

Helps for the Teacher: Samson

My goal in this overview of the Samson lesson from Judges 13-16 is to show the key verse, the theme, and the overall structure that I would use if I were teaching it.

Let's get started.

The key verse I've selected is **Judges 14:1**, "Samson went down to Timnah and SAW A WOMAN in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines." And **Judges 16:20** is another summary theme: "And Samson awoke from his sleep and said, 'I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him."

These two verses highlight the **two major themes** developed in the story:

1. Samson was living by what his eyes saw, even when it was forbidden by God.
2. Samson thought that there were no consequences for breaking his vow to God.

Most people who have heard of Samson know about "Samson and Delilah," but there are actually **three** women in the story of Samson: all of them are Philistines and all of them appeal to his eyes and desires. **At least five times Samson broke his Nazirite vow, but only on the last time do we see the complete collapse of his life.**

When you put the two threads together, what we see is that

Samson was a man set apart for God's purposes, who instead was living for his own pleasures, And thinking there were no consequences for doing so.

I would say that Samson's life is an example of presumptuous sin.

I've divided the story structure into three sections.

The story begins with

- **Samson is set apart as a Nazirite.**
- **Samson lives by what he sees and wants!**
 - A. He sees a woman from Timnah and marries her.
 - B. He eats honey out of a dead lion.
 - C. He sees a prostitute and spend the night with her.
 - D. He sees Delilah and loves her and lives with her.
 - E. He gives away the secret of his strength and vow with God.
- **Samson brings shame to himself and God.**
 - A. His eyes are gouged out. (You notice the parallel: He saw. He saw. He saw. And now he cannot see.)
 - B. He is paraded at the feast of Dagon as a trophy of superiority over God.
 - C. He dies with the Philistines, finally doing the thing that he had been set apart to do from the beginning.

Here are some useful facts to have as you study this passage:

Who are these Philistines that pop up in the story?! The Philistines were invaders from the Sea, probably from Crete. They had tried an unsuccessful attempt to invade Egypt, and after that had settled along the Gaza Strip in five major cities. They were encroaching on Israelite territory.

Second, God's answer to the Israelites' distress—the Philistines had been oppressing them for 40 years--was...a baby! A very special dedicated baby! The Nazirite vow is explained in detail in Numbers 6. It was usually voluntarily for a short period of time in order to dedicate oneself to a special purpose for God.

But in this case, we see that God dedicates Samson's life from conception!

The three marks of the Nazirite were that they were not to drink any wine, they were not to touch any dead body, and they were not to cut their hair

Third, the angel told Samson's mother: "He shall BEGIN to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Judges 13:5 That was true, because his life was cut short. Samson is actually a contemporary of Samuel, whose life began in very much the same way, but of course, they had very different endings. The Philistines are going to become a problem, not only during Samson's life and Samuel's life, but also through Saul's reign and into David's early reign, before they are finally subdued.

Fourth, Samson was from the tribe of Dan—and you remember from the end of Judges, that most of the Danites had migrated to the northern part of Israel. We find Samson's parents still on the land given in the original allotment by Joshua. It is an indication that there was faithfulness to God in Samson's family.

Fifth, we are not given Samson's appearance in the Scriptures, but personally, I don't think he was a big hulking man with big, bulging muscles. Here's why—the "secret" of his strength was unknown. If he had looked like a body builder, I think the Philistines would have been having Delilah find out what his secret workout routine was! Really, they just could not account why he was so strong on these occasions.

When the Spirit of God came on Samson, there was supernatural strength that defied logical explanation apart from God. So in my opinion, I think Samson looked just like a normal Israelite man.

And finally, more than any of the other Judges, Samson's life was a parallel to the spiritual condition of Israel at the time. Think about it: Israel was set apart to be holy from their birth—from when God took them out of Egypt at Passover. They were not a strong or mighty nation on their own, in fact, they were one of the smallest nations, but the secret of their strength was in their covenant with God. They started mingling with the gods of the other nations, and we see Samson start mingling with the Philistines. When the covenant was broken, they were afflicted by their enemies, and we see that in Samson's life at the end. Samson's disregard for his vow, eventually led to his blindness and shame, and brought about shame to God. This is eventually what happens to the nation of Israel as well. Remember Isaiah says: They have eyes, but they don't see. They have ears, but they don't hear. And that God's Name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the way that they've been living.

As you prepare to teach this lesson, take a minute to ask yourself what things attract your eyes and attention? Is there anything that would cause you shame? And finally, are you living for the purpose for which you have been set apart to God?

Many blessings as you teach God's Word!