

Judges 13 and 14

Aim of lesson

To show Samson's faith and zeal for the Lord, and also his wilfulness.

Background study

Numbers 6:1-8. Map of Israel in the time of the Judges, or a physical map of the area.

Suggested outline of lesson

Ask the children to name the biggest and strongest man they know. This is the story of Samson, to whom God gave great strength. The Lord was with him, and had given him this strength in order that he could overcome God's enemies. It is important to make clear that Samson was strong because God gave him strength, not - or at least, not only - because he was very muscular. It was when 'the Spirit of the Lord' came upon him that he was enabled to do such mighty deeds.

Show the position of Zorah on the map, and also the tribe of Dan close to the border of the Philistines, who had been the Israelites' enemies for forty years. Whenever the Israelites forgot God, he punished them by delivering them into the hands of their enemies. At this time the tribe of Dan was ruled by the Philistines.

However, there were still some people who trusted in God, from among whom he chose Manoah and his wife for a special part in his purpose. Describe the startling visits of the angel and the impact these had upon the couple. Describe the promise made to them of a son; how he was to be a Nazirite from birth, and what this entailed, i.e., not to drink wine, not to cut his hair, and not to touch a dead body. Point out that the reason for Samson's long hair had nothing to do with fashion. Also explain that his mother was to be very careful about what she ate and drank whilst pregnant.

The Nazirite

Emphasize how the parents would bring up Samson, carrying out the rules of the Nazirite vow. But although Samson was set apart for a special purpose, he did not always remember to obey God's commandments. Refer to the wrong choice of a woman of Timnath for a wife, and the grief it caused Samson's parents, who knew the importance of God's

Relevance to the children's lives

No matter how good our parents are or how much they try to help us to be godly people, there comes a time when each of us has to make a decision to serve the Lord of our own free will, or to turn away from him. Samson was sometimes disobedient and wilful, as we all are.

What strengths do we have? (Health, energy, senses, brain, etc.) In what way can we use these strengths to serve God? How can prayer, and thinking about what God would want us to do, help us to obey him?

law against marrying unbelievers. Furthermore, although he had strength to kill a lion without any weapons, on his way to Timnath, Samson's contact with its dead body on two occasions was against the Nazirite vow. Note also (chapter 14:6) that he did not tell his parents what he had done.

The wedding feast

When describing the wedding feast, explain the customs of that time when parents "arranged" marriages for their children. In Samson's case, however, his parents were forced to comply with his desires to marry the woman from Timnath.

Refer to the seven days of feasting, the bridegroom celebrating with his companions, at the end of which would come the wedding. Thirty young men of the Philistines were present at Samson's feast, and when he met them Samson challenged them to answer his riddle. Explain this clearly. Can the children answer it? Indicate the reward offered by Samson for getting it right. Describe how Samson's new wife betrayed him by giving away the answer and how Samson retaliated and, in anger, killed thirty Philistines in order to settle the wager. This Samson did unaided by any man, but helped by the strength given to him by the Lord.

In concluding the story, sum up the character of Samson. Show on the one hand that his behaviour was far from exemplary, and yet how God used his strengths to overcome the enemies of Israel.

Worksheets

Samson's riddle reads 'Out of the eater something to eat, out of the strong something sweet'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we want to use all our energy and strength and enthusiasm to serve you. Forgive us when we do what we want, instead of what you would have us do. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped" (Psalm 28:7).