eyes in judgment. Earlier, Samson saw a Philistine woman and demanded her as wife because she "pleases me well" (Judges 14:1–3). Later, he went to Gaza and saw a harlot (Judges 16:1). Now the consequences become devastating.

This does not mean every suffering is directly tied to personal sin, but in Samson's case the narrative clearly connects his downfall to his choices.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus teaches that sin enslaves: "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). But He also says, "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Everyday Application: Sin often promises freedom but brings bondage. What we refuse to surrender may eventually master us.

5. What hope is found in the statement that Samson's hair began to grow again? (Judges 16:22)

Judges 16:22 says Samson's hair began to grow again after it had been shaven. This verse is quiet but important. It does not erase Samson's failure, blindness, or imprisonment, but it signals that his story is not finished.

The growing hair points to the possibility of restored strength, but more deeply, it points to God's mercy. Samson cannot undo his past, but he can still cry out to the Lord. Judges has repeatedly shown that when God's people suffer, the Lord is moved by their groaning (Judges 2:18).

Forward Connection to Christ: Peter also failed grievously by denying Jesus three times, but Jesus restored him and gave him work to do (Luke 22:61–62; John 21:15–19). Failure does not have to be the final word when grace intervenes.

Everyday Application: Consequences may remain, but God's mercy can still meet us. Restoration does not always mean life returns to what it was, but it does mean God can still work.

6. What does the Philistine celebration reveal about the spiritual battle behind the story? (Judges 16:23–25)

The Philistine lords gather to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, saying their god has delivered Samson into their hands (Judges 16:23–24). This is not only personal humiliation for Samson; it becomes a public attack on the honor of the Lord. The Philistines interpret Samson's defeat as proof of Dagon's power.

This is similar to other moments in Scripture where the nations misread Israel's defeat as the weakness of Israel's God. But the Lord is never threatened by idols. Later, when the ark is placed in Dagon's temple, Dagon falls before the ark of the Lord (1 Samuel 5:1–5).

Forward Connection to Christ: At the cross, Jesus' enemies mocked Him and thought He was defeated (Matthew 27:39–44). Yet what looked like defeat became the place of victory over sin, death, and the powers of darkness (Colossians 2:14–15).

Everyday Application: God's work is not always visible in the moment. What people interpret as defeat may become the stage where God displays His power.

7. What does Samson's final prayer teach us? (Judges 16:26–30)

Samson asks the boy leading him to let him feel the pillars of the temple. Then he prays, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God…" (Judges 16:28). Samson's prayer includes personal vengeance, so it is not a perfectly pure model. Yet it is still significant because Samson finally calls on the Lord in weakness.

Earlier, Samson often acted from impulse and personal desire. Here, blind and powerless, he knows he needs God. Hebrews later includes Samson among those who "through faith subdued kingdoms" and "out of weakness were made strong" (Hebrews 11:32–34).

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus also dies with outstretched arms, but unlike Samson, His death is not vengeance or personal failure. Jesus gives His life willingly to save sinners (John 10:17–18; Luke 23:34). Samson's death brings judgment on enemies; Christ's death brings salvation to enemies who repent and believe.

Everyday Application: Even broken prayers can reach God when they are turned toward Him. But Samson also warns us not to wait until everything collapses before we call on the Lord.

8. How should we understand Samson's final act and death? (Judges 16:28–31)

Samson prays:

"O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God…"
— Judges 16:28 NKJV

God grants Samson strength one final time, and the temple of Dagon falls. Judges 16:30 says, "So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life." This is a major blow against the Philistines and their false god, but it is not a simple heroic ending. Samson's prayer includes personal vengeance, and his death comes after deep compromise, humiliation, and loss.

Still, God's purpose is not lost. Before Samson was born, the angel said he would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5). Samson's final act continues that beginning. God shows mercy by hearing Samson's cry, but the ending also warns us that sin can make a person's usefulness deeply costly and painful.

Samson does not complete Israel's deliverance. He begins it. The Philistine problem continues into the days of Samuel, Saul, and David (1 Samuel 4:1–11; 1 Samuel 17:1–11, 45–51). So Samson's story leaves us looking for a better deliverer.

Forward Connection to Christ: Samson points forward mostly by contrast. Samson dies because of his own compromise and brings judgment on enemies. Jesus dies in perfect obedience and gives His life to save sinners, even praying, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Samson's death kills many; Christ's death opens salvation to many (Mark 10:45; John 10:17–18).

Everyday Application: God's mercy can meet us even after failure, but Samson's life warns us not to confuse giftedness with holiness. God may still accomplish His purposes, but compromise can make our path far more painful than it needed to be.

Quick Summary of Judges 13–16

Judges 13 begins with grace before Samson is even born. Israel has again done evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Philistines oppress them for forty years (Judges 13:1). Yet before Israel is shown crying out, God announces a deliverer. The angel of the Lord tells Manoah's wife that her son will be a Nazirite from the womb and will "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5). Samson's life begins with calling, consecration, and promise.

Judges 14–15 show both Samson's strength and his instability. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him with power (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14), but Samson is often driven by desire, anger, and impulse. He pursues a Philistine woman because she pleases him (Judges 14:1–3), eats honey from the carcass of a lion connected to his earlier victory (Judges 14:8–9), and responds to betrayal with escalating violence (Judges 14:19; 15:7–8, 15). God is working against the Philistines through Samson, but Samson himself is not presented as a clean model of wisdom or holiness.

Judges 16 brings Samson's pattern to its tragic end. He again follows desire, first in Gaza and then with Delilah in the Valley of Sorek (Judges 16:1, 4). Delilah presses him daily until he gives away the secret connected to his Nazirite calling (Judges 16:16–17). His hair is cut, his strength leaves, and he does not know that the Lord has departed from him (Judges 16:19–20). The man who lived so much by what he saw is blinded, bound, imprisoned, and made to grind in Gaza (Judges 16:21).

Yet the story does not end with only failure. His hair begins to grow again (Judges 16:22), and when the Philistines gather to praise Dagon, Samson prays to the Lord for strength one last time (Judges 16:23–28). God grants strength, the temple falls, and Samson strikes a final blow against the Philistines (Judges 16:29–30). This continues what God announced before his birth: Samson would begin to deliver Israel, not complete the deliverance (Judges 13:5). The Philistine conflict continues after Samson, especially in the days of Samuel, Saul, and David (1 Samuel 4:1–11; 1 Samuel 17:1–11, 45–51).

Summary line:
Samson's story is both hope and warning. He was chosen before birth, empowered by the Spirit, and strengthened by God to begin Israel's deliverance. But he also treated his calling carelessly, gave temptation repeated access, presumed on past strength, and suffered deeply for his compromise. His final prayer shows that God's mercy can still meet a broken person, but his death leaves us longing for a greater Deliverer. Samson dies because of his own failure and brings judgment on enemies; Jesus dies in perfect obedience and brings salvation to sinners (Mark 10:45; John 10:17–18; Luke 23:34).