

PART 4

CONNECT GUIDE

**THE BOOK OF
JUDGES**

**WALLACE MEMORIAL
BAPTIST CHURCH**

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AS WE BEGIN

A READING PLAN

WEEK 9

- Judges 13
- Judges 14
- Judges 15
- Judges 16
- Luke 2

WEEK 11

- Day 1: Judges 13
- Day 2: Judges 14
- Day 3: Judges 15
- Day 4: Judges 16
- Day 5: Luke 23

WEEK 10

- Judges 13
- Judges 14
- Judges 15
- Judges 16
- Luke 22

WEEK NINE

DAY 1: JUDGES 13

If you're a sports fan then you've probably been through the disappointment of a player or team that just doesn't live up to the hype. Your team drafts a highly sought after player, you get all excited, you buy the jersey, and you start to think your team is really on the rise. Then the season sets in and all those expectations come crashing down. The interesting part? It's hardly ever about that player's talent. They've had enough talent and natural ability to get to the top, so that clearly can't be the problem. It's almost always a problem with attitude, work ethic, or character, and since we're studying Judges, we're about to get a healthy dose of failure in all three of those categories.

Samson is actually going to be the last of the tribal rulers appointed by God in the book of Judges. His birth was a miracle in the same manner as Isaac and John the Baptist. His potential was massive because of his supernatural abilities and fearlessness in the face of danger. Theoretically, Samson could have been one of the greatest rulers in the world and a mighty testament to the power of God. Sadly, his focus was only on himself. His legacy was anger, brutality, pettiness, and infidelity. He's primarily remembered for two things: 1. Being really strong, and 2. Being manipulated by a prostitute.

We will read the story of Samson (4 chapters) in its entirety every week for the next three weeks. As you read I want you to ask a specific question of yourself: What am I doing with the talents, abilities, and passions that God has given me? You

may not be battling lions, or beating a hundred Philistines to death with a donkey jaw, (at least I really hope you're not) but God has given you special talents and abilities. He's also given you spiritual gifts that exist exclusively for the benefit of the church, and just like Samson, your job is to lead the people around you out of bondage and into a relationship with God.

So as we read, study, and get perpetually disappointed by Samson, remember to ask the Spirit to convict and guide you on how you can better use your potential for the Kingdom of God.

- What natural talents and abilities do you have that could benefit your church?
- How can you find a way to use them?

DAY 2: JUDGES 14

It's time we dealt with the most important phrase in the entire book of Judges, or at least a version of it. According to the angel from the previous chapter, Samson was destined to be a great ruler and deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. The angel said this to his mother, and then again to his father. I imagine that the two of them had great hope for their son to overthrow and cast out their enemies. This is why they seem so confused when Samson decided to marry one of them instead. When his father suggests that Samson choose a more suitable alternative, Samson makes a very telling reply. He tells his father "Go get her for me, for she is right in my eyes." Believe it or not, that phrase sums up the entire problem

of sin that Israel has been dealing with for a couple hundred years at this point. However, we want to be very clear in what that means so we don't stray into another error, so let's break that phrase, and the situation, down a little bit.

The people of Israel were specifically commanded not to intermarry with the other people in the land. They are told this in Numbers, Joshua, and Judges. So when their potential deliverer decided to make the same mistake that has been plaguing them for generations, it's understandable that his father offers the alternative of someone else who shares his beliefs. It's very important to note here that neither God's command, nor Manoah's suggestion has anything to do with race, ethnicity, or the disgusting and sinful concept of "racial purity." Many have taken these commands and verses out of their context and used them to justify racism as biblical morality. That's not what the verses are saying and ANY tolerance of that idea is nothing more than sin. Which is why Manoah, specifically suggests that Samson avoid intermarrying with "uncircumcised" people. Circumcision was a covenant that showed a family was seeking to have a right relationship with God. Any Midianite, Philistine, Canaanite, or Moabite (like Ruth) could have repented, worshiped God and been accepted. God's command and Manoah's suggestion are about not entertaining any compromises in their faith.

Samson's reply however, is that she's good "in my eyes." The phrase "in my eyes" is an assertion that God does not get to set objective rules. It's an assertion that all morality is subjective and I will decide what's right for me in any given circumstance. Samson is saying that he simply doesn't care

what God wants because this is what he wants so it's right for him. Israel's problem since the day they left Egypt has been the same. God tells them what's right, and they decide they know better. Samson is prideful, petty, and self centered... because he's the embodiment of Israel's culture and ethics. As we move further in the book of Judges this becomes a repeated thematic phrase. The writer of Judges describes the depth of immorality by saying "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

As we read today, let's take a serious self inventory. Are we doing what's right? Or just what's right in our own eyes? Our God doesn't make compromises. He doesn't tolerate "the lesser of two evils." We're not permitted to edit or editorialize His commandments. So let's read the words of God, and thank the Holy Spirit when He convicts us of places we need to repent.

- Why do people so often justify their sin with Bible verses out of context?
- Where are you tempted to do the same?

DAY 3: JUDGES 15

Many of the terrible leaders we've seen in the book of Judges have a certain trait in common: They care about themselves far more than they care about their people. Gideon, murdered his own people and then and then accepted the tribute of a king without the responsibility. Abimelech killed his own brothers for power. Jephthah sacrificed his own daughter and slaughtered 42,000 men of Ephraim. Each of these actions

goes deeper and deeper into an “in my own eyes” sense of the world that sacrifices the lives and well being of others for the power and pride of the few. Samson is in many ways the same, but it’s rare that we see someone act like this in a way that’s as petty as Samson.

In the previous chapter, Samson told a riddle to his wedding guests, and when his new wife gave away the answer, he beat them to death and seemingly abandoned her. In chapter 15 we see him return months later, expecting her to be available for dinner and his pleasure. It was Samson’s job to cast out the enemies and return his people to the worship of God. Instead he’s taken to little more than prideful vengeance and sexual abuse to one Philistine family. Yes, the Philistine leaders were oppressing Israel, but this woman is now just another victim of Samson’s desire. When Samson returns, her father is confused because he thought Samson had abandoned her, and he thus allowed her to marry another man. In fear, her father offers Samson his younger daughter, which seems like an offer that a self enthralled sex abuser would readily accept, but instead Samson decides to destroy crops and commit animal abuse... not to fight the Philistines, not to free Israel, not to stop oppression, but just to soothe his pride.

Samson doesn’t defeat or drive out the Philistines, he simply angers them until they take out their anger on his people in the form of military raids. At this point it’s actually hard to tell if Samson or the Philistines pose the greater threat. We started this study in Judges 1 by talking about leadership and consequences, and Samson embodies the consequences of bad, petty, self centered leadership. He could have been a

supernatural wonder if he chose to follow God and free his people, but instead he chose to satisfy his whims and let his people suffer. This self centered attitude is the hallmark of poor leadership. If you have a leader that is constantly throwing insults, settling petty scores, and making decisions that cause poor and helpless people to suffer then that leader is the embodiment of human sin.

Samson's awful leadership and lack of integrity make us realize how badly we need a savior instead. A savior who would fight back when a helpless woman is being abused (John 8). A savior who would take no insult and make peace with those who belittled him (Matthew 17). A savior who would give his life for his people instead of causing them to suffer for his pride (Luke 23). Samson's evil should cause us to long for Jesus.

- Why does the world tolerate (and even celebrate) self centered leaders?
- How can we do what's right even if we're caught up in the consequences of others?

DAY 4: JUDGES 16

We've talked about "The Judges cycle" a number of times in our study. When we use that term we are typically referring to the entire nation of Israel repeating the cycles of negligence, idolatry, and oppression. Yet with Samson, we see another cycle that's perhaps even more relatable. Samson goes where he should be going, he becomes entangled with women he should not be with, and ends up in petty self centered violence

to avenge his pride. It's the same cycle of personal sin and violent reaction over and over again.

Judges is perhaps the most violent book in the entire Bible, and Samson himself has killed over 1000 Philistines with his own hands at this point. Just like Samson's cycle of sin though, the outcome of his violence is decidedly different than the other Judges. Othniel, through Deborah, details Judges who do battle to rescue Israel. Gideon and Jephthah use violence for protection and for their own vengeance. Abimelech uses violence and deceit to gain power. For Samson however, none of his attacks have improved Israel's situation in the slightest. His violence is always in retaliation to a perceived insult. The most powerful and supernaturally gifted Judge of them all has actually done the least to free his people. While it's tempting to put Samson in the same category as Jephthah and Abimelech, there's an overwhelming aura of simple disappointment that outweighs his evil.

Here is where we find the point of identification and application. Just like Samson, you and I are called to rescue people from the oppressive forces of sin and idolatry, but if we refuse to address the repeated cycles of sin in our lives we'll undoubtedly become a self centered disappointment. It could be your anger ruining your witness in the community. It could be materialism that robs you of generosity. For many right now in our context it's vitriolic political rhetoric that dehumanizes those around us.

Samson had superpowers and untold strength, but it didn't help him because he was completely crippled by his rampant desire. Samson didn't need more abilities, he needed a trustworthy

friend to hold him accountable. Samson was isolated, arrogant, and at the mercy of every urge that took him. No, you and I probably can't rip a city gate off its hinges or do battle with an army, but because we have the Holy Spirit and the church to guide us we can be more effective at rescuing our friends and neighbors than Samson ever was. The question is: Will you be humble enough to be corrected and held accountable by your fellow church members? Will you listen to the Holy Spirit when he offers you conviction? These are questions that may well determine the direction of your life and the lives of those around you. How will you respond?

- What are struggles that you deal with on a regular basis?
- Who do you have in your life to hold you accountable?

DAY 5: LUKE 2

We just read four chapters about a psychopath disappointment and now we're reading the Christmas story... this has to be a misprint right? Not at all. There are actually a number of similarities between the birth of Samson and the birth of Jesus. Both were born under miraculous circumstances. Both men were prophesied by an angel. Both were born to women who did not expect to be having a child. The angel had to go and reassure both of their husbands. Both were born with special vows to God. Most importantly, both Jesus and Samson were both born with a mission to save their people from an oppressive force.

That's really where the similarities end though. The last verse of Luke 2 tells us that Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Samson on the other hand grew in stature... that's it. Samson's most noteworthy characteristic should have been his strength, but instead it was his inability to grow in any wisdom whatsoever. He never learns. He never reflects. He simply desires and reacts. He actually loses favor with everyone he comes in contact with, especially the people who suffer for his actions. In the end the presence of God leaves him because he refuses to obey God in anything.

The story of Samson should disappoint and upset us, but more than that it should make us long for Jesus. A savior who could have wielded every supernatural power in the universe, but chose to humble Himself to the point of execution. Execution by the very people He was trying to save. Samson sacrifices people for his pride. Jesus sacrificed Himself for you.

- How can you grow in wisdom?
- How can you grow in favor with God and men?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: NOVEMBER, 2 2025

WEEK NINE: JUDGES 13

This week we began our look at the life of Samson. Although he is remembered for his strength, we see that he was the most disappointing of all the Judges in Israel. His self centered pride and love of violence completely defined him. Today your campus pastor will go into more depth on the birth of Samson, what it means for us as a church, and how this disappointing story can make us look forward to Jesus.

ACTION STEP _____

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

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CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 9

- Have you ever been excited for something only to be let down? Was it a sports team? A movie? A meal? Why does the hype make the disappointment so much worse?
- Read Luke 1 and 2. How are the Prophecies of Jesus and Samson similar? How are they different?
- Read Judges 13:23. This is a great summation of what confidence in God looks like. Split up into groups. Find multiple commandments in the New Testament we should carry out with the same confidence. Be ready to explain to the other group why each commandment is difficult and why we need encouragement for each one.
- Samson ultimately ends up a great disappointment. How can this happen when his parents did everything they were supposed to?

WEEK TEN

DAY 1: JUDGES 13

There is a notable difference between arrogance and confidence. One is an admirable quality that inspires those around us while helping us do our best work. The other is one of the most off putting attributes a person can have. The strangest part about these two qualities however is that they are subjective. Someone can be talented, capable, even impressive, but if they think too highly of themselves then they are arrogant regardless of what they have to back it up. On the other hand, someone can have very modest abilities, and still be confident in what they can do.

We actually see this difference clearly in this section of Judges. Samson has supernatural strength. He was prophesied to be a great warrior. He's exceedingly clever. He is, however, also arrogant. Samson believes that his gift and abilities made him better than those around him. He believed they entitled him to do and take whatever he wants without consequence. The height of arrogance is when Samson believes that he no longer has to obey the God of the universe because he's "special." Samson's arrogance colors every action and interaction of his life.

However, in chapter 13 we also see the picture of confidence in Samson's mother. We don't know her name, because she's simply referred to as Manoah's wife in chapter 13, but she is the few humans in this entire story that shows any type of righteousness. Being childless in her culture was a difficult circumstance, and she was likely shamed by those around her,

yet when the angel of the Lord appears, she readily accepts his word and tells her husband what they should do. After Manoah and the angel have a second discussion Manoah begins to have anxiety because he has had a divine encounter.

This is when we see her confidence truly shine through. She reminds him that if God wanted to harm them he wouldn't have given them instructions and a mission. She then does exactly what God asked her to do without delay. She has no special talents that we know of, she has no claim to pedigree or lineage, and she's even living under oppression and cultural shame, but she shows us the meaning of confidence because she believes that God will do exactly what He said He's going to do.

The contrast between Samson and his mother should remind us that our confidence should not be found in our talents, abilities, wealth, or circumstances. She reminds us that we can have absolute confidence in what we're called to do in this life because our mission comes from God and as long as we're following Him there is nothing that can take eternity away from us.

- How do you spot the difference between confidence and arrogance?
- Do you struggle more with arrogance or lack of confidence? Why?

DAY 2: JUDGES 14

How do you deal with those who oppose you? How do you deal with people who cause you problems? Are you inviting that conflict into your life? As we study chapter 14 of Judges these questions become issues we need to deal with. Most of us aren't in the same position as Samson. I highly doubt that anyone reading this devotion is being oppressed by a foreign army, and I'll guarantee that none of us were prophetically destined to expel anyone from our land. I will, however, assume that you've had people who decided to cause problems in your life. Maybe it was another passive aggressive insult at Thanksgiving. Maybe it's someone you work with that thinks making you look bad will improve their career. Regardless of why you face opposition, you have to make a decision about how you're going to deal with it.

Samson should have been at the head of an army driving out the Philistines, but instead he was allowing himself to become entangled with those enemies. Samson was born into conflict, but his current issues were self made. He could have praised God for the strength he had to defend himself from a wild animal, but instead he chose to gamble and provoke the very men he was supposed to be defeating. As he tried to swindle them, they did what dangerous men do and threatened someone helpless to aid them. We must again reiterate, that Samson's new wife was a victim of both sides here, she's not an enemy just because she's a Philistine. When she eventually gives up the answer to the riddle Samson kills 30 men in a fit of rage.

At this point we need to once again compare Samson to Jesus. Jesus was tempted by the Devil in Luke 4, but He remained obedient and rebuked Satan with Scripture. Jesus was in a difficult situation in John 8, but He showed the woman mercy, called her to repentance, and rebuffed her attackers. Jesus cared for the disciple that betrayed Him. Jesus even pleaded for mercy on behalf of those who were executing Him. Jesus came to teach the world about the Kingdom of God, He deserved to be worshipped and was instead murdered. In return He offered forgiveness. So now, with those two examples in mind let's reconsider the question from the beginning.

- How do you deal with those who oppose you? How do you deal with people who cause you problems?
- Are you inviting that conflict into your life?

DAY 3: JUDGES 15

Ehud assassinated an evil King and then drove out his army. Jael killed an oppressor with a tent peg. Shamgar fought off invaders with farming tools. Even Gideon drove out the Midianites before he turned on his own people. Samson? He burned food and provoked the enemy because he was mad at his father in law. Yes, he really was that pathetic. The burning of the fields was not part of a military strategy or a coordinated attack, it was petty vandalism and quite frankly... animal abuse. (Seriously, what did foxes ever do to him?) and the consequence was the death of his wife and her family as well as a punitive expedition against his people.

"We get it, Samson was awful!" Yes, I understand that Judges can be tedious and often feel hopeless, but even in the midst of Samson's evil we get to see the faithfulness of God at work in Judges chapter 15. In an effort to save their own lives, the men of Judah deliver him to the Philistines bound in ropes. It's here that the Bible tells us the Spirit of the Lord empowered Samson to break those bonds and do battle with the Philistines. We need to stop and consider that. Even after all of Samson's sin, pride, and pettiness, God still empowered Samson with His Spirit to save the men of Judah.

We would assume that if Samson experienced this type of mercy, he would fall to the ground in repentance, but that's not what happens. Instead Samson, who was just empowered by God to defeat a thousand men, asks God if He sent him out here to die of thirst! Sound familiar? It's exactly like the Israelites in the wilderness asking God if He brought them out of Egypt to starve them. Surely God has had enough... but in a shocking turn God has mercy and miraculously gives Samson some water.

Yes, we're disgusted and annoyed with Samson, but we should also be overwhelmed by the grace and mercy of God. It should fill us with joy that God's mercy has nothing to do with our works, or our obedience, or our righteousness, but

everything to do with His faithfulness and His character. So let's learn from Samson. Let's repent and praise God for His mercy while we still can.

- How has God helped you even when you didn't deserve it?
- How can you remember to praise God for His mercy? What reminders can you set in your life?

DAY 4: JUDGES 16

If you look at the building blocks of Hebrew writing there is one signature feature that defines their cultural emphasis: If it's repeated, then it's important. For 21st century westerners like us, this can sometimes feel tedious, because in a book like Judges we see the same themes repeated over and over. This often happens to the point that we look at a story like that of Samson and simply say "Yeah, I get it" and move along. I'd like to urge you not to do this. Yes, each repetition does feel similar and the modern attention span has little time for pondering nuance, but every cycle and thematic repetition gives us a brand new insight into human nature.

The ironic part here is that as we're struggling with trying to move on too quickly, Samson is completely incapable of moving on. His life is one pathetic loop of the same desire. We might call it tragic, if Samson had any redeeming qualities, but because he is who he is we'll just stick with pathetic. The repeated arc of Samson's life is actually quite simple. He seeks out an object of lust, he compromises his few morals to satisfy his desire, his

sin has consequences, then he retaliates indiscriminately with rage and brutality. Somehow, he continues to evade physical harm because of his supernatural abilities. This is where we lean in and ponder why the cycle is so pronounced. What is the author of Judges trying to tell us about sin, salvation, humanity, and God? Well, like most of the Judges before, and like many of the Kings after him, Samson is a leader that embodies the sinful flaws of Israel.

Samson doesn't learn that satisfying his lust and beating people to death won't bring him fulfillment. As the reader we're kind of stuck screaming "Bro!!! Try something different!" Yet, Israel is exactly the same in Judges... and Joshua... and 1 Samuel... and 2 Samuel... and 1 Kings... and 2 Kings... and, well you get it. Samson's pull to lust and violence is just a mirror of Israel's pull to idolatry, violence, and self centered pragmatism. Sadly Israel won't learn from Samson's mistakes, but there is still time for us to learn.

Samson makes the same mistakes because he won't recognize that he's not the ultimate authority. We should ask ourselves if we are considering this in our lives. Yes, you're probably honoring God with your words in public, but what about with your words in private? What about with your money? What about how you speak to people online? Samson made the same mistakes because he was never accountable to anyone. Who holds you accountable? Do you have a friend, a Connect Class, a D group, or even a mentor you trust? If you don't have anyone to hold you accountable then you're basically signing up to be a weaker version of Samson.

Lucky for us, we have access to the Holy Spirit. We can feel accountability and conviction from our own hearts. The question is: Will you give up your authority to the Holy Spirit? Or will you be like Samson and demand that your own way is superior?

- Who holds you accountable?
- What are your problems you find yourself repeating?

DAY 5: LUKE 22

If there is anything Samson does well, it's to make us wish for a better leader. Since we're talking about the Bible we know that leader is Jesus. Today I'd like us to look at 2 statements from Jesus that set him apart from Samson, and show us why Jesus is who we need.

Right before He is about to be betrayed and murdered, Jesus asks the Father if there is any other way. He knows that physical pain of beating and crucifixion that is coming for Him. He also knows the terrible spiritual agony that will be the sin of the world and separation from the Father upon His physical death. Jesus also knew that He was the only person who had ever lived that DIDN'T deserve this punishment, but He never rebelled. Even in His moment of greatest dread, Jesus said "not my will, but yours be done." The one who created the universe laid down His authority for the good of the world.

Samson's father asked him to at least consider morality, but Samson rejected it.

When Judas ultimately does come with armed soldiers to capture Jesus a few verses later a fight breaks out and one of the soldiers has his ear cut off. Now, at this point Samson would have beaten everyone in a 10 mile radius to death just for being there, but Jesus calls the defense to a halt and heals His attacker. In a world where we make much of violent strength, Jesus chooses to heal the very people who seek to harm Him.

Jesus cared for His betrayer, His attackers, His friends who failed Him, and for a world that was rejecting Him. The only person who ever deserved any praise willingly laid down His life and His pride to save His enemies. Samson was willing to sacrifice anyone and everyone for his pride and his desire. Samson should sadden and disgust us, but more than that he should make us realize that we're more like him than we are like Jesus... which is exactly why we need Jesus so badly.

- How do you respond when you are threatened?
- Do you seek the good of those who oppose you? Why is this so hard?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: NOVEMBER 9, 2025

WEEK TEN: JUDGES 7

This was our second of three weeks exploring the life of Samson. This week we focused on the cyclical nature of Samson's life and how it was representative of Israel's spiritual state. Today your campus pastor will give you a deeper explanation of Samson's individual battles to help us understand why He was the most pathetic and disappointing Judge of all.

ACTION STEP _____

How will I live out the action step this week?

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CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 10

- Have you ever had to deal with someone who only cares about themselves? Why is it so frustrating to deal with narrow minded people, especially in leadership?
- Samson decided to marry a Philistine woman. Why was his father against this? Why is this about belief and idolatry and not racial or ethnic separation? How can we refute people when they talk about texts like this in sinful terms of "racial purity."
- As a Nazarite, Samson should have gone to the temple to repent after eating the honey from the lion. (Because it was unclean.) Instead he doubles down and uses his rejection of the law for a treacherous scheme. What are some ways people in our culture try to justify and profit from sinful acts like Samson?
- Almost all the leaders we've seen in Judges do battle of some kind with the enemy. Why are Samson's battles, and their outcomes, unique and different from the rest of the book?
- Most of Samson's actions cause suffering for others. Have you ever made a decision that had consequences for other people? How can we go about repenting and making that right?

WEEK ELEVEN

DAY 1: JUDGES 13

This week we are going to take a slightly different approach to several of our devotions. With this being the 3rd week in a row we're studying the Samson narrative, it's time to review and apply much of what we've learned. To that end, I'll be asking several questions each day that review the connections we've made. This will also give you a chance to practice your Bible study methods!

- We've made several references to the similarities between the prophecy of Samson and the Prophecy of Jesus. Read Luke 1 and 2. Write down as many similarities between Judges 13 and these chapters as you can find.
- Both Mary and Manoah's wife were asked to accept a difficult task on faith. What is a difficult thing you need to do in your spiritual walk? How can you show confidence like these two women?
- We see that Manoah had a great deal of fear about his interaction with the angel. What fears are holding you back in your Christian growth? How can you have someone near to strengthen you like Manoah's wife did for him?

When Manoah asked the angel what He should do, the angel basically said "You've already been told, just go do it." Many of us spend a great deal of time asking God what we should be doing, but the Bible has thousands of pages of instructions

about how to live the Christian life. Samson refused to do anything he was commanded to do. Will we learn from Samson's mistakes or repeat them?

DAY 2: JUDGES 14

Today we will be answering questions that help sharpen our skills of interpreting Hebrew writing. Remember the writers in the Bible primarily wrote in thematic cycles where they focused on different aspects of repeated themes. You'll find these themes by tracking repeated words, phrases, ideas, and story arcs. Don't worry, Samson is so bad at personal growth that he makes it easy to spot repetition!

- How is Samson like Jephthah, Abimelech, and Gideon? What specific traits do they share? How is he even worse?
- How is Samson different from Ehud, Deborah, Othniel, and Shamgar? Are they alike in any way?
- Samson said that it was "right in his eyes" to marry a non believer. God said that Israel had done evil in His eyes. How many times does Samson specifically reject the law in chapters 14-16?

This chapter is where we see Samson begin the habits that will rob his life of meaning, bring suffering to others, and ultimately end in his death. How can we help people who are younger avoid pitfalls like these? How can we help people break cycles and establish habits that honor God instead of only gratifying their desires? How can we create a church atmosphere without

performative morality and shaming where people can openly confess, and address their faults? How can all these questions help point people to Jesus?

DAY 3: JUDGES 15

Today we will take another step into our deeper study of Samson and we'll focus once more on how Hebrew writers teach us lessons through thematic repetition.

- How do Samson's actions become a reflection of Israel? What were his specific sins that he refused to address? How do those sins mirror the spiritual state of Israel?
- What responsibilities were being ignored by Samson? What should he have been doing instead? What responsibilities do you have that you don't like? What are the consequences for ignoring your personal responsibilities?
- What are the consequences for ignoring your own spiritual growth? What are the consequences for ignoring evangelism and missions?
- Samson caused others to suffer for his pride and selfishness. How can you avoid these mistakes? What's the difference between setting healthy boundaries and making sacrifices for others?

A final note on this chapter is that it's difficult for many people because of the violence. Yes, basically every chapter of Judges is violent, but this chapter specifically says that Samson

killed a great number of people because the Spirit of the Lord indwelling him. What can we learn about God's justice from this? Is it difficult for you that justice might sometimes require violence?

DAY 4: JUDGES 16

We've talked several times about chapter 16 in relation to Samon's cyclical repetition of sin, but today we finally need to talk about his death. There is much left unsaid in this final piece of his story that should cause us to pause, wonder, and ask God to change us.

Samson was eventually brought down by his unstoppable drive for sexual promiscuity. Delilah treacherously betrayed him on a daily basis and he still sought her out. Israel's oppression by the Philistines is mirrored by Samson's captivity to his sexual desire. A desire that he describes in chapter 14 as "right in my eyes."

The symbolism is barely veiled as Samson's eyes are gouged out when he is seized. It's only when he no longer has his own subjective viewpoint of the world that he seems truly able to realize that he's wasted his life. The Philistines that he was sent to cast out now have him because he only devoted himself to his petty whims. The saddest part of all, is that even as he realizes his life is over he still misses the point. Samson asks God for one act of supernatural strength, but his purpose in asking is for his own revenge.

Genesis 50:20 says "you planned evil against me. God planned it for good, to bring about the survival of many people." Samson still thinks his strength was for him. He still wants to retaliate to soothe his pride. Even though he doesn't get it, God still grants him this strength and over 1000 of the Philistine leaders are killed along with him. Samson was still self centered, but God planned it for good. Although they were not driven out, the Philistines would be diminished for generations after losing that many leaders.

In the end Samson got the worst thing possible: Exactly what he wanted. He got sex, vengeance, and a story that will be remembered, but for all the wrong reasons. God still used him to defeat the Philistines leaders just like He promised, but Samson was sadly an unwilling participant. Samson's end, just like his life, was an embodiment of disappointment. We have the same choice as Samson. God will be glorified. His plans will come to fruition. Will we be redeemed and rejoice in his plans, or will we be unwilling participants who get exactly what we went looking for?

- How can getting exactly what we want be the worst outcome for us?
- Have you ever been in a bad situation that God redeemed for good?

DAY 5: LUKE 23

How is it possible that two people can do the exact same thing in such a different way? We've talked a good deal about how Samson and Jesus had numerous similarities in the prophecy of their birth. Judges 13 and Luke 1 and 2 have a lot in common. Their lives however could not have been more different. Jesus perfectly obeyed everything, while Samson only obeyed his sinful desires. Jesus was always about His Father's business while Samson was only focused on his vices. Jesus healed people as He shared the Kingdom of God. Samson killed people out of pride as he shared beds with prostitutes.

A similar birth, an opposite life, and then both share a sacrificial death in the most opposite way possible. Samson's sin and his unchecked desire finally did him in. His refusal to learn and grow led him to a path that we could see coming from the first paragraph of his story. Jesus lived a perfect life, and was still seized and imprisoned by His enemies. Jesus was sent to die because his righteousness threatened the religious and political power of those who were manipulating the Scripture to oppress people.

In the end Samson got his last wish for violent retribution as he killed himself with his captors. Jesus was mocked, beaten, and murdered without ever protesting. Samson only wanted to see his enemies die. Jesus prayed for mercy upon the very people who were killing Him.

Samson is everything this world tells us we need in a leader. Strong, aggressive, dominant, and self determined. We need Jesus instead. The world will offer us self centered leaders time after time. Men and women who tell us that violence and retribution is the way, while Jesus tells us to love our enemies. The leaders this world offers will tell us to mock, belittle and destroy our enemies, while Jesus will tell us to serve and redeem them. Samson deserved his punishment and gave his life for his pride. Jesus deserves praise and worship, but gave His life for you.

We will be faced with a choice every day: Do we follow the self centered, prideful, petty Samsons of this world, or will we follow Jesus?

- Pray and ask God to help you discern the character of the leaders you follow.
- Pray and ask God to show you how to better follow Jesus.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: NOVEMBER 16, 2025

WEEK ELEVEN: JUDGES 8

This was our final week of study on the life of Samson. We saw that his refusal to learn or grow eventually led to his downfall. We also saw that even though Samson was still focused on himself in the end, God redeemed the situation to accomplish His plan. Today your campus pastor will give you a final conclusion to the wasted potential that was Samson, and show you how even a leader this bad can be a hopeful prophecy of Jesus.

ACTION STEP _____

How will I live out the action step this week?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 11

- Consider all 4 chapters of Samson's story. As a class, make a list of all the similarities between his story and the story of Jesus. Now do the same with the differences.
- How do Samson's personal cycles of sin and consequences mirror the history of Israel? Do we have similar cycles in our context and culture? What about in our own personal lives? How can we recognize and avoid these cycles?
- If you know someone who is stuck in a repetition of sin and consequences, how can you help them see it in a way that points them to Jesus?
- In the end Samson sacrificed himself for revenge, proving that he never understood the character of God. In contrast, Jesus prayed for mercy upon those who were killing him. How can we pray for, serve, and show mercy, to those who oppose us in our lives. Answer this question as an individual, and then talk about how we can do this collectively as a church.

