

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL**Judges 2–4**

Memory Verses: *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (Judg. 21:25 ESV).

Background Helps:

In our study of “God’s Covenant Story,” we have now seen two of God’s great promises to Abraham fulfilled: (1) the multiplication of Abraham’s seed (Ex. 1:7; Deut. 26:5) and (2) the gift of the land of Canaan (Deut. 26:9; Josh. 21:43; Ps. 105:44). By the end of the book of Joshua, God has made the people of Israel a populous nation and settled them in the Promised Land, just as he covenanted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Building on God’s covenant with Abraham, the LORD also made a covenant with Israel through Moses, summarized in the Ten Commandments (sometimes called “the old covenant”). In this week’s study from the book of Judges, we will see how the people of Israel were unfaithful to this Mosaic covenant.

In Judges 2:1-2 “the angel of the LORD . . . said, ‘I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, “I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.” But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?’” According to Judges 2:7-10, the older generation failed to pass on the story of God’s covenant faithfulness to the next generation with the result that they transgressed the covenant (2:20) by serving other gods (2:11-13, 17, 19). Therefore, the LORD left a remnant of the other nations in the land of Canaan to test Israel to see if they would obey the commandments that he gave through Moses (2:21–3:6).

The book of Judges records a recurring cycle during this period in which “(1) the people break the covenant and sin against Yahweh, (2) Yahweh disciplines them by allowing aggression against Israel by foreign nations, (3) there is a call to repentance and a cry for help, and (4) Yahweh raises up a hero or deliver, called a judge, who rescues the people from their enemies and rules them for a time.”¹ Much of the book of Judges narrates examples of this cycle including the stories of Othniel (3:7-11), Deborah and Barak (4–5), Gideon (6–8), Jephthah (10:6–12:7), and Samson (13–16). These judges were an expression of God’s gracious commitment to his covenant. He was giving the people of Israel opportunity after opportunity to change their ways and obey the covenant.

The memory verse, Judges 21:25 (cf. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1), captures the spirit of rebellion that characterized the days of the judges. It is also an anticipation of the next covenant we will study: God’s covenant with King David.

Lesson Helps:

Here are some miscellaneous ideas for this week’s lesson:

¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 188.

- In all classes review the recurring cycle that pervades the book of Judges.
- Use the story of Deborah and Barak, which is included in our readings, as an example of this cycle. It will be especially important to use this story in children's classes.
- In adult classes challenge parents (and grandparents) to pass God's covenant story on to the next generations.
- We have studied the book of Judges before but, this time, be sure to relate your lesson to "God's Covenant Story." Show your students how God was faithful to his covenant with Israel by raising up judges even while Israel was unfaithful to the covenant by breaking the God's commandments given through Moses—especially the first commandment not to serve other gods.
- Include the memory verse as part of a tantalizing foretaste of the next covenant we will begin studying next week!
- A possible lesson aim: My students will learn about God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness to the Mosaic covenant during the days of the judges, so that they will choose to serve the LORD alone as their God.

Home Assignment:

 Read Ruth.

 Memorize Ruth 1:16b ESV.