

Samson *and* His Women: The Folly of Passion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Judges 14–16.*

Memory Text: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

The story of Samson presents many challenges to the modern reader. A lot of things just seem hard to understand, which only goes to show that, as Paul said, we see through “a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Only after Jesus returns will we get the full picture.

Nevertheless, even through a “glass darkly” there’s enough there for us to learn a few good lessons from the rather sordid story of Samson and his wife and Delilah.

Delilah was never the wife of Samson, but there are many similarities in the experience Samson had with the woman he had married earlier and with Delilah, the woman he later fell in love with. (1) Both were Philistines. (2) Both were approached successfully by the Philistine elders to snare Samson. (3) The attempts of both were resisted by Samson initially, but in the end he yielded to both. Though he did not marry Delilah, it is her name, rather than that of his nameless wife, that has become associated with Samson.

The Week at a Glance: Samson was a man given great gifts and a calling from the Lord. He was also a man of great passions. It’s a sad story of how these conflicted.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 11.*

The Call of Samson

Read Judges 13. What evidence did Manoah and his wife have of the special calling given them? What conditions came with that calling?

Judges 13 makes it very clear that Samson was to have a great role in Israel, that God planned to use this man to do a special work, to begin to “deliver” Israel from the Philistines (*Judg. 13:5*). The Hebrew word for “deliver” comes from a root word, *ysha*, from which the name “Jesus” and the Hebrew word for “Savior,” *Moshiah*, arises.

Samson obviously had a great calling. Of course, being called of God doesn’t make the one called infallible, or free of sin.

Read Judges 13:24, 25. What do these texts tell us about Samson?

Read Judges 14:1–3 and 16:1. What do these texts tell us about Samson?

Whatever his great calling, Samson showed some dangerous character weaknesses. Samson’s emotions were guided purely by physical appearances. The first time he said to his parents, “ ‘I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife’ ” (*Judg. 14:1, 2, NIV*). Later he saw a prostitute in Gaza and went to spend the night with her (*Judg. 16:1*). At a time when he should have been concentrating on the special mission, at a time when he should have been true to God, he let his passions get control over him, and he then linked himself in an intimate way with the enemies of Israel. How ironic! He’s called to “deliver” Israel from the Philistines, and the next thing we know, he’s marrying one.

What has God “called” you to do? What weaknesses of character are standing in your way of fulfilling that calling? What promises can you claim from the Bible for the victories that will enable you to do whatever God has called you to do?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *1 John 2:16*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: Put God first in matters of the heart.

Feel: The danger of making poor relationship choices.

Do: Count the cost of human infatuation and lust.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Samson—the Destroyer (*Judg. 13:2–5*)

A Before Samson is even an embryo, the angel instructs his parents not to “drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing.” To what extent do a mother’s choices influence her unborn child?

B The Samsonite luggage company knew what they were doing when they named their product. How does praying in the strength of Jesus’ name give spiritual muscle to our prayers?

C Hun warriors wore their hair long when they rode into battle. The Bible also tells of “long-haired warriors” (*Note: This is in a footnote about Deut. 32:42 in the Contemporary English Version*), like Samson, who grew their hair to show they had taken sacred vows to their gods. How do our lives witness that God has called us to serve Him?

II. Delilah—the Consumer (*Judg. 14:1–4; 16:1, 4*)

A A “lion roared against Samson,” but the “spirit of the Lord came mightily upon [him],” and he tore it apart. Satan, too, “goes about like a roaring lion seeking to devour.” How is Samson’s victory over the lion God’s promise to us of victory over sin?

B Samson “loved” Delilah. Yet, Delilah sells him out to the Philistines for money to buy 275 slaves, proving that her name might mean “consumer.” How is this a warning about what happens when we cherish sin?

III. Eyeless in Gaza (*Judg. 16:17, 18, 28–30*)

A When Delilah cuts Samson’s hair, the Lord leaves him. Familiarity with sin deadens us to the Spirit’s leading. What safeguards us against this delusion?

B Eyeless and chained like a dog, Samson pleads with God to give him strength to pull down the temple of Dagon. How does God rescue us to the “uttermost” (*Heb. 7:25*) the moment we turn to Him?

► **Summary:** Genuine love is based on a strong, loving relationship with God.

Samson's Wedding Day

Read Judges 14. What mistakes are we seeing Samson make?

Samson, apparently, frequented the Philistine towns west of his home. He also had no second thoughts, it seems, about forming alliances with the women who caught his fancy there. The Israelites looked down on the Philistines and used the word *uncircumcised* as synonymous with *heathen* (*1 Sam. 14:6*), even though the Philistines were their rulers at the time (*Judg. 14:4*). The alliances of Samson with non-Israelite women no doubt caused his parents a lot of concern, especially considering the special circumstances of his birth and calling (*vss. 3, 4*).

Also, from the time before the Flood, godly men had been attracted by beautiful ungodly women and lapsed into wickedness (*Gen. 6:1–5*). Solomon, too, married many foreign wives who worshiped other gods. They were from nations specifically banned by God (*1 Kings 11:1, 2*). These alliances were not just political: Solomon is recorded as “ [holding] fast to them in love’ ” (*vs. 2, NIV*). While these wives turned his heart to other gods, Solomon still worshiped Yahweh, though not wholeheartedly (*1 Kings 11:4–6*).

What do the actions of the Philistines say about the nature of those people with whom Samson was uniting?

What we see here is an example of just how dangerous the wrong influences can be. Take someone with inherent weakness and place that person—regardless of his or her divine calling—in a bad environment, and the results can be very painful for everyone.

Look carefully and prayerfully at the influences around you, at least the ones you can control. Are they aiding you in your spiritual life, or are they working against it? What changes must you make?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Samson’s birth is a divine intervention for a specific call. But his life turned out to be one of folly, sensual infatuation, moral failure, and emotional disaster. Yet, the book of Hebrews includes his name among those who will inherit the eternal kingdom (see Heb. 11:32). This is truly a remarkable story of human folly and divine grace. Keep this focus before your class as you study the lesson.

The Bible is full of stories that illustrate human failure and divine rescue through grace. Consider the fall of Adam and Eve, the choice of Lot to dwell in Sodom, the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron, the sensuous detour of Samson, the premeditated sin of David, and the distant land of the prodigal son. Each case reveals, on the one hand, willful human rebellion against God—the deliberate betrayal of the Father’s trust, the sensual pull of the distant land, and choosing to worship at the altar of self even when that means the rejection of the Creator. On the other hand, each case also reveals the undying love and the ever wooing and waiting of God’s grace.

Discuss: In view of the above, what do the following texts mean to you? “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*Rom. 5:20, NKJV*). “ ‘The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out’ ” (*John 6:37, NKJV*).

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: Samson and his misadventures of self-rooted will show how power, if not kept under the discipline of God’s will and purpose, can turn a life of great possibility to unbelievable tragedy. Help your class members realize how true this is in our life—be it personal, family, or church life.

Bible Commentary

Of the many God has called to fulfill His will, Samson is the most tragic case of all. The tragedy lies in preferring the desire of self against the service of God, in embracing the forbidden in open defiance of God’s will, in the failure to recognize the meaning and purpose of power. Yet, in spite of such tragedies, God’s grace manifests itself as the real source of strength, salvation, and hope.

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Samson's Revenge

This marriage seemed to go from bad to worse. Though Samson's wife "betrayed" him, it's not hard to understand her fear. After all, look at what her own kinsmen threatened to do to her and her family (*Judg. 14:15*). Perhaps she should have told Samson what happened and asked for his help and protection. Either way, this ill-advised marriage didn't last long. Samson's anger and then abandonment of his wife set the stage for the suffering that was to come.

What reason is given for Samson's return to his wife? *Judg. 15:1*. What does this tell us about Samson?

However much one would like to put the best spin on Samson's motives, the text seems to indicate that he was moved more by his lust than by any desire for marital reconciliation. Whatever his motives, he obviously wasn't too pleased to discover that his wife had been married off to another. Marriage seems about as corrupted back then as it is today.

What did Samson's responses here tell us about his character? *Judges 15*.

Obviously, as shown by his actions after his wife was married to another man, Samson had a violent temper. And maybe, too, he really loved his wife and was angered that she was with another man.

Next, his killing of Philistines might have come also out of love for his wife; or maybe he acted out of guilt, believing that his burning of the field led to their murder. Whatever the reasons, a great deal of suffering that could have been avoided occurred because Samson, who should have known better, allowed his emotions and passions to rule.

Samson, angry at his wife, walks out right away. Imagine, however, if he would have shown her some mercy, grace, and forgiveness. How different things might have been. Spend time at the foot of the Cross, and from that understand the forgiveness granted you through Jesus. Now, apply that same forgiveness to the next person who angers you.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**I. Samson: Self Versus God**

A miracle child, a self-centered man. Samson is a miracle child, like Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist; but it is not the miracle that makes the man but what he chooses to do with it. A miracle just opens the door to great possibilities, but walking through that door is left to individual choice of whether to obey the will of the One who caused this wonder to begin with. Being sanctified as a Nazarite (*see Judg. 13:5*) and raised by God-fearing parents who consistently asked, “What shall we do for the child?” (*vs. 8*) paved the high road for Samson’s pursuit of his calling. But Samson chose the low road. He was called to deliver Israel from the Philistines, but the first act of his manhood is the choice of a Philistine girl for a wife. “Get her for me, for she pleases me well,” he almost orders his father (*Judg. 14:3, NKJV*). The wishes of me become paramount, and the will of God is set aside. “She pleases me well” becomes the criterion of the most important choice a man can make. Will she please God? Will she help me serve God? Does she worship my God at all? The person whose priority is self has no time for such questions, and quickly Samson forgets that his very existence is a miracle of the Sovereign of the universe, whom to obey is the first duty of every creature. Samson’s downfall began with those words of self-assertion: “She pleases me well.” Even the strength to tear up a lion cannot save him from the betwitching lion of self-centeredness.

Discuss: Why does the Bible prohibit marriage with an unbeliever? How do you answer the rationale so often offered: “After the wedding, everything will be OK.”

II. Samson and Delilah: Embracing the Forbidden

Strength without discipline, power without purpose. Physical strength does not protect the citadels of one’s soul; that requires spiritual stamina and moral integrity, something Samson lacked and left undeveloped by his fondness for women and close association with idolaters. God’s purpose for Samson’s life was to deliver Israel from their enemies, and He equipped Samson for this purpose with enormous physical courage and strength. But Samson had neither the spiritual discipline nor the moral purpose that alone can empower an individual to carry out God’s will and calling.

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The Sad Saga Continues

Judges 15 ended with Samson killing one thousand Philistines. “After his victory,” wrote Ellen White, “the Israelites made Samson judge, and he ruled Israel for twenty years.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 564. Here we see how Samson was to “begin” to deliver Israel (*Judg. 13:5*).

Read Judges 16:1–3. What other leaders in the Bible, despite having great privileges, showed similar weaknesses? What was the cost?

His going to a prostitute was bad enough, but arrogantly going to one in the middle of his enemies? “But notwithstanding his sin, God’s mercy had not forsaken him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 565. Samson escaped with his life. But would he learn his lesson?

Read Judges 16:4–6. What does this tell us about the kind of relationship he entered into again?

Unlike the other women he was with, including his wife (at least the one mentioned in Scripture), it says that he loved Delilah. It doesn’t seem, however, that the love was reciprocated.

Read Judges 16:5–20. What does this story tell us about the power of love to blind the eyes? What should have been apparent to Samson from the beginning? Why didn’t he see it?

However foolish it was on his part to get involved with another Philistine woman, he should have seen early on that this woman was not out for his good. So strong, though, was the power of “love” and passion that he persisted in keeping up the relationship, despite how obvious it was that he should have fled right from the start.

How carefully do you guard your emotions and your passions? How many “good” people ruin their lives and the lives of their loved ones by not controlling the emotions? What’s the best way to protect yourself from this trap?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**III. Samson: Prayer to Fulfill His Purpose**

“O Lord God, remember me, I pray!” (*Judg. 16:28, NKJV*). When has God forgotten Samson and a thousand other sinners like him? God never forgets or forsakes. He always remembers sinners and awaits the return of the prodigals. It is we who forget God and live as though we don’t need Him until we come to that desperate, final moment. And Samson found himself at that final moment. Once feared by his enemies, now he stands before them in public display, humbled and humiliated. The human soul is often so stupid and senseless that it requires a humiliating knockdown in order to look up and see the Source “from whence cometh help.” For the first time, Samson publicly acknowledges that there is a higher power, the Sovereign of the universe, to whom he is accountable. He prays, “Remember me . . . strengthen me,” and then he begs, “just this once.” No prayer of such absolute surrender and submission goes without an answer. It is ironic that in the temple of the heathen, amidst sacrifices offered to idols, Samson comes to his senses and grasps the true reality of a living God. God makes the death of Samson a moment of victory.

By faith Samson. The story of Samson does not end in the Philistine temple; it ends in the roll call of the faithful of all ages (*Heb. 11:32*). God’s grace is wide enough, His love deep enough, Christ’s cross real enough to forgive every confessed sin, to embrace every repenting sinner, and to welcome home every prodigal. There lies the road from sin to salvation, and Samson is an enduring example.

Discuss: (1) Three times Delilah betrays Samson. Why does he not flee from her instead of succumbing to her pressures? What does this say about the allurements of sex? (2) For 20 years Samson judged over Israel. What does this show about God’s patience with erring leaders and followers alike?

► STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: Lead your class members to discuss the following and draw some principles that will help them in their life and faith.

Thought Question:

Samson is the last judge named in the Bible. The first one is Othniel (*Judg.*

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Blinded by Love

Read Judges 16:16–31. If you could derive a moral from this story, one that would be relevant for us today, what would it be, and why?

God made men and women as He did and ordained them to be married as a symbol of the unity and closeness He seeks with His church (*Rev. 21:2*). The ideal relationship should bring each partner closer to God, not drive one or the other away. In this case we can see so clearly how a wrong relationship can separate someone from the Lord.

“What a change to him who had been the judge and champion of Israel!—now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 566.

What irony is found in the fact that Samson was blinded?

In reading the story, we can see that Samson, regardless of the mistakes he had made, hadn’t lost his faith, however imperfect that faith was. And God was still able to use Samson to accomplish His goals. How much better, though, would it have been if Samson had been faithful to the truth he knew. That God was able to accomplish His purposes despite Samson’s failures doesn’t justify those failures. It shows only that God works His will despite us; how much better if He would work His will through us.

Samson is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as a faithful follower of the Lord. What does it tell us about God’s grace? What hope can you draw from this for yourself?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

3:7–11), a model judge who gave Israel 40 years of peace. Compare and contrast the two judges. What lessons can you draw from their life and mission?

Application Questions:

Marriage is a sacred ordinance, and sex is God’s beautiful gift to human beings. From Samson’s story, what do you learn about guarding the sacredness and purity of such a precious gift? What pitfalls should we avoid?

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: Following are some principles that can be drawn from today’s lesson. Consider their relevance and application for today.

“To a godly man, and to the church with which he is connected, a worldly wife or a worldly friend is as a spy in the camp, who will watch every opportunity to betray the servant of Christ, and expose him to the enemy’s attacks.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1006.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “True Love or Infatuation,” pp. 50–54, in *The Adventist Home*.

“The narrative creates an impression of almost incredible stupidity on the part of Samson. At any time he could have put an end to Delilah’s questioning by leaving her and returning to his home. But Samson’s chief fault was not so much stupidity as sensual infatuation. In the ruin and shame that this sensual weakness brought upon him, and the way in which, step by step, it led him to forfeit God’s miraculous gift of supernatural strength, lies the chief moral of the story.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 398.

“God’s providential care had been over Samson, that he might be prepared to accomplish the work which he was called to do. At the very outset of life he was surrounded with favorable conditions for physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral purity. But under the influence of wicked associates he let go that hold upon God which is man’s only safeguard, and he was swept away by the tide of evil. Those who in the way of duty are brought into trial may be sure that God will preserve them; but if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall, sooner or later.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 568.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What can you do to help someone who seems to be allowing his or her passions to overrule better spiritual judgment?
- ❷ What can you do as a church to give folk who are being tempted the help and encouragement of a strong, loving, and understanding congregation? What changes need to occur in the church so that those who need help can find people who care and understand, as opposed to those who will condemn and judge them?
- ❸ As a class, take time together to pray for your church leaders, those given great responsibilities, that they will be protected from making the same kind of mistakes that Samson made.

Summary: Samson’s story is of a strong man brought down by his moral weaknesses. A strong relationship with his God would have helped him control his relationship with women. His experience illustrates the text “Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers” (*2 Cor: 6:14, NKJV*).