

# Introduction to the Period of Judges

(Joshua 23, 24, Judges 2)

## Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, have the children play *Follow the Leader*, but don't appoint a leader. See how confusing it is without one! Talk about the importance of having a good leader—one that will show them the right way to go. Also, talk about the importance of being a good follower. A leader is impotent without followers!]

How would it be if you were trying to lead some people who suddenly decided to follow their own way? Good followers always listen and obey their leaders; they show their love and respect by always following the rules! They don't go off and do their own thing.

## Opening Prayer

Father, Your word tells us that Jesus is the Way and that no one can come to You except by Him. Teach us this morning how important it is for us to be faithful followers of Jesus. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## Memory Verse

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart. (Matthew 22:37).*

## Lesson

The children of Israel had finally settled into the Promised Land. Joshua, Israel's courageous leader, who had taken the people from the desert, across the Jordan River and into the land, had died. They had no leader now; they were on their own.

There would be many obstacles yet to be overcome in their new homeland. Joshua had failed to drive out all the Canaanites like God had told him to do; they were now living in among these heathen nations. How they would handle these obstacles would be a test of their faith.

Before Joshua died he reminded the people to always remember to love and obey God.

Joshua 23:11

*So be very careful to love the LORD your God.*

Joshua warned them not to follow after other gods; he told them what would happen if they didn't stay loyal to God.

Joshua 23:12-13

*"But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, then know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the LORD your God has given you.*

And, the people promised to always love and obey God.

Joshua 24:24

*The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God. We will obey him alone."*

For the next ten or twenty years after Joshua died, as long as Joshua's leaders were still alive, the children of Israel loved and obeyed God and all went well for them.

Judges 2:7

*And the Israelites served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the leaders who outlived him—those who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.*

However, even though the children of Israel had promised God to love Him with all of their hearts, when their godly leaders had all died, and the next generation came into power, the people eventually broke their promise to God. They became close friends with the Canaanites who didn't even believe in God. Soon the children of Israel began worshiping Baal, a false god.

Judges 2:10-12

*After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for*

*Israel. The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight and served the images of Baal. They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the LORD.*

After all that God had done for them, He no longer had first place in their hearts. Other gods, people, and things became more important.

Often you and I are just like those Israelites. When we first became God's children, we wanted to love and serve Him with all our hearts. But after a while, we let other people and things become more important until He no longer has first place.

Our idols are not made of wood or stone, but they are every bit as sinful. What are some things that take the place of God in our lives? What are some other activities, hobbies, or priorities we can have in our lives besides God? We may watch too much TV; we may become too busy to help people in need; we may want to play with our friends more than spending time reading our Bibles or praying.

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. 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.

God's Word says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Matthew 22:37). If you are His child, you should be loyal to God, giving Him first place in your life.

To be loyal means that you are true and faithful to the one who deserves your love and obedience. Why does God deserve your loyalty? [Teacher, discuss who God is and what He has done for you.]

God deserved the loyalty of the Israelites; He had proved Himself to be a mighty God on their behalf. But they were not loyal to Him. Instead they disregarded His command and followed their own ways!

And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel.

#### Judges 2:15

*Every time Israel went out to battle, the LORD fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress.*

Why would God become so angry? He was angry because His people were worshiping a lie. They were praying to things that weren't gods at all. He knew that they would only become disappointed and unhappy because the false gods couldn't answer their prayers.

If you are God's child, He desires your loyalty because He loves you and wants only what's best for you. That's why it's so important to be loyal to God. You need to always give Him first place in your life.

How do you stay loyal to God?

1. Stay close to God; spend time alone with Him each day reading His Word and praying to Him. Nothing should be more important than the time you spend with God.
2. Don't become close friends with kids who do not love and serve God. Stay away from the wrong things they try to get you to do.
3. Do what God says in His Word. Find out what God wants you to do, then serve Him by helping others with all your heart.

If only the Israelites had remained loyal to God – God wanted to bless them with good things, but now they were headed for trouble and heartache!

Because of their disloyalty to Him, God allowed the Israelites to feel fear, confusion, and frustration: they were defeated by the Canaanites.

In spite of the Israelites disobedience, God showed His great mercy by raising up judges to save the people from their enemies.

#### Judges 2:16

*Then the LORD raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their attackers.*

God appointed leaders called *judges*. Judges were not kings; they were more like an umpire in a baseball game. They made decisions that helped bring peace and justice to the people. They were also leaders who led the people in battle against their enemies.

In the next few weeks we are going to learn about some of the judges that God raised up to lead the Israelites.

Judges 2:18

*Whenever the LORD raised up a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge's lifetime. For the LORD took pity on his people, who were burdened by oppression and suffering.*

God blessed the people when a judge was over them. But even though they promised to love only God, their loyalty never lasted.

Judges 2:19-22

*But when the judge died, the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them. They went after other gods, serving and worshiping them. And they refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. So the LORD burned with anger against Israel. He said, "Because these people have violated my covenant, which I made with their ancestors, and have ignored my commands, I will no longer drive out the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died. I did this to test Israel—to see whether or not they would follow the ways of the LORD as their ancestors did."*

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.

We tend to follow the same cycle. We remain loyal to God as long as we are near those who are devoted to him. But when we are on our own, the pressure to be drawn away from God increases. That is why it is important for you to choose friends that encourage you to remain loyal to God no matter what.

How strong is your loyalty to God? Do you choose to say, "No!" to sin? Have you chosen friends that encourage you to stay loyal to

God? God desires and expects you to be loyal to Him and to give Him first place in your life.

## Closing Prayer

Father, please help us to remain loyal to You no matter what. Bring us friends who love and obey You. And help us to encourage our friends to be faithful to you, too. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## Learning Activities

### Game Center

#### ***Follow the Leader (or, alternate opening activity)***

Find an open space and have the students form a circle, sit down, facing each other.

Choose one student to be the "detective," and have them leave the room.

While the "detective" is in another room, choose a student from the circle to be the "leader" – the rest will be "followers".

Staying seated in the circle, have the "leader" begin leading the students in whatever actions they feel like doing, such as clapping, stomping, making funny faces, waving arms, etc.

Bring the "detective" back in and place them in the middle of the circle.

The detective's job is to determine who the "leader" is.

The "leader" may do as many actions as often as they like until they are discovered.

The trick for the "followers" is to avoid too much eye contact with the "leader," so as to keep the "detective" guessing.

Once the "leader" is found out, they become the "detective" and must leave the room. A new "leader" is chosen, and the game repeats.

**Balloon Score Review**

Prepare ten balloons by blowing them up and putting a piece of paper with a score inside each one. When a child answers a question for his team, he scores 100 points. He also chooses a balloon and bursts it to find his additional score.

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

1. After Joshua died who became the leader of the children of Israel? (No one, they had no leader.)
2. Before Joshua died, what did he remind the people to always remember to do? (Love and obey God.)
3. What did Joshua warn the people would happen if they turned away from God? (God would not drive out their enemies before them. He would allow the people to be conquered by their enemies.)
4. Why didn't the children of Israel remember to love God with all their hearts? (All the godly leaders had died and they became close friends with people who didn't even believe in God. Soon they began worshipping false gods.)
5. Why did God become angry with the Israelites? (His own chosen people started worshipping a lie and God knew they would be disappointed.)
6. What could happen to us if we become close friends with people who don't know and love God? (We can be tempted to sin.)
7. What are some things that we can let take the place of God in our lives? (TV, toys, busyness, activities, hobbies, sports, friends.)
8. What does it mean to be loyal to God? (To give Him first place in our lives; to be true and faithful.)
9. Why does God deserve our loyalty? (He died for our sins. He loves us and only wants what's best for us.)
10. How do you stay loyal to God? (Stay close to Him, stay away from friends that aren't good for us, and do what He says in His word.)
11. How did God show His great mercy to the Israelites? (He raised up judges to save the people from their enemies.)
12. Tell me about the cycles that Israel went through starting with giving Him first place in their hearts.
  - a) **Faithful to God:** They stayed strong in their love and devotion for the Lord for a while.
  - b) **Forsake God:** Eventually, they became close friends with the Canaanites who didn't even believe in God.
  - c) **Trusting false gods (idols).** They began worshipping the false gods of the Canaanites.
  - d) **Conquered by enemies:** This made God angry, so He allowed the Canaanites to have victory over them, just as He had warned the people He would.
  - e) **Cry for mercy:** Then the people cried out to God for help. And in His mercy, God raised up a godly leader called a judge to lead the people in victory against their enemies. They stayed loyal to God under that judge's rule, but after that judge dies, they would lose interest in God again.