



4

Israel Disobeys God

Key Theme

- God alone is to be worshipped.

Key Passages

- Joshua 21:43–45; Judges 2:1–15; Exodus 20:2–6

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Define idolatry.
- Explain the consequences for Israel's idolatry.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will place bookmarks at Joshua 21, Judges 2, and Exodus 20.

Students will put the Memory Verse Strips in order and then practice saying the verse together and/or with a partner.

- Cut paper into strips for each student to mark today's study passages.

- Print and cut out the Memory Verse Strips from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Put complete sets into envelopes or small plastic bags.



Studying God's Word

page 4

The nation of Israel under Joshua's rule continued to conquer the land of Canaan. God's promises had begun to be fulfilled. After Joshua's death, however, the people became idolatrous. Worshipping false gods, they turned their back on God. This angered God. He removed His hand of protection from Israel and the people suffered. God alone is to be worshiped and obeyed.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.

- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Identifying Idols

page 7

Every person fails to obey the command to worship God alone. Students will take time to examine their hearts in an attempt to understand any idols in their lives and look to the hope of the gospel for destroying those idols.

- Student Guides

- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Before you begin to prepare for your lesson this week, please prepare your heart and mind by reading Joshua 23:14–16; Judges 1–3; and Colossians 3:4–6 (paying particular attention to the fact that in verse 5, covetousness is identified as a form of idolatry).

Our last lesson described the event of the miraculous conquest of Jericho. Israel, after that victory, endured the consequences of one man's disobedience when it was defeated at Ai, the next city God commanded it to conquer (Joshua 7). After dealing with the problem of this man's sin, Israel conquered Ai; and the principle that God would bless obedience and withhold blessing from disobedience was firmly demonstrated. The rest of the book of Joshua is the history of that generation's conquest of the land of Canaan, culminating in Joshua's description in chapter 23:14 that all of God's promises of blessing and guidance in the giving of the Promised Land were fulfilled.

Judges chapter 1 gives a summary of the last part of the land's conquest and the failure of Israel to completely cast out the idolatrous inhabitants. Judges 2:1–3 records the Angel of the Lord warning Israel that this failure would have bitter consequences: "they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you." Joshua's generation seemed to take the warning to heart; Judges 2:7 says that the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and of the elders of that generation who outlived him. However, after that generation's death, the people became idolatrous and did not know the Lord nor the work that He had done for Israel (Judges 2:10). Their idolatry took the form of worshipping the gods of the conquered people whom Israel had not cast out in the previous generation. These gods

were the Baals, usually thought to be gods of fertility and prosperity (Judges 2:11).

Israel's quick fall into idolatry may seem far removed from us. In our culture, there is little temptation to actually worship a Baal or to make an idol and bow down to it. The root of the Israelites' idolatry, however, was that instead of trusting and serving the true God, and devoting themselves to His great purposes, they chose to worship gods whose claim to deity lay in their willingness to serve the desires of the people. In this, we are much like the Israelites, and we are warned by Paul in the book of Colossians to "put to death" selfish and impure desires (Colossians 3:5). In this exhortation, we see the common ground of our own sin with the idolatry of Israel: covetousness—selfish, sinful desire for what God has not given. And the Apostle Paul warns that "no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5). If we aren't fighting this sin of covetousness—putting it to death—it's evidence that we may not be a true believer.

The rest of Judges 2 describes the anger of the Lord against Israel's idolatry and disobedience as He delivered them into the hands of the surrounding nations (Judges 2:14). But we also see the undeserved compassion that God exercised in raising up judges to deliver Israel from her enemies again and again (Judges 2:16). Judges 2:11–23 gives a broad, general description of the cycle that history records of Israel during the era of the judges. The recurring pattern included the Israelites turning to idolatry, angering the true God; God bringing consequences against them in the form of oppression by idolatrous nations; the Israelites crying out, "groaning" to God for deliverance from oppression;

God showing compassion on them and providing a deliverer by way of a judge; and finally after regaining deliverance, Israel turning again to covetous idolatry, beginning the cycle anew. Clearly, this is not a highlight of Israel's history. As the book of Judges closes, the Lord gives insight into the Israelites' condition: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Note that the root of the Israelites' disobedience was always their failure to trust that the true God was caring for their best interests. Idolatry—including our bent toward putting pleasure, worldly possessions, and comfort before God—is never a matter of obedience alone. Idolatry reveals a heart that does not have faith and trust in God and all His purposes. Idolatry will put our selfish desires above the one true God. As we read Israel's history, although we see a stream of blessings for obedience and consequences for disobedience, the root issue is always faith. Would Israel trust that the true God is faithful to His promises and that His promises are the true prosperity of His people? Will we trust that the true God is faithful to His promises and that His promises are the true prosperity of His people? Whenever disobedience occurs, the answer to this question is no—whether we are talking of Israel or ourselves.

Luke 18:18–24—the account of the rich young ruler and Jesus—gives us a New Testament illustration of the struggle we often encounter between loyalty toward God and love for the world. Like the rich young

ruler, we want the eternal life (and all the blessings) that God provides through Christ's sacrifice, and yet we often have conflicting desires to hold onto the immediate blessings that we can obtain in this life. God does not demand of His followers that they avoid all worldly blessings, but He clearly commands them to value Christ and a life honoring Him to the extent that worldly blessings have no hold on our hearts. Our failure to be able to "let go" of worldly desires may keep us from Him (Mark 8:34–38). What our hearts trust and value will ultimately lead us to obey or disobey our Lord.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Holy and just Lord, you are gracious and so merciful. As I study the idolatry of the Israelites, help me to examine my own heart. Where there is any hint of something or someone in my life that comes before you, reveal it. In your mercy forgive me. And by the power of your Holy Spirit, help me get my relationship with you right, for you are all that matters. Help me to pass on the truth of this lesson to the children in my class. It is so easy to be entrapped by the things of this world. Give them the strength and discernment to avoid the sin of idolatry. Continue to open their eyes as we study your Word. I pray that each one of them would come to know you as the one true God of their life.



COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will mark their Bibles at Joshua 21, Judges 2, and Exodus 20 with strips of paper.
- They will put the Memory Verse Strips in order and recite the verse together and/or to each other. They may work individually or in teams.

This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the Memory Verse. We have provided a template on the Resource DVD-ROM you can use to make Memory Verse Strips to be put in order each week. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.



Review

Let's stop and think about where we are in the big picture of history in our lessons.

Refer to the Seven C's of History Time Line. Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land in 1452 BC. The promise of the land was given to Abraham around 1900 BC. Noah was aboard the Ark in 2349 BC, and Adam was created about 4000 BC.

So, we stand at about 2,500 years after the creation of the universe. God has brought His chosen people into the land of Canaan after 40 years of discipline, and this is a major shift in the history of the Bible. The rest of the Old Testament from this point

on is focused on the events related to the nation of Israel.

The Promised Land was divided by Joshua and given to the tribes of Israel. You can read about those details in the book of Joshua, and there is probably a map in your study notes or in the back of your Bible that shows the distribution of the land. God, through Moses and Joshua, had told the Israelites to go into the land and utterly destroy all of the people and all of their idols. Over eight years, the people battled the inhabitants of the land and claimed what God had given to them.



➤ Write on the board, "What idols do you worship?"



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Joshua 21:43–45

With that Introduction, let's read Joshua 21:43–45 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What had the Lord given to Israel? *Joshua 21:43. All the land that He had sworn to give them.*
- ? How much of God's promise of a land was fulfilled? *The entire promise*

- ? **What does verse 44 go on to tell us?** *The people had rest; peace; their enemies had been taken.*
- ? **How about verse 45? What does it say about the Lord?** *The Lord had been faithful to Israel. All He had promised had come to pass.*
- ? **How well did Israel's enemies do in the battles?** *No one was able to stand against God's people as He led them in battle.*

Discover the Truth

The Israelites had the victory; they had peace. They were dwelling in the Promised Land.

Do you think God still required obedience from them? Or could they just relax now that the promise had been fulfilled? *God still demanded His people honor Him with complete obedience.*

God still desired obedience. That did not change, and it will never change. God demands and deserves the obedience of His people!

God was faithful to fulfill all of His promises to the people of Israel. The Israelites, on the other hand, did not completely obey. In Judges 1, we learn that the inhabitants of the land were not completely driven out by the people. This failure to obey set a trap that would later spring on their descendants.



FAITHFUL

READ THE WORD

At the end of Joshua's life, he delivered an address to the Israelites, exhorting them to obey God and warning them that if they turned to the idols of the Canaanites, God would judge them. The people made a covenant at Shechem to serve God faithfully. These things are recorded in Joshua 23–24 where we also read of Joshua's death at 110 years old.

The end of Joshua overlaps with the book of Judges. We are going to read Judges 2:1–15 which gives us a good summary of the events of the end of the campaign to take the Promised Land. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Judges 2:1–15

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who is the Angel of the Lord mentioned in the passage?** *This must be another pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus coming to deliver a message to the Israelites.*
- ? **What makes it clear that this is not a prophet delivering a message on God's behalf?** *There is no "Thus says the Lord" introducing the words, but it is delivered in first person. Compare to Joshua 24:2 where Joshua is speaking on behalf of God.*
- ? **What did the Angel of the Lord communicate to the people?** *He told them that because they had not obeyed Him and completely wiped out the pagans who inhabited the land that the idols and people would become a snare to them and a thorn in their sides.*

Idol: anything that receives your affection and attention above God.

- ? **How did the people respond to this message?** *They wept and cried out in response to the message.*
- ? **How long did the people continue to follow God?** *All the days of Joshua and the elders who served with Joshua and saw what God had done in the wilderness years.*
- ? **How old was Joshua when he died?** *Judges 2:8. 110 years old.*
- ? **What happened when that generation had died?** *The next generation did not know the Lord or the miracles He had done for Israel.*
- ? **What happened after the elders died?** *The Israelites started worshipping the Baals and the Ashtoreths and forsook the right worship of God. They also followed other gods, bowing down to them and serving them instead of God.*
- ? **What is an idol anyway?** *Allow discussion.*

An idol is anything that we worship instead of God. Or we could say that it is anything that receives more affection or attention in our lives than God does.

- ? **What does the Bible mean when it uses the terms Baals and Ashtoreths?** *Allow discussion.*

Baals refers to false Canaanite gods. The Ashtoreths were Canaanite goddesses. The Israelites had conquered many nations. Those nations did not know the true God. They worshipped many false gods. And this verse tells us that Israel began to worship these gods as well. They were not worshipping God alone. They were worshipping the false gods of the people all around them.

- ? **How did God respond to their idolatry?** *God was very angry with them and gave them over to their enemies, causing them to be taken over by the surrounding nations.*

Discover the Truth

Just as God had said, the Israelites had failed to drive out the pagans and their worship practices and these idols and practices led the people astray. Not unlike the golden calf that was worshipped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the Israelites abandoned God and served a false God.

- ? **Where do we find a direct command given to the Israelites to avoid worshipping idols?** *Exodus 20 in the Ten Commandments has the direct prohibition. Have someone read Exodus 20:2–6.*

God called the Israelites to worship Him alone and not to worship anything else. Just as He had promised here, God, being jealous for the worship of His people, disciplined those who rebelled.

The Baals and Ashtoreths worshipped by the Israelites are the images of the Canaanite fertility god and goddess. The statues and practices associated with the worship involved sexual perversions and human sacrifices—all things that are abominations to God.

Exodus 20:2–6

Now, I doubt that any of you have a little carved image on your nightstand that you pray to every night and morning, but we are going to try to define idolatry from a biblical perspective so that we can each understand the idolatry that may be in our own hearts.



Identifying Idols

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Have the students find the Identifying Idols activity in their Student Guides.

In your Student Guide you will find the Identifying Idols activity. Take a few minutes to look through these passages of Scripture and understand what the Bible has to say about idolatry. Do this activity on your own, as it will ask you to examine your own heart in light of our lesson. *Make yourself available to answer questions if any arise.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Review the answers to the activity as time allows.

1. When you think of idolatry, what comes to mind? *Most will think of carved images or physical objects that represent some god or goddess.*
2. What do Ephesians 5:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 tell us about idolaters? *Idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.*
3. What interesting connection regarding idolatry is made in Colossians 3:5–7? *Covetousness is a form of idolatry—money or wealth is set above God.*

4. Read Luke 18:18–24. In light of Colossians 3:5, what was the idol that this man was serving above God? *He was more interested in keeping his possessions than following God. His affection and attention was focused on his wealth, not God. Wealth had become his idol and he worshipped it rather than God.*

5. Is it possible to make an idol in your mind, without actually carving a piece of wood, and giving your affection and attention to it (Ezekiel 14:3–6)? *Yes, and we do it all of the time. We put our trust in and give our affection to “gods” that we make up in our hearts/minds.*

The Israelites did not trust God, but put their trust in false gods that had no real power to satisfy their demands. They gave their affection and attention to idols and failed to trust God and to serve Him as foremost in their lives.

Sports, money, music, hobbies, friends, food, exercise, church activities, and many other things can become idols in our hearts.

- ? What hope do you have of destroying the idols that are present in your heart? *It is only in the power of the gospel that we can hope to destroy the idols in our hearts and serve God exclusively. Because we have the Holy Spirit living in us to sanctify us and because Christ has freed us from our slavery to sin, we can overcome our sin and place our full trust in God in every situation. Encourage the students to read Romans 5:18–6:23 or read it to the class if time allows.*





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we think about the disobedience of the Israelites, we might be tempted to think that we would never make the same mistake as them. They had seen God do miracles and knew they were to obey God and all that He commanded, but they failed to destroy all of the idols and those who worshipped them. This failure set a trap, and it was the next generation who stepped into the trap.

The consequences of their disobedience led the next generation to turn to worshipping the false gods of the Canaanites. As a result, God was angered and He disciplined the Israelites by turning them over to be plundered and ruled by pagan nations. God had delivered to them what they deserved for their disobedience.

Not unlike the Israelites, we are descendants of Adam and our sinful nature draws us to worship things other than God. We know the truth about God, but we forget those things and place our trust in idols in our hearts. Even though we don't carve an image, we worship an idol nonetheless.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? Where do we see worship of physical idols in the world today and how could we use that as an opportunity to share the gospel? *Hindus, Buddhists, modern pagans, Wiccans, many tribal religions that make idols, and those who pray to statues of saints all worship idols. We can bring the gospel to these people and help them see the uselessness of these idols in cleansing them from their sin. They need the Savior and to worship the only true God.*

- ? **Where do we see the worship of idols of the heart in our culture, and why don't they ever satisfy the worshippers?** *Many people worship money, sports, technology, entertainment, social status and relationships, children, spouses, celebrities, self, and a host of other things that replace God. The message of the gospel and true worship of God are the only things that will truly satisfy the souls of mankind.*
- ? **In what ways are we just like the Israelites?** *As humans, we share a sin nature and we tend to seek to satisfy our own selfish desires rather than worshipping God. We forget the promises of God and turn to worthless things. We must repent and trust God when we do so.*
- ? **What are some strategies that we can use to help keep ourselves from falling into worshipping idols?** *Memorizing Scripture, encouraging one another, meditating on God's Word, preaching the gospel to ourselves, prayerfully auditing our own desires and actions, etc.*
- ? **What advantage do we have over the Israelites in overcoming our sinful idolatry?** *We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us (those who are in Christ) and the knowledge of what Christ has done for us through His life, death, and Resurrection. We can trust in what has been accomplished for us.*



MEMORY VERSE

Joshua 1:8–9 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for lessons we can learn from what is revealed in Scripture.
- Praise God for offering forgiveness of our idolatry through Christ.
- Ask God to examine us and reveal any idols in our hearts.

