



Session 11

COMPROMISED POTENTIAL

God keeps both His promises and His warnings.

JUDGES 16:4-6,13-20

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley. 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.” 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?” [...] 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—”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.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!”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.”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.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.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.

Identify the steps taken by Samson that moved him closer to compromise. Note how each step was related to the previous and led to the next.

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

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?

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

Samson's story is recorded in Judges 13–16. The statement “the Israelites again did what was evil in the LORD's sight” (13:1) makes one final appearance in the book and is the prelude to Samson's story (see also 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6). Because the Israelites once again slid into an evil lifestyle, the Lord allowed them to be oppressed by the Philistines. The Angel of the Lord announced to a childless family from the tribe of Dan that they would have a son (13:2-3). This boy, Samson, would be dedicated to God from birth (13:4-5).

The Angel of the Lord consecrated Samson as “a Nazirite ... from birth” (13:5). Two kinds of Nazirites are found in the Bible. Some took a Nazirite vow only for a specific period. Others were Nazirites based on a lifelong vow. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul is an example of the former (Acts 18:18; 21:22-26). Samson and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-17) are examples of lifelong Nazirites. According



to Numbers 6:1-21, Nazirites were prohibited from drinking wine (vv. 3-4), cutting their hair (v. 5), or touching any dead thing (vv. 6-7).

The Nazirite vow is a key aspect for understanding Samson's life. He violated the prohibition against touching any dead thing when he scooped honey from the carcass of a lion he had killed (Judg. 14:5-9). We are never told he drank wine, but we can assume he did as part of the wedding feast he hosted, since such occasions were characterized by merrymaking with wine (14:10-12; John 2:1-11). The word for "feast" in Judges 14:10 comes from the Hebrew word meaning "to drink." Before his interaction with Delilah (the focus of this session), Samson the Nazirite already had violated all but the prohibition against cutting his hair.

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?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 4

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

Some time later refers to the events recorded in verses 1-3. In these verses Samson slept with a prostitute in Gaza (Philistine territory). Desiring to kill him, the men of Gaza waited for the strong man to emerge. But Samson escaped Gaza at midnight. Then *some time*

later he **fell in love** with a woman from **the Sorek Valley**. The Sorek Valley ran from the hill country of Judah and Dan westward to the Mediterranean coast. For the first time in Samson's womanizing, the writer provides a name: **Delilah**. Scholars debate the exact meaning of her name. Many maintain the name means "of the night." Regardless of the meaning of her name, she certainly brought darkness on Samson.

VERSE 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."

In chapter 14 the Philistines employed a threat against Samson's wife in a plot against him (v. 15). In chapter 15 the Philistines attempted to subdue Samson physically before he killed one thousand of them with the jawbone of a donkey (vv. 14-15). In 16:5, the Philistines thought better of a frontal attack. They devised a different strategy. They tried bribery, each promising Delilah **1,100 pieces of silver** if she could discover and reveal to them the secret of Samson's strength.

These leaders probably came from the major Philistine towns: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (see 1 Sam. 6:17). Combined, the Philistine leaders offered Delilah 5,500 pieces of silver—an exorbitant sum! The value of silver fluctuated in the Old Testament world, but a comparison of other silver transactions illustrates Delilah's compensation. For example, Jeremiah purchased a field for 17 pieces of silver (Jer. 32:9), and 30 pieces of silver could purchase a slave (Ex. 21:32). The amount of the bribe reveals the fear that the Philistines had of Samson.

VERSE 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?"

Initially, Delilah simply asked Samson, **Where does your great strength come from?** In all probability Delilah waited for the perfect opportunity and injected her request into a current conversation. One can almost hear Delilah casually say, "Oh, by the way, you are a strong guy, Samson. Where does your strength come from?" This and



the following six verses record two attempts Delilah made to discover Samson's secret. Samson offered Delilah an absurd reply in the first attempt, saying that if he were bound with bow stings (cords made from animal intestines) that had not been dried he would become as weak as any other man. The Philistines supplied Delilah with the stings and waited in an adjacent room to determine if Samson spoke truthfully. Delilah bound Samson with the strings. When alerted to the potential presence of Philistines, Samson snapped the strings. On her second attempt, Samson told Delilah that if he were bound with new ropes he would become as weak as any other man. Again, the Philistines supplied Delilah with new ropes and waited as Delilah bound Samson. But again Samson thwarted her efforts by snapping the new ropes "like a thread" (v. 12).

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

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 13 records Delilah's third attempt to discover the secret of Samson's strength. After Samson did not answer her direct question (v. 6), Delilah acted in a cunning, calculating, and manipulative manner. As in the second attempt (vv. 10-12), Delilah again accused Samson of mocking her. One senses tension between Samson and Delilah as Delilah accused Samson of lying to her.

Delilah asked for the third time, ***Tell me how you can be tied up.*** As previously (16:7,11), Samson offered an absurd reply. He told Delilah if she would integrate his hair with the fabric being woven on a spinning wheel, he would become as weak as any man. Samson courted disaster with this tease in that his hair was truly the key to his strength.

VERSE 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.

Evidently Samson lay down beside the loom. Bordering on the comical, he allowed Delilah to weave his long hair into the fabric and tighten it with a weaver’s pin. One can visualize Samson, a giant of a man who once killed a lion empty-handed, a man feared by the Philistines, with his hair woven into a spinning wheel as though he was a child whose hair had been accidentally caught in the apparatus.

The process of having his hair woven into the wheel didn’t seem to concern or disturb Samson, because he fell asleep. As previously (vv. 9,12), Delilah jostled him from his slumber with the announcement ***the •Philistines are here!*** This attempt proved fruitless as well.

VERSE 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!”

All three initial attempts got Delilah no closer to Samson’s secret. In this verse, Delilah appealed to the fact that Samson loved her. Unfortunately for Samson, he failed to recognize the fact that Delilah did not reciprocate his love.

We might ask: *How could Samson have been so unperceptive? How did he not see the real Delilah and her intentions?* In two words: misguided love. For the first and only time in the Samson narrative (chaps. 13–16), the writer informed readers that Samson “fell in love” (16:4). In previous chapters Samson “saw a young Philistine woman” (14:1) and “saw a prostitute” (16:1). But Judges 16:4 reveals that he fell in love. He allowed his feelings for Delilah to cloud his judgment to the extent that he made poor decisions and compromised his potential.

We recognize the beauty of the love between a man and a woman. God inaugurated marriage as He instructed a man to leave his father and mother in order to bond with his wife (Gen. 2:24). Such bonding cannot be accomplished without love. The issue with Samson was not his love for a woman but rather the kind of woman he loved.



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 16-18

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.” 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.

Delilah’s persistence ultimately overwhelmed Samson’s resolve: ***he told her the whole truth***. Of the three requirements of the Nazirite commitment—abstaining from wine, not touching any dead thing, and not cutting one’s hair (Num. 6:1-8; Judg. 13:5)—Samson had kept only the last one. When describing himself as ***a •Nazirite to God from birth***, Samson used a generic word for God instead of the covenant name for the Lord. This suggests a lack of intimacy with God. He showed an amazingly foolish spiritual blind spot by revealing: ***If I am shaved, my strength will leave me***.

VERSE 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.

Oblivious to the situation, Samson fell ***asleep on*** Delilah’s ***lap***. He would ultimately be destroyed in the very place where he felt the most secure.

Samson was willing to break his Nazirite vow to God and compromise his standing with the Lord for the love of a woman. The real tragedy in Samson’s life occurred not when the Philistines subdued him but when he compromised his potential by trusting a pagan woman rather than the Lord.

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.

VERSE 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.

Delilah woke Samson with *the Philistines are here!* He awoke, saying, *“I will escape as I did before.”* He *did not know that the LORD had left him.* The Lord was the source of Samson’s strength. When he lost the presence of the Lord, he lost his strength. But Samson did not even realize it. It seems that his heart was so far from God that, apart from his lack of strength, he never would have noticed God’s absence from his life.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit empowered individuals for specific tasks (see 14:6). Since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christians receive the indwelling Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation, and He remains in us permanently, providing eternal security (see John 10:27-29; 14:16-17). Nevertheless, by our disobedience we grieve the Holy Spirit and can hinder His work in us and through us.

The end of Samson’s story is told in the remainder of chapter 16. When he was brought into a pagan temple to be mocked, Samson prayed to God for strength to take revenge on his Philistine enemies. He then pushed over two support columns, causing the temple to collapse and kill many Philistines. Samson also died in the disaster.

Samson was an imperfect instrument. He compromised his devotion to the Lord, yet God still used him to deliver His people from their enemies. The lesson here is not that Samson is a model for Christians to follow; the lesson is the danger of spiritual compromise.



IN MY CONTEXT

- Partnering with people who hold non-Christian beliefs and values can lead to spiritual compromise.
- How we treat temptation demonstrates our true love, either for God or for ourselves.
- God may remove His hand of protection from those who betray His trust.

What criteria do you use for determining if you should or should not associate with a person, group, or institution? How do these criteria reflect biblical values?

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.

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?

MEMORY VERSE

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted. —Judges 17:6