

## Lesson 1: Othniel: Understanding the Cycle

**Theme:** The stories in Judges help us understand our fallen nature and our (often unrealized) need for God's amazing grace.

**Scriptures:** Judges 2: 1-5, 3:7-11

**Icebreaker:** (Have everyone in the group answer this question)

Who is one of your spiritual heroes? (Someone you look to for spiritual encouragement and enlightenment). It could be someone you know, a Christian leader from the past, or a modern leader you read or listen to today.

### Introducing Judges:

**Say:** Before we dive into the stories found in these pages, let's share some of the things we know about Judges.

- How familiar are you with the stories in Judges?
- Who are some of the Judges, and what makes them special?
- What are their stories? What did they do for God? How did they help the people of Israel?

### Fun Facts about Judges:

- Judges are leaders who have been raised up by God and empowered by the Spirit to deliver God's people from oppression and subjugation because of their sinful action.
- The Judges were not people who sat on a court and provided over disagreements (although Deborah did do that), they were primarily military leaders against other nations that were enslaving them.
- The stories in Judges occurred about 3000 years ago, roughly 1200 BC.
- The stories take place after Joshua's death (Moses' successor) and before Saul becomes king.
- When the people of Israel took control of the Promised Land, they were to get rid of all foreign influences, which they did not. These influences continually pulled the people away from God.
- When the people of Israel would call on God for deliverance, He would raise up a Judge to lead them to freedom.
- After a judge died, they would return to their old ways of rejecting God.
- There are 12 judges, 6 major and 6 minor. 12 is a very common number in the Bible.
- The minor judges relate to the short mention of the particular judge, often less than 3 verses long.
- The stories are not told in chronological order, but to show the descending spiral of depravity.

### From Judges for You:

"Judges can be described as 'despicable people doing deplorable things' and 'trashy tales about dysfunctional characters.' As the history unfolds even the heroes, the judges, become increasingly flawed and failing, and their efforts have less and less redemptive effect. What in the world is this doing in the Bible? The answer is important one, it is the Gospel! Judges is not about following moral examples, it is about a God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through us despite our constant resistance to his purpose." (page 9-10)

### Read and discuss six main themes of Judges found on pages 10-12.

Discuss:

- What are the six themes Keller proposes.
- What do these themes say about God and his work of redemption?
- What do these themes say the People of Israel, our world, and ourselves?
- Which theme resonates with you the most? Why?

- What do you hope to learn through our study on Judges

**Sermon Discussion:** This week's sermon was on the story of Othniel and the cycle of sin and redemption. Take some time to discuss your takeaways from the message.

- What are some things you learned during this week's sermon?
- What were some questions you had or items you were confused about?
- What is your impression of Othniel, based on the sermon?
- How did this week's sermon help you understand the cycle of sin and redemption in the people of Israel?
- What did you learn about the cycle of sin and redemption in your life?

**Meet Othniel:** Read Judges 3:7-11

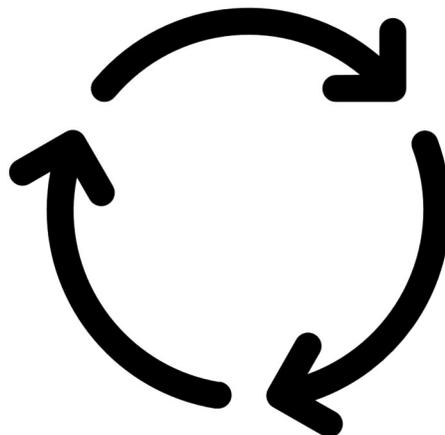
- Who is Othniel? (also see Judges 1: 12-15)  
Note: Caleb was Joshua's best friend and right hand man. He was faithful to God, when the rest of the people wandering in the wilderness were unfaithful to God. Of that generation, only He and Joshua were allowed to enter the Promised Land.
- Why was God angry with the people of Israel and how did He respond?
- When and why did God "raise up" Othniel as a Judge?
- How did Othniel become a judge and what action did he take?
- What was the outcome of Othniel's leadership?

For more on Othniel's story, read the section "How God brings Revival" in *Judges For You*, pages 43-45

- What additional insights does Timothy Keller provide?
- How does Keller show God at work through the highs and lows of this story?
- What does Othniel's story teach us about the Cycle?

**Diagram the Cycle:**

Using Othniel's story, create a diagram of the Cycle, starting with the people's rebellion and ending with the Judges' death. What additional points do you think will be repeated throughout the book of Judges.



**Read Judges 2:11-19** and discuss what additional insight did you gain about the cycle by reading this passage?

- What was the evil that the Israelites did?
- What does God do because they angered him? Do you think his anger was justified?
- What happened when God raised up a judge?
- When does the cycle begin to repeat itself?

**Read “The Repeated Cycle” in Judges for You, pages 33-34**

- Does this section provide any additional insight into The Cycle?
- What might you need to add to your cycle diagram?

**Compare your cycle diagram to the one on Judges for You, page 207.**

- How are they different?
- Are there things you missed?
- Are there things you think Keller should have added?

**Discuss:**

- What do you think about the Cycle?
- Can you think of other stories in the Bible where the Cycle was lived out?
- How have you seen the Cycle in your own life? Have you seen this repeated pattern in your life?
- How might understanding this cycle give you a deeper understanding of God’s amazing grace?

**Personal Reflection:** Invite the group to quietly reflect on these questions as you read these questions, pausing for time of reflection.

- Where do you find yourself on the cycle today?
- Do you find yourself rebelling against God? Cry out for forgiveness.
- Do you find yourself caught in the consequences of your actions? Cry out for rescue.
- Do you find yourself in a time of redemption? Praise God for his salvation.
- Are you in a place of peace with God. Praise God for his deliverance?

**Romans 2:4** says, “God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.” It is God’s kindness toward Israel, and to you, that he allows the cycle to occur over and over and over again. God desires for your repentance and you to give your heart over to him. He continually works for you!

**Share:**

- How has this discussion helped you view yourself, in light of God’s grace?
- How might it help you in your interaction with others?
- How can the group be praying for you this week?

**Close in prayer.**