

OPEN YOUR BIBLE

READING THE BIBLE BETTER – BIBLE GENRES





WELCOME

First things first, thank you for choosing to be part of a Small Group. Deciding to get in a circle with others is an investment in your own growth and a decision to prioritize community. It isn't always easy; it takes time, energy, dedication, prayer and vulnerability, but it is one of the best things you can do to grow closer to Jesus and influence others. We love what God does in people's lives when they get together in circles to discover who He is and who He has made us to be. Our prayer is that He will work in you and through you in this study to transform you and the world around you.

OPEN YOUR BIBLE

OPEN YOUR BIBLE is a seven-week Small Group Series designed to help us better read, understand and apply the Bible to our lives. Our plan is to make this a yearly series that will focus on specific ways that we can Read the Bible Better. This series is meant to complement our sermon series in the Book of Galatians. While the sermon series is taking a “telephoto” look at one book of the Bible, this series is meant to take a “wide-angle” approach looking at the Bible in a broader context. In this Small Group series, our focus will be on learning about the different literary styles or genres of the Bible. Understanding the different kinds of literature in the Bible will help us to better see what God’s word is communicating and to better apply it to our lives. Our first lesson will look at the Bible as a whole; each lesson thereafter will focus in on one specific Bible Genre. As we learn about the styles and characteristics of different parts of the Bible, our hope is that we will develop a greater comfort with reading the Bible and a greater ability to interpret and apply it our lives.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

Each week's session is designed to guide your group through a Bible Study that will encourage you to understand God's word more deeply and apply it more fully. Every week as we study a Bible Genre together we will engage with passages that exemplify that type of literature and learn how to better read and understand it.

Each lesson has the following elements:

TOPIC and BOTTOM LINE

Every lesson will be built around the specific Bible Genre we'll be examining that week. We're also including a BOTTOM LINE which captures a main idea of the week's lesson.

CONSIDER THIS

CONSIDER THIS begins with your own life experiences and is designed help you and your

group begin to connect with the week's topic and create an interest in going deeper.

GENRE OVERVIEW

The GENRE OVERVIEW is designed to provide a brief overview of the traits and characteristics of genre we'll be examining. This section will provide information about the style, structure and purpose of the genre we're covering. It will also provide guidelines for how to best approach the genre to get a true understanding. Each Genre Overview will be accompanied by a brief Video Teaching highlighting one aspect of that week's Bible Genre.

OPEN THE WORD

Every week, you and your group will OPEN THE WORD together. This is the heart of every study. The main objective of this time together will be to explore passages of scripture that will help you dig into the type of Bible Literature that you are

exploring that week. Each week we'll include a number of passages that will allow you to get a feel for the unique characteristics and style of the genre we're exploring. Sharing what you see and think together will increase your insight into the scripture and prepare you and your group to understand and apply the meaning of the passage together.

KNOW THE WORD

KNOW THE WORD will help you and your group to explore the content from the passages you examined more deeply by focusing in on some central ideas from the scripture passages and providing points for discussion.

LIVE THE WORD

God's word is not to be known in just an intellectual context; it is to be known experientially - it is to be lived. LIVE THE WORD is designed to challenge your group to think about how to apply what you have learned in meaningful ways to your everyday lives.

FOR NEXT WEEK

Open Your Bible provides your Small Group with the opportunity to explore a good deal of scripture together each week. We want to make sure that your group has time to dig into the word together in discussion. To maximize your discussion time, we are asking that each member of the group take responsibility for one section of scripture FOR NEXT WEEK. Each week between meetings, every Small Group member will have the opportunity to contribute to the following week's discussion by taking just a little time between Small Group meetings to 1) read the Genre Overview for the upcoming week, and 2) examine a small passage of scripture and answer a few questions.

...the will of God,
...s, and are faithful
...from God our Father

...and Father of our Lord
...blessed us in Christ with
...es, *even as he chose us in
...that we should be holy and
...red us for adoption to himself
...to the purpose of his will, *to the
...he has blessed us in the Beloved,
...h his blood, the forgiveness of our
...of his grace, *which he lavished upon
...making known to us the mystery of his
...which he set forth in Christ *as a plan
...for all things in him, things in heaven and

...and an inheritance, having been predestined
...of him who works all things according to the
...that we who were the first to hope in Christ might
... glory *In him you also, when you heard the word
...of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed
... Holy Spirit, *who is the guarantee of our inheritance
...possession of it, to the praise of his glory,
... because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus
...ward all the saints, *I do not cease to give thanks for you,
... in my prayers, *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
... you, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation
... what is the hope to which he has called you, what
... most inheritance in the saints, *and what is the
... power toward us who believe, according
... *that he worked in Christ when he
... at his right hand in the heavenly



EPHESIANS 1:7

Lesson Topics

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Week-1 The Bible

The Story of God, the Story of Us

CONSIDER THIS

What are some things you believe about the Bible?
Why do you believe these things?

Without using a Bible or a phone/device, work
together to try to name all 66 books of the Bible.

GENRE OVERVIEW

Open your time together by watching this week's
video message, reading the Genre Overview and
discussing what stood out to you about the what
you heard and read.

The Bible is not one book, it is a collection of 66
books (63 if you consider that Samuel, Kings and
Chronicles are not split in the Hebrew Bible). Sixty-six
books written over the course of about 1500 years
that tell one story – the story of God's rescue of His
people. This book is 100% divine and 100% human;

it was written by ordinary men and women inspired by the Holy Spirit to create God's word to all people.

What we call the Bible consists of two collections of books commonly known as the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, records the story and thought of the Jewish people, through whom God brought forth Jesus the Messiah. The New Testament, or Greek Bible, records the Ministry of Jesus and the foundation of the church. The two collections were separated by a period of a little over 400 years. While both Jews and Christians acknowledge the divine nature of the Hebrew Bible, only Christians acknowledge this of the New Testament.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE.

- It is the very word of God to mankind.
- It is without error in all that it teaches.
- It has two natures – divine and human.
- It is clear in its teaching on salvation.
- It does not and cannot contradict or conflict with science (though our understanding of either the Bible or the natural world may be in error).

HERE ARE SOME THINGS WE KNOW ABOUT THE BIBLE

- It has been preserved as it was originally written.
- It is historically accurate – it has never been proven wrong in any historical detail.
- It is archeologically accurate - it has consistently been proven true by archeological evidence and has never been refuted by it.
- It has never been shown to contradict with science.
- All the New Testament accounts were written or informed by eyewitnesses before the close of the first century AD.

OPEN THE WORD

We have selected one passage about God's word from each of the genres we'll be studying throughout this series. Divide your group into pairs and have each pair read one or two of the passages below to answer this question:

What does the passage tell you about the Bible? _____

OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

WISDOM LITERATURE

PROVERBS 30:5, 6

Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
⁶ Do not add to his words,
lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

PROPHETIC LITERATURE**ISAIAH 55:10, 11**

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
 and do not return there but water the earth,
 making it bring forth and sprout,
 giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
 it shall not return to me empty,
 but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
 and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

THE GOSPELS**LUKE 4:16-21**

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as
 was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he
 stood up to read.¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to
 him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,
¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
 because he has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
 and recovering of sight to the blind,
 to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat
 down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.
²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled
 in your hearing.”

THE EPISTLES**HEBREWS 4:12, 13**

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged
 sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of
 marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

REVELATION 21:5, 6

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also, he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

KNOW THE WORD

1. What did you learn about the Bible from the passage(s) you read?

2. In the passage from Deuteronomy, what connection do you see between verse 6 and verses 7-9? _____

3. What does the passage from Luke tell you about the Bible as a whole? How does this passage connect to the passages from Proverbs and Isaiah? _____

4. What encouragement can we take from the passage from Hebrews? What caution should we take from it? _____

5. What comfort can we take from the passage in Revelation? Look at the context of this verse to understand "when" it is being said.

LIVE THE WORD

1. Is the Bible God's word? What does this mean? _____

2. When asked, "How do you know the Bible is the word of God?" many Christians will cite 2 Timothy 3:16 as proof. Is this a good approach to defending the Bible as God's word? Why or why not?

3. The passage we read in Proverbs talks about God's word proving true. Have you ever felt like God's word wasn't proving true in your life? How did you reconcile that? What insight might verse 7 provide when we face this confusion? _____

4. Have you experienced in your life what the author of Hebrews discussed in his letter? _____

5. What encouragement should we take from the passage we read in Revelation? How can this passage help us to view and approach our lives differently? _____

6. What are you currently reading/studying in the Bible? If nothing, share what keeps you from reading or studying. Consider committing as a group to reading one chapter of Galatians every day throughout this study. _____

FOR NEXT WEEK

1. Read the **GENRE OVERVIEW** for next week's lesson on Old Testament Narrative. Highlight, underline or note anything that stands out to you.

2. Look at the **OPEN THE WORD** for Week 2. Every member of the Group should read and answer the questions for Passage #1 and Passages #2-5 should be divided among the group members.



A Crooked Line Straight to Jesus

CONSIDER THIS

They say hindsight is 20/20. Think of something that you thought was a good idea at the time, but that turned out to be not such a great idea in the end. What didn't you see? _____

Think also of something that you thought wasn't so good that, looking back, turned out to be a huge blessing. What didn't you see? _____

GENRE OVERVIEW

Open your time together by watching this week's video message and discussing what stood out to you about the Genre Overview.

Over 40% of the Old Testament is made up of narrative – Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah,

Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Jonah and Haggai are written entirely or partially in a narrative style. Old Testament narratives are written as history and should be read and understood as historical accounts. They are not allegories or moral stories. In fact, it is very important that readers avoid assuming that the stories told in these narratives are meant to serve as moral examples – often it is just the opposite. Old Testament Narratives can and should be understood on three levels.

1. Redemptive History – the universal story of God, His people and His plan of salvation.
2. National History – the story of Israel, God’s chosen people who would bring forth the Messiah.
3. Individual Histories – the parts that make up the whole; specific stories about specific characters.

The hero of the Old Testament Narratives is God; the villain is Satan, as manifest in the evil powers of the world. Throughout the narratives, individual men and women are called by God to play a part in the larger story of redemption that He is telling. These men and women are sometimes heroic, but they also frequently act in very unheroic and even despicable ways. The individual characters of the stories are depicted “warts and all,” and their examples just as often serve as examples of what not to do.

Old Testament narratives are always told by an unnamed narrator who rarely adds commentary or provides physical descriptions. The narrator remains objective, telling the story in a blunt, matter-of-fact manner. Old Testament narrative was written to be

heard more than it was to be read, and so repetition of words, phrases and plot cycles were primary tools to help the audience remember key ideas and concepts. When things are repeated, you can be confident that it is important.

THE PROGRESSION OF REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

The Creation, Fall, Flood and Separation of the Nations: Genesis 1 – 10

The Patriarchs – Abraham to Joseph: Genesis 11 – 50 and Job

The Exodus: Exodus – Deuteronomy

The Conquest of the Land: Joshua – Ruth

The United Kingdom: 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles

The Divided Kingdom: 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Jonah and Haggai

The Exile from the Land: Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and Esther

The Return to the Land: Nehemiah, Ezra and Haggai

OPEN THE WORD

Read Genesis 37:2-28 together and discuss your answers to the questions, then have each group member share a summary and their thoughts on what they read in their assigned passages.

#1 - GENESIS 37:2-28

² These are the generations of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

⁹ Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.

¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley

of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. ¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"

¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." ¹⁷ And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life."

²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

1. What happened? To whom? _____

2. What does it tell you about how God works in our lives? _____

3. What things stand out to you about this passage? _____

4. Is there anything that bothers you about what you read? _____

#2 - GENESIS 39:1-32

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me."

⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because

you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

¹¹ But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹² she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. ¹³ And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵ And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." ¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house."

¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled.

²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.

²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

1. What happened? To whom? _____

2. What does it tell you about how God works in our lives? _____

3. What things stand out to you about this passage? _____

4. Is there anything that bothers you about what you read? _____

#3 - GENESIS 41:14-36

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." ¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. ¹⁸ Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. ¹⁹ Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows, ²¹ but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the beginning. Then I awoke. ²² I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good. ²³ Seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them, ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed

up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.” ²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, ³¹ and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. ³² And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. ³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. ³⁵ And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. ³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

1. What happened? To whom? _____

2. What does it tell you about how God works in our lives? _____

3. What things stand out to you about this passage? _____

4. Is there anything that bothers you about what you read? _____

#4 - GENESIS 42:1-25

When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" ² And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." ³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. ⁵ Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." ⁸ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. ⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land."

¹⁰ They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food.

¹¹ We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies."

¹² He said to them, "No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see." ¹³ And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." ¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you. You are spies. ¹⁵ By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."¹⁷ And he put them all together in custody for three days. ¹⁸ On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God:¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households,²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so. ²¹ Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us." ²² And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." ²³ They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them.²⁴ Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵ And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

1. What happened? To whom? _____

2. What does it tell you about how God works in our lives? _____

3. What things stand out to you about this passage? _____

4. Is there anything that bothers you about what you read? _____

#5 GENESIS 49:33 AND 50:14-26

³³ When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

¹⁴ After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little

ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. ²³ And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. ²⁴ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." ²⁵ Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." ²⁶ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

1. What happened? To whom? _____

2. What does it tell you about how God works in our lives? _____

3. What things stand out to you about this passage? _____

4. Is there anything that bothers you about what you read? _____

KNOW THE WORD

1. Read Genesis 35:22-26. What insight does this give you into the family dynamic at the root of our story? What does it tell you about who God uses? _____

2. Consider Jacob and Joseph in passage #1 (Genesis 37). What character flaws do you see in each? _____

3. In Genesis 39 (passage #2) what do we learn about Joseph's character? What do we learn about how God blesses us for good character? _____

4. Does Genesis 41 (passage #3) redeem what happened to Joseph? How do you see God at work? _____

5. What do we learn in Genesis 42 (passage #4) about Joseph's dreams from the first chapter? Is there anything in this chapter that foreshadows the greater story God is telling? _____

6. Who is the hero of Genesis 49 and 50 (passage #5)?

What perspective do these passages give us about the grand scheme of Biblical narrative? _____

LIVE THE WORD

1. Throughout the story of Joseph, we see God working through the sinful character, broken decisions and tragic circumstances of the characters of the narrative. As you look back on your life how have you seen God work through these same aspects of your story?

2. It is very easy for us to see what God was doing in the story of Joseph. It was probably not so easy for Joseph. How do you think Joseph was able to remain faithful in all that happened to him? What kept him from bitterness and anger? _____

3. How do you think Joseph was able to forgive his brothers? Is there anyone that you need to forgive? How might Joseph's story help you move towards that? _____

4. Look at your own story and think about God as the hero. What hope does the passing of Jacob and Joseph from the story give you? _____

FOR NEXT WEEK

1. Read the GENRE OVERVIEW for next week’s lesson on Wisdom Literature. Highlight, underline or note anything that stands out to you.

2. Look at the OPEN THE WORD for Week 3. Divide the readings from Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes among the group. Each member of the group should read their passage(s) and answer the questions.



Living Well in the Big and the Small

CONSIDER THIS

What is the best piece of advice you have ever been given? Who gave it and what difference did it make for you? _____

Who is the wisest person you know? What makes them wise? _____

GENRE OVERVIEW

Open your time together by watching this week's video message and discussing what stood out to you about the Genre Overview.

The term "Wisdom Literature" acts as a large umbrella covering a wide scope of writings found in the Bible. It includes prayers, songs, proverbs, stories, romance, philosophy and lament. Some of these works deal with great universal questions of meaning and purpose and why bad things happen to

good people; others are concerned with matters as mundane as how to deal with an intrusive neighbor, what we can learn from ants or how to respond when your spouse isn't in the mood. This collection of literature made up of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations and Job contain powerful insights into every facet of life expressed in some of the most beautiful and creative literature ever composed.

What unites this diverse collection of works is their purpose: to instruct the people of God in how to live well and how to live honestly. When we understand what these books are communicating and apply their wisdom to our lives, we will live better. We will learn how respond to difficulties with both joy and wisdom. We will learn how to better navigate relationships and handle conflict. We will learn what it looks like to be honest with God about our frustrations, doubts and anger. We will learn how to pray. How to grieve. How to love. How to live. How to worship.

The key is learning how to receive the wisdom offered and apply it to our lives. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Job deals with what might be the most difficult question in life – why do really bad things happen to really good people? Job may be the oldest written story in the world. It is both historical narrative and wisdom literature. It is about a righteous man who loses everything and, quite naturally, has questions he wants ask God. As he processes what has happened to him, he is joined by three friends who offer “comfort” in the form of their perspective of what has happened and why. The most important thing to keep in mind when reading Job is that it is primarily written from the human perspective of a deeply tragic circumstance. It covers the full range of human responses to and understandings of suffering, many of which are not beneficial or true. Job should be read from the perspective of a journey through suffering, not as a “how to handle suffering manual.”

Psalms is a collection of prayers, songs and hymns. It is poetry and, as such, it is highly symbolic and deeply emotional. The psalms express the greatest joys, deepest laments, rawest sorrow and purest worship of the human experience through the symbolic and creative language of poetry. Psalms are experiential and emotive; to interpret them literally is often to interpret them symbolically, since they are expressed in symbolic language. Psalms communicate the heart and the subjective experience of God more than they express objective truths or realities.

Proverbs seek to capture truths about life and living well. The focus of Proverbs is gathering wisdom and applying it. It is important to remember that proverbs are principles, not promises; they supply general truths about how to live well but are not ironclad promises that apply to each individual. Proverbs often make use of parallels and contrasts to convey the truths they are trying to capture.

Ecclesiastes and Lamentations deal with the human experience of despair and disillusionment. They are stark and raw and bleak and reflect life as we sometimes experience it. They express human perspectives rooted in time and temporary experience. These books do not necessarily communicate the divine perspective, but they do convey eternal truths.

Song of Solomon captures the beautiful mess of romantic relationships. Marriage is the fullest human expression of the image of God and this book captures it in all its beauty and all its mess. It is both a celebration of romance and a guide to pursuing romance in a godly manner.

OPEN THE WORD

Share your thoughts and observations about the passages you read.

JOB

JOB 4:1-11 (NLT)

Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied to Job:

² "Will you be patient and let me say a word?

For who could keep from speaking out?

³ "In the past you have encouraged many people;
you have strengthened those who were weak.

⁴ Your words have supported those who were falling;
you encouraged those with shaky knees.

⁵ But now when trouble strikes, you lose heart.
You are terrified when it touches you.

⁶ Doesn't your reverence for God give you confidence?
Doesn't your life of integrity give you hope?

⁷ "Stop and think! Do the innocent die?
When have the upright been destroyed?

⁸ My experience shows that those who plant trouble
and cultivate evil will harvest the same.

⁹ A breath from God destroys them.
They vanish in a blast of his anger.

¹⁰ The lion roars and the wildcat snarls,
but the teeth of strong lions will be broken.

¹¹ The fierce lion will starve for lack of prey,
and the cubs of the lioness will be scattered

1. What is the central message of this passage? _____

2. What is true about it? _____

3. What is maybe not so true? _____

PSALMS

PSALM 1

Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

1. What is the central message of this passage? _____

2. What is true about it? _____

3. What is maybe not so true? _____

PROVERBS

PROVERBS 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

PROVERBS 11:8, 9

The righteous is delivered from trouble,
and the wicked walks into it instead.

⁹ With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor,
but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.

PROVERBS 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

PROVERBS 26:4, 5

Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.

⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.

1. What is the central message of these passages? _____

2. What is true about them? _____

3. What is maybe not so true? _____

ECCLESIASTES

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11 (NLT)

These are the words of the Teacher, King David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem.

² "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!" ³ What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? ⁴ Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. ⁶ The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles. ⁷ Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea. ⁸ Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. ⁹ History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. ¹⁰ Sometimes people say, "Here is something new!" But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. ¹¹ We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

1. What is the central message of this passage? _____

2. What is true about it? _____

3. What is maybe not so true? _____

KNOW THE WORD

1. Share with each other about the passages you read. What are the central ideas that are being communicated? (Note: For now, stick to what the text says and not your understanding of it.) _____

2. Does the message of Eliphaz in Job represent a biblical understanding of suffering? Why or why not? If not, how do you explain or make sense of this passage? (see Job 42:7) _____

3. How does the framework of “principles, not promises” help you understand the readings in Psalms and Proverbs? What is each expressing? What would be the danger in understanding each of them as promises? _____

4. How are the apparently contradictory ideas of Proverbs 26:4, 5 both true? In what sense can each of these two statements be true? _____

5. What do you make of the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes? Is his perspective biblical? If so, in what sense? _____

6. Read 1 Kings 11:9-13. Does this passage give you any insight into what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes? _____

LIVE THE WORD

1. In what sense are ideas and perspective of these passages true? How have you seen these statements at work in the world? _____

2. Consider the context of Job and what had happened to Job. How does Eliphaz’s response to Job demonstrate a lack of wisdom? What can we learn from the way he responds to Job? _____

3. Look at the principles from the Psalm and each of the Proverbs. How can each be applied to our lives? _____

4. Is Solomon correct? Is there nothing new under the sun? Give examples that support your perspective. _____

FOR NEXT WEEK

1. Read the **GENRE OVERVIEW** for next week’s lesson on The Prophets. Highlight, underline or note anything that stands out to you.

2. Look at the **OPEN THE WORD** for Week 4. Divide the readings from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Zephaniah among the group. Each member of the group should read their passage(s) and answer the questions.



Week-4 The Prophets

Everything God Promises, He Does

CONSIDER THIS

Have you or someone you know ever been to a psychic? How was the experience? _____

Have you ever given sound advice only to have it ignored? What happened? How did you respond to the outcome? _____

GENRE OVERVIEW

Open your time together by watching this week's video message and discussing what stood out to you about the Genre Overview.

A Prophet is someone who speaks the words of God for the people. In this sense, the words and activities of prophets are a far broader presence in the Bible than what is recorded in Prophetic literature. The words of prophets such as Melchizedek, Moses,

Samuel, Elijah and Elisha are recorded in Old Testament but the writings that contain their activities and prophecies are not considered prophetic literature. Prophetic work also continued into the New Testament period through John the Baptist – the last Old Testament Prophet – and in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, but these also are not works of prophetic literature. Prophetic Literature as a form developed during the period of the United and Divided Israelite Kingdoms. Although prophecies and prophets are present in earlier works of the Old Testament, prophecy emerged as its own literary form during the Kingdom Period. The prophetic books contain not narrative, but specific prophecies concerning Israel's relationship with God, the future of the nation and its enemies, and the coming of the Messiah.

Prophetic literature is predominantly written as poetry although some, such as Jonah and parts of Jeremiah and Hosea, are written in narrative form. Most of the prophecies concern the future of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah and that of their enemies. God's people were constantly following after other gods and ignoring His laws and commandments. The prophets were warning and reminding them that this straying would eventually cause them to be conquered by their enemies and to be removed from the land promised to them through Moses. Woven throughout these prophecies about the judgment which would come upon both Israel and her enemies, were God's promises. He promised to never abandon them even in the midst of judgment, to restore them back to the land at the appointed time and to send a Savior who would fulfill the promises made to Abraham and his descendants. Each and every one of these prophecies has been fulfilled.

The Old Testament Prophetic Books are generally divided into two categories, the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. These titles do not indicate the significance of the prophets so much as the volume of their writings. The Major Prophetic books consist of the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations,

Ezekiel and Daniel. The Minor Prophetic books are shorter but more numerous, consisting of the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

OPEN THE WORD

Share your thoughts and observations about the passages you read.

ISAIAH 53:1-3

¹ Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

1. What is this passage about? _____

2. Who is the prophecy for? _____

3. What stands out to you in this passage? _____

JEREMIAH 11:9-13

⁹ Then the LORD said to me, “There is a conspiracy among the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem. ¹⁰ They have returned to the sins of their ancestors, who refused to listen to my words. They have followed other gods to serve them. Both Israel and Judah have broken the covenant I made with their ancestors. ¹¹ Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them. ¹² The towns of Judah and the people of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they will not help them at all when disaster strikes. ¹³ You, Judah, have as many gods as you have towns; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.’

1. What is this passage about? _____

2. Who is the prophecy for? _____

3. What stands out to you in this passage? _____

¹ The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash[a] king of Israel:

² When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD."

³ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵ In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel."

⁶ Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means "not loved"), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them.

⁷ Yet I will show love to Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the LORD their God, will save them."

⁸ After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. ⁹ Then the LORD said, "Call him Lo-Ammi (which means "not my people"), for you are not my people, and I am not your God.[b]

¹⁰ "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'children of the living God.'

¹¹ The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.

1. What is this passage about? _____

2. Who is the prophecy for? _____

3. What stands out to you in this passage? _____

ZEPHANIAH 3:17-20

The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.”

18 “I will remove from you
all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals,
which is a burden and reproach for you.

19 At that time I will deal
with all who oppressed you.

I will rescue the lame;
I will gather the exiles.

I will give them praise and honor
in every land where they have suffered shame.

20 At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you home.

I will give you honor and praise
among all the peoples of the earth
when I restore your fortunes
before your very eyes says the lord.

1. What is this passage about? _____

2. Who is the prophecy for? _____

3. What stands out to you in this passage? _____

KNOW THE WORD

1 What are some things that stand out to you about what you have discussed? What are some takeaways? _____

2. Do you notice any differences between the writings of these four prophets? Any similarities? _____

3. Compare and contrast the passages from Zephaniah and Jeremiah specifically. How do you reconcile a God who said both of these things? _____

4. What do you make of God's command to Hosea? What was God trying to say to Israel and to Hosea? _____

5. How did you approach your interpretation of the prophets differently than Old Testament Narrative or Wisdom Literature? Why? _____

LIVE THE WORD

1. What do these passages tell us about God? What specific attributes do each of these passages illuminate? _____

2. Does God get frustrated? Why or why not? Have you ever felt frustrated with how the world responds to God? With how the church responds to God? What frustrates you? What can we learn from these passages? _____

3. Identify one promise or warning in each of these passages. Are these promises and warnings for us? Why or why not? If so, who are they for and why? If they are not for us, in what ways can we appropriately apply them to our lives? _____

FOR NEXT WEEK

1. Read the **GENRE OVERVIEW** for next week's lesson on The Gospels. Highlight, underline or note anything that stands out to you.

2. Look at the **OPEN THE WORD** for Week 5. Every member of the group should read the four gospel accounts in parallel and note similarities and differences.



Week-5 The Gospels

Four Books, One Story

CONSIDER THIS

What is the best biography you have ever read/seen?
What makes it your favorite? _____

What is the best news you have received this week?
This year? Ever? _____

GENRE OVERVIEW

Open your time together by watching this week's video message and discussing what stood out to you about the Genre Overview.

Four Books. That is all the information we have about the life of Jesus. Four books, 89 chapters, just under 65,000 words in the original language - that's it. Yet these four books have done more to change the world than all other books combined. These four books tell one story. The Godspell, the God story,

the good news that God had come to be with us; to save his people Israel; and to rescue the world from sin and death.

The Gospels tell the Jesus story from the perspective of four men – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of them used their own individual creativity to tell the story of a carpenter who changed the world; each of them had a unique audience and purpose in mind. As a result, they each shaped the true story of Jesus differently to reach that audience with the good news.

The Gospels are not biographies, at least not in the modern literary sense. They are certainly biographical, but their focus is too narrow and specific in comparison to modern biographies – each overwhelmingly focuses on Jesus' three-year ministry and even more so on the final week of his life. The gospel writers, with the exception of Luke, do not always follow a chronological progression in their story telling; instead, they structure the events of Jesus' life around the themes and messages they wish to communicate about Jesus. This was a normal style and approach in First Century Middle Eastern Culture.

Matthew was one of the 12 Apostles who accompanied Jesus in his ministry. His gospel emphasizes Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament who had come – though not as expected - to save His people, Israel, and establish His kingdom on earth. Mathew was writing to a Jewish audience and emphasized Jesus' connection to the Old Testament writings and prophecies more than any other Gospel writer.

Mark wrote as an eye witness to the events of Jesus' life, but was not one of the 12. He was a partner with Peter in his ministry and Peter is likely his primary source. His story of Jesus, written to a broader audience of both Jews and Gentiles, shows Jesus as a man of action - the King who had come in power to save his people. He also portrays Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah who took on the sins of his people so that they would be healed.

Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, is the only Gentile and the only writer who was not an eye witness of Jesus' life. He was, however, a masterful historian and scholar who wrote with the greatest structure and complexity. Luke likely researched and composed his gospel account while Paul was imprisoned in Judea after his arrest in Jerusalem (see Acts 21-26). His focus was on the good news that Jesus had come to also save the Gentiles; Luke emphasizes Jesus as the savior of all. Luke uses the title "son of man." As a doctor, he also emphasized Jesus as a healer. Luke is captivated by the humanity of Jesus and the miracle that God would take on human nature to be with us.

John wrote the last and most unique of the gospel accounts. His writing is in the simplest Greek style, yet it contains staggering theological insight. John explicitly stated his reason for writing, "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). John emphasized Jesus' divinity; for John, Jesus is the I AM – the Word of God dwelling among us. John wrote to reveal the true nature of Jesus and his triune relationship to the Father and Spirit.

OPEN THE WORD

Share your thoughts and observations about the passages you read. What similarities and differences did you see in each account? _____

MATTHEW 26:47-56

While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him."⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him.⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword."⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me.⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

MARK 14:43-51

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." ⁴⁵ And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ⁴⁶ And they laid hands on him and seized him. ⁴⁷ But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ And they all left him and fled. ⁵¹ And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, ⁵² but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

LUKE 22:47-53

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

⁴⁹ And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"

⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

JOHN 18:1-11

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

KNOW THE WORD

1. What stands out to you about what you have read and heard so far?

What are one or two take-aways? _____

2. What details are only mentioned by one author? Why might this author have included this information? _____

3. Can you make any connections between the information provided in the Genre Overview about each Gospel with the specifics of the gospel accounts? Based on the information you gather, why do you think some authors included certain details, while others did not?

4. What main biblical principle or overall theme do you find running through all four accounts of this event? _____

5. Do these accounts read to you like eyewitness testimony? _____

LIVE THE WORD

1. Which of these accounts/gospels is your favorite? Why? _____

2. Why do you think there are four gospels? Do the differences matter? Why or why not? Have the differences in the accounts ever caused doubt or confusion for you? _____

3. The Gospel of Mathew and Luke are very similar in their content and writing. Why do you think this might be? Which do you think came first and why? _____

4. In John's account, what do you make of v. 5 and 6? What deeper theological meaning might John have in mind by including this detail? _____

5. These gospel accounts do not paint a favorable picture of the disciples who wrote or shared them. Why do you think they were so willing to share such an unflattering picture of themselves? What can we learn from this? _____

FOR NEXT WEEK

1. Read the **GENRE OVERVIEW** for next week’s lesson on The Epistles. Highlight, underline or note anything that stands out to you.

2. Look at the **OPEN THE WORD** for Week 6. Every member of the Group should read one of the passages from the Epistles and answer the questions that follow.



Week-6 The Epistles

Letters to the Church

CONSIDER THIS

Where/What/Who are the places and people that cause you to feel the safest and the most relaxed?

What makes them safe or relaxing? What do these people and places bring to your life? _____

GENRE OVERVIEW

Open your time together by watching this week's video message and discussing what stood out to you about the Genre Overview.

The Epistles make up over two-thirds of the entire New Testament (21 of the 27 books) and were written by Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude, with the majority being Paul's. The value of the Epistles to

the church cannot be overestimated. These books unpack and explain how the Good News of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection changes everything for everyone. The Epistles teach us how to think, act and interact in light of the completed work of Jesus.

At the most basic level, an Epistle is a letter from one of the apostles to another individual or group; but Epistles are also more than letters as we might think about them. An epistle was an ancient literary form which was widely used in the Roman World. These formal letters had a purpose larger than correspondence

between two people or groups; they were often meant for much wider distribution and intended to be copied and distributed to communicate ideas on a far broader scale than only those addressed in the letter. C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* is a comparable contemporary example.

That fact that Epistles are letters presents a difficulty when it comes to interpretation. It is often the case that the author is responding to a set of specific questions or circumstances about which we lack detail. It is sometimes like listening to one side of a phone conversation. Despite this, there is no lack of rich insight into the Christian life that can be gained from reading the Epistles; it is just important to keep in mind that these letters were not written to us and that sometimes we lack information that the original recipients had.

The intended audiences of the epistles vary from groups of churches as in Galatians or James, to specific churches as in Philippians or 1 and 2 Corinthians, to specific individuals such as Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Just as they vary in intended audience they also vary in formality. Romans and Hebrews stand as examples of highly stylized examples of the genre, whereas the Epistles to Timothy and Titus are significantly more intimate and read more like personal letters.

Although they were written with specific audiences in mind, it is clear that their value to the church as a whole was immediately recognized and they were quickly copied and distributed throughout the Christian world. Even the more personal styles of the letters to Timothy, Titus or Philemon still contain broader instructions and teaching that have benefitted the entire church. So much of what the church does and how it approaches ministry is due to the instruction we are given in the Epistles. Studying these books will provide us with an ever-deepening insight into the grace of Jesus and His love for our lost world.

OPEN THE WORD

Share your thoughts and observations about the passages you read.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? ² Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴ Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? ⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶ But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers! ⁷ The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. ⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men[a] ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1. Who wrote this Epistle? To whom? (Feel free to Google this) _____

2. What is the central idea of this passage? _____

3. What is the tone of the passage? _____

COLOSSIANS 2:6-10

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

1. Who wrote this Epistle? To whom? (Feel free to Google this) _____

2. What is the central idea of this passage? _____

3. What is the tone of the passage? _____

PHILEMON 1:8-22

⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you— I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. ²² And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

1. Who wrote this Epistle? To whom? (Feel free to Google this) _____

2. What is the central idea of this passage? _____

3. What is the tone of the passage? _____

JAMES 3:1-7

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

1. Who wrote this Epistle? To whom? (Feel free to Google this) _____

2. What is the central idea of this passage? _____

3. What is the tone of the passage? _____

KNOW THE WORD

1. What are some differences between these passages? Similarities? What is the overall feeling of each passage? _____

2. Rank these passages from most personal to most formal in tone. What accounts for the differences? _____

3. Is there anything not immediately evident to you within these passages regarding the subject? Is there any information you are missing or questions you have? What would help you understand more?

4. What can you gather about the recipients of these letters? Is there more to the story? _____

5. Compare and contrast the passages from Corinthians and Philemon. Paul wrote both of these epistles, but would you say they are markedly different in tone and emotion? Why or why not?

LIVE THE WORD

1. How has the fact that these are epistles shaped your interpretation of them? How do you approach these readings differently than other genres? Why? _____

2. Which of these passages apply most directly and immediately to your personal life? Why? Which apply least and why? How can we apply those that seem least applicable? _____

3. Paul wrote about many things...theology, relationship, church rules, roles and leadership, his hardships, his love for God, Christ and people. If you were to write an epistle to somebody, what would you discuss if you were writing:

- a) about a problem in the church (1 Corinthians/James)
- b) about a core theological issue (Colossians/James)
- c) about a sinful/broken social system (Philemon)

FOR NEXT WEEK

1. Read the **GENRE OVERVIEW** for next week’s lesson on Apocalyptic Literature. Highlight, underline or note anything that stands out to you.

2. Look at the **OPEN THE WORD** for Week 7. Every member of the Group should read one of the passages in Revelation and answer the questions as best they can.



Week-7 Apocalyptic Literature

It's the End of the World as We Know It

CONSIDER THIS

Has it ever felt like your world was “coming to an end?” What happened? How did your world come back together? _____

How do you think our world will end? _____

GENRE OVERVIEW

Open your time together by watching this week's video message and discussing what stood out to you about the Genre Overview.

Apocalyptic Literature focuses on the coming final judgment and salvation of the world at the end of history as we know it. It is both some of the most fascinating and the most confusing literature of the

Bible. Extra care is needed when studying the Apocalyptic books because they deal with things that have not yet come to pass and express those things using highly symbolic language. Trying to understand what these works are teaching is much akin to the saints of the Old Testament trying to understand the Messianic Prophecies about Jesus – there was far more that was unclear than was clear. The Apocalyptic books include Ezekiel, Zechariah, Revelation and parts of Daniel and Isaiah. Many of these works are also included in the list of books of prophetic literature. Revelation is a unique combination of epistle, prophetic and apocalyptic literature.

The language of apocalyptic literature is symbolic and fantastic. It is usually expressed in terms of dreams and visions of other-worldly things that are yet to come. This literature focuses on a future time when the known physical world will collide and merge with the unseen spiritual world. As such, the events and characters it describes are frequently very strange and fantastic and are often quite difficult to comprehend or understand. Symbolic numbers – 3, 7, 10, 12, 40, etc. - are also frequently used in this literary form.

When reading apocalyptic literature, a position of humility is incredibly important. While there are certain things that we agree upon – Jesus will return to bring justice, set everything to right and defeat evil once and for all – there is great disagreement about the details of how all this will come to pass. There are at least five different schools of thought about the end times which this literature describes. The truth is that we just aren't certain how all the events described will play out in history. This is not to say that apocalyptic literature is not worth reading, but that we should approach it with great humility and be open to the possibility that our understandings may not be accurate. When trying to interpret this literature we should 1) focus first on what is clear; 2) do our best to understand what the author was trying to say to his audience; and 3) be open to learning different views and understandings of this literature.

OPEN THE WORD

Share your thoughts and observations about the passages you read.

REVELATION 1:9-20

⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

1. What is this passage about (as far as you can figure)? _____

2. What symbols do you find in the passage? _____

3. What are some possibilities for what these symbols could represent? (Avoid the temptation to apply this to our current day and age.)

4. What is one thing you are certain that the passage is communicating?

REVELATION 11:1-8

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. ³ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. ⁶ They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,

⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

1. What is this passage about (as far as you can figure)? _____

2. What symbols do you find in the passage? _____

3. What are some possibilities for what these symbols could represent? (Avoid the temptation to apply this to our current day and age.)

4. What is one thing you are certain that the passage is communicating?

REVELATION 12:1-12

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven

diadems. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. ¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

1. What is this passage about (as far as you can figure)? _____

2. What symbols do you find in the passage? _____

3. What are some possibilities for what these symbols could represent? (Avoid the temptation to apply this to our current day and age.)

4. What is one thing you are certain that the passage is communicating?

REVELATION 21:1-8

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

1. What is this passage about (as far as you can figure)? _____

2. What symbols do you find in the passage? _____

3. What are some possibilities for what these symbols could represent?
(Avoid the temptation to apply this to our current day and age.)

4. What is one thing you are certain that the passage is communicating?

KNOW THE WORD

1. Rank the passages you read from most clear to least clear.

What accounts for the clarity or lack thereof? _____

2. Read verse 1:19. What complexity does this bring to interpreting Revelation? _____

3. Which two Biblical figures are symbolized in Revelation 11? How can we know this? Do you think this is literal or figurative in terms of their identity? What argument could be made from the Gospels for both views? (see Matthew 17:1-3 and 11-13). _____

4. Is Revelation 12 talking about a past event or a future event? What arguments could be made for both? _____

5. What is the central message of Revelation 21? What hope does this give you? What difficulties does it present? _____

LIVE THE WORD

1. Why is Revelation in the Bible? What benefit do we get from a book so filled with symbolism that it is difficult to understand?

2. Should Apocalyptic Literature make us optimistic or pessimistic about the future? Why? _____

3. There is a maxim in Biblical Interpretation that says, "The plain things are the main things." What is clear to you from Revelation? What is important about what is clear? _____

4. Revelation talks a lot about judgment. This isn't something we talk about all that often. Do you fear judgment? Why or why not?

5. Why is the concept of judgment important? How should we as followers of Christ understand judgment? _____

6. How should the conclusion of Revelation affect how we live our lives and approach our future? _____



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