

THE FIRST JUDGES

JUDGES 3



KEY PASSAGE: 2 Chronicles 7:14

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: *What is repentance? Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to Jesus.*

CHRIST CONNECTION: God brought consequences to His people for their sins, but He also raised up judges to save them from their enemies. We also have consequences for our sins, but God sent Jesus to save us from our sins once and for all.

STORY POINT: God provided Israel with judges to rescue them.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

Today's story ushers in a new chapter for God's people: the era of the judges. These short-term rescuers pointed to the need for an eternal Rescuer and Savior with the power to redeem and transform the hearts of God's people once and for all.

What pattern began to unfold in the lives of the Israelites? How did God prove Himself faithful and gracious in the lives of the Israelites, despite their sin?

The generations of Israelites who fought to conquer the land and renewed their commitment to God's law had died. Judges 3:4 tells us how God left some nations to test His people and determine if they would walk in obedience to His commands. Unfortunately, the Israelites began to worship the gods of the nations around them.

The same phrase is repeated throughout Judges: "The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight." They forgot the Lord who swore to never forget His people. God allowed His people to be ruled and oppressed by foreign nations as a consequence for their sin. The cycle of apostasy was at work: Israel sinned, received consequences, and cried out to God for help; He sent a judge or deliverer, the people repented, and the cycle began anew.

In this chapter, we are introduced to three judges: Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar. Through their leadership, God continued to prove Himself faithful by intervening and delivering His people, always preserving and setting them apart from the world. These earthly judges, however, could never save the people from their sins or produce new hearts with the desire to obey God. The peace these judges provided could not offer lasting change.

Lead kids to see that only Jesus has the power to give us new hearts and transform us into His image. While judges provided temporary peace, Jesus has established an eternal peace for those who place their faith in His finished work on the cross. Even the mightiest earthly hero pales in comparison to the Prince of Peace who was resurrected to bring us new life! Pray that awe would mark children's hearts as they reflect on God's provision to secure everlasting peace and salvation.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10-15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25-30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Match It” activity page.

SAY “ Each picture had a shadow match. Today, we will learn how the judges God provided to rescue His people were like a shadow of the true Judge to come—Jesus! ”

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ What were the Israelites doing that led to God punishing them? [Allow responses.] The people did what was evil and started to worship idols. So, God brought consequences on them because of their sin. They became slaves and were treated badly. Then the people cried out to God. So, God raised up a judge to rescue His people, and they had rest for a time.

Who were the first three judges God sent to help His people? [Allow responses.] When God’s people turned to Him for help, **God provided Israel with judges to rescue them.** God sent the judges Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar to rescue them. But these judges were not able to keep the people from turning away from God. When each of these judges died, the people went back to worshiping idols. People need a Savior to rescue them from their sin once and for all. Jesus is the true Judge because He lives forever and is able to completely save those who trust in Him. Only Jesus can change people’s hearts so they want to turn away from sin and follow Him.

God brought consequences to His people for their sins, but He also raised up judges to save them from their enemies. We also have consequences for our sins, but God sent Jesus to save us from our sins once and for all. Those who trust in Jesus have the Holy Spirit live inside them. The Holy Spirit gives believers hearts that love God and have the power to say no to sin. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ The Bible tells us that God loves us and sent Jesus to rescue us from our sin. If we repent and believe in Jesus, we can have eternal life with God. We won’t be perfect while we live on this earth, but if we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us of our sins. God will help us live for Him and show others His goodness. ”

(Tip: Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Prompt kids to discuss:

1. If Jesus died on the cross for our sin, why do we still sin?
2. How does Jesus save us from our sin once and for all?



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

5 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud 2 Chronicles 7:14 together.

SAY ““ Our key passage reminds us God is always present to forgive, but it also gives us a command to follow. We must humble ourselves. Do you know what it means to humble yourself? It means to consider others more important than yourself. Jesus is humble, and He thought of us as more important when He went to the cross for our sin. ””

Lead kids to sit in a circle. Say the first word of the key passage and then have the kid sitting to your right say the next word. Continue saying one word around the circle until the key passage is complete. Then, repeat again, saying it a little faster.

6 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY ““ Thank You, God, for loving us enough to send Your Son, Jesus, to rescue us from sin. Help us worship You and repent when we sin. Give us hearts that want to follow Your ways. Amen. ””

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles Guide kids to open their Bibles to Judges 3. Explain that the book of Judges is found in the Old Testament and records the history of the Israelites in the early days of living in the Promised Land. Tell kids that the book's name comes from the type of leaders Israel had during this time period.

Choose a volunteer to read aloud Joshua 3:9 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

SAY “What did God do when the Israelites cried out to Him? [Allow responses.] God sent a judge to save them from their enemies. The first judge God sent was Othniel, but God would send many more judges because His people continued to do evil, receive consequences, and cry out again.

God is merciful, or freely shows kindness, when people cry out to Him. When we cry out to God to save us from our sin, He will show us mercy and forgiveness. God sent Jesus as our perfect Judge who saves us from sin and the punishment our sin deserves.”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “What punishment does our sin deserve?”

Remind kids that all sin deserves death. Discuss how all sin is wicked in God's sight because He is holy. Tell kids that those who do not repent of their sin and trust in Jesus will spend eternity in hell. Tell kids that hell is a real place, but because of God's love for us, He sent Jesus to rescue sinners from sin and death.

SAY “What makes Jesus different from the judges in the Old Testament?”

Discuss how Jesus is not just a man; He is also the Son of God. Jesus lived a perfect life and died for us to make the way to live with God. But unlike the judges in the Old Testament, Jesus showed He has power over sin and death when He rose from the dead. Tell kids that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to live in believers, and He can change our hearts to repent, love God, and obey Him. The judges could not change people's hearts but only remind them of God's laws.

SAY “What can we do when we sin, even after we trust in Jesus?”

Tell kids that we repent of our sin, telling God we are sorry and asking Him to help us turn away from sin. **Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to Jesus.** Remind kids that, in Jesus, God declares us righteous. Jesus' perfect obedience is given to us because He took on our sin. Our sin will not stop God's love. We repent because we love God, not to earn God's love.

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**



LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)



OPTION 1: DON'T LET IT FALL

Before the session, inflate 10–15 balloons. Guide kids to disperse about the room and scatter the balloons around the room. Then explain that when you say “Go,” kids will pick up a balloon and work together to keep the balloons afloat. When one touches the floor, it can’t be picked up again. Time kids to see how long they can keep the balloons up, until the last one hits the floor.

SAY “*You could only keep the balloons up for so long until they all eventually fell to the floor. This reminds me of our story and how God provided Israel with judges to rescue them, but the judges could only save the people for a time. Eventually, the Israelites would fall back into their same sinful cycle. But God loves us, and He sent Jesus to be our perfect Rescuer. Jesus changes our hearts so we can obey God and love Him. And Jesus doesn’t just save people for a short time; He saves them for eternity! Unlike the balloons that fell to the ground, Jesus will never let us go (John 6:37-40). We can give our lives to Him, knowing He loves us and will one day bring us to live with Him forever.*”



OPTION 2: PATIENT PUZZLERS

Before the session gather four different 20–25 piece puzzles. Remove one puzzle piece from each puzzle and swap it with a piece from another puzzle. Place the puzzle pieces in a plastic baggie.

Form kids into four groups and provide each group with a puzzle. Challenge groups to put their puzzle together. Eventually, kids will recognize that a piece does not fit. Tell kids they must then find their missing piece by visiting another group to see if they have it. Allow kids to figure out whose piece belongs to which group. Then invite kids to complete their puzzle when they find their missing piece.

SAY “*It required patience to not only work on the puzzle but also to find the missing piece. Did you know that God is patient? Today, we saw God’s patience when He continued to show mercy to His people over and over again. The Bible tell us that God’s patience and kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). But one day, God will judge people for their sin. Only those who have repented and trusted in Jesus will be saved.*”

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.