



## LEADER'S GUIDE

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# Bible Basics

Course Lecturer: Dr. Sid Buzzell

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**If you have not already done so, it is important that you first review our [Leader's Packet](#) for specifics on how to open, facilitate, and close your group sessions.**

This Leader's Guide walks you step by step through this lesson. Use as much of the suggested material as you find helpful. Some sections have more than one discussion question or idea so you can choose an option that fits your group. Feel free to add other ideas as well. You may also choose to extend this particular lesson to two or more sessions.

The Leader's Guide contains information that isn't covered in the Listening Guides so the group session adds value to those who have completed the Listening Guides.

### Step by Step Through the Study

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As you prepare for the session, you will find information you need to lead the discussion questions in this Leader's Guide.

*Introduction to the Old Testament*

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 1. “In Lesson 1, we will discuss an introduction to the Old Testament and highlight its relevance and spiritual riches.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Recall key elements of the story told in the Old Testament.
2. Understand some of the reasons that the Old Testament is a “treasure-house of wealth.”
3. See how Old Testament books fit into the categories of history, poetry, or prophecy.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

*Before getting into the Genesis study ask group members how they relate to the Bible.*

- You can either ask each person to give a brief statement about what they think the Bible is and if it is important to them.
- Or you can just pose the questions for the group to discuss.

# Discussion

## Discovering the Old Testament

Open the lesson portion of your group meeting with a brief discussion of how the Old Testament story begins. Read Genesis 1:1–2 and imagine together what that was like—no people, animals or plants, no light or stars or planets. The terms “formless” and “empty” mean that there was no life and there was no place for life to exist—just darkness and water.

The writer uses a form of poetic writing to describe an almost indescribable place. Moses’ major message to Israel in Genesis 1 and 2 is that, contrary to the beliefs of all the nations surrounding Israel, there was One God and He created all things according to His plan. Israel’s God is the supreme ruler of the universe and each individual He created to live in it. Genesis 1 and 2 introduce the Bible’s theme.

Comment on Genesis 1–11. There are a number of views among Bible-believing scholars on how we read Genesis 1 and 2, and those views are beyond the scope of an introductory course like Bible Basics. Most Old Testament scholars who believe the Bible is God’s holy inspired Word agree to disagree with other like-minded Bible scholars who interpret these chapters differently than they do. While there is friendly discussion and interaction among these scholars as they search for common understanding, there is little rancor. Genesis 1 and 2 focus on the “Who” and “why” of creation and are not as clear on the “when” and “how” of creation. Do not get bogged down in a debate over how or when God created the universe.

Genesis is the Old Testament’s foundation. Briefly explain its purpose and structure:

- *Genesis 1–2: Moses wanted his readers to know that Israel’s God created everything and that as a good and loving God, He created humans for a relationship with Himself.*
- *Genesis 3–4: These chapters describe where the alienation between God and the humans He created began and how serious it is.*
- *Genesis 5–11: These chapters tell the story of God’s second beginning with Noah and the story of Babel’s tower to demonstrate man’s continued rebellion against God.*
- *Chapters 12–50: These chapters tell the story that was of greatest interest to Moses’ original readers because it tells the story of their nation’s founding fathers. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and his twelve sons were Israel’s fathers, or patriarchs. The Jews throughout the rest of Old Testament history read Genesis 12–50 as the story of their national origin.*

Open a brief discussion by asking if group members have understood Genesis that way or if they have other impressions of the book’s purpose.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if they can imagine how Moses’ first readers or listeners (most of the Genesis material was communicated orally to Israel before it was written) would have responded to these stories.*

- *Remind people that the context for when Moses was delivering these stories is described in Exodus.*

Stress the fact that God is the primary character in the Old Testament.

- *The Old Testament is filled with stories of fascinating people and events, but all the stories are connected together by the presence of God's guiding hand.*
- *Ask your group how reading the Old Testament as God's story would (or does) influence the way a person would read it.*

Read the list of reasons given in the lesson for the Bible's value and let the group discuss why they are significant:

- *It tells us about God.*
- *It answers questions about how life began.*
- *It tells how evil came into our world.*
- *It prophesies of the Messiah-Redeemer.*
- *It inspires us to holy living.*

Ask if anyone can name a personal "value" they connect to the Old Testament.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Have you benefitted from any specific part of the Old Testament?*
- *If so, state how it has influenced you in a sentence or two.*
- *Take a few minutes and, as a group, thank God for the benefits we find in the Old Testament.*

Ask group members to describe their experience with the Old Testament. (Never read it? Read parts of it? Heard sermons on it? etc.).

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

Ask what parts, if any, of the Old Testament are most familiar or if anyone has a favorite part.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

Ask what parts are least familiar, or most difficult to read.

## **The Riches of the Old Testament**

If you (the leader) have read a lot of the Old Testament, share the value you have found by reading it. If you haven't read the Old Testament very much, explain that many others have reported the rich treasures they find in the Old Testament.

- *Ask group members to share any help or valuable life-lessons they have discovered from reading the Old Testament.*

This section of the lesson describes four "riches" of the Old Testament. Read each of these sections as preparation for a discussion on them.

The Old Testament provides the foundation for the whole Bible.

Ask if anyone can explain the relationship between the Old and the New Testament.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *The New Testament without the Old Testament is a story that starts in the middle and the Old Testament without the New Testament is a story that stops in the middle. The two testaments were intended to complete each other.*
- *Illustrate with the fact that Jesus, His disciples, Paul, Barnabas, and the earliest Christians were all Jewish and lived under the Old Testament laws and customs.*

The Old Testament tells us about Jesus Christ.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Point out the five different things this paragraph in the lesson says the Old Testament tells us about Jesus.*
- *Ask the group if any of these are especially significant to them.*
- *Illustrate with the fact that the Jewish sacrifices outlined in Leviticus introduce us to Jesus' death as our sacrifice. Many Old Testament prophecies about Jesus substantiate the validity of Jesus' claim to be Israel's Messiah, God's Son.*
- *Ask if others in the group can share ways they know that the Old Testament presents Jesus.*

The Old Testament provides the foundation for faith in Christ.

- *Ask what "faith stories" people know about from the Old Testament—stories where people trusted God and He came through for them (Noah's preservation in the ark, Abraham and Isaac, Joseph, Moses and the Red Sea, Joshua and Jericho, David and Goliath, etc.).*
  - ◊ *These Old Testament stories confirm for us that God keeps His word and bolsters our trust in Jesus' claim that He can save us from sin.*
- *Ask if group members think about the Old Testament this way. Do they just read stories and prophecies or do they see God at work confirming their faith by telling us historical incidents of His faithfulness. Discuss how people "see" and "experience" the Old Testament's purpose.*

Knowing the Old Testament helps us to know God.

Discuss the three kinds of knowledge we find about God in the Old Testament:

- *Factual knowledge—Ask the group what facts we discover about God in the Old Testament.*
  - ◊ *God's power, wisdom, love, justice, faithfulness, holiness, beauty, creativity*
- *Personal knowledge—God is revealed as One who relates to His people.*
  - ◊ *Abraham was called God's friend; God spoke to Moses face to face; God saved Daniel from the lions; in Psalm 23 God is David's shepherd; God fed Israel in the wilderness.*
- *Practical knowledge—The Old Testament teaches us how to live better lives.*
  - ◊ *The Ten Commandments protect us from harming ourselves and each other; Proverbs give us wisdom; Psalms teach how to worship; prophets warn us about disobedience.*

## Knowing God Through the Old Testament

Of all the people and events found in the Old Testament ask each group member if they have a favorite character.

*(Listening Guide question 16)*

Of the literally hundreds of Old Testament stories ask each group member to name a favorite and give a brief explanation of why they chose it. Give a few minutes for them to consider their answer.

*(Listening Guide question 17)*

After all have responded, ask the group to think about God's role in their own story. Give them a few minutes to prepare and go around the group again discussing how God fits into their story.

If your group members are completing the Listening Guides they will have answers to these questions and you can use a question-and-answer format for this section of the group session. If not, you can either view this section of the lesson together, or you can present it as a brief lecture.

Over how many years was the Old Testament written?

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- 1,000—Moses in 1400 BC to Nehemiah in 400 BC

How many years of known history does the Old Testament cover?

- 1,700—From Abraham in 2100 BC to Nehemiah in 400 BC

How many authors wrote the Old Testament?

*(Listening Guide question 19)*

- 30 authors

How many books are in the Old Testament?

*(Listening Guide question 20)*

- 39 books

What are the three kinds of literature found in the Old Testament?

*(Listening Guide question 21)*

- Narrative history, Poetry, Prophecy

One purpose of the Bible Basics course is to open the door to the Old Testament

What are the four major stages of Old Testament history?

*(Listening Guide question 22)*

- Beginning or patriarchal: 700 years from Abraham to the Exodus

- *Exodus to Settlement: 400 years from Moses through Judges*
- *Kingdom era: 460 years from Saul to the Israelites' exile in Babylon (1050 BC–586 BC)*
- *Exile and reconstruction: about 200 years from Jerusalem's destruction to the end of the Old Testament era*
  - ◊ *Discuss how group members see God at work in each of these Old Testament eras to accomplish His will.*
  - ◊ *Discuss how the Old Testament events relate to us.*
  - ◊ *Remind the group that “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The Old Testament is more than stories and psalms and prophetic sermons.*

Ask the group what some of the “profitable” lessons are that we see in the Old Testament.

- *Our God is greater than any force in our world.*
- *Our God faithfully keeps His word.*
- *Our God is concerned for how sin destroys the people He loves and offers to rescue us from our sinful tendencies.*
- *Our God meets our deepest needs and satisfies our deepest hungers.*

Close with a discussion of some encouraging or comforting or inspiring views of God that group members have found in the Old Testament.

## Application

Pray that God will show you what He is like as you go through this course on Bible Basics. Then ask Him to show you two or three of the most important things He would like to reveal to you about you as you take this course.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone sees the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.



## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading the overview of Lesson 2. “In Lesson 2, we will discuss an overview of Genesis through Numbers and trace Israel’s settlement in the Promised Land.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Identify important characters and events in Genesis.
2. Explain how God’s chosen people entered and settled in the Promised Land.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Discussion

### Review

Begin with a review of the last group session.

Ask if someone can name the four eras of Old Testament history:

- *Beginnings: From creation to preparation to enter Canaan (Genesis to Deuteronomy)*
- *Settlement: Conquering and dividing the land in Joshua and settling in the land in Judges*

- *Kingdom: From King Saul to the Babylonian exile—1050 BC to 586 BC or about 500 years (1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings)*
- *Exile and Reconstruction: From Jerusalem’s destruction to Nehemiah’s wall—586 BC to 400 BC or about 200 years (Ezra and Nehemiah)*
  - ◊ *An important note: Many Old Testament dates are obscure and we often round time periods off to the nearest century. Don’t get bogged down with exact dating unless the biblical text gives a date.*

Ask each person to write down (literally or mentally) one spiritual lesson they took away from the last session.

## Beginnings (?–1440 BC)

Ask what the two major “beginnings” are in Genesis.

- *Chapters 1–11: Beginning of everything*
- *Chapters 12–50: Beginning of Israel*
  - » *Who was the Genesis account originally written to? (Israel)*
  - » *Therefore, which of these beginnings is most relevant to these readers? Why?*

Ask how many chapters in Genesis tell us about creation.

- *Genesis 1 focuses on the creation of the whole universe.*
- *Genesis 2 focuses in on the creation of humans in God’s image.*
- *The creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 highlights and emphasizes human creation because the relationship between God and His people are the focus of the Bible’s story.*

<b>A Summary of the Creation Days</b>	
<b>Day 1: Light 1:3–5</b>	<b>Day 4: Sun, Moon, Stars 1:14–19</b>
<b>Day 2: Sea and Sky 1:6–8</b>	<b>Day 5: Creatures for Sea and Sky 1:20–23</b>
<b>Day 3: Fertile Earth 1:9–13</b>	<b>Day 6: Creatures for Fertile Earth 1:24–31</b>
<b>And on the Seventh Day God Rested: 2:1–3</b>	

Ask someone to read Genesis 1:26–28.

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask what the emphasis is in verse 26 (God’s image and human responsibility).*
- *Ask what the emphasis is in verse 27 (male and female both included in God’s image).*
- *Ask what the emphasis is in verse 28 (God’s covenant with Adam and Eve).*

Ask someone to read Genesis 2:7 and 2:15–25.

- *These passages introduces the major plot of the whole Bible. The focus is on God’s creation of man and*

*woman in His own image—so He could have an intimate relationship with them and they with Him. This is the foundational emphasis for the rest of the Old and New Testament.*

Ask someone to read Genesis 3:1–7—the story of the Fall. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and introduced sin into the human race. This is known theologically as the Fall of man.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask if anyone would summarize the events of 3:1–7 in their own words as if they were explaining it to a group of middle school students.*

Ask someone to read Genesis 3:8 and explain why we could call this the most tragic result of the Fall.

- *Adam and Eve, who had the privilege of an intimate relationship with God, were alienated from Him and hiding in fear. That has been the human condition ever since.*

Genesis 4–11 presents sin’s devastating results.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Chapter 4 illustrates the result of sin in Adam’s and Eve’s own family.*
- *Ask someone to read Genesis 4:6–7 and explain the two options God offered Cain.*
  - ◊ *Do well and live well or fall under sin’s destructive power.*
  - ◊ *Which choice did the human race take as demonstrated in chapters 4–11?*
- *Ask someone to read Genesis 6:5–8 and summarize what it says about Noah’s day.*
  - ◊ *How is that description like and unlike the human race today?*
- *Ask someone to summarize Moses’ message to his readers in Genesis 3–11.*
  - ◊ *Humans lived in constant rebellion against God.*
- *Ask how that message relates to God’s selection of Abraham in Genesis 12.*
  - ◊ *The first eleven chapters of Genesis prepare the reader for God’s next “beginning” by selecting Abraham and his descendants as His people. Their commission was to demonstrate to the rest of the world what life looked like when lived by God’s instructions and wisdom.*
    - » *Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5 that Israel was the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Remember that this sermon was preached to Jews.*

Ask someone to read Genesis 12:1–3. What six important promises did God make to Abraham?

- *Great nation, blessing, his name would be great, he would be a blessing, God would bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him, all people will be blessed through him.*

Ask someone to read Genesis 17:1–8 where God expanded on the original covenant with Abraham. What is added in chapter 17?

- *Changed Abram’s name to Abraham, father of many nations, kings would come from him, covenant would be passed on to his generations forever, God would give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants forever.*

Discuss how this covenant shapes Israel’s history throughout the Old Testament and even today.

- *Through the Old Testament—When Joshua invaded Canaan he was reclaiming Israel’s own Promised Land. When the Assyrians and Babylonians took Israel and Judah captive, Abraham’s descendants were removed from their land.*
- *Today—Israel and Arab nations both claim to be heirs of this covenant. Ishmael was Abraham’s firstborn and by custom was the legal heir. But God specifically stated that Isaac, the second born, was to be the heir of His choice (Genesis 17:20–21).*

Genesis continued Abraham’s story for four generations.

- *Abraham (Genesis 12–25), Isaac (21–35), Jacob (25–49), Jacob’s twelve sons (29–50) and Joseph’s two sons (48–50).*
- *Jacob’s twelve sons were the “fathers” or “patriarchs” of Israel’s twelve tribes. Genesis 12–50 tells the story of Israel’s founding fathers and the covenant God made with them.*
- *Because Joseph’s brothers sold him as a slave, he was taken to Egypt and Jacob and Joseph’s brothers eventually followed him there. The family was living in Egypt when Genesis ended.*

Ask someone to read Exodus 1:6–7 and describe what happened in Egypt.

Read Exodus 1:8–12 and describe what happened next.

Discuss the rest of the story in a broad overview:

- *Israel cried out to God and He called Moses to deliver them from Egypt (Ex. 3–6).*
- *The ten plagues on Egypt (7–12), including the Passover (11–12), prepared Israel to trust God and believe He was powerful enough to deliver them from Egypt’s military power.*
- *Israel’s exodus (12:33–40)—God led Israel from Egypt to the Red Sea.*
- *Read Exodus 12:40–42—Israel had been in Egypt 430 years.*
- *God parted the Red Sea for Israel—see Exodus 14:13–31 (cf. 30–31).*

Exodus 16–18 records the story of Moses leading the people to Sinai.

Exodus 19–40 and Numbers 1–10 tell the story of Israel’s one-year stay at Mt. Sinai where God gave Israel His laws that would govern their life throughout the Old Testament and the Gospels. Jesus and the apostles lived under these Mosaic laws. The Gospels fit the Old Testament culture.

Numbers 11–36 records Israel’s refusal to trust God to give them the land of promise and the resulting forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

The period of “Beginnings” ends at Deuteronomy 33 with Moses’ death.

After surveying this overview, ask the group what this says to them:

- *About God.*
- *About Israel.*
- *About themselves.*

Ask if anyone knows what the Old Testament's first five books are called?

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- *Genesis through Deuteronomy is referred to as the Pentateuch, which literally means "five books" and is also called the Torah, the Law of Moses, and the Book of the Law.*

If your group is completing the Listening Guides, ask what "significant truths" they selected from the Noah story and explain what made them significant.

If your group isn't doing the Listening Guides, ask them to reflect on these first five books of the Bible and name one important truth they learned about God from the "Beginnings" era.

Give them a few minutes to reflect and construct a "Truth about God."

If your group is completing the Listening Guides, ask which of the ways we see ourselves in the Pentateuch and Job listed in the lesson was most "like" and/or "unlike" them and explain why they selected it.

If your group isn't doing the Listening Guides, ask them to reflect on these first five books of the Bible and

- *Name one important truth they could apply to their own life from the "Beginnings" era.*
- *OR name a character or event they found especially interesting and construct a life-lesson from that character or event to share with the group.*

## Settlement (1440–1050 BC)

Introduce the "Settlement" era by stating that it involves three movements in Israel's history:

- *Israel invaded and inhabited the land God gave to Abraham and his descendants (Joshua 1–12).*
- *Israel divided the land among the twelve tribes and lived by God's Law (Joshua 13–24).*
- *Israel rebelled against God and suffered the consequences of their disobedience (Judges 1–21).*

Point out that the "Settlement" era is a story of stark contrast between obedience and blessing in Joshua and disobedience and tragedy in Judges.

Ask someone to read Joshua 1:1–9 (Joshua's commissioning) and then discuss its two parts with the group.

- *God's commitment to Joshua (chapters 1–5)*
- *Joshua's commitment to God (chapters 6–9)*

Read Judges 2:6–11 and discuss the contrast between Joshua stories and those in Judges.

Read Judges 21:25, which is a summary statement of Judges' account, and discuss the two facts it states.

- *"No king in Israel" = they had rejected God as their king and that's why there was no king.*

- *“Everyone did what was right in their own eyes” = Israel lived with anarchy and had become as wicked as the neighboring nations.*

The book of Judges sets up the next period of Israel’s history—the “Kingdom” era. There was no king in Israel, and Israel desperately needed a king.

Major events of the “Settlement” era include:

- *Jericho’s walls, invasion and division of Canaan, Joshua’s death*
- *Israel’s judges (Othniel, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, etc.) delivered them from their oppressors*
- *Samuel was Israel’s last judge and anointed Israel’s first two kings, Saul and David.*

Ruth’s story is a stark contrast from the depressing history of the judges. Ruth’s writer opened the book with, “Now it happened that during the time when Judges governed” (Ruth 1:1). At least one family (Naomi’s) and one village (Bethlehem) in Israel followed God’s way of life during the time when the nation as a whole rebelled against God.

The Philistines plagued Israel until King David, Naomi’s great-grandson, finally defeated them and gave Israel rest from oppression. The Ruth story introduced King David’s ancestors (Ruth 4:16–22) and Judges introduced Israel’s desperate need for a righteous king who would lead Israel to follow God’s laws.

If your group is completing the Listening Guides, ask which truths they saw about God in the Jordan River crossing (Joshua 3–4) are the most significant and helpful and ask group members to share their observation and application.

If your group isn’t doing the Listening Guides, ask them to reflect on Joshua and Judges and

- *Name one important truth about God they can find from the “Settlement” era.*

If your group is completing the Listening Guides, ask which one of the characters they saw in the “Settlement” era that was most “like” and/or “unlike” them and explain why they selected it.

If your group isn’t doing the Listening Guides, ask them to reflect on the stories from Joshua and Judges and

- *Name one important truth they could apply to their own life from the “Settlement” era.*
- *OR name a character or event they found especially interesting and construct a life-lesson from that character or event to share with the group.*

## Application

When we read about Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and Israel it is obvious that God was active in their life. Can you tell of an event when you believe God was active in your life? If so, summarize it in a

paragraph. If not, why, when many people can tell stories of God’s intervention, do you think you have not experienced Him?

## Reflection

It is important to promote this Reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following “Overview” of Lesson 3. “In Lesson 3, we will trace the initial history of Israel’s kings and examine the exile of Israel and Judah.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Trace the history of Kings from Saul to Jeroboam and Rehoboam.
2. Understand key events in the return of Judah from exile.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Discussion

### Kingdom Through Exile

#### Group Leader Note

To help you navigate through the “Kingdom” era, we have provided a bird’s-eye view of that historical period. Familiarize yourself with it before teaching the lesson so you can help group



members place the specifics into their proper place in the whole story.

### Books involved

- *1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings—survey the historical narrative of the “Kingdom” era.*
- *Prophets Isaiah through Zephaniah ministered during the “Kingdom” era.*
- *Most psalms, Solomon’s proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are from this era.*

### Time period (1050–586 BC)

- *Israel was united under Saul, David, and Solomon from 1050 to 930 BC.*
- *The kingdom split and became the nations of Israel and Judah after Solomon died in 930 BC.*
- *The “Kingdom” era ended in 586 BC when Babylonia conquered Judah.*
- *Assyria conquered Israel in 722 BC.*

### Major Characters

- *Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Rehoboam (Judah’s first king after the division), Jeroboam (Israel’s first king after the division).*

### Prophets

- *The time when Israel’s prophets ministered is recorded in 2 Kings 14–25 and in Ezra and Nehemiah. There are four Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and twelve Minor Prophets. A Major Prophet is a longer book and a Minor Prophet is a shorter book.*

Ask a group member to read 1 Samuel 8:1–7 and, as a group, identify three reasons Israel wanted a king.

- *Samuel’s age*
- *Samuel’s godless sons*
- *To be like the other nations (see also 8:19–20)*

Read 1 Samuel 8:7–9 and discuss God’s response to Israel’s demand for a king.

### Talk about the king issue

- *God had already spoken to Israel about having a king.*
  - ◊ *In Genesis 17:6 God promised Abraham that a king would be in his lineage.*
  - ◊ *In Deuteronomy 17:14–20 God told Moses there would be a king.*
- *The problem was they had rejected God as their king and wanted to replace Him with a human king. God intended for a godly king that He would select to lead them.*
- *Israel’s stated purpose for wanting a king was to be like the surrounding nations. God’s intention was that the surrounding nations would want to be like Israel.*

Ask the group if they can name the four major characters in Israel’s United Kingdom period.

- *Samuel (1 Sam. 1–25)*
- *Saul (1 Sam. 9–31)*

- *David (1 Sam. 16 – 1 Kings 2)*
- *Solomon (1 Sam. 1–11)*

Ask if anyone can name some important facts about King Saul.

- *Israel's first king*
- *Subdued the Philistines for a time*
- *Disobeyed God and was rebuked twice (1 Sam. 13:11–14; 15:22–23)*
- *God rejected Saul as king and replaced him with David.*
- *After David killed Goliath, Saul's jealousy drove him to spend the rest of his reign trying to destroy David (1 Sam. 17–30).*
- *Saul took his own life rather than surrender to the Philistines (1 Sam. 30).*

Outline of David's life

- *David's triumphs: 1 Samuel 16 to 2 Samuel 11*
- *David's tragedies: 2 Samuel 12–24*

Ask if someone can describe some indicators of David's effectiveness as Israel's second king. (*Listening Guide question 2*)

- *Anointed by Samuel and filled with God's Spirit (1 Sam. 16:12–14)*
- *Defeated Goliath (1 Sam. 16)*
- *Finally subdued the Philistines*
- *Captured Jerusalem as his capital*
- *Moved the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem—united Israel's religious and political life and symbolized that he was a king who ruled under God's guidance.*
- *God promised him in a covenant that one of his descendants would rule the world in justice, peace, and righteousness, initiating Israel's Messianic hope fulfilled in Jesus (2 Sam. 7).*
- *His psalms*

Ask group members to reflect on what they know about David and to select what, to them, is the greatest lesson we can learn from David's life.

- *Teaching note: We can think of David in two ways—David and Goliath or David and Bathsheba.*
  - ◊ *What's the difference? What does it say about a person when they decide which aspect of David's life they decide to focus on? What lesson do we learn about life from the fact that a person's life can be summarized by one event?*

Outline of Solomon's life

- *Solomon's glory and construction of God's temple: 1 Kings 1–10*
- *Solomon's apostasy and the division of Israel into two nations: 1 Kings 11*

Ask what some of the signs of Solomon's success were (summarized in 1 Kings 10). (*Listening Guide question 4*)

- *His wisdom*
- *His writings*
- *His continued expansion of Israel's borders*
- *Amassed enormous wealth for Israel*
- *His greatest work was building God's temple in Jerusalem.*

However – ask someone to read and discuss Solomon's tragedy.  
(*Listening Guide question 5*)

- *Solomon's idolatry: 1 Kings 11:1–4*
- *Israel's division: 1 Kings 11:9–11*

Discuss with the group what we can learn from Solomon's life.

Ask if someone can describe Rehoboam's folly in perpetuating the split in Israel's kingdom (1 Kings 12).

- *Israel asked Rehoboam (Solomon's son and heir) to lighten their taxes. Israel's elders advised him to do so. He refused their advice and followed the advice of his contemporaries who told him to increase the tax load.*
- *Ten of Israel's tribes rebelled and formed their own nation, anointing Jeroboam as their king and leaving only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin under Rehoboam's rule.*

Israel's prophets preached God's messages of repentance and forgiveness (2 Kings 14–Nehemiah 13).

- *There were many non-writing prophets who preached faithfully at the cost of their life.*
- *There are sixteen writing prophets whose messages are preserved in Bible books named for them.*
- *Elijah was the earliest of this era's prophets (875 BC) and Malachi was the latest (400 BC).*
- *The prophets ministered to various groups:*
  - ◇ *Three prophets' ministry addressed Gentiles (Jonah, Nahum, Obadiah).*
  - ◇ *Three prophets addressed Israel, the northern nation (Amos, Hosea, and perhaps Joel).*
  - ◇ *Two ministered during Israel's exile (Ezekiel and Daniel).*
  - ◇ *Three ministered to Judah after the return from exile (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).*
  - ◇ *The other five (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Micah) ministered to Judah, the southern nation.*

Ask what nation defeated Israel and in what year.  
(*Listening Guide question 11*)

- *Assyria defeated Israel in 722 BC.*

Ask what nation defeated Judah and in what year.  
(*Listening Guide question 12*)

- *Babylon—under Nebuchadnezzar—defeated Judah in 586 BC.*

Discuss the exile as God's faithful commitment to His covenant with Israel in Deuteronomy 30:15–20.

- *Deuteronomy was God's final message to Israel before Moses died and Joshua led them into the land. This formula of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience had been in place since that time. Israel's destruction is far more a testimony of God's patience for 800 years of Israel's rebellion against Him than it is of His wrath in keeping His promise in Deuteronomy to judge Israel's disobedience.*

If your group members have completed the Listening Guide, ask them

- *To share the two truths they selected that we see about God in the period of Israel's kings that are the most significant and helpful to them.*
- *Of these two "most significant" truths, explain what makes one of them significant to them.*

If your group isn't completing the Listening Guides, ask them to select one event or person from the "Kingdom" era that teaches them something about God that they find helpful. Give them a few minutes to prepare a brief explanation to share with the group.

If your group members have completed the Listening Guide, ask them to share

- *One of the ways they see themselves in the time of Israel's kings that is either most like or least like them and explain in one sentence how it is either like or unlike them.*

If your group isn't completing the Listening Guide, ask them to select an event or person from the "Kingdom" era that teaches them a personal lesson about themselves and in a brief paragraph share it with the group. Give them a few minutes to think about their responses.

## Exile (586–400 BC)

To help you lead the discussion on the Exile and Reconstruction era we have provided some background on that period.

Books involved

- *Ezekiel and Daniel during the Exile*
- *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi during the Reconstruction*

Time period

- *Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC.*
- *The Persians defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC.*
- *Cyrus the Persian released the Jews in 538 BC. Read Ezra 1:1–3.*
- *Zerubbabel led 42,360 Jews back to Jerusalem in 538 BC.*
- *Work on rebuilding the Jerusalem temple began in 537 BC.*
- *The Persians stopped the work in 530 BC because of false accusations from Judah's enemies—including the Samaritans.*
- *In 520 BC the Persians allowed the work to begin but Judah's citizens had lost interest. The prophets*

*Haggai and Zechariah persuaded the people to resume work on the temple (Ezra 5:1).*

- *The temple was completed in 516 BC—seventy years after it was destroyed. Jeremiah 25 prophesied a seventy-year captivity.*
- *There is a sixty-year gap between Ezra 6 when the temple was completed and Ezra’s return in Ezra 7–10 (Ezra had nothing to do with the temple construction).*
- *Ezra returned to Judah and led a great spiritual revival in 458 BC (Ezra 7–10).*
- *Nehemiah returned in 445 BC and led the people in rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 1–6).*
- *After the wall was completed, Ezra led Judah’s citizens in a second revival (Nehemiah 7–12).*
- *Nehemiah returned to Persia for a short time in 433 BC (Nehemiah 13:6) and then returned to lead a third spiritual revival (Nehemiah 13:7–18).*
- *Malachi, the prophet, was preaching to Judah during Nehemiah’s time.*

Ask the group if they can name three “things” that were “rebuilt” when the Jews returned to Jerusalem.

*(Listening Guide question 17)*

- *The temple under Zerubbabel*
- *The walls under Nehemiah*
- *The people under Ezra*

Discuss God’s sovereign control over His people in the following exercise.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask someone to read Ezra 1:1–3 and discuss God’s role in Judah’s release from exile.*
  - ◊ *Cyrus the Persian ruler was the most powerful man on earth.*
- *Ask someone to read Daniel 6:28 and discuss God’s plan in having Daniel in Persia during Cyrus’s reign.*
  - ◊ *God places His people in strategic roles, whether in Persia or in our own neighborhood or workplace or school. God places us in strategic places as His witnesses (Acts 1:8).*

Ask what two topics are discussed in the period of the exile.

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- *The Jews in exile under the Babylonians and their return to Judah under the Persians*

Ask what two nations ruled over the Jews in exile.

*(Listening Guide question 19)*

- *Babylonians (605 BC to 538 BC)*
- *Persians (538 BC through the end of the Old Testament)*

Ask which Persian ruler allowed the Jews to return to Judah.

*(Listening Guide question 20)*

- *Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1:1–11)*

Ask who led the first group of Jews back to Judah and led in rebuilding the temple.  
(*Listening Guide question 21*)

- *Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:1–7)*

If your group members have completed the Listening Guide ask them to share

- *One of the two truths they selected that we see about God in Cyrus’s time that are the most significant and helpful to them.*

If they have not completed the Listening Guide, ask them to think back over the time of exile and reconstruction and identify one way they see God at work in that time and share how it increases their trust in God’s faithfulness. Give them a few minutes to reflect and construct a thought to share about God with the group.

If your group members have completed the Listening Guide ask them to share

- *One of the ways they see Judah’s citizens in the time of Judah’s exile and/or reconstruction that is most like or least like them and explain in one sentence how it is like or unlike them.*

If your group is not completing the Listening Guides, ask them to reflect on the time of Judah’s exile and reconstruction and select an event or a person they most or least identify with and what lesson they can share with the group about our lives with God in our time.

## Application

Discuss ways we see God at work in our life.

- *Can we openly and honestly pray for God’s blessing on our life because we faithfully follow His teaching?*
- *Are there areas of our life that we can address so we can be God’s testimony like Daniel was to influence people to do things that honor God?*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this Reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something

one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 4. “In Lesson 4, we will see why the New Testament has been both loved and hated, and we will consider the influence of Roman, Greek, and Jewish culture on its authors.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain why the New Testament has been both loved and hated.
2. Understand the influence of culture on the writers of the New Testament.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Discussion

### Introduction

Open the session with a discussion of what the New Testament is about.

- Ask group members how they would explain what the New Testament is about.
- Get more specific and ask what the Gospels are about, Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation.
  - ◊ Gospels—about Jesus’ life and ministry (Matthew 1:1)



- ◇ *Acts—about the early church’s spread around the Roman world*
- ◇ *Epistles—instructions to the new believers about how the Christian life works*
- ◇ *Revelation—John’s explanation of God’s sovereign control over His world and the culmination of human history on earth*

Ask if the group can name two reasons we can trust the New Testament.

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- *The writers’ claims that their messages were from God—Galatians 1:11–12; 2 Peter 1:20–21*
- *The profound impact its message has had on individuals and cultures*
  - ◇ *Paul asked Philemon, a slave owner, to treat his escaped slave Onesimus (who had accepted Christ) as a brother, an amazing cultural shift.*
  - ◇ *Jesus treated Mary and Martha as “disciples” and His other demonstrations of respect for women were counter-cultural.*

*Millions Have Loved It . . .* This paragraph focuses on the comfort, confidence, wisdom, and instruction people have found in the New Testament. Millions of lives over the centuries have been deeply changed by the gospel.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask group members to discuss ways the New Testament has influenced their culture.*
  - ◇ *Schools, hospitals, human rights, better laws, etc. based on the “Judeo-Christian ethic.”*
- *Ask group members if they have any favorite New Testament character whose life was changed, or favorite Bible passage or verse that gives them hope or guidance.*
  - ◇ *Paul (Acts 9), Zaccheus (Luke 19:2, 5, 8); Onesimus (Philemon 11); Matthew (tax collector to apostle)*
- *Ask group members to share any personal changes they have experienced after becoming Christians.*

*Millions Have Hated It . . .* This paragraph focuses on those who have opposed the New Testament’s teachings.

Ask the group to name two individuals or groups who were opposed to the New Testament. Describe their opposition.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

- *Roman emperors, some ancient and modern scientists and philosophers*
- *Some liberal-minded theologians who can’t accept supernatural miracles have attempted to make the New Testament (and Old Testament) a strictly human book.*

Ask the group if they have any personal frustrations with the New Testament’s teachings.

- *There are some passages that are hard to understand—Revelation, parts of Hebrews, etc.*
- *There are some complicated doctrines—the trinity, Jesus’ nature, election, etc.*
- *There are some controversial topics—church governance, modes of baptism, etc.*
  - ◇ *The point is: don’t be frustrated that there are difficult ideas and passages. We are trying to understand God’s infinite truth with finite minds.*

- ◇ *Read John 14:25–26. This passage, along with 1 Corinthians 2:6–13, teaches that Jesus’ Holy Spirit must help us understand His deeper truths. What does that tell us about reading the Bible?*
  - » *The essential role of prayer and meditation*

Ask the group what people who they know and associate with at work or school think of the New Testament.

Ask group members how they personally relate to the New Testament.

- *Read it, memorize it, ignore it, seek to live by it?*

Ask what great things the New Testament has done.

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

Ask if there are any personal stories of how the New Testament has helped someone in a specific way.

Ask if anyone knows how many books are in the New Testament.

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

- *27*

Ask if someone can tell the group when the New Testament books were written.

*(Listening Guide question 6)*

- *Last half of the first century—James and Galatians, the earliest New Testament books, may have been written before AD 50 and Revelation, the latest New Testament book, in the early 90s.*

Ask the group to discuss some of the things the New Testament claims it can do.

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

- *Teach us how to be born again (John 3)*
- *Give us peace with God (Romans 5:1)*
- *Give us a new life (2 Corinthians 5:17)*
- *Provide all we need for holiness (2 Peter 1:1–4)*
- *Teach us about God (Hebrews 1:1–3)*

Read James 1:21–22 and discuss its message. The Bible isn’t a magic book that changes life just by being in its presence. We have to read it, understand it, and apply it.

## The Background of the New Testament

Ask if anyone knows much time elapsed between the Old and New Testament eras.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

- *400 years*

Ask if anyone can tell the group what two ways God revealed Himself in New Testament times  
(*Listening Guide question 9*)

- *Read Hebrews 1:1–3—God revealed Himself to us in Jesus.*
- *Read 2 Timothy 3:16—God revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures.*

Comment on the ways culture had—and hadn't—changed during the four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew.

- *Greek and Roman culture and customs had crept into the Jewish culture, but many Jews still lived by the Old Testament Scriptures.*

Ask what four forces must we acquaint ourselves with to understand the impact of Christ's coming.  
(*Listening Guide question 10*)

- *Political: Roman rule governed the Jews, but they still had some power over themselves.*
- *Social: Acts 6 refers to the “Hellenized” Jews. There were two kinds of Jews during New Testament times—those who adopted aspects of Greek culture and those who stayed loyal to Jewish customs (Pharisees).*
- *Economic: Jews paid heavy taxes to the Romans and many chafed under it. A whole hated subculture of Jewish tax collectors existed in the Jewish communities.*
- *Religious: There were distinct religious groups among the Jews—the Sadducees who believed only Moses' writings (the Pentateuch) and the Pharisees who strictly kept all the Old Testament teachings. Many Jews were like nominal Christians of our day—Jewish by birth, but ignored the religious aspects of Judaism.*

Ask how many years the Jews had lived under Roman domination.

- *In 63 BC Pompey, the Roman general, defeated the Greeks and took possession of Palestine.*
- *The Romans controlled Palestine through the whole New Testament era.*

Briefly summarize how Rome influenced each of the following aspects of life in Palestine: peace, government, travel, and communication.

(*Listening Guide question 12*)

- *Peace: There was no threat of invasion from foreign armies like Israel and Judah suffered in the Old Testament.*
- *Government: Roman law created a climate of justice and safety.*
- *Travel: Roman roads and navy and the presence of Roman soldiers made travel easier and safer. Paul's missionary journeys were greatly enhanced because of Roman influence.*
- *Communication: The Romans made Greek the language of the empire (lingua franca). While many Jews preferred to speak in Aramaic they could also communicate in Greek.*

Discuss some of the negatives of Roman rule.

- *Taxes; pagan and emperor worship; Jewish hatred of the Romans; rise of the Zealots often caused tension with the Romans leading to punishment; Jews were treated like second-class citizens in their*

*own country; confusion over why Messiah had not yet come.*

Ask if anyone can name ways Greek culture influenced life in New Testament times.  
(*Listening Guide question 13*)

The Greeks ruled over Palestine from 331 BC to AD 63. They forced Greek culture and religion on all the peoples they conquered including the Jews—a process called Hellenization. The Jews, especially, rebelled because if they didn't teach their children the Hebrew language they wouldn't be able to read their Scriptures. So the Greeks helped the Jews translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek—a volume called the Septuagint.

- *Read Acts 6:1–4 and discuss the problem in the early church resulting from Hellenization.*
- *Greek culture still dominated Palestine for years after the Romans replaced the Greeks.*

Ask the group to discuss two positive influences from the Greek era.

- *Language—The Romans adopted the Greek language because it was already spoken throughout the empire.*
  - ◊ *That made Paul's missionary work much easier because he could use the common language.*
  - ◊ *The New Testament was written in Greek, a very sophisticated and precise language.*
- *Culture—Greek philosophers had raised many questions about life that were answered satisfactorily by the Christian teachings.*

Ask if anyone can explain ways the Jewish background influenced life in the New Testament.  
(*Listening Guide question 14*)

- *Read Luke 2:21–24 and discuss how Jewish background influenced Jesus' life.*
- *Read John 2:13–16 and discuss how Jewish background influenced Jesus' life.*
- *Read Mark 14:60–64 and discuss how Jewish background influenced Jesus' life.*
- *Read Philippians 3:2–7 and discuss how Jewish background influenced Paul's life.*

The Jews had some autonomy and ruled internal affairs through a group of seventy elders referred to as the Sanhedrin.

- *The Sanhedrin was made up Sadducees and Pharisees, the two major Jewish parties.*
- *Their power was limited and they had to collaborate with the Roman officials (Mark 14:1–3).*

Ask if someone can name the two institutions that were the center of Jewish religious life.  
(*Listening Guide question 16*)

- *The Jerusalem temple was the center of worship, education, and political life for the Jews.*
  - ◊ *Luke 2:21–22—Jesus was presented at the temple for circumcision and dedication.*
  - ◊ *John 2:13–17 and Matthew 21:12 & 13—Jesus “cleansed” the temple twice.*
  - ◊ *Acts 21:27–28—Paul was arrested for defiling the temple by bringing Gentiles into it.*
- *The synagogues were local centers of Jewish social, political, and religious life. They were found all over the Roman world where Jews had migrated.*

- ◇ *Mark 1:21—Jesus began His ministry by teaching in the Capernaum synagogue.*
- ◇ *Luke 21:12—Jesus warned that His followers would be “delivered to the synagogues and prisons to be judged.” The synagogue was central to Jewish life.*
- ◇ *Acts 13:14—When Paul went to a Gentile area he would, first, enter the synagogue where the Jews gathered and present Jesus to them. The phrase, “To the Jews first and then to the Greeks” (Romans 1:16) characterized Paul’s ministry.*

## Application

Many Christian people go to church regularly, some even attend Bible studies, but feel neither hate nor love toward the New Testament. How do you relate to this literature? Do you ever consider what it actually is? Do you ever thank God for so clearly and carefully outlining His moral will to us? What is your response to these questions? If you were talking with a non-Christian friend who asked for your opinion of the New Testament what would you say?

## Reflection

It is important to promote this Reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following “Overview” of Lesson 5. “In Lesson 5, we will learn the various categories of New Testament books, consider events in the life of Christ, and learn major themes in the book of Acts.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Briefly state the content of the Gospels, the book of Acts, the Epistles (letters), and the book of Revelation.
2. Give a brief overview of the life of Christ as contained in the Gospels.
3. Explain the major themes of the book of Acts.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

Open the session with a brief review of Lesson 4.

*Ask what two reasons you discussed for why we can trust the New Testament.*

- The message is from God—2 Timothy 3:16; Galatians 1:11–12; 2 Peter 1:20–21.
- The life change it produced and is still producing in individuals and cultures.

How many years between the Old and New Testament periods?

- 400 years

How many books in the New Testament?

- 27

What was the time span covered in the New Testament?

- About 95 years from Jesus's birth to the writing of John's book of Revelation

What three cultures shaped life in the New Testament?

- Roman, Greek, Jewish

## Discussion

### Knowing God Through the New Testament

Ask if anyone knows how many authors participated in writing the New Testament.

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- 9

Can anyone name them?

- *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and Hebrews' author*

Ask how we would explain the difference between a New Testament author and a New Testament writer.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

- *God is the New Testament's Author and He inspired these eight writers to communicate His message. Although inspired by God, each writer's personality shows through.*
  - ◊ *e.g., Paul's precise Greek/Roman outlines, James's, John's and Peter's less structured approaches*

The Old Testament covers 1,700 years of known history from Abraham to Nehemiah (2100 BC–400 BC) and an unknown period of time from Adam to Abraham.

The New Testament covers one century, but the events in that century have changed the world. What would we name as some of the most significant events of the first century?

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

- *Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection*
- *The coming of the Holy Spirit and birth of the church*
- *The spread of Christianity around the Mediterranean world*



- *Writing the twenty-seven New Testament books*

Ask the group members what the four literary groupings of New Testament books are.  
(*Listening Guide question 5*)

- *Gospels—about Jesus’ life and ministry (Matthew 1:1)*
- *Acts—about the early church’s spread around the Roman world*
- *Epistles—instructions to the new believers about how the Christian life works*
- *Revelation—John’s explanation of God’s sovereign control over His world and the culmination of human history on earth*

Ask if anyone has a favorite grouping.  
(*Listening Guide question 6*)

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Where do they spend most of their Bible reading time? Why?*
- *Anyone have a favorite book or passage? Why?*

Ask if anyone knows what the word “testament” means.

- *Read 1 Corinthians 11:25—“covenant”*

Ask why the word “testament” is appropriate for this body of literature?  
(*Listening Guide question 7*)

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *It corresponds with the Hebrew Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament (covenant).*
  - ◊ *Ask what covenant you studied in Lesson 2 (Abrahamic—Genesis 12 and 17).*
  - ◊ *How actively was God involved in that covenant during the Old Testament?*
    - » *Forgave Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his sons for consistent disobedience*
    - » *Judges’ example of giving chance after chance*
    - » *Continued to call Israel back to faithfulness through the prophets*
    - » *Restored Judah after their Babylonian exile*
    - » *Gave Israel the land*
    - » *Blessed them and cursed their enemies when Israel was obedient*

Ask what promises this covenant provides for us.

- *A relationship with Jesus Himself—1 Corinthians 11:25 (“Remember Me”); John 15 (“Abide in Me”)*
- *The Holy Spirit’s presence—John 14:16–17; Acts 1:8, 2:1–4; Ephesians 1:13–14*
- *A new life—2 Corinthians 5:17*
- *Forgiveness of sin—1 John 1:9*
- *Spiritual gifts and a supportive church—1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12*
- *Born again into God’s family—John 3:16 and Romans 8:14–17*

Discuss with group members how actively



*(Listening Guide question 8)*

- *The Christians they know participate in this “covenant.”*
- *They participate in this “covenant.”*

The New Testament contains fascinating literature. Ask group members to name passages or stories that illustrate the following types of literature:

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

- *Intense drama: Jesus’ birth, healings, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension; Peter’s denials and Jesus’ forgiveness (John 21—“Do you love me?”); Paul’s conversion; John’s vision of God in Revelation 4*
- *Inspiring teaching: Jesus’ parables; Peter’s sermon (Acts 2); Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)*
- *Practical instruction: Ephesians 5 on marriage; 1 Corinthians 14 on church order; Timothy and Titus on church leadership; 1 John 1:9 on confession; Ephesians 4 on managing conflict*

Read John 1:14 and Hebrews 1:1–3 (cf. 1:3, “the radiance of God’s glory,” and “the exact representation of His nature”), and discuss the relationship between Jesus becoming human and our understanding of God. Jesus revealed God more clearly in His Son than anywhere else. To know God, we must know Jesus.

## Gospels: Biography

Jesus’ story begins with a fantastic event – Mary’s pregnancy while a virgin (Luke 1:29–38). Take a moment and reflect on this astounding event. God Himself fertilized one of Mary’s eggs so that Jesus would be fully God and fully human. No mind can grasp the fullness of that fact in an instant. Discuss together how you would explain that event to a thirteen-year-old girl.

*(Listening Guide question 11)*

- *This event was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14.*

Read Luke 1:26–33 and identify three pieces of information the angel gave to Mary and her responses. You can guide your group through this dialogue and try to see the drama in it. Mary would likely have been about twelve or thirteen years old. Emphasize her amazing maturity and commitment to obey God!

- *Verse 26 (the Lord is with you); Mary’s response (v. 29)*
- *Verses 30–33 (You will have a baby); Mary’s response (v. 34)*
- *Verses 35–37 (Your baby will be the Messiah); Mary’s response (v. 38)*

Ask, of the three pieces of news the angel announced to Mary, which do you think would be the most difficult to process? Or astounding? Why?

*Two great, astounding facts:*

- *She was a pregnant virgin—terrifying and unbelievable—in a small Jewish village. Gossip and condemnation would be her lot—punishable by stoning.*

- *She was going to be the mother of Israel's promised Messiah—a once-in-the-history-of-the-world event. And it was happening to a peasant girl in a remote, rural town.*

Read Matthew 1:18–25. Discuss this event. Put yourself in Joseph's place when Mary tried to explain her pregnancy.

*(Listening Guide question 13)*

- *Joseph didn't believe her (v. 19).*
- *He obeyed the angel and honored Mary (vv. 20–25).*

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), Mary had to travel 75 miles – walking or riding on a donkey (not air conditioned) – while she was nine months pregnant.

What does that tell you about Mary?

The last angel visitation was to Daniel about six hundred years before the announcements to Zechariah (John the Baptist's father), Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. Add the star leading the Magi, and the fulfilled prophecies and discuss what the Gospel writers want their readers to understand.

- *They were careful to make sure their readers understood the deep gravity of Jesus' birth.*

This birth introduced the most important event in all of history.

Ask what two great events in Jesus' life the paragraph presents.

*(Listening Guide question 16)*

- *Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21–22). Ask if anyone can explain why Jesus was baptized.*
  - ◊ *Baptism demonstrated a committed association with something. We are baptized to demonstrate that we are one of Jesus' followers. Jesus was identifying with the fallen human condition and our great need when He was baptized.*
- *Jesus's temptation (Luke 4:1–13). Read Hebrews 4:14–16. Jesus' temptation shows us that Jesus understands our deepest struggles and can identify with us when we come to Him for help.*

Ask how many years Jesus' public ministry lasted

*(Listening Guide question 17)*

- *Three years. He began when He was thirty years old (Luke 3:23).*

Ask what three major activities marked Jesus' ministry.

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- *Preaching*
- *Miracles*
- *Relationship with His followers, especially the Twelve*

Ask where the sermon is located in the Gospels.

- *Matthew 5–7 and Luke 6:20–49.*

Ask if anyone can summarize what Jesus presented in His Sermon on the Mount.

- *You can ask the group to turn to Matthew 5–7 and scan the sermon, pointing out its different movements.*
  - ◊ *Beatitudes (5:1–12);*
  - ◊ *Renewal of Moses’ Law (5:15–47);*
  - ◊ *Motives, rewards, and God’s provision (chap. 6);*
  - ◊ *Instructions about life in God’s kingdom (chap. 7).*

Ask what most people think of when they consider Jesus’ teaching ministry.

- *His parables—Jesus’ parables begin in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 6. John has no parables.*

Ask what other great aspect of Jesus’ ministry people often focus on.

- *Miracles*

Ask why people think Jesus performed the miracles.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask someone to read John 10:37–38. Miracles substantiated His claim to be God.*
- *Miracles also demonstrated that He had the power and the will to save His people.*
  - ◊ *Healing the paralytic in Matthew 9:1–8 shows His compassion, but also His power to forgive sin.*

Jesus’ ministry was also known for His investment in His twelve apostles.

Why was it important for Jesus to invest so much time in His twelve apostles?

*(Listening Guide question 21)*

- *Jesus left nothing in writing. After His ascension His apostles would carry on the work He initiated. Only they were in a position to teach and answer questions about this new movement until others were familiar with what God was doing through the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:1–7).*

Comment on the fact that Jesus was drawing enormous crowds to Himself by His ministry. Feeding five thousand and then later, four thousand, illustrates His popularity.

Ask if anyone knows why the religious leaders rejected Jesus.

*(Listening Guide question 22)*

- *They resented His popularity (Matthew 11:18; Luke 6:6–7).*
- *They rejected His claim to be the Messiah in spite of His works (Matthew 12:22–24).*

Take a few minutes to “Humanize” Jesus by discussing how He may have responded to this rejection.

*(Listening Guide question 23)*

- *Although He was God, Jesus experienced the full array of human emotion.*

- *What do you think Jesus “felt” during these times of rejection: Fear? Anger, Sadness, Other? Combination of feelings?*

So much attention is given to Jesus’ death in each Gospel, but each Gospel is a book of joy and triumph. Why do you think that’s so?

*(Listening Guide question 24)*

- *The gruesome fact of Jesus’ crucifixion is essential to His story, but not the end of the story. His death is followed by the grand account of His resurrection.*
- *The fact of Jesus’ death is humanity’s greatest tragedy.*
- *The result of Jesus’ death is humanity’s greatest victory.*

Jesus traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Jesus celebrated His final Passover—a feast God introduced to Moses so Israel would never forget what He did for them in Egypt (Exodus 12:23–27). Jesus gave this traditional feast of remembrance a new meaning by commanding us to remember His sacrificial death for us.*
- *Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 and discuss what Paul said about the Eucharist. Note especially Paul’s emphasis on “remember” and relate it to Exodus 12 passage.*
- *Ask if the group believes most people “remember” what Jesus did when they take communion.*

This is the heart of the biblical story and each of the Gospels gives it full attention. A brief summary:

- *Jesus met with His closest friends and followers to celebrate Israel’s great feast and fill it with new meaning. He washed their feet and ate the Passover meal (Luke 22:1–22).*
- *He prayed with His disciples in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46).*
- *He was arrested and tried (Luke 22:47–23:25).*
- *He was crucified (Luke 23:26–56).*
- *He was raised from death (Luke 24:1–49).*
- *He ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50–53).*

Read this paragraph to the group a few times and see if they can comfortably “tell Jesus’ story.” Try it a few times and see if you can recall most of the details.

*(Listening Guide question 26)*

Encourage people to feel comfortable and confident about telling this story correctly. It is the heart of the Christian message.

If your group has completed the Lessons and Listening Guides ask them to share one of the truths they see about God in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection that is the most significant and helpful them.

If they are not completing the Lessons, ask the same question as above and give them a few

minutes to reflect and prepare a brief presentation to share with the group.

## Acts: History

Read Acts 1:1–3 and as a group discuss the brief introduction to Acts provided in this paragraph that transitions from Luke’s story of Jesus’ life and ministry before and after His crucifixion.

Acts’ story moves from Jesus’s resurrection, through the affirmation Jesus gave His followers for forty days between His resurrection and ascension and then to the church’s miraculous birth and its spread across the Roman Empire.

If your group has completed the lesson, ask them what four headings we can divide Acts into. If they haven’t completed the lesson, suggest the headings provided in the course notes (*Listening Guide question 29*)

- *Power (Acts 1:1–2:13)*
- *Proclamation (Acts 2:14–3:26)*
- *Persecution (Acts 4:1–8:3)*
- *Paul (Acts 9:1–28:31)*

Read Acts 1:1–3 again and highlight the facts Luke wants his readers to understand.

- *Luke had written a previous account about what Jesus began to do (Luke’s Gospel).*
- *Jesus had given orders to His apostles before He was taken up to heaven.*
  - ◊ *Great Commission—Matthew 28:18–20 (on a mountain in Galilee)*
  - ◊ *Final Commission—Acts 1:8 (on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem)*
- *Jesus gave many convincing proofs of His resurrection (v. 3).*
- *He was on earth over a period of forty days between His resurrection and ascension (v. 3).*
- *During those forty days Jesus taught His followers about God’s kingdom (v. 3).*

Read Acts 1:4–5. What promise did Jesus make to his apostles?

Read Acts 1:8. What was Jesus’ final commission to His followers?

### Ideas for Discussion

- *What areas were they supposed to take Jesus’ message to?*
  - ◊ *Jerusalem*
  - ◊ *All Judea and Samaria (provinces—Jerusalem was in Judea and Samaria was just north)*
  - ◊ *The ends of the earth*
- *This commission can also serve as an outline of Acts:*
  - ◊ *The gospel to Jerusalem—Acts 1–7*
  - ◊ *The gospel to surrounding Jewish areas—Acts 8–12*
  - ◊ *The gospel to the world—Acts 13–28*

- *Ask group members how they would explain what the New Testament is about to a high school student.*
  - ◊ *Gospels—about Jesus’ life and ministry (Matthew 1:1)*
  - ◊ *Acts—about the early church’s spread around the Roman world*
  - ◊ *Epistles—instructions to the new believers about how the Christian life works*
  - ◊ *Revelation—John’s explanation of God’s sovereign control over His world and the culmination of human history on earth*

Read Acts 2:1–4 and briefly discuss this event which is the fulfillment of the promise of 1:4–5.

- *This event signals the beginning of the church age and a new relationship where the Holy Spirit is dwelling inside Jesus’ followers.*
- *It occurred ten days after Jesus gave the Final Commission and is called the “Day of Pentecost” after the Jewish feast that was being celebrated when the event occurred.*

To answer the skeptics’ scoffing about the Pentecost events (2:13), Peter made the first public presentation of the gospel message (2:14–36).

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Because Peter’s proclamation convinced his Jewish listeners that they had just crucified their Messiah (2:36) they were horrified and asked Peter what they should do.*
  - ◊ *Read Peter’s answer in verses 37–38.*
  - ◊ *Read their response in verse 41.*
- *Discuss how the group thinks this response from the Jews would have affected the apostles.*
  - ◊ *Enormous confirmation and excitement! Three thousand Jews, who a little over a month ago had demanded Jesus’ crucifixion, had now accepted Him as their Messiah. The gospel message, empowered by the Holy Spirit and delivered by one of them “worked”.*

Read Acts 4:1–3 and discuss the apostles’ imprisonment. Ask how group members think they might have responded.

- *Other persecution accounts are in 5:17–18 (a second imprisonment); 7:54–60 (Stephen’s stoning); and 8:1–2 (Saul’s rampage against Christians).*

Read Acts 5:29–31 and 5:42. Discuss what could have changed these men from the way they were when they had abandoned Jesus during his trials and crucifixion.

- *They had witnessed Jesus’ resurrection and spent forty days with Him.*

Stephen was not one of Jesus’ twelve apostles but he too preached a powerful sermon. What was the source of his power?

*(Listening Guide question 38)*

Acts 7 records Stephen’s story. He was the first Christian martyr. Read Acts 8:1–2 and then 11:19–21. Discuss how God used Stephen’s tragic death to honor this fallen hero of the faith. What resulted from his persecution?

Paul was converted and committed. He went from being the church’s persecutor to its great missionary.

Luke tells the story in Acts 9. But he also put Paul's story in Paul's own words in Acts 22:6–11.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Read the story in Acts 22 and discuss Paul's response to Jesus.*
- *Remember that Paul was a devout follower of God and the Hebrew Scriptures. He persecuted Jesus' followers because he was convinced Jesus was a fraud and danger to Judaism.*
- *But once convinced that Jesus was for real, Paul was as devoted to Him as he had been previously opposed to Him.*
- *Discuss what it means to be devoted to Christ as Paul was.*
  - ◊ *Should we view Paul as an odd duck or should we view him as a model?*

Paul mainly conducted his ministry in three forms. Ask if someone can name those forms.

- *He traveled as a missionary and preached the gospel to those who had never heard it.*
- *He also mentored younger believers. Silas, Timothy, Luke, and Titus were among his mentees.*
- *He also wrote letters to churches and individuals that have been preserved in the New Testament.*

Discuss how each aspect of Paul's ministry benefitted the church of his day and our day.

Discuss which aspect of Paul's ministry the group thinks has been most beneficial to Christians through the church's history. Why?

Acts 21–28 records Paul's four years in prison. Ask what happened to Paul's ministry when he was imprisoned.

*(Listening Guide question 45)*

- *He taught the gospel to the prison guards.*
- *He wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.*

The course notes say that “the flame that was ignited on Pentecost still burns brightly today.”

### Ideas for Discussion

- *How brightly does the flame of Pentecost burn in your Christian community?”*
- *How about in your own personal experience?*
- *How does Christ's story and Paul's story influence you on a weekly or daily basis?*

If your group has completed the Lessons and Listening Guides ask them to share one of the truths they see about God through the history of the church that is significant and helpful to them.

If they aren't completing the lessons, ask the same question and give them a few minutes to construct a response.



## Application

This lesson presented a number of life-impacting facts. Of all that you covered in the lesson, select one fact that was “most significant” to you. What made it so significant? Describe, in a sentence or two, how you believe a person who takes all this seriously should respond to it.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.



## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 6. “In Lesson 6 we will learn major themes addressed in the New Testament Epistles (letters) and understand key idea in the book of Revelation.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain major issues addressed by the New Testament Epistles (letters).
2. Understand key ideas in the book of Revelation.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Discussion

Introduce this session as a continuation of Lesson 5. In Lesson 5 you surveyed the first two categories of New Testament books, and in this lesson you will survey the other two categories.

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask if someone can name the four categories of books in the New Testament*
  - ◇ *Gospels—about Jesus’ life and ministry (Matthew 1:1)*
  - ◇ *Acts—about the early church’s spread around the Roman world*
  - ◇ *Epistles—instructions to the new believers about how the Christian life works*

- ◇ *Revelation—John’s explanation of God’s sovereign control over His world and the culmination of human history on earth*
- *Ask how many books are in the New Testament.*
  - ◇ 27
- *How many writers*
  - ◇ 9
- *Can anyone name the New Testament writers?*
  - ◇ *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude and Hebrews’ author*
- *How many of the New Testament books are epistles?*
  - ◇ 21
- *How many of those did Paul write?*
  - ◇ 13
- *What is another name for “Epistle”?*
  - ◇ *Letter*
- *What is another name for “Testament”?*
  - ◇ *Covenant—cf. 1 Corinthians 11:25*

## Letters: Instruction

This section of Lesson 6 lists a few of the New Testament churches and the issues Paul addressed in his letters. List the cities named below and see if the group can identify the main themes or ideas Paul’s letter to them addressed.

- *Corinth—immorality, divisions, strife*
- *Philippi—discouragement*
- *Rome—clarity about what the gospel really is*
- *Thessalonica—persecution and confusion about the last days*
- *Ephesus—instruct*

Ask the group what other questions, issues, encouragements, etc. they can think of that the epistles address.

Ask if anyone has a favorite epistle and why it is their favorite.

Ask what the best way was to meet the needs of the growing church.

Explore together what roles the New Testament letters played in the early church.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *List reasons the group gives for why they write emails, texts, letters, memos, etc.*
  - ◇ *To inform, teach, correct, answer questions, give thanks, encourage, scold, apologize, explain*
  - ◇ *These are the same reasons the New Testament writers wrote their epistles.*

- *The more we know about why the letters were written the more sense they make to us when we read them.*
  - ◊ *Suggest that as they read an epistle they ask themselves why the writer included that topic. The writers always taught, addressed needs, or encouraged the readers.*
    - » *Read James 1:1–2 and ask what situation James was addressing.*
    - » *Read 1 Peter 2:1–2 and ask what concern Peter had that led him to write that.*
    - » *Read 2 Timothy 2:15 and ask what dangers Paul was warning Timothy about.*
- *Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and list the ways Scripture can profit us and discuss them.*

Discuss how the churches or individuals who received these letters may have responded.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask the group how they feel when they receive a text, email, etc.*
  - ◊ *Depends on who it's from, your relationship, the message's content, its purpose*
    - » *Read Galatians 1:6. What is the letter's tone? How would you respond?*
    - » *Read 2 Corinthians 13:1–2. What is the tone of 2 Corinthians? How would you respond?*
    - » *Read Philippians 1:2–8. What is the tone of Philippians? How would you respond?*
  - ◊ *The point of these readings/reflections is that when we read an epistle, it's important to ask how the writer and readers related, what the tone of the letter was, and how the readers would process the letter.*

The primary purpose of these letters was to amplify and expand on Jesus' teachings as they related to specific situations.

Ask group members to read the passages below and explain what the writer instructed the church to do.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ephesians 4:1–3 (Protect the church's unity as a sign of walking worthy of our calling.)*
- *1 Timothy 3:1–2 (Select only the highest quality people as leaders in the church.)*
- *Galatians 6:1–2 (Help restore a Christian brother or sister who has sinned publicly.)*
- *Hebrews 13:17 (Support your church's leaders.)*
- *Ask the group to think of other instructions we find in the epistles.*
  - ◊ *Then ask which would be most important for the churches in their area? Or for their church? Why?*

Ask members to write (or compose in their minds) a short letter to the church they attend.

- *In one paragraph, compliment the people about one or two of the most positive things.*
- *In a second paragraph, make one suggestion that they feel would most help their church and what they personally could do to help address it.*
  - ◊ *If you feel comfortable doing so, ask group members if they can find a Bible passage they would use to support their compliments or their suggestion.*

As a group, see how many passages from the epistles you can name that teach us about a healthy church.

Ask group members to read the passages below and identify the personal teachings we discover.

- *Romans 12:10 (Love one another.)*
- *Romans 13:1 (Submit to government leaders.)*
- *Ephesians 5:1 (Imitate Christ.)*
- *1 Corinthians 16:1 (Care for one another.)*
- *1 John 1:9 (Confess our sins.)*
- *Titus 3:2 (Don't speak evil of others.)*

Discuss which of these you would most likely include if your group were going to write a letter to be read by the Christians in your city but could include only two topics.

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

Encourage the group members to write down personal lessons about living that they discover when they read the epistles.

List the doctrines below that are addressed in the New Testament epistles and ask members how well informed they are about each.

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

- *Jesus is God (Colossians 1:13–19).*
- *The Holy Spirit indwells and ministers to believers (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).*
- *All are sinners and need to be rescued by God (Romans 3:23).*
- *Salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9).*
- *Christians are commanded to forsake sin (Romans 6:1–14).*
- *Righteousness is available through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21–22).*
- *The Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16).*
- *All people will be resurrected from the dead (1 Corinthians 15).*

Go back through the list of topics again and ask the group to put a 1 (well-informed), 2 (sort-of-informed), or 3 (clueless) next to each doctrine.

Encourage the group to read these passages that teach us the biblical doctrines. Stress the importance of being regular students of this indispensable body of instructions for God's people.

If some want to develop their theology foundation they can take the course ST101 Theology Basics and become better informed about the basic Christian doctrines.

If they want a deeper exposure to theology they can take the Christian University GlobalNet series of theology courses, ST302 through ST507. Go to [christianuniversity.org](http://christianuniversity.org) to see the catalog of courses.

Our Daily Bread Christian University also has a New Testament survey course and courses on

individual Bible books for further study.

Those who completed the Listening Guide for this section were asked to select two of the truths we see about God in the epistles that are the most significant and helpful to them and explain what makes one of them significant. Take a few minutes for those who have completed this exercise to share their statements.

If your group is not doing the lessons, explain that one of the most significant contributions the epistles make is how they teach us about God.

- *God guides us through the process of dealing with our deepest needs (Paul's thorn in the flesh—2 Corinthians 12:7–10).*
- *God has paid the supreme price to redeem us from our sin (Romans 3:21–26).*
- *God understands our struggles and helps us deal with them (Hebrews 4:12–16).*
- *God lovingly disciplines us to protect us from sin's destruction (Hebrews 12:7–13).*
- *God is preparing an eternal kingdom where sin and evil are removed (2 Peter 3:10–13).*

Encourage the group members to identify what they learn about God as they read the epistles.

## Revelation: Prophecy

Leader note: Many seminary-trained teachers avoid teaching portions of Revelation because of the various views of interpretation. Delving into the details of the book of Revelation in this Basics course may well raise more questions than you have time to address. So the Leader's Guide will present an overview of the book of Revelation but not attempt to discuss all the apocalyptic, figurative imagery in the book. If you or some of your group members want a more thorough study of Revelation, go to the CUGN catalog and take Dr. Craig Blomberg's course, NT228 Revelation: The Book of Revelation—The End and the Beginning.

This Leader's Guide for Revelation will take you through a brief discussion of Revelation's purpose and structure with selected passages to read and discuss and some ideas for application.

Explain that Revelation is a complicated book with various viewpoints on just about everything except how to spell its name. In this Basics course you will treat Revelation like the other New Testament books and only discuss a broad overview of its content. Ask the group to avoid trying to turn the session into a prophecy conference (or debate).

The first paragraph in the section on Revelation provides a thumbnail sketch of the New Testament's emphases. Can you name the events? If not, read the paragraph over a few times and see if you can repeat this catalog of the New Testament's high points.  
(*Listening Guide question 12*)

The session notes asked the following questions:

### Ideas for Discussion

- *How will the history of the world turn out? What lies ahead for the church and its people?*
- *Ask the group if they ever ask themselves these questions.*
- *If so, what kind of answer do they generate?*
- *Do people they talk to ever ask these questions?*
- *If so, what do they tell them?*

The book of Revelation is God's answer to those kinds of questions.

The Christians in John's day (AD 90) were suffering severe persecution from the Roman government and were wondering if God had lost control of His universe, their world, and their lives. The book of Revelation was written to assure them that God was still in control and that in His time Jesus would purge the earth of evil (Revelation 6–18) and would return to personally establish His rule (Revelation 19–22).

Suggest here that Lesson 6 goes into far more detail than you can discuss in your brief meeting time. Group members can read and re-read the lesson with the book of Revelation and absorb more of the book's specifics. If they want to study more they can take Dr. Blomberg's courses.

The purpose of this session is to present the book's theme and general structure to help the group members in their own study of the book.

**Revelation's Author:** John the apostle. He named himself in 1:1, 4, 9 and 22:8. It was most likely written around AD 95.

**Revelation's Recipients:** Seven churches in Asia Minor. It is probably a letter that was intended to be circulated to all the churches and not limited to these seven.

**Revelation's Purpose:** Roman authorities were beginning to enforce emperor worship and Christians had to make a clear stand against the empire. As a result, persecution was increasing.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Read Revelation 2:10; 3:10; 2:13; 6:9 and discuss the various ways Christian were being persecuted.*
- *Ask your group how they think they would respond to such conditions.*
- *The book's purpose was to reveal God's sovereignty as a basis of encouragement and strength for the persecuted church. Revelation teaches us that God has not lost control of His world and that in His time He would return and establish His reign.*

#### **Revelation's Theme**

##### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Read Revelation 4:11 and 5:11–14 and discuss how the book presents Jesus in these passages.*
  - ◊ *Stress the fact that in spite of all the references to beasts and destruction in the middle section of the book (the great tribulation, 6–18) that the book's theme is Jesus' victory over Satan and evil.*
- *Chapters 19–22 present details of Christ's return.*
  - ◊ *Ask someone to read Revelation 19:11–16 and discuss how John presents Jesus here.*

- ◇ *Ask someone to read Revelation 22:12–13 and discuss how John presents Jesus here.*
- *Emphasize the fact that John needed to present all the difficult details of the great tribulation in order to give his main theme its proper emphasis, but that we shouldn't make all the mysteries of chapters 6–18 the major focus of our study.*
  - ◇ *Read Revelation 1:1 and see what the book is called there in its opening statement.*

Revelation's Outline: The outline is presented in 1:19, where John was told, "Write . . ."

- *The things you have seen (the vision of God, described in chapter 1)*
- *What is now (the condition of the church in John's day, described in chapters 2–3)*
- *What will take place later (the events described in chapters 4–22)*

Because the imagery was primarily related to events and characters more obvious to the original readers, many of the book's details undoubtedly made more sense to them than to those of us who must depend on conjecture to interpret some of the imagery. Our concerns deal with the big picture of Jesus' return and His victory over Satan.

Revelation's contribution to the New Testament was that it helped the people of John's time gain a better understanding that their difficult circumstances were under God's sovereign control and that they should not abandon their commitment to Christ.

Revelation teaches Jesus' supreme rule over His creation and encourages believers to worship Him and eagerly look for His return.

Even if we can't clearly identify all of the imagery in Revelation 6–18 we understand that when God cleanses the earth of Satan's evil emphasis and presence, He will recreate a holy place for His followers.

- *Read Romans 8:18–23 and discuss the fact that in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve fell that the whole of God's creation was affected (Genesis 3:17–19) and needs to be "set free from its slavery to corruption" (Romans 8:21).*
- *Read Revelation 21:1–4 and discuss John's description of God's new creation.*

Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:18 that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people" (NIV). This description of Christ's return is always set before Christians as a sustaining hope. Pray Paul's prayer for yourself and claim this glorious promise as your guiding and empowering hope when your world gets difficult and discouraging.

*(Listening Guide question 31)*

Reflect on what you have discovered in this brief look at God's glorious reconstruction of His universe and write down one statement that you would make to Jesus if you could tell him face to face how the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" has influenced your opinion of Him, or of yourself.



## Application

The book of Revelation opens (1:3) and closes (22:7) with blessings for those who read and keep the words of “this book” of Revelation. In places it is a difficult book to read. But God obviously wanted His people to be familiar with it and said, “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:7, NKJV). The most fitting application to this Revelation is to read it and pray for God’s strength and wisdom to “keep” it.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.



*Can We Really Trust the Bible*

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 7. “In Lesson 7, we will learn how the Bible’s claims to be trustworthy are backed up by its preservation, unity, accuracy, and impact.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. List two reasons why some people do not trust the Bible.
2. Explain three reasons why people do trust the Bible.
3. Describe your own reasons for trusting and/or not trusting the Bible.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

*Begin the lesson with a brief review of the course.*

Lesson 1: Introduction to the Old Testament

1. How many Old Testament books are there? (39)
2. How many Old Testament authors are there? (30)
3. How many years of known history does the Old Testament cover? (1400 to 400 BC = 1,000 years)

## Lesson 2: Beginnings Through Settlement

4. How many books cover the Old Testament “Beginnings” period? (the first five Old Testament books)
5. What is that collection of books called? (Pentateuch, Torah, Law of Moses)
6. What books are included in that collection? (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)
7. What are the Old Testament eras? (Beginnings, Settlement, Kingdom, Exile/Reconstruction)
8. How many books cover the “Settlement” period? (three: Joshua, Judges, Ruth)

## Lesson 3: Kings Through Exile

9. In what two forms did Israel’s kingdom exist? (united and divided)
10. What were the two nations called during the division? (Israel with ten tribes and Judah with two tribes)
11. When did the “Kingdom” era end? (586 BC)
12. What event ended it? (Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem.)
13. How long was the exile? (70 years)
14. What ended the exile? (Cyrus the Persian defeated Babylon and released the Jews.)
15. What are the three major events of the “Reconstruction” period?
  - Rebuilding Jerusalem’s temple (book of Ezra)
  - Rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls (book of Nehemiah)
  - Rebuilding Jerusalem’s people (revivals in Ezra and Nehemiah)

## Lesson 4: Introduction to the New Testament

16. How many years between the Old and New Testaments? (400)
17. How many books in the New Testament? (27)
18. How many writers? (9)
19. Can anyone name them? (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, Jude, Hebrews’ author)
20. How do we group the New Testament books? (Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation)
21. What three cultures influenced the New Testament times? (Roman, Greek, Hebrew)

## Lesson 5: The Gospels and Acts

22. What two major themes are addressed in these books?
  - Jesus’ life and ministry (Gospels)
  - The birth and spread of the church (Acts)
23. How many years of history are covered in the New Testament? (about 95)
24. How long did Jesus’ ministry last? (about three years)
25. What three things characterized Jesus’ ministry? (teaching, miracles, focus on disciples)
26. What does *testament* mean? (covenant)
27. What are the three movements in Acts?
  - The gospel to Jerusalem (Acts 1–7)
  - The gospel went to Judea and Samaria (Acts 9–12)
  - The gospel went to the Roman world (Acts 13–28)

## Lesson 6: Letters and Revelation

28. How many epistles are there? (21)
29. How many by Paul? (13)
30. How many different writers? (six: Paul, Hebrews' author, James, Peter, John, Jude)
31. What was the primary purpose of the epistles? (instruction)
32. Who wrote Revelation? (John the apostle)
33. What was Revelation's theme?
  - Stated in 1:1—the revelation of Jesus Christ. It was written to reassure suffering Christians that God is in control of His creation and will eventually restore it to its intended glory.
34. What are the three movements in Revelation?
  - Stated in Revelation 1:19:
    - ◇ The things John had seen (Revelation 1)
    - ◇ The things which are (Revelation 2–3)
    - ◇ The things that will be hereafter (Revelation 4–22)
35. What does the large central section of the book (Revelation 4–18) deal with?
  - The great tribulation where God purges the earth of evil in preparation for Christ's return as King of kings and Lord of lords in Revelation 19.

# Discussion

## Introduction

Ask the group to discuss their personal feelings about the Bible. Do you trust it?  
(*Listening Guide question 1*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *What do you base that trust on?*
- *OR What are the sources of your doubts?*
- *How consistently do you consult it for direction and advice?*
- *How often do you use the Bible when giving advice or encouragement to others?*

## Does Anybody Doubt the Bible's Trustworthiness?

Ask the group how they would you respond to someone who claims the Bible has scientific and/or historical inaccuracies.  
(*Listening Guide question 4*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask the person to name and document the specific inaccuracies he/she has found. What is the inaccuracy and what specific authority is used to prove that the statement is inaccurate?*
- *Point out that those who refute the Bible have attempted for centuries to invalidate it and none has found that “silver bullet” inaccuracy that proves the Bible is inaccurate.*

Discuss how they might respond to someone who says it is outdated and irrelevant to today’s culture.

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

- *The Bible was written to ancient cultures and some statements are not applicable to current culture. Sacrificing animals, dietary laws, and some cultural customs were entirely appropriate to the culture they were addressed to. But some statements do not work in a different culture.*
- *Because of these cultural differences we read and apply the Bible in two steps:*
  - ◊ *Exegesis asks how the biblical text was to be applied at the time it was written.*
  - ◊ *Hermeneutics asks how the biblical text would be applied in our time and culture.*
  - ◊ *Most often the two are the same, but the two-step reading process accounts for the fact that the Bible books were written in a different cultural context.*
    - » *Sacrificing animals was appropriate for ancient Israel but not today.*
    - » *Dietary laws protected Israel from diseases we need not worry about today.*
    - » *The culturally accepted roles of women and slaves do not work in modern times.*

## The Bible Claims It Is Trustworthy

Ask a group member to read 2 Timothy 3:16 and discuss what “inspired by God” means.

- *Literally, “God-breathed”; the teaching is that God directed the writers to state the exact meaning He intended. They most often used their own words to communicate the meaning, but God superintended and guided them so the statements communicated what He intended.*

Ask someone to read 2 Peter 1:20–21 and discuss its meaning.

- *The ideas and concepts in the Bible did not originate with the writers.*
- *God shaped the writers’ understanding of His ideas and they were not open to human interpretation.*
- *The will and intention of the Bible’s statements were not driven by human initiative or concern.*
- *The biblical writers were, literally, “carried along” by God’s Holy Spirit.*
  - ◊ *The word Peter used in verse 21 translated “moved” (New American Standard Bible) or “carried along” (NIV) means “to be borne along, to move along while one is being sustained, supported, propelled or driven” (Arndt & Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament).*
  - ◊ *The verb is in the passive voice. The writers were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit.*
- *The final phrase of verse 21 says that they were carried along as they “spoke from God.”*

Using this paragraph and the next, compare 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20–21. List two ways their messages are similar and two ways they are different.

*(Listening Guide question 6)*

- *Differences:*

- ◇ *Second Timothy claims it is profitable and gives reasons why and 2 Peter doesn't.*
- ◇ *Second Timothy uses the word inspired and 2 Peter elaborates on that concept with three statements.*
  - » *No private interpretation*
  - » *Not the writer's will being expressed*
  - » *Writers were "carried along" as they spoke (wrote) God's intended messages.*
- *Similarities:*
  - ◇ *Both claim that the ideas in Scripture are not limited to human wisdom or insight.*
  - ◇ *Both claim that God is the ultimate Author of the Bible's ideas and message.*
  - ◇ *Both claim that humans fully participated in expressing what God intended.*

Neither passage teaches that God overcame the writer's individual personality.

Read Amos's earthy statements in Amos 4:1–3 and compare with Isaiah's poetry in Isaiah 40:29–31.

- *Amos was a farmer by trade and his imagery shows that. Isaiah was a prophet to kings and was obviously highly educated and had a poet's heart.*

When we compare Luke's Greek as an educated physician and native Greek speaker with Peter's very rough Greek as a "Greek-as-second-language" and less-educated writer in 2 Peter we see how their culture and education influenced their writings.

Scripture is a joint effort—with God providing the ideas and assuring they were accurately stated and the writers using their own vocabulary and writing style to clearly and accurately communicate what God wanted His people to understand.

Read and discuss what Paul said about the result of the God/human partnership in 1 Corinthians 2:12–13.

There are eight passages below where writers credit God for the information in their book. You can either assign one passage to different group members to read and tell the group what it says, or you can read them yourself and discuss together.

- *In Daniel 9:2 Daniel referred to Jeremiah's statement as a word from God.*
- *In Jeremiah 29:10 (the passage that Daniel referenced) Jeremiah acknowledged that his statement was from God.*
- *The Old Testament prophets consistently wrote that "The word of the Lord came . . ." (Isaiah 6:6; Jeremiah 1:1–2; Ezekiel 1:1–3; Hosea 1:1, etc.)*
- *Paul emphatically stated that his message was not from men but from God (Galatians 1:11–13).*
- *John stated that his revelation was from God Himself (Revelation 1:1, 19).*

During His time on earth, Jesus affirmed the Scriptures.

Ask group members to read and comment on the passages below.

- *Mark 7:13; 7:8; Luke 4:21*

- *Jesus referred to Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4–5), Noah’s flood (Matthew 24:37–39), and Jonah’s fish (Matthew 12:38–41) as real events.*
- *Ask what that fact says about Jesus’s view of the Old Testament.*
- *Jesus treated fantastical stories of the Old Testament as real events.*
- *Jesus claimed that His own words were Scripture (John 12:48–49).*
- *Jesus used Scripture as authoritative proclamations when answering His critics (Matthew 22:32).*
- *Jesus used Scripture during His temptation to refute Satan (Matthew 4).*

## The Bible’s Unity and Preservation

Ask how you would answer the claim that the Bible is full of contradictions.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *The Old Testament was written over a period of one thousand years and includes thirty-nine books written by thirty different authors.*
- *After four hundred years of silence, the New Testament was written over a period of fifty years and contains twenty-seven books written by nine different authors.*

But the single theme from Genesis to Revelation is God’s rescue of mankind from sin through His Son Jesus Christ.

- *The Old Testament’s thirty-nine books announce Jesus as humanity’s hope for salvation.*
- *The New Testament’s twenty-seven books announce the fulfillment of that hope.*

Those who would discredit the Bible by finding contradictions in its message have not succeeded.

Share the fact that there are no original manuscripts of Bible Books. Only copies.

Ask the group how that fact influences your confidence in the Bibles we read today.

*(Listening Guide question 13)*

- *The biblical manuscripts have been copied thousands of times, from various parts of the world, over many centuries, and yet the message in copy after copy has never varied in any way.*
- *The only discrepancies in the texts, and there are very few, have to do with slight errors in copying. These discrepancies include errors like reversing letters (“ie” becomes “ei,” word order is reversed, etc.).*
- *The scribes’ amazing care to preserve—not only the text’s meaning but also its exact words and letters—is astounding.*
- *There is no single biblical truth that has been influenced in any way by copyist errors.*

## The Old Testament Text

Because they were considered sacred texts the scribes took great care to accurately preserve them.

Discuss the Masoretes' stringent care.

- *The Masoretes were trained scribes who considered these biblical texts as sacred writings from God and so they handled them with the greatest respect.*
- *After copying a page, the Masoretic scribes would count the letters on both the original and the copy. If the number of letters differed they would destroy the copy and recopy it.*
- *The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, were thousands of years older than manuscripts currently in use. After careful comparison the ancient Dead Sea manuscripts were identical with the Masoretic Texts used to translate the Old Testament in the Bibles we use today. The care given to preserving the accuracy of these texts assures us that we have amazingly accurate copies of what the original writers recorded.*

Discuss the group members' confidence in the accuracy of the Bible they hold in their hands today.

- *If no one mentions it, point out the fact that the same God who painstakingly inspired the writers to accurately record His message would undoubtedly act to preserve that message.*

## The New Testament Text

Although there are minor copyist discrepancies between texts, ask what claim would a New Testament textual scholar make for the Bible you read today.

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- *No discrepancies have been found that in any way influence the meaning of any Bible passage we read today. What we read in our modern Bibles is the same message that has been carefully and diligently preserved over the many centuries since the original texts were written.*

Fortunately we have an enormous number of New Testament manuscript copies to compare. In addition, those copies are closer to the time of the original writings than any other literature of their time.

Scholars who study ancient documents like the New Testament weigh two factors: (1) How many copies of a text do we have and how accurately do those copies agree? (2) How close in time are the copies to the original documents? Comparing the New Testament texts with other writings of their time—which are accepted as legitimate without question—adds great confidence to our belief in the accuracy of our New Testament texts. We have

- *Ten manuscripts of Caesar's Gallic Wars; Earliest Date: AD 900*
- *Twenty manuscripts of Livy's History Of Rome; Earliest Date: AD 400*
- *Eight manuscripts of Thucydides's History; Earliest Date: AD 900*
- *Eight manuscripts of Herodotus's History; Earliest Date: AD 900*
- *Fourteen thousand manuscripts of New Testament writings; Earliest Date: AD 125*
- *For the New Testament we have many thousands of manuscripts with almost identical agreement (except for minor copyist discrepancies that do not influence the texts' meaning).*
- *Some of those texts are only separated from the original manuscript by less than two hundred years.*



From the standpoint of textual evidence there is no ancient document that compares with the New Testament. There is no reason to doubt that what Paul wrote to the Corinthians or what John wrote about Jesus has been preserved with complete accuracy in the Bible we read today.

Give group members a few minutes to reflect and comment on their response to the Bible's texts.

## The Bible's Prophetic Accuracy

Read Deuteronomy 18:22 and discuss its meaning and implications.

Read Jeremiah 29:10 again and then read Ezra 6:15, which gives the exact date of the temple's reconstruction after the Babylonian captivity. The temple was destroyed in 586 BC and rebuilt in 516 BC. Do the math.

Read Daniel's vision of the four beasts that represent the four nations that would rule the Jews.

- ◇ *Daniel 7:17 explains the interpretation of Daniel's vision of four beasts (7:1–28). Each beast described a nation that would rule over the Jews in the future.*
- ◇ *Read the third beast's description in 7:6 that describes the Greek empire.*
  - » *The leopard with four wings depicts incredible speed, which characterized Alexander the Great's rapid sweep across the ancient world.*
  - » *The beast's four heads depict the fact that when Alexander died, his empire was divided among four of his generals. Two of the four, Ptolemy and Seleucid, ruled over the Jews from 323 BC to 166 BC.*
- ◇ *Daniel's vision occurred centuries before Alexander's time.*

Read Isaiah 36:5–7 and then 37:36–38. Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, had surrounded Jerusalem and threatened to destroy it. Judah's king Hezekiah asked Isaiah the prophet for advice and Isaiah prophesied that Jerusalem would be spared and that Sennacherib's sons would kill him (36:5–7). That happened shortly after Sennacherib returned to Assyria (37:36–38).

Read God's challenge to the false idols (Isaiah 41:21–24) and then His claim in 42:8–9 and discuss how God proves that He is God and the idols are not.

These are three of hundreds of similar prophecies that have already been accurately fulfilled.

Ask group members to reflect on Old Testament prophecies that are history to us and how that influences their trust in the Bible's claim to be inspired by God.

In addition, there are numerous direct and implied statements about Jesus in the Old Testament. (For the following passages you may want to assign the Old Testament passage to one person and the New Testament to another. Have the Old Testament passage read first, then the New Testament). Ask volunteers to read the following passages and explain what they refer to.

- *Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 1:26–35 (virgin birth)*
- *Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1 (Bethlehem)*



- *Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 2:1 (Immanuel)*
- *Isaiah 9:1–2 and Matthew 4:12–16 (Galilee)*
- *Zechariah 9:9 and Matthew 21:1–5 (triumphal entry)*

*Discuss the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament's promise of a savior and ruler from God.*

## The Bible's Powerful Impact

Paul wrote that the gospel would change lives of those who followed it.

- *The gospel changed cultures and society.*
  - ◊ *Ask group members to name charities or societal changes that have been inspired by the Bible's teachings. (hospitals, schools, families, women, slavery, human rights, etc.)*
- *Societies change only when its people change. Jesus changes the world one person at a time.*
  - ◊ *Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and discuss its meaning.*
  - ◊ *An early illustration of personal change is seen in Jesus' own followers. They fled at His crucifixion (Mark 14:50) and Peter denied Him three times. After His resurrection, they were imprisoned and beaten (Acts 4:1–4; 5:40) and yet they continued to preach His message. All of them but John the apostle were martyred rather than deny Jesus.*

Ask the group to share

- *Some ways a friend or a neighbor's life has been impacted by the gospel.*
- *Some ways the Bible has had an impact on their own life and family.*

## Application

Imagine for a few moments how our world, your country, your city, your home would be different if there was no Bible truth influencing it.

Think about some countries or cultures you live in, have been exposed to or read about that have rejected the Bible and its teachings. How are those situations different than places where the Bible has had an influence?

How strongly does the Bible actually influence your day-to-day life?

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.