ACT I
In front of the pagan temple of Dagon at Gaza, a group of Hebrews beg Jehovah to free them from persecution by the Philistines. Samson, their leader, reproaches them for their lack of faith and rallies their courage. When the Philistine commander, Abimélech, denounces the Hebrews and their God, Samson leads his followers to defy Abimélech. The High Priest of Dagon appears from the temple and finds Abimélech dead. The Philistines want to avenge his death, but a messenger brings word that, under Samson’s command, the Hebrew band has destroyed the harvests. Cursing the Israelites, the High Priest rushes off with his guards. Samson and his followers return, thanking God for the new strength he has given them. The temple doors open and Delilah (a Philistine woman and Samson’s former lover) comes out with her maidens, singing of spring and her love for Samson. She invites Samson to visit her that night. In spite of the warning of an old Hebrew, Samson accepts.

ACT II
Delilah awaits Samson and invokes the power of love to help ensnare him. She is visited by the High Priest who announces that the Hebrews have secured Gaza; only Samson’s destruction will break their resolve. He urges her to seduce Samson in order to discover the source of his superhuman strength and she promises to do so. After Samson arrives, he is seized with misgivings. Delilah, confident of her success in arousing his passion, describes how her heart awakens at the sound of his voice. She asks that he tell her the secret of his strength as proof of his love, but Samson resists. Unable to learn the secret, Delilah rejects him completely. The infatuated Samson pursues her. He whispers to Delilah that the source of his power is his long hair. Delilah drugs him and cuts his hair. She calls the Philistine soldiers who move in to seize Samson.

ACT III
Blinded, shorn, and shackled, Samson turns the millstone in the prison of Gaza. Haunted by the reproaches of his followers as they echo through the darkness, he cries out to God for mercy.

At dawn, the Philistines celebrate the defeat of Samson. The blind prisoner is led in by a child. Unmoved by the jeers of the crowd or Delilah’s mockery, he prays. When the High Priest challenges him to prove the power of God to restore his sight, Samson begs for a return of his
strength. Led by the High Priest and Delilah, the pagans celebrate their rites, which end with the humiliation of Samson. Samson asks the child to lead him to the temple pillars. Pulling on the shackles to which he is bound, he brings down the temple around himself and his enemies.