

Aim of lesson

To think about Samson’s strengths and weakness, and to learn what is important in our lives

Bible background

Judges 13-14,16

Outline of lesson

Subject to the Philistines

Remind the class what life had been like (Judges 6:1-6) before Gideon was called, when the Midianites had impoverished the Israelites. Now there was another enemy, the Philistines, but the effect would have been the same.

The Danites had been allocated their territory between Jerusalem and the coast (see the map in the young peoples’ workbook), but they had not been able to drive out the people who lived there (Joshua 19:40-48, Judges 18). As a result they had to live among the Philistines, and they would have lived in terrible poverty, unable to feed themselves properly.

Samson’s birth

Tell the story of how the angel appeared to Manoah and his wife. You may like to read Judges 13:1-11, 19-25, with different members of the class reading the parts of a narrator, Manoah, his wife, and the angel.

Get the young people to read Numbers 6:1-8 to find what were the restrictions on the life of a Nazirite. Bring out the main point (verse 8) that they were intended to be consecrated to the service of God. For many people the Nazirite vow was for a specific period, but the implication of Judges 13:5 ‘the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth’ is that Samson was intended to be a Nazirite for life. Note that being a Nazirite is not the same as a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23), ‘which means someone from Nazareth’.

What was Samson like?

Ask the class what they think Samson was like. Was he strong, muscular tall and athletic? No doubt, like most people, they will think he was all of these things, but one of the points that emerges from this lesson is that his strength did not come from himself, but was given by God whenever God wanted him to do something special.

Some things Samson did

Get the class to look at these passages to pick out the main events in Samson’s life. You will need to fill in the story in a few places.

Judges	What did Samson do?	What do you think?
14:1-4	Samson married a Philistine woman	God had forbidden marriage with the nations around Israel (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). But notice that this was brought about by God. God sometimes uses evil to work his purpose (Hitler, for instance).
14:5-6	He killed a young lion and ate honey from the carcass	God gave him strength, as he had David (1 Samuel 17:34-37). Samson and his parents may have been starving, but Samson was not supposed to touch a dead body. Could that be why he didn’t tell his parents where the honey had come from?

Summarise the story of the riddle and how Samson’s wife, fearing for her life, persuaded him to tell her the secret, then told the Philistines.

14:18-20	He killed 30 Philistines and took their clothes	God gave him strength, but was this the right thing to do? Is this like Solomon, who had God-given wisdom but did not always use it?
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Summarise how Samson took 300 foxes and burned the Philistines’ crops, then was tied up by the men of Judah and handed over to the Philistines.

15:14-20	He killed 1000 Philistines	He was saving his people from the Philistines who were oppressing them, and thanked God for his salvation.
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(It may be that Samson did not kill all these people single-handed. For instance, when Gideon’s army defeated the Midianites it is written in Judges 8:10-11 as though he acted on his own.)

16:1-3	He visited a prostitute	Prostitution is forbidden (Leviticus 19:29)
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So in summary, Samson’s life was a strange mixture of the good and the bad. It is unusual in scripture for someone with so many obvious faults to be regarded as faithful.

Samson and Delilah

Now look at chapter 16. Samson made another mistake by becoming involved with another Philistine woman. Learning from his mistakes seems not to have been a strong point. The chart in the workbooks should briefly summarise what happened.

Where did Samson's strength come from, and how did he lose it?

Get the young people to look at Judges 14:6,19, 15:14,18, 16:17,20,28. Try to bring out the point that his strength did not come because Samson was the strongest man alive. It came because God strengthened him, and left him when God left him.

Think of the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:10 – when I am weak, then I am strong.

So what were his strengths and weaknesses?

Get the young people to try to summarise Samson's character – something like

Strengths	Weaknesses
He was a man of faith who is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as an example to us	He couldn't resist a pretty woman
He wanted to save his people from the Philistines	He didn't learn from his mistakes
He was prepared to give his life to save his people	He should have cared more about obeying God's laws

It is instructive to learn that in God's eyes (Hebrews 11:32:34) it is Samson's faith that stands out. Not that we can ignore God's commandments, but perhaps Samson is a wonderful example of how God understands our weaknesses and forgives our sins – Romans 5:8-9.

Digging deeper

Dan – a mobile tribe

This section looks at what happened to the tribe of Dan (Samson's tribe) after his death. What should have happened, of course, was that the whole nation of Israel should have driven the Philistines out of the land that God had allocated to Judah and Dan. By now, however, all the tribes had separated and Dan was left on their own. Giving up the unequal struggle, they found the unsuspecting city of Laish in the far north and captured it.

Relevance to our lives

It is important not to leave the impression that we can just do whatever we want, and God will forgive us, but on the other hand Samson is a dramatic example of the principle that we are saved by our faith, and that God counts as righteousness the faith of one who trusts in him.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to learn from Samson that if we trust in you, you will look after us in times of trouble. Help us to trust in your strength and not in our own.

Other suggestions for activities

- The young people could try to remember other miraculous births, and then could look up the references for the others. Other examples of barren women to whom God gave a child include Sarah (Genesis 17:15-10), Rebekah (Genesis 25:21), Rachel (Genesis 29:31), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5), and Elizabeth (Luke 1:7). Jesus' birth was of course miraculous, but in a different way.
- The class could think of other people in the Bible who might have been Nazirites. Two were also miraculous births: Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:14). Maybe also, for a time, the apostle Paul (Acts 18:18).