

Samson (Part 1)

(Judges 13 - 15)

Introduction

Do you want to live your life in a way that pleases the Lord? Every day you are faced with choices to do right or do to wrong. What do you do to make sure that you don't think or say or do anything that is displeasing to God? [Teacher, lead the children in a discussion of how to make right choices.] If you were on your way to school and a friend said, "Hey, let's go over to the grocery store and see if we can steal some candy!" What would you do?

In today's lesson we are going to learn about a man named Samson, who made wrong choices that got him into real trouble. He didn't even try to live his life in a way that pleased God. He made bad choices.

Opening Prayer

Father, it is so important for us to learn how to make right choices. Give us a heart to always please You in everything that we think, say, and do. Help us to learn from Samson's mistakes how important it is to keep ourselves pure for You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Do not share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. (1Timothy 5:22).

Lesson

Israel went through several cycles of rebelling against God, being overrun by enemy nations, being delivered by a God-fearing judge, remaining loyal to God under that judge, and then, again forgetting God when the judge died.

God had told Joshua and the children of Israel to wipe out all the peoples that lived in the Promised Land – every man, woman, and child. He didn't want them to have anything to do with the Canaanites because they worshipped false gods and did many detestable things. He wanted the Promised Land to be a land free of idolatry, a place where His will was done and people only worshipped Him.

But the Israelites failed to wipe out the Canaanites! And whenever they had no strong leader, they became too friendly with the people living in the land and began to follow their ways and drift away from following God and did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Judges 13:1

Again the Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight, so the LORD handed them over to the Philistines, who oppressed them for forty years.

The Israelites were in trouble again! Once again, they were doing something that was evil. They started worshipping the gods of the Canaanites. So, God let their enemies, the Philistines, conquer them!

But, as always, because of His great love for the children of Israel, God planned a way to help them get out of trouble. His plan involved a woman living in Israel who was barren – she was old and she never had any children. God sent an angel to talk to her.

Judges 13:3-5

The angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah's wife and said, "Even though you have been unable to have children, you will soon become pregnant and give birth to a son. So be careful; you must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink nor eat any forbidden food. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines."

The angel told her that she was not to drink any alcohol nor was she to eat any forbidden food. Then, he went on to tell her that when her son was born, she was never to cut his hair for he was to be set apart for God's special plan. God was going to use her son to conquer the Philistines, but he had to follow Nazirite rules all his life.

A Nazirite, was a person who completely devoted himself to serving God. A Nazirite made a promise to God that he would keep his life pure before the Lord. To set himself apart from other people, Nazirites never ate or drank anything made from grapes, nor cut their hair. Following these rules showed others that they were keeping their heart and mind pure before the Lord.

Samson's mother started preparing him for service to the Lord even before he was born by keeping the Nazirite vow herself – she didn't drink alcohol or eat unclean food while she was pregnant.

Judges 13:24

When her son was born, she named him Samson. And the LORD blessed him as he grew up.

Samson kept the vow, at least while he was young. And, as we will find out, this gave him special strength and power. But when he grew up he broke his vow to keep his life pure. He often got into trouble because he was spoiled and wanted his own way.

Judges 14:1-2

One day when Samson was in Timnah, one of the Philistine women caught his eye. When he returned home, he told his father and mother, "A young Philistine woman in Timnah caught my eye. I want to marry her. Get her for me."

A girl from the Philistines had caught Samson's eye. He should never have had anything to do with the Philistines. They were very bad people, but Samson wasn't careful about who he made friends with.

If you become close friends with someone that doesn't know and love God, you will find that it may be very tempting to do things that displease God, too. You may desire to be accepted by your friends at school, for example, but remember, it's important for you to choose good friends – ones that love God, too. It is important for you to choose friends that encourage you to remain loyal to God no matter what.

He demanded that his parents get her for him. They tried to talk him out of wanting this Philistine girl.

Judges 14:3

His father and mother objected. "Isn't there even one woman in our tribe or among all the Israelites you could marry?" they asked. "Why must you go to the pagan Philistines to find a wife?" But Samson told his father, "Get her for me! She looks good to me."

His parents didn't want Samson to marry a Philistine girl. They knew God would not be pleased if Samson married a girl that did not share his faith in the one and only true God.

What they didn't know is that the Lord would use this situation to come against the Philistines, who were harshly ruling over Israel.

Judges 14:4

His father and mother didn't realize the LORD was at work in this, creating an opportunity to work against the Philistines, who ruled over Israel at that time.

His father and mother finally gave in to his wishes and went down to Timnah to meet the girl's parents and arrange for the wedding.

Judges 14:5-6

As Samson and his parents were going down to Timnah, a young lion suddenly attacked Samson near the vineyards of Timnah. At that moment the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him, and he ripped the lion's jaws apart with his bare hands. He did it as easily as if it were a young goat. But he didn't tell his father or mother about it.

The next time Samson went to Timnah was for his wedding.

Judges 14:8-9

Later, when he returned to Timnah for the wedding, he turned off the path to look at the carcass of the lion. And he found that a swarm of bees had made some honey in the carcass. (9) He scooped some of the honey into his hands and ate it along the way. He also gave some to his father and mother, and they ate it. But he didn't tell them he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.

You see, it was against the law of Moses for him to touch a dead body, so he didn't tell them where he got the honey.

Samson's father made the plans for the marriage which included a big party. The bride's parents chose 30 young Philistine men to be Samson's groomsmen.

Samson decided to have a little fun with his groomsmen, so he told them a riddle.

Do you know what a riddle is? A riddle is a question or a puzzle to be solved. For example, *what goes up when the rain comes down?* (An umbrella!)

Samson was so sure that the groomsmen wouldn't be able to guess the riddle, that he made a bet. He said that if they guessed the riddle, he would give each of them a new set of clothes. But if they couldn't guess the riddle, each of them had to give him a set of clothes. (Clothes were very expensive in Bible times and hard to get. So, this was an expensive bet!)

So, Samson told them this riddle:

Judges 14:14

So, he said: "Out of the one who eats came something to eat; out of the strong came something sweet." Three days later they were still trying to figure it out.

Can you guess the answer? Of course, we know he meant the lion was strong and the honey sweet, but the men couldn't guess it. They puzzled over it for three days and they realized they would never be able to solve it. They didn't want to let this Israelite get the better of them, so they decided to get Samson's bride to get the answer for them.

Judges 14:15

On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to explain the riddle for us, or we will burn down your father's house with you in it. Did you invite us to this party just to make us poor?"

The bride was terrified! She didn't want to be burned alive in her father's home. So, she begged Samson to tell her the secret.

Judges 15:16

So, Samson's wife came to him in tears and said, "You don't love me; you hate me! You have given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer."

"I haven't even given the answer to my father or mother," he replied. "Why should I tell you?"

At first, he wouldn't tell her, but she begged and begged so much that he finally gave in.

Judges 15:17

So, she cried whenever she was with him and kept it up for the rest of the celebration. At last, on the seventh day he told her the answer because she was tormenting him with her nagging. Then she explained the riddle to the young men.

How do you think Samson felt when the groomsmen were able to give the correct answer to the riddle? Samson got angry at his new bride; she had told the secret! So, Samson went out to punish the Philistines by attacking them!

Judges 14:19-20

Then the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. He went down to the town of Ashkelon, killed thirty men, took their belongings, and gave their clothing to the men who had solved his riddle. But Samson was furious about what had happened, and he went back home to live with his father and mother. (20) So, his wife was given in marriage to the man who had been Samson's best man at the wedding.

He was burning with anger and left there and went back to live at his father's house. Later, after he cooled off, he went back to get his wife, but he didn't know that she had been given in marriage to another man.

When he found out, he was furious! To get even with them, he lit torches in the Philistine fields and burned their crops and vineyards.

Judges 15:4-5

Then he went out and caught 300 foxes. He tied their tails together in pairs, and he fastened a torch to each pair of tails. (5) Then he lit the torches and let the foxes run through the grain fields of the Philistines. He burned all their grain to the ground, including the sheaves and the uncut grain. He also destroyed their vineyards and olive groves.

Now it was the Philistines' turn to be angry. They decided to go to war against the Israelites. They sent an army against the Israelites and demanded that they turn Samson over to them.

The Israelites were afraid of the Philistines and didn't want trouble. So, they promised the Philistines they would capture Samson, tie him up, and turn him over to them.

Judges 15:12-13

But the men of Judah told him, "We have come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines."

"All right," Samson said. "But promise that you won't kill me yourselves."

(13) "We will only tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines," they replied. "We won't kill you." So, they tied him up with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

Again, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him giving him mighty strength. He was so strong, the ropes went "snap" and fell off his wrists as if they had only been threads. Then he picked up a donkey's jawbone and killed a thousand Philistines with it.

Judges 15:15

Then he found the jawbone of a recently killed donkey. He picked it up and killed 1,000 Philistines with it.

Samson was a self-centered, spoiled child and he was unable to control his anger. And, his parents were not very good disciplinarians, either. He made wrong choices and didn't keep his life pure. But God, in spite of all this, was able to use Samson's uncontrolled anger to accomplish His will to wipe out many of the Philistines. God truly can use all things to accomplish His will.

Next week we will continue the story of Samson and we will find out that he eventually realized his dependence on God. He could have learned this lesson much sooner in his life. How sad that Samson didn't choose to keep his life pure; how much trouble this brought on him!

Closing Prayer

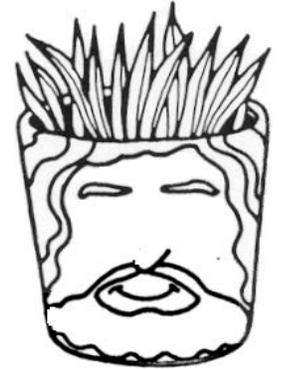
Father, please help us to learn from Samson's mistakes. Help us to be careful to think and do right things – things that will please You. Help us to always say "No" to anything that would not bring You honor. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Samson's Hair

Stuff cotton into a small paper cup. Out of a sponge, cut a circle just large enough to fit tightly inside the top of the cup. Soak the sponge in water and then set it on top of the cotton. Sprinkle dill, watercress, grass, or mustard seed on top of the wet sponge. Set the cup where it can get sunlight, but not in a place where the sponge will dry out too quickly. Your seeds will start to grow in about three days if you remember to keep the sponge moist at all times. You may want to draw a picture of Samson's head on the paper cup. Watch to see which "Samson" grows the longest "hair."



Game Center

Longest String Game

Procedure:

1. Create a poster board with a picture of Samson.
2. Punch holes in his scalp.
3. Put pieces of yarn of various lengths through the holes, tying a big knot at both ends.
4. For a correctly answered review question, the child gets to pull a string of yarn.



5. The child with the longest (or shortest) string is the winner. For variety, cut another yarn the exact length of one of the pieces of Samson's hair, and put it in your pocket. The winner would be the one who pulls out the string of yarn the same length as yours.

Or use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. Explain the cycle that the children of Israel went through over and over again. (Rebelling against God, being overrun by enemy nations, being delivered by a God-fearing judge, remaining loyal to God under that judge, and then, again forgetting God.)
2. When the angel of the Lord appears to Samson's mother and told her she was to finally have a baby, what did He tell her she had to do? (Keep from drinking alcohol and food that was unclean.)
3. What did the angel of the Lord tell her to do to Samson's hair? (Never cut his hair)
4. What is a Nazirite vow to God? (A promise to keep your life pure before the Lord.)
5. What did God give Samson as a result of his keeping the Nazirite vow? (Extra strength and power)
6. Why was it wrong for Samson to want to marry the Philistine girl from Timnah? (God told the children of Israel to not have anything to do with the heathen people that lived in the land; they were not good influences on them.)
7. When the Israelites became too friendly with the heathen people that lived around them, what were they tempted to do? (Forget about God and to follow their ways, worshiping their false gods.)
8. What can happen if you become close friends with someone that doesn't know and love God? (You can be tempted to do things that displease God.)
9. Is it a good thing when parents give in to their children and let them always have their own way? (No! We need discipline so we will learn right from wrong.)
10. What happened when Samson and his parents were going down the road to Timnah? (A lion attacked and Samson killed it.)
11. What did Samson find in the carcass of the dead lion? (A swarm of bees and some honey.)
12. What did Samson promise to give to the 30 men at the wedding celebration if they could solve his riddle? (A complete change of clothes.)
13. How did the men come up with the right answer to Samson's riddle? (They begged Samson's new wife to find out for them. So, she cried and nagged him to tell her. Then she told the men.)
14. What made Samson kill 30 men and take their clothing? (He became angry that his wife told his secret.)
15. What happened when Samson caught 300 foxes, tied their tails together in pairs, and lit a torch between each pair? (He let the foxes run through the fields of the Philistines, burning their crops and vineyards.)
16. What happened when Samson was captured and they tied him with two new ropes and led him away? (The strength of the Lord came upon Samson and he snapped the ropes off his wrists!)
17. What did Samson do with the donkey's jawbone? (He killed a thousand Philistines with it.)

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