

COMPROMISED POTENTIAL

God keeps both His promises and His warnings.

JUDGES 16:4-6,13-20

MEMORY VERSE: JUDGES 17:6

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Judges 13:1–21:29, First Thoughts (p. 114), and Understand the Context (pp. 114-115). Review the Introduction to Judges on pages 10-11.
- **STUDY** Judges 16:4-6,13-20, using Explore the Text on pages 115-119. As you study, notice Delilah's persistence in pursuing the secret of Samson's strength.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study on pages 120-121 and More Ideas on page 122. Refer to the resources at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible for more ideas.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploreTheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Posterboard and markers; and A salt shaker and a flashlight for More Ideas (p. 122). Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 7** (Chart: *The Judges*); **PACK ITEM 8** (Chart: *The Oppressors of Israel*); **PACK ITEM 13** (Poster: *Judges 17:6*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God's Purpose of Grace

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Every human life is full of potential. Alert parents will help their children develop their potential to get the most out of their lives. By responding to the nurturing care of their parents, many children will develop exceptional athletic prowess, academic acuity, or excellence in the fine and performing arts. Some children will become giants of the faith because their parents trained them in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6).

However, other people short-circuit their lives. Some with exceptional athletic ability fail to fine-tune their skills. Others with academic acumen never really apply themselves. Still others forego the rigorous demands of rehearsal required of first-class musicians. Frequently, these people compromise their potential by making unwise choices or allowing distractions to dominate their lives.

(In PSG, p. 113) **What are some things that keep a person from reaching his or her full potential? What role does spiritual compromise play in failing to reach one's full potential?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Geography and the Story of Samson," available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Samson epitomizes the process of compromise. He frequently compromised his devotion to the God of Israel by associating with the idolatrous Philistines. He found himself in constant turmoil and dispute with his oppressive neighbors. He relied on his physical prowess rather than humbling himself before the Lord. As a consequence, Samson was not as effective as he could have been. He compromised his potential for becoming a great servant of the Lord.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 13:1–21:29

The Angel of the Lord consecrated Samson as "a Nazirite to God from birth until the day of his death" (Judg. 13:7). Numbers 6:1-21 describes the Nazirite vow and delineates three prohibitions. First, Nazirites were prohibited from consuming any product of the vine (Num. 6:3-4). Second, Nazirites were prohibited from cutting their hair (Num. 6:5). Finally, Nazirites were prohibited from touching any dead thing (Num. 6:6-7).

The prohibition against consuming any product of the vine was prescribed for Samson's mother and repeated three times for emphasis (Judg. 13:4,7,14). The prohibition against a Nazirite cutting his hair also was emphasized (13:5). Though the prohibition against touching any dead thing was not explicitly mentioned in the "birth announcement" narrative of Judges 13, it was still an important part of the Nazirite vow. Samson violated this

prohibition when he scooped honey from the carcass of a lion he had killed (14:5-9). Samson was never said to have drunk wine, but that can be inferred by the title of the feast, which was from a Hebrew word meaning “to drink” (14:10-12). Thus, as we approach this session’s passage focusing on the interaction between Samson and Delilah, Samson the Nazirite had violated all but the prohibition against cutting his hair.

The Nazirite vow is one key aspect for understanding Samson’s life. Another key aspect is the role of the Holy Spirit in his life. Four times, the Spirit of the Lord was involved in Samson’s actions. First, the Spirit of the Lord “began to direct him in the Camp of Dan” (13:25). Second, the Spirit of the Lord empowered him to kill a young lion with his bare hands (14:6). Third, the Spirit of the Lord “took control of him” and Samson went down to Ashkelon and killed 30 Philistine men, plundering them to settle a wager (14:19). Fourth, the Spirit of the Lord “took control of him” again, enabling him to kill 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (15:14-16).

Samson was an imperfect instrument. He compromised his devotion to the Lord by breaking his Nazirite vow. He sought the pleasure of Philistine women above all else (14:1-3; 16:1,4). Yet, through the course of his shortened life, God was able to use Samson to deliver His people from Philistine oppression.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PLEASE TELL ME (JUDG. 16:4-6)

VERSE 4

Samson ***fell in love*** with yet another Philistine woman. Previously he had married a Philistine woman (14:1-7). Though his parents voiced grave concern over their Hebrew son marrying a Philistine woman, Samson insisted (14:3). His willingness to compromise the covenant traditions of Israel to fulfill a physical lust marked one of Samson’s great weaknesses.

However, in the case of his marriage to the Philistine woman, the narrator of the story informed the reader “this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion against the Philistines” (14:4). We should understand this to mean that God would use Samson’s folly to Israel’s advantage. That marriage did not work out. Later, Samson also gratified his lust with another Philistine woman, a harlot (16:1). Thus, when the reader is introduced to ***Delilah***, she is actually Samson’s third Philistine paramour.

Delilah lived in the ***Sorek Valley***. The Sorek Valley extended from the Philistine-controlled area near the Mediterranean coast inward toward Jerusalem. The Philistines controlled the western end of this extended valley, while the Hebrews controlled the eastern end closer to Jerusalem. The valley was easy to traverse and might explain how Samson found it so easy to journey back and forth from Judah to Philistia.

BIBLE SKILL

Examine a related passage to gain a clearer view of a passage.

Read Psalm 1, focusing on the verbs in verse 1. Reflect on what the verbs reveal to us about spiritual compromise. Read the verse in various translations. Write a summary of what you discover. What does Psalm 1:1 teach about a process of compromise? In what ways does Samson’s life serve as an illustration of the truths found in Psalm 1?

JUDGES 16:4

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley.

JUDGES 16:5

⁵ The Philistine leaders went to her and said, “Persuade him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each of us will then give you 1,100 pieces of silver.”

JUDGES 16:6

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me, where does your great strength come from? How could someone tie you up and make you helpless?”

JUDGES 16:13

¹³ Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have mocked me all along and told me lies! Tell me how you can be tied up.” He told her, “If you weave the seven braids on my head with the web of a loom—”

VERSE 5

The •Philistine leaders most likely were the rulers of the five city-states that made up that region: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (1 Sam. 6:17-18). That the Philistine leaders went to Delilah reveals their fear of Samson’s physical prowess but also Delilah’s receptivity to collusion.

Her task was to persuade Samson to share the secret of his extraordinary strength. The word **persuade** translates the literal Hebrew “entice him and see.” Unable to overcome Samson’s physical strength, the Philistine rulers thought to outmatch him by using Delilah, a source of weakness to the compromised Samson.

Their objective was to learn **where his great strength comes from**. The ultimate goal was threefold. First, they wanted to **overpower him**. Second, they wanted to **tie him up**. Third, they wanted to **make him helpless**. For her part in the conspiracy, Delilah would receive **1,100 pieces of silver** from each leader, or 5,500 pieces total. This represented an exorbitant amount and speaks to the desperation of the Philistine leaders to rid themselves of Samson’s deadly nuisance.

VERSE 6

The story moves quickly to Delilah’s implementation of the plan. She said to Samson, **please tell me**, being more subtle than polite. First, she asked him: **Where does your great strength come from?** This no doubt was taken by Samson as a compliment to his physical prowess, something he had come to rely on against the Philistines.

Second, she asked him: **How could someone tie you up and make you helpless?** At first, this question seems too straightforward, as if to give Samson a tip-off that he was being trapped. Yet, the following verses reveal Samson’s state of mind. He thought he could outwit Delilah by telling her a series of lies: his strength could be compromised by tying him up with seven fresh bowstrings (Judg. 16:7) or with seven new ropes (v. 11). In each case, Delilah followed up on Samson’s statements only to discover he was lying to her. Each time, the Philistines laid in ambush only to see their prey escape.

(In PSG, p. 116) **What does Delilah’s persistence communicate about Satan’s desire to destroy our potential? How do we see this persistence today?**

IF YOU LOVE ME (JUDG. 16:13-15)

VERSE 13

After being duped twice, Delilah confronted Samson by saying, **you have mocked me**. The verb is revealing in that *mocked* means “to deceive.” Samson did not need his physical strength to best Delilah; he could outwit her with his deceit, or so he thought. His lies concerning the fresh bow strings (v. 7) and new ropes (v. 11) proved to be deliberately deceptive. Yet she was

persistent in her temptation, asking him again to tell her how he could be **tied up**. This verb *tied up* appears for the eighth time in this passage (vv. 5-13). One would think Samson would have caught on long before now. Yet, Samson's pride provided a false sense of security. He thought even if he was tied up, he could use his strength to escape easily.

Convinced of his own superior intellect, Samson continued to toy with Delilah. Still deliberately deceptive, he told her that weaving **the seven braids on my head with the web of a loom** would result in his being bound. For the first time, he mentioned the seven braids on his head. Samson was tempting fate. We note a progression in his deceptions. The new ropes (v. 11) were stronger than the fresh bow strings (v. 7). Having his braids woven into a loom would have weighted him down, thus creating a bigger obstacle to overcome than being bound with new ropes. However, the biggest development in this third deception was the fact that Samson was connecting his hair to his strength, albeit in a deceptive way.

VERSE 14

Little did Delilah know that the very hair she had woven into the loom represented the source of his strength. The actual source of Samson's strength was the Lord Himself. Samson's relationship with the Lord was further defined by the Nazirite vow placed upon him at birth and extended to the day of his death (13:7). As we noted in the Understand the Context section (pp. 114-115), Samson had violated two of the three prohibitions of the Nazirite vow before he met Delilah. Only the prohibition against cutting his hair was still intact.

For the third time, she told Samson **the Philistines are here** (16:9,12,14). As before, Samson was able to flee to safety. Each time, he no doubt felt victorious in the mental scrimmage he was engaged in with Delilah. Each time he had bested her with deceit. Each time Delilah persistently tempted him again.

VERSE 15

Delilah played her trump card. She feigned to be in love with Samson, yet hurt that for **the third time** he had **mocked** her and not told her what made his **strength so great**. She questioned him: **How can you say, 'I love you' when your heart is not with me?** Her question provided an interesting picture of love as giving your heart to someone, but the question was a ruse from start to finish. Her actions paralleled those of Samson's former wife (14:16-17).

For the fourth time (16:5-6,9,15), Samson's strength is mentioned. Often, Samson's strength is magnified with the adjective *great* (vv. 5,6,15). In truth, Samson's strength had the same source as Gideon's strength—the presence of the Lord, as we noted in last week's session (6:14). Delilah's question was purely rhetorical. Unbeknownst to Samson, Delilah had surpassed him in deceit. She feigned love and also tried to define love. Unless he told her the source of his great strength, he must not truly love her. She defined love as Samson's submitting to her treachery and revealing the true source of his great strength. Samson was about to fold.

JUDGES 16:14

¹⁴ She fastened the braids with a pin and called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin, with the loom and the web.

JUDGES 16:15

¹⁵ "How can you say, 'I love you,'" she told him, "when your heart is not with me? This is the third time you have mocked me and not told me what makes your strength so great!"

JUDGES 16:16-17

¹⁶ Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out, ¹⁷ he told her the whole truth and said to her, “My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.”

JUDGES 16:18

¹⁸ When Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth, she sent this message to the Philistine leaders: “Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth.” The Philistine leaders came to her and brought the money with them.

(In PSG, p. 118) **In what ways might unbelievers and wayward Christians manipulate a believer so as to nullify, even destroy, Christian potential?**

THE PHILISTINES ARE HERE (JUDG. 16:16-20)

VERSES 16-17

Samson was bested by Delilah. This exchange of deceit and counter-deceit was no mere game. What Samson thought was a challenge of the wits Delilah took as a fight to the finish. Thus, **she nagged him day after day**. The Hebrew verb rendered *nagged* means “to constrain” or “to restrict.” One gets the image of a python slowly constricting its prey until at last death comes. The verb **pleaded** serves to magnify her persistence. Three times Samson deceived her and came out on top, but Delilah pressed him four times.

Finally, Samson revealed to her the secret of his strength: his uncut hair. Samson explained his hair had never been cut because he was a **•Nazirite to God from birth**. The last of the three Nazirite prohibitions had been revealed to a woman who feigned love for him, while desiring to be enriched by 5,500 pieces of silver. Samson’s statement **if I am shaved, my strength will leave me** confirmed that his Nazirite vow would be nullified. In spiritual terms, the breaking of the vow meant losing the presence of the Lord.

In turn, the loss of God’s presence meant a loss of Samson’s physical strength: **I will become weak and be like any other man**. In this line, we discover the true tragedy of compromised potential. God gifted Samson as a Nazirite and as a deliverer of Israel. But the strongest man alive surrendered his standing with the Lord and compromised his potential to the evil machinations of a heathen woman. Samson’s uncut hair was the remaining symbol of the Nazirite vow binding him to the Lord. Samson surrendered this secret to gain the love of a wanton woman.

VERSE 18

Delilah sensed immediately Samson was telling her **the whole truth**, revealing the secret of his great strength. She acted quickly by summoning the Philistine leaders: **Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth**. The phrase *one more time* confirmed her ongoing complicity in the plot to trap Samson and ruled out any notion she actually might have loved him.

The Philistine leaders **came to her and brought the money with them**. The mention of the money at this point in the story forms a framework for the narrative going back to verse 5, where the 1,100 pieces of silver per leader was first mentioned. This literary framework underscores Delilah’s true motive for betraying Samson: greed.

VERSE 19

Having summoned the Philistine leaders, Delilah set about to apply the finishing blow. **She let him fall asleep on her lap**. Samson’s hair

lay unprotected from the enemy. As he slept, the source of his strength was compromised. Delilah **called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head**. The seven braids, mentioned only here and in verse 13, were the final connection with Samson's status as a Nazirite set apart to do God's work. Interestingly, the English translations suggest the man cut off Samson's braids, but the Hebrew verb *shave off* is feminine, suggesting Delilah shaved off his braids. Perhaps the man only assisted.

The simple statement **she made him helpless** is literally "she began to humble him." More telling is the notice that his strength left him. From Delilah's perspective, the fourth time was the charm. Her persistence had rendered Samson helpless.

VERSE 20

As she had done three times before (vv. 9,12,14), Delilah cried, **Samson, the Philistines are here!** Samson awoke, thinking he would escape as in the past and oblivious to the fact that he was defenseless. His twin declarations, **I will escape** and I will **shake myself free**, reveal his failure to grasp the dire straits to which he had subjected himself. This fourth time, however, Samson discovered that the Philistines were there and he could not escape. They were there to seal his downfall, to bind him, and to enslave him.

The story narrator wrote perhaps the most somber words in Scripture: **he did not know that the LORD had left him**. In the previous verse, we were informed "his strength left him." In both verses, the same Hebrew verb meaning "to depart" or "to turn aside from" was used. The Hebrew writer specifically used the identical verb and prepositional phrase to draw the connection between the two statements "his strength left him" and *the LORD had left him*.

The Lord was the source of Samson's strength. That strength was symbolized by the seven braids of his uncut hair. Once Samson compromised the secret of his Nazirite vow, he also compromised his potential to deliver God's people. Perhaps the worst part is that Samson had for so long compromised himself with the Philistines that when the Lord did leave him, he did not know it. One wonders how the presence of God could leave a person and yet they still remain clueless to His departure. Samson reaped what he sowed. He was about to experience life after the abandonment of God.

In the period of the judges, the Spirit came on an individual to accomplish a specific purpose. If that individual failed to follow the Lord, the Spirit departed from the unrepentant individual (see also 1 Sam. 13:13-14; 16:14a; Ps. 51:11). Since the coming of Christ, true believers enjoy the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit beginning at the moment of salvation (John 10:27-29). Nevertheless, by our disobedience, we too can grieve the Holy Spirit and hinder His work in us and through us.

JUDGES 16:19

¹⁹ Then she let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. In this way, she made him helpless, and his strength left him.

JUDGES 16:20

²⁰ Then she cried, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" When he awoke from his sleep, he said, "I will escape as I did before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: As the group arrives, welcome them and direct them to read First Thoughts in the PSG (pp. 112-113). Lead the group to talk about the things that keep a person from reaching his or her full potential.

DISCUSS: *What role does spiritual compromise play in failing to reach one's full potential? (PSG, p. 113)*

LOOK: Remind the group of this ongoing study of the judges, reviewing the previous sessions from the Book of Judges. Use **Pack Item 8** (*Chart: The Oppressors of Israel*) as a visual guide to aid your discussion.

TRANSITION: *Today we'll take a look at the judge named Samson in Judges 16 and the compromises he made.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Briefly summarize the information in Understand the Context (PSG, pp. 113-114), using **Pack Item 7** (*Chart: The Judges*). Then invite a volunteer to read aloud Judges 16:4-6, as the group listens for the deal that Delilah struck with the Philistine leaders. Call for a volunteer to read aloud the information under Verse 4 (PSG, pp. 114-115) to set the stage for what is happening in this story of Samson and Delilah.

DISCUSS: *What does Delilah's persistence communicate about Satan's desire to destroy our potential? How do we see this persistence today? (PSG, p. 116)*

DIRECT: Create two teams. Instruct one team to read the information under Verse 5 (PSG, p. 115) and the other to read the information under Verse 6 (PSG, pp. 115-116) to find out more details about Delilah's plot with the Philistines. Ask: *In what ways was falling in love with Delilah a spiritual compromise for Samson?*

TRANSITION: *Samson gave temptation a foothold in his life when he began a relationship with a Philistine woman. The Philistines were enemies of the Hebrew people and did not worship the one true God.*

READ: Briefly describe the events that occurred in verses 7-12 as Delilah tried unsuccessfully to discover the source of Samson's strength. Then instruct someone to read aloud Judges 16:13-15, as the group listens for the lies that continue between Samson and Delilah.

DISCUSS: *In what ways might unbelievers and wayward Christians manipulate a believer so as to nullify, even destroy, Christian potential? (PSG, p. 118)*

GUIDE: *Samson and Delilah's relationship was built on lies and deceit. Yet instead of turning away from temptation, Samson continued to play along with Delilah's trickery.*

DISCUSS: *Samson seemed to realize the relationship with Delilah was a trap, yet he did not turn away from the relationship. Why do we sometimes continue to play with temptation even though we know the dangers?*

TRANSITION: *From the time of his birth, Samson had God's presence blessing him (Judg. 13:24-25). Yet because Samson did not stand against the temptation that he encountered, he never achieved his full potential.*

READ: Read aloud Judges 16:16-20, as the group listens for the details of Samson's downfall. Instruct them to silently read the information under Verse 20 (PSG, p. 119) to help them understand what it meant that God had left Samson. Stress that since Christ came, as His followers, we can depend on the assurance that the Holy Spirit is with us always.

DISCUSS: Invite the group to turn to those sitting beside them and share responses to the following questions: *What false assumptions do you see Samson making in this passage? What other false assumptions do you see people make that lead to compromise?* Call for volunteers to share their responses with the group.

SHARE: *Samson fooled himself into thinking he could treat temptation lightly and still have victory over it. We must never think that temptation is something to be toyed with or treated lightly.* Point out **Pack Item 13** (Poster: Judges 17:6). Emphasize that the downfall of Samson and many others—both in the Bible and today—is that they believe they can do what they want and not compromise their morals, witness, and service to God.

ASK: *How does standing against temptation show that we love God? How does giving in to temptation show that we love ourselves? What are the dangers we face when we stumble into spiritual compromise?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

ASK: *How does compromise in our lives impact our Christian testimony among our family and friends? How does compromise in our lives impact our relationship with God?*

DIRECT: Guide the group to consider their responses to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 120): *Discuss with your group actions a believer can take to fend off temptations to compromise Christian beliefs. What can your Bible study group do to encourage one another not to succumb to spiritual compromise? Record insights gained.* Encourage the group to share their responses.

PRAY: Ask God to strengthen the group as they seek to draw closer to Him and to turn away from any temptations they encounter.



PRACTICE

- Contact those who have been absent and ask for their prayer needs. Pray for these needs and any others you are aware of within the group.
- Send the group an email or text message encouraging them to pray for each other that they may stand strong against any and all temptations they encounter.
- Follow up with any answers to questions the group had during this week's study.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement the introduction, write these two questions on posterboard: (1) *When is compromise a positive thing?* (2) *When is compromise a negative thing?* As the group arrives, encourage them to jot down a quick response to one or both of the questions. Explain that in today's study, we will see that spiritual compromise is a very negative thing.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement Judges 16:13-15, call for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:13-16. Display a salt shaker and a flashlight. Note that Jesus calls His followers to be “salt” and “light” in our world. Point out that in today's study we see how Samson's faith was compromised because of his entanglement with a pagan woman. Ask: *As Christ followers, where do we find the balance between being salt and light in the world, but not allowing ourselves to be spiritually compromised by our culture?*
- To supplement Judges 16:16-20, point out that spiritual compromise is a danger we need to avoid, and we also need to help others see its danger. Ask: *How can we communicate to our children and grandchildren the dangers of partnering with people who hold non-Christian values?*
- To enhance the discussion on spiritual compromise, encourage the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 114): *Read Psalm 1, focusing on the verbs in verse 1. Reflect on what the verbs reveal to us about spiritual compromise. Read the verse in various translations. Write a summary of what you discover. What does Psalm 1:1 teach about a process of compromise? In what ways does Samson's life serve as an illustration of the truths found in Psalm 1?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Call attention to the third question set (PSG, p. 120): *Reflect on the truth that believers possess the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit to equip them to ward off spiritual compromise. How does that truth help you as you face temptation? What are you doing to put yourself in a position to more readily listen to the Holy Spirit?* Read the questions aloud and encourage the group to record a personal response in their PSG.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Review the words to “'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus,” by Louisa M. R. Stead, focusing on the third verse that reminds us that with Jesus we have the power to turn from temptation.