

# 13

## JUDGES 16

### TITLE

DISOBEDIENCE AND FAITHFULNESS:  
THE BOOK OF JUDGES

FALL  
2023

Explore  
the Bible

## opening ILLUSTRATION

Before class, write the following on index cards, one name per card: Tarzan, Gaston, (from *Beauty and the Beast*), Simba (from *The Lion King*), Luisa Madrigal (from *Encanto*), Captain Marvel, Maui (from *Moana*), and Dwayne 'the Rock' Johnson. Group the students into two teams and say, "Today we're going to finish our study of Samson. But I want you to get into the right frame of mind; you're going to be working as a team to guess some famous strong people and characters." Invite one volunteer from each team who has seen plenty of adventure movies to come to the front. Give the volunteers half the cards. Instruct the volunteers to describe the name on one card without using any of the words on it, one at a time, and repeat until all the names are used. Keep track of the time each team takes to name the individual on each card; the team who takes the least amount of time wins.

## context

Some skeptics—even Christian skeptics—argue that there is no way that today's passage contains a true story. They purport that Samson's strength is fabricated and there is no way that a man could push down the pillars of a temple. But Dr. Bryant G. Wood points to an 1972 excavation of a Philistine temple; its main hall had a room whose roof was upheld by two wooden pillars, set on stone bases, along the center axis. An extremely strong man could feasibly reach both pillars and cause the roof to collapse. However, it takes faith to believe in Samson's strength; that kind of muscle power comes only from the Lord. May we all ask God to strengthen their faith to believe His Word.

## expository OUTLINE

**JUDGES 16:4-10** *We must guard our hearts against those who would separate us from God's call.* Though God's instructions to His people included choosing spouses within the nation of Israel, Samson was disobedient to these instructions. He repeatedly fell in love with women who were not from among God's people and who had no regard for God or His laws. This revealed that Samson did not protect his heart from temptations and things that would lead him to disobedience. We are called to guard our hearts (see Prov. 4:23), and that means we stay alert to the things that draw us away from God. Not only did Delilah not follow the Lord, but she was on a mission to find out the secret of Samson's strength so that the Philistines could overpower him. We may read the story and wonder how Samson could be so gullible. However, Samson's failure shows that as sin blinds us, we also fail to use the wisdom that is ours in the Lord.

**JUDGES 16:16-21** *Godless people rejoice when God's people are humiliated.* Delilah used her ability to persuasively plead to convince Samson to open up his heart to her. Obviously, Samson's hair would have been a defining characteristic, but because neither Delilah nor the Philistines knew God, they didn't know about the Nazirite vow or what Samson's hair represented. Let's be clear: it wasn't the hair that was Samson's strength source; it was God. But as Samson chose to walk further and further away from his holy calling, he began to disregard it more and more. For the fourth time, Delilah did the very thing Samson told her not to do. This time, it worked. Delilah's deception led to Samson's downfall, and the Philistines further humiliated him by gouging out his eyes and making him grind grain like a slave in prison. Samson's story is the great "What if" of scripture: What if he had obeyed God and lived out his calling?

**JUDGES 16:22-30** *A humbled person is willing to give God glory, no matter the cost.* We don't know how long Samson sat in prison, weak and blind. But we can only imagine that he lost all sense of pride and came humbly before the Lord in the miserable darkness. At some point, the Philistines had a celebration and sacrifice to their god, whom they praised for handing over Samson. As a token of their celebration, they decided to bring him out to "entertain" them, which may have meant they mocked or harmed him. In the midst of the powerful Philistines, our humbled hero finally glorified the Lord; his one and only recorded prayer asked for strength so that he could pay back the Philistines. Remember: God's plan was to judge the Philistines for their evil. And He did it, even though Samson's sinful life was marked by disobedience. We can celebrate Samson's final moments because he fulfilled his purpose and God's plan, ending his life in faith (see Heb. 11:32).

## group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 16:4-10.

- .01** How did Samson feel about Delilah, according to verse 4? How does this passage point to the fact that love is not the only needed ingredient for a healthy marriage?
- .02** Delilah tricks Samson not once but three times (see vv. 8-15). What does this reveal about Samson? What or who inspires you to live foolishly?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 16:16-21.

- .03** Do you nag or pester others? (If you don't know the answer, ask a friend who will tell you honestly.) What can you do to avoid this tendency?
- .04** To what has God called you? Are you living in such a way to show your obedience to Him and His call?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 16:22-30.

- .05** How were the Philistine leaders and people mistaken in their power over Samson? How do people in your life give credit where it is not due?
- .06** Though there is much we should not mimic in Samson's life, what can we learn from him as we watch his last moments?

## session CONNECTION

The thought of death and dying can bring great anxiety to many people, young and old. But one of the recurring themes of the Bible is that death can be the revelation of God and the fulfillment of His purpose. The greatest example of this is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus (see Mark 16:1-14). Though the women who had come to the tomb believed Him, they were distraught over His death. But we see their joy when they hear the news that He is alive and see Him for themselves! Samson, whose life had been marked by selfishness and pride, chose to honor God dramatically with his own death (see Judges 16). All Christians can share the hope of eternity and find peace in life and in death because we know we will live forever with God.

## application

Remind students of the opening illustration, in which they guessed some notable strong people from movies. Engage students in contrasting the strong individuals from the opening illustration with Samson; if they don't point it out instantly, reveal that God was the source of Samson's strength, rather than working out or years of lifting weights. Say something like, "Regardless of what we look like, we, too, can be strong in the Lord." Open your Bible and read Exodus 6:10-18, stressing the opening sentence: "Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength." Wrap up our study of Judges by saying, "We're called to be strong in the Lord. Samson showed us what happens when we live for ourselves; let's put on the armor of God and live for Him!"

We are called  
to guard our hearts  
and we stay alert to the  
things that draw us away  
from God.