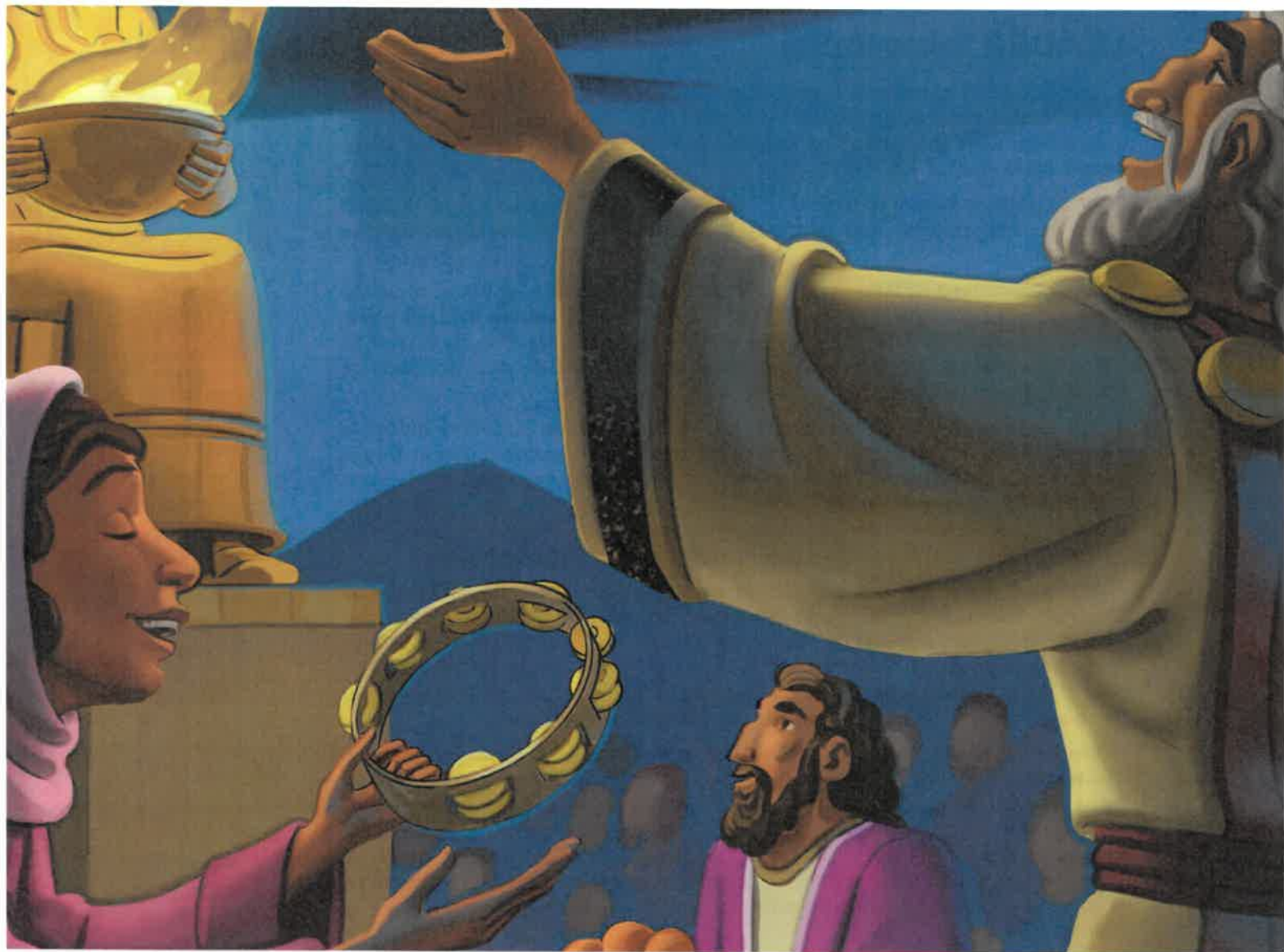


UNIT 8 | SESSION 1

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.



PREPARE

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



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY 🗨️ What does it mean to rescue someone or something? Have you ever helped rescue an animal? When? 🗨️

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 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: ANIMAL RESCUE



Before the session, hide 10 stuffed animals around the room. Consider hiding animals in easy locations while others are more challenging to find. Tell kids you have some “lost” animals and you need their help to find and rescue them. (Tip: If space is limited, consider placing stickers of animals in various locations around the room for kids to find.)

SAY 🗨️ If we’ve ever lost a loved toy, like a stuffed animal, we know how sad it can make us. But if the toy was found and returned, we experience great joy! Today, we will see how God’s people needed to be rescued. The Israelites turned away from God, and their sin led them to experience consequences. We’ll see how God showed His love for His people by sending judges to rescue them from their enemies. 🗨️

☐ OPTION 2: OVER, UNDER, AND THROUGH

Form kids into groups of three. Direct the two kids from each group to hold the hula hoop while the third kid will perform the actions. Lead the hula hoop holders to lower the hula hoop to the floor while the other kid jumps over it. Then guide the hula hoop holders to raise the hoop above their head while the kid goes under. Finally, lead the hoop holders to hold the hula hoop vertically, so the kid can go through it. Allow groups to practice each movement. Then challenge groups to see who can complete the cycle of actions the fastest. The group to finish last is out. Repeat until there is one winner overall.

SAY 🗨️ You repeated the same actions over and over until one group was the winner. Today, we will learn how the Israelites entered into a cycle. Yet, their sinful actions led to consequences rather than victory. In the book of Judges, we see a cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, rescue, obedience, and then back to sin. Today, we’ll learn how **GOD PROVIDED ISRAEL WITH JUDGES TO RESCUE THEM** from this cycle. 🗨️

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Match It" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- ☐ stuffed animals, 10

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ hula hoops, 1 per group



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- ☐ inflated balloons, 10–15
- ☐ timer

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- ☐ 20–25 piece puzzles, 1 per group

Reflection and Prayer

- ☐ Bible Story Coloring Page (optional)



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video
- ☐ Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "The First Judges" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster

Questions from Kids

- ☐ "Unit 8, Session 1" Questions from Kids video

Missions Moment

- ☐ "Send Portland" missions video

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "If My People (2 Chronicles 7:14)" song
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “Hi, kids! My name is [your name], and I am glad to see you! Today, we will begin a new book of the Bible called Judges. Do you know if Judges is in the Old Testament or New Testament? [Allow responses.] Judges is in the Old Testament. As we hear our story, we’ll learn how God’s people turned away from Him and began to worship idols. But God loved His people. So, **GOD PROVIDED ISRAEL WITH JUDGES TO RESCUE THEM.** [Display the Story Point Poster.]

If you have your Bibles with you, please take them out. [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] Let’s prepare our hearts to hear our Bible story. Pray with me: ‘Dear God, thank You for Your grace. Help us see our sin and our need for forgiveness. Lead us to receive Your grace through faith in Jesus. Amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “Each time we meet, we learn a big picture question and answer to help us focus on a specific truth from God’s Word. Our new big picture question is, **What is repentance?** The answer we’ll learn is, **Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to Jesus.** Let’s say the answer again: **Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to Jesus.**

In today’s story, we will learn that God’s people sinned when they worshiped other gods. We’ll see how their sin led to bad consequences. But God provided a way to be rescued just as He provided the way for us to be rescued from our sin. When we repent and trust in Jesus, we are rescued from the consequences of sin. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “In the book of Joshua, God’s people obeyed His commands and God blessed them. With God’s help, the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan. Before Joshua died, he warned them to worship and obey God. Today, we will see how, after Joshua died, the Israelites didn’t keep their promise to worship God and obey Him. Their disobedience led to a terrible cycle of consequences, and as we’ll see, God graciously sent judges to rescue His people. ”



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story



1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Judges 3:7-31. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The First Judges.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

THE FIRST JUDGES

“After Joshua died, **the Israelites began to do what was evil in the Lord’s sight. The people failed to obey God’s law to worship Him alone. They worshiped the gods of the people who lived near them, and God was angry with their sin. So, God sent a foreign king to capture the people as a consequence.**

The Israelites cried out to the Lord to save them. God raised up Othniel (AHTH nih el) to save them. Othniel was the first judge of Israel, a leader who led Israel to follow God and saved them from their enemies. The Spirit of the Lord was with **Othniel**, and he **defeated this foreign king in battle. God’s people turned away from sin and had peace for 40 years.** Then Othniel died.

After Othniel’s death, the people went back to worshipping other gods and doing evil in the Lord’s sight. So, God sent King Eglon of Moab to attack and defeat His people as a consequence for their sin. Then the Israelites cried out for God to save them from slavery. So, God raised up another judge—Ehud—who would save the people from King Eglon.

Ehud made a short sword and hid it on his thigh under his clothes. He went to visit King Eglon with a gift. When no one else was around, **Ehud used his hidden sword to defeat the king, and then Ehud secretly escaped.** King Eglon’s servants returned and found him dead on the floor.

After Ehud escaped, he sounded the ram’s horn and all of Israel met him. Ehud said, “The LORD has handed over your enemies, the Moabites.” The Israelites fought against Moab and won. Then Israel had peace for 80 years. **Later, God raised up a third judge named Shamgar. He delivered Israel from their enemies, the Philistines.**

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. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Practice it: Practice saying the names of the judges as a group.

Active listening: When the Israelites make good choices, tell the kids to give a thumbs up. When they make poor choices, tell kids to give a thumbs down.



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

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 worshipping 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.) Gospel Poster

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 8, Session 1” Questions from Kids video. 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 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Tell kids that Portland, Oregon, is in the Northwest area of the United States. Share how millions of people live in Portland, yet many of them have not trusted in Jesus. Play the missions video.

SAY 🗣️ Portland, Oregon, has fewer people who are believers in Jesus than anywhere else in the United States. Many people living in Portland also do not attend any church or religious organization. Portland is an important place to focus on starting new churches and finding creative ways to share the gospel. Let's pray that more Christians will start churches in Portland to help people hear about the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. 🙏

6 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.

~~Lead kids to sing "If My People (2 Chronicles 7:14)." You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.~~

7 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 and display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. 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.

Consider pointing out the location of Canaan (F10) on the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. 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**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

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.