

The First Judges

1

BIBLE PASSAGE: Judges 3:7-31

MAIN POINT: God's people turned from Him to worship idols.

KEY PASSAGE: Isaiah 33:22

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.

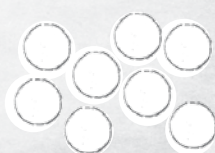
SMALL GROUP OPENING
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LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY
(25–30 MINUTES)
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(25–30 MINUTES)
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Following Joshua's death, the Israelites were without a leader. They fell into a cycle of sin that can be seen during each reign of the judges. The cycle is marked by an A-B-C-D-E pattern. Let's look at the first judge, Othniel, to see this pattern.

First, the people fell into Apostasy. They turned away from God and served other gods. (Judg. 3:7) Next, they experienced a period of Bondage. God was angry with the Israelites, and He gave them into the hand of the king of Aram. (v. 8) Third, the people Cried out to God. (v. 9) God sent a Deliverer to save them. (vv. 9-10) Finally, they had Ease in the land. (v. 11) Then Othniel died.

This pattern continued with Ehud. The people had again turned from God. Their apostasy made God angry. He sent them into bondage by strengthening the king of Moab to defeat Israel. The Israelites served the king of Moab for 18 years.

The Moabites were well-fed, especially the king. They enjoyed the fruit of the Israelites' labor while the Israelites went hungry. By thrusting a sword into the king's belly, Ehud disemboweled the king and left him dead on the floor of his room. The fat covered over the handle of the sword so that Ehud could not remove it.

After Ehud delivered Israel, the Israelites struck down the Moabites and there was peace in the land for eighty years. But Ehud would die, and they would need another judge to lead them.

The Israelites needed someone better than a judge; they needed a king who would save them not only from the consequences of their sin, but the sin itself. That was all part of God's plan. God sent a true Deliverer; His Son, Jesus, died for our sin and delivered us forever from the oppression of sin and death.



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training made simple

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The BIBLE STORY

The First Judges

Judges 3:7-31

Joshua had died. Without a strong leader, the Israelites began to disobey God and worship false gods. They forgot about the one true God. God was angry. He let an enemy king take over the Israelites, and they served the king for eight years.

Then the Israelites remembered how good they had it when they loved and obeyed God. They cried out to Him, “Save us!” God wanted the people to love and obey Him, so God raised up Othniel (AHTH nih el) to rule over them as the first judge.

Othniel led the Israelites into battle against the king of Aram, and God helped the Israelites win. **The land was peaceful for 40 years, then Othniel died.**

Again, Israel forgot about God. God gave the king of Moab power to attack the Israelites and defeat them. The Israelites served the king of Moab for 18 years. The Israelites were sad. They remembered how good they had it when they loved and obeyed God. They cried out to Him, “Save us!” So God raised up Ehud (EE huhd) to save them.

The Israelites sent Ehud to the king of Moab, who was a very fat man. Ehud had a double-edged sword under his clothes. Ehud said, “I have a secret message for you.” The king dismissed all his attendants so he was alone with Ehud.

When the king stood up, Ehud pulled out his sword. He pushed it into the king’s belly. The sword was swallowed up by the king’s fat. Ehud couldn’t even pull it out! Ehud escaped down the porch, locking the doors

of the room behind him. Ehud was gone when **the king's servants came in.** The door was locked and they thought he was using the bathroom. They waited, but the king never opened the door. The servants got worried, so they unlocked the door **and found their king dead** on the floor!

When Ehud escaped, he blew a ram's horn and he became the Israelites' leader. "God will help us defeat our enemies, the Moabites," Ehud told them. So the Israelites battled the Moabites and took control over them. **There was peace in the land for 80 years.**

When Ehud died, the Israelites forgot God again. They turned away from Him. When they remembered how good they had it when the loved and obeyed God, they cried out to Him, "Save us!" God sent a third judge, Shamgar (SHAM gahr), to save them.

Christ Connection: The judges saved the people from the consequences of their sin, but not the cause of it. God's plan was to one day send a true Deliverer—Jesus, His own Son—to be the King of His people. Jesus saves people from sin forever.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover that God chose ordinary men to rescue His people from their enemies—ordinary men whom God empowered by His Spirit (Judg. 3:10) for His glory. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: The First Judges

BIBLE PASSAGE: Judges 3:7-31

MAIN POINT: God's people turned from Him to worship idols.

KEY PASSAGE: Isaiah 33:22

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, invite them to tell you about a person from history whom they believe was a good leader.

SAY • What makes someone a good leader? [*Invite kids to respond.*] Over the next few weeks, we are going to learn about people who were called judges. The judges protected God's people from their enemies and also helped them follow God.

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the "Find the Treasure" on the activity page.

SAY • In today's Bible story, we are going to learn about a man who hid something, but it wasn't a treasure. We will learn how God used this man to help turn His people back to Him.

- "Find the Treasure" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Find the sword

Before the session, hide the sword cards around the classroom. Invite kids to find the cards and bring them to you. Guide them to place the cards in alphabetical order.

SAY • Our Bible stories for the next few weeks are going to be about the judges. God used judges to rescue His people from their enemies. One of the first judges used a hidden sword to deliver God's people.

Use the cards to explain the pattern of the judges:

- **Away from God:** God's people sinned against God.
- **Bondage:** God's people were captured by a nation.
- **Cried to God:** God's people cried to God for help.
- **Deliverer:** God sent a deliverer—a judge.
- **Ease:** God's people enjoyed peace.

OPTION 2: Make a ram's horn

Before class, cut apart the party horns and keep only the mouthpieces so that you have one for each kid. Cut the paper towel tubes into thirds for each kid. Demonstrate how to cut one of the paper towel tube pieces lengthwise so kids can wrap it in a cone shape around the mouthpiece.

Secure it with tape. Tape the other pieces of the paper towel tube to the horn so that it makes the curving shape of the ram's horn. Kids will then wrap the entire horn with masking tape. They may also decorate the horn.

SAY • After one of the judges in today's Bible story defeated an enemy king, he blew a ram's horn. We will learn more about the judges and why the Israelites needed them in our Bible story.



• "Sword Cards" printable

- paper towel tubes
- scissors
- wide masking tape
- party horn mouthpieces
- crayons or markers
- images of shofars or ram's horns from the Internet (optional)

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.

- room decorations
- Themed Background Slide (optional)

Tip: Choose decorations that fit your space and your budget.

SUGGESTED THEME DECORATIONS: Simulate the interior of a diner by setting up a few chairs and round tables with checkered tablecloths, generic condiment bottles, and napkins. Write special menu items and prices on a small chalkboard. Consider using the themed background slide.

Countdown

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

- countdown video

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

[Large Group Leader enters dressed in a polo shirt and slacks with an apron and a name tag. Leader is also carrying a notepad and pen to take orders.]

- leader attire
- notepad
- pen

LEADER • Good morning! Is this your first visit to the diner? I'm [*your name*]. I will be happy to serve you. We have everything you could possibly think of on our menu. See? [*Look down and realize that you don't have any menus.*] Now, where did I put those menus? No problem. I can remember the specials of the day. Let's see, was the special the tuna salad soup and the ham and bean sandwich? Or is it the tuna salad sandwich and the ham and bean soup? [*Throw up*

your hands.] I don't think I am ever going to get the hang of this. I just can't seem to remember all the stuff I keep forgetting!

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • You know, the Israelites in the Bible had a hard time remembering some pretty important stuff, too. [*Point to the previous Bible stories on the timeline.*]

• Giant Timeline

The Israelites had spent 40 years in the wilderness before God used Joshua to lead the people into the promised land. Joshua lived a long time, but when he was old and knew he was going to die soon, he told the people to remember all of God's laws and obey them. Joshua told the people to love and worship only the one true God.

[*Point to today's Bible story on the timeline.*]

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before the Israelites forgot about God. They actually started worshipping some of the false gods that the nations around them served. I don't know about you, but that seems like a recipe for disaster!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • It's a good thing that our God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and good. God knew the Israelites would not be able to obey Him for long. God had a plan to give them leaders called *judges* to deliver them from their enemies and turn them back to God.

Our big picture question for the next few weeks is, ***How does God accomplish His plan?*** As you listen to our Bible story, think about the answer to that question.

- Bibles
- “The First Judges” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Main Point Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Judges 3:7-31. Tell the Bible story in your own words, or show the Bible story video “The First Judges.” For a shorter version of the Bible story, read only the bolded text in the Bible story script.

LEADER • What happened for the Israelites to be in such a pickle? **God’s people turned from Him to worship idols.** When God’s people worshiped idols instead of the one true God, He allowed their enemies to attack them. Then the people remembered how God had always taken care of them. They cried out to God for help.

What did God do when His people asked for help? Did God say, “You are on your own now”? No! God raised up judges and used them to rescue the Israelites and help them serve God again. That sounds like the answer to our big picture question! ***How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.*** [*Invite kids to repeat it one more time.*]

After the judge rescued them, everything was fine and the people always obeyed God ... right? Wrong! When the judge died, they fell back into the cycle of sin. The judges saved the people from the consequences of their sin, but not the cause of it. God’s plan was to one day send a true Deliverer—Jesus, His own Son—to be the King of His people. Jesus saves people from sin forever.

Ask the following review questions. Invite kids to make an *O* with their arms overhead if the answer applies to Othniel. Kids will make an *E* with their bodies if the answer applies to Ehud and an *S* if the answer applies to Shamgar.

1. Who was the first judge? (*Othniel, Judg. 3:9*)
2. Who was the second judge? (*Ehud, Judg. 3:15*)
3. Who was the third judge? (*Shamgar, Judg. 3:31*)
4. Who defeated the king of Aram? (*Othniel, Judg. 3:10*)
5. Who gave Israel 40 years of peace? (*Othniel, Judg. 3:11*)
6. Who hid a sword? (*Ehud, Judg. 3:16*)

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me (optional)

Use Scripture and the guide provided with this session to explain to boys and girls how to become a Christian. Assign individuals to meet with kids who have more questions.

Encourage boys and girls to ask their parents, small group leaders, or other Christian adults any questions they may have about becoming a Christian.

Tip: Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Isaiah 33:22.

LEADER • During the time of the judges, the people of Israel did not have a human king to rule over them like the other nations. They had someone greater! God was their Judge, lawgiver, and King!

The people did not always obey God—just like we don't always obey God—so God sent His Son, Jesus, to be our ultimate Judge, Savior, and King!

Say the key passage with the kids twice, and then sing the key passage song.

- Key Passage Slide or Poster
- "He Will Save Us" song

• “Unit 9, Session 1”
discussion starter
video

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Do you always listen to warnings you hear? Think about that as you watch this video.

Show the “Unit 9, Session 1” discussion starter video.

LEADER • Frosty ignored the warnings, and then he got into trouble. Did Frosty deserve help? [*Invite response.*]

Before Joshua died, he warned the Israelites that if they forgot God, they would be punished. But they didn’t remember Joshua’s warning, and they forgot God. Did the Israelites deserve to be rescued? Why did God rescue them?

LEADER • We need to be rescued from our sin. Do we deserve to be rescued? No. God would be right to punish us for our sin. But He loves us and sent Jesus to rescue us from sin. Providing forgiveness we don’t deserve is called grace.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “All for Your Glory” song

LEADER • When I think about God’s grace, it makes me want to sing!

Sing together “All for Your Glory.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Who remembers our big picture question and answer? *How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.* Let’s pray.

Dear God, thank You for loving Your people. You always work for Your glory and our good. Help us to always trust in You. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:19.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus.

Small Group LEADER

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- poster paper
- index cards
- scissors
- marker
- tape

Write the key passage on a large sheet of poster paper, but leave blanks for the words *Judge*, *lawgiver*, *King*, and *save*. Cut index cards into thirds and write each letter from the omitted words on separate cards.

Guide kids to form the four missing words and then tape them into the proper blank.

SAY • The Israelites did not have a human king to rule over them. The people were supposed to remember and obey God's laws and let God lead them as their King. Unfortunately, the Israelites did not remember that God was their Judge, lawgiver, and King. We can remember that God sent Jesus to be our King forever, and we obey Jesus and allow Him to lead us because of what He did to rescue us from sin.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Open your Bibles to Judges 3:7-31. Briefly review the Bible story, and then form two teams to play a trivia game. You will ask a question and kids will raise their hands if they know the answer. If a kid answers correctly, he gains one point for his team. If he answers incorrectly, the other team gets a chance to steal the point.

Ask the following review questions:

1. Why did God let an enemy king take over His people? (**God's people turned from Him to worship idols**, *Judg. 3:7*)
2. What did the people do when they remembered God? (*They cried out to God for help, Judg. 3:9*)
3. Who was the first judge? (*Othniel, Judg. 3:9*)
4. What happened after Othniel died? (*The people forgot about God again, Judg. 3:12*)
5. Who was the second judge? (*Ehud, Judg. 3:15*)
6. What did Ehud blow after he escaped from Eglon's palace? (*a ram's horn, Judg. 3:27*)
7. Who was the third judge? (*Shamgar, Judg. 3:31*)
8. How many years of peace did Ehud provide? (*80, Judg. 3:30*)
9. ***How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.***

SAY • As you can see, God's people were quick to forget God and the things He had done for them. Even the judges could not keep God's people from disobeying God. But many years later, God sent Jesus to rescue people from sin. Jesus died to take away His people's sin for good, and He changes us from the inside out.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: The judge says ...

Invite kids to play a game of "Simon Says," but instead of completing the commands of "Simon," they will complete the commands that are preceded by "The judge says."

If kids do not do the judge's command, or if they do a command the judge did not say, they must sit out. For younger kids, do not eliminate players who make a mistake.



SAY • It was hard to obey everything the judge said, wasn't it? The Israelites struggled to obey God, just like some of us struggle to obey our parents, our teachers, and other people whom God has chosen to be our leaders. When **God's people turned from Him to worship idols**, He allowed their enemies to attack them. Then they remembered how good God is and asked Him for help.

The judges rescued the people for a little while, but the judges could not make the people stop sinning. Jesus is a better Judge, lawgiver, and King. He rescues us from sin, and He also changes our hearts so we can live lives that please Him.

OPTION 2: Sin chain reaction

Print and cut apart two or three sets of the sequencing cards. Tape the sequencing cards to cardboard blocks. Assist younger kids as they set up the blocks on their shortest side a few inches apart like dominoes. Talk through the cycle of sin as they set up the blocks in the correct order. Remind kids that each time the judge died, the people would fall back into the habit of sin. Once the kids have set up the blocks, invite a volunteer to tap the first block to knock the others over. Reset the blocks in a new pattern and play again.

SAY • The Israelites were stuck in a cycle of sin. **God's people turned from Him to worship idols**, so He allowed their enemies to attack them. The judges saved the people from the consequences of their sin, but not the cause of it. God sent a true Deliverer—Jesus—to be the King of His people. Jesus breaks the cycle of sin and saves people from sin forever.

- "Judges Sequencing Cards" printable
- cardboard blocks
- tape

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal and instruct the kids to draw a picture of one of the judges from today's Bible story. Assist kids as they write the key passage, Isaiah 33:22, at the top of their journal page.

SAY • Do you remember our big picture question and answer? *How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.* God sent the judges to rescue His people from their enemies. Many years later, He would send a better Judge—Jesus—to rescue His people from sin once and for all. How can God use you in His plan to tell other people about Jesus?

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the coloring page provided with this session. Pray, thanking God that He sent His Son, Jesus, to break the cycle of sin once and for all. Pray that God would help the kids turn away from sin and trust in Him. Pray that God will also use the kids to spread the gospel of Jesus in your community, city, and throughout the world.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid
- crayons or markers

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.

Journal Page

God Judges His People

Key Passage: Isaiah 33:22

Big Picture Question: How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.

Session 1: The First Judges

Judges 3:7-31

God's people turned from Him to worship idols.

Session 2: Deborah and Barak

Judges 4-5

God's people needed someone to rescue them from their enemies.

Session 3: Gideon

Judges 6-8

God used Gideon's weakness for His glory.

Session 4: Samson

Judges 13-16

God gave Samson power.

Session 5: Ruth and Boaz

Ruth 1-4

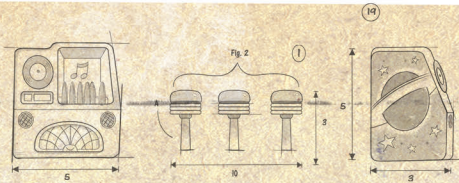
God provided a redeemer for Ruth.

Session 6: Eli and Boy Samuel

1 Samuel 1-3

God called Samuel to share God's plan.

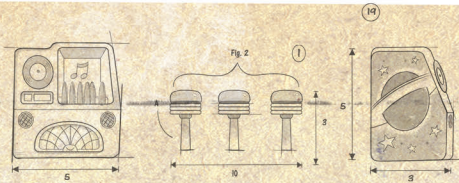




**The LORD is our
Judge, the LORD is
our lawgiver, the
LORD is our King.
He will save us.**

Isaiah 33:22

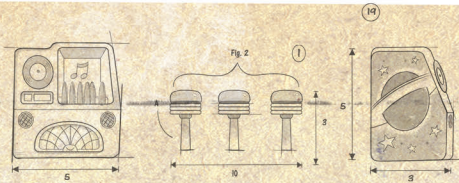




The LORD is our
judge, the LORD is
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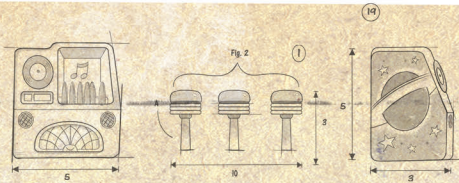




The LORD is our
judge; the LORD is
our lawgiver; the
LORD is our king;
he will save us.

Isaiah 33:22





The LORD is our
judge, the LORD is
our lawgiver, the
LORD is our king; it is
he who will save us.

Isaiah 33:22



God's people
turned from
Him to worship
idols.





Find the Treasure

DOWNLOAD THE
TGP FAMILY APP

INSTRUCTIONS: Make your way to the hidden treasure while avoiding other ships, sharks, and dead ends.



KEY PASSAGE: Isaiah 33:22

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

- How does God accomplish His plan? God uses people for His glory and our good.

BIBLE STORY:

THE FIRST JUDGES

- After Joshua died, the Israelites began to disobey God and worship false gods.
- God disciplined Israel and when they cried out for help, He provided a judge to deliver them.
- Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar were the first judges.

FAMILY DISCUSSION STARTERS:

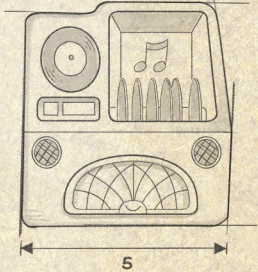
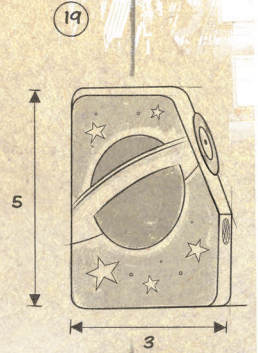
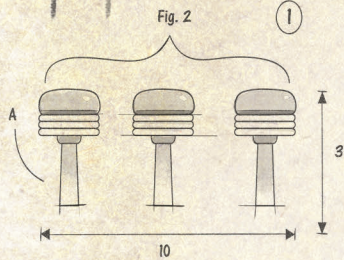
- What sins do you struggle with over and over again?
- What leaders has God blessed us with? How can we support them?

FAMILY ACTIVITY:

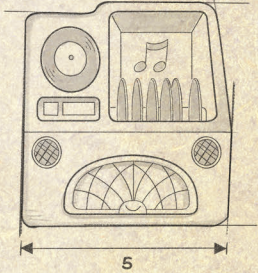
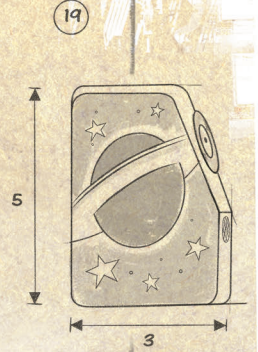
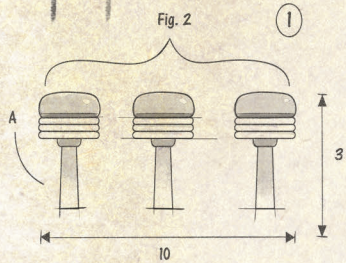
- Play a game of “Follow the Leader” through your neighborhood.
- Go further: Write, decorate, and send thank-you cards to leaders whom God has placed in your life. Consider including a gift card as well.



How does God accomplish His plan?



How does God accomplish His plan?



God uses people for His glory and our good.





God's people forgot about God.



God let Israel's enemies defeat them.



God's people cried out to Him for help.



God sent a judge to help His people.



God gave His people peace.



**Away from
God**



Bondage



**Cried to
God**



**Deliverer
sent**



**Ease in the
land**