

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

The story of the Bible in one hour



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: The aim of this session is simply to get an overview of the whole story of the Bible. Our handout emphasises key themes, and tries to show how the Bible is one, consistent narrative. It tells us what kind of world God made, why He put us here, who He made us to be, and where God's world is heading. The more we can understand God's story, the more we will make sense of ours.

Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What are some of the main themes in the story of the Bible?



Understanding the information (40 minutes)

This session is simply about reading through the three sided summary. There are missing words to create a bit of fun along the way.

It might be helpful after you have been through each of the five sections to pause and see whether people have any questions, or to ask, "So what does this mean for us?"



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)



For the beauty of your creation
We give you thanks
For making us in your image
We give you thanks
For your everlasting covenant love
We give you thanks
For the freedom of your kingdom
We give you thanks
For rescuing us from exile
We give you thanks
For the gift of Jesus
We give you thanks
For living, dying, resurrected, ascended
We give you thanks
For your universal family
We give you thanks
For your grace given to us
We give you thanks
For the the promise of your return
We give you thanks
For hope of creation restored
We give you thanks
For ever and ever
We give you thanks

Amen.

THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

with highlighted themes

See if you can place these words in the correct spaces as you read the story:



garden anointed vision blessing salvation
Temple rule relationship covenant renewed Saul
Promised kingdom sacrifice obeying Leviticus

CREATION, FALL AND COVENANT

Key Books: Genesis

Characters: Noah, Abraham

Dates: Up to 1870 BC



God is a **creator**, who brings new life. He creates the heavens – not a separate place we go to when we die but a description of God’s space, the realm of spiritual realities we cannot see – and the earth – the space where human beings exist. From the beginning, God’s intention is that heaven and earth should overlap and be in harmony.

Human beings are created as the pinnacle of God’s creation, in God’s image, made to live in the closest possible relationship with Him, and given the royal dignity of being able to join in with God’s creative work by ruling.

But the experience of human beings has two realities. We are made in the **image of God**, and to be a blessing in God’s creation. But the decision to make ourselves the ones who decide what is good and evil, rather than..... God (described in the story of Adam and Eve but played out again and again in history) drives us away – separating heaven and earth.

We live with the consequences of this separation in lives which fall short of our human calling, relationships between God and people, and between human beings, in which trust is broken, and in which things which are created to be acan easily be twisted out of shape. This “**fall**” affects the “heavens” as well as the earth, with much of the evil and pain we face being influenced by the unseen rebellion of spiritual forces. Death results.

The story of the world is God’s mission to restore what is broken, so that heaven and earth can once again be reunited, and human beings can recover our original relationship and calling. This is the meaning of

So God re-creates, at first by calling a people to be a blessing to the nations. A new people. For the Jewish people, the purpose of life is joining in with God’s restoration of the world.

ISRAEL: EXODUS, PROMISED LAND, TEMPLE

Key Books: Exodus,
..... , Numbers,
Deuteronomy, Joshua
Characters: Moses,
Aaron,
Miriam, Moses, Joshua
Dates: 1870 BC – 1045
BC.



The people of Israel are made slaves in Egypt, yet God rescues them so that they can **worship** Him in freedom. In order to be with them, God establishes a in the midst of His people – initially a moveable tent called a tabernacle, and later on a physical building in Jerusalem.

This is the place where His **presence** (heaven) overlaps with ours (earth) and so both tabernacle and Temple were decorated in a way that made the people remember the initial in which they were made to be completely at one with God.

At the centre of these dwellings is the Holy of Holies – the space in which God dwells. It can only be entered once a year by the high priest. This is because God remains holy, and His people remain cut off from Him by sin. So around the Temple God gives a system of animal sacrifice, in which the lives of animals are given to absorb the cost of people's sin, though not in a permanent way. Despite this being an incomplete solution, it provides a way for God and His people to continue in.....

EXILE AND FUTURE HOPE

Key Books: Judges, 1
and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2
Kings, 1 and 2
Chronicles and the
prophets

Characters: Gideon,
Deborah, Samson,
Ruth, Samuel, ,
David, Solomon,
Elijah, Elisha.
Dates: 1045 BC – 586
BC.

God's love for His people, and His calling on their lives to be a blessing remain, but again and again Israel keep choosing not to obey. The kingdom splits and eventually they are taken into their **exile** from God's Land.

Yet through this time God appoints certain people to speak His words to Israel – calling them back to be people who will live holy lives, marked by **justice** and **right-living**, restoring the earth. Over time this vision emerges as a promise of God's kingdom being fully established again – a time when God's heavenly will be completely at one with the earth.

Prophets speak of someone with God's Spirit (Messiah) who will bring God's **kingdom** to earth once again, healing lives, changing people's hearts so that they will want to do what God desires once again, and enabling them to be with and worship God everywhere.

Israel returns from exile, yet is still under occupation, and looks forward with longing for this Messiah for four hundred years.



JESUS, KINGDOM, GRACE

**Key Books: The
gospels**
**Characters: The
Father,
Son and Holy Spirit**
Dates: 1 AD - 33AD



Jesus is this anointed one. He is called the “Word made flesh” who sets up God’s tabernacle among us (John 1). He is the Temple – the place of God’s full presence. In His life and wherever He goes He creates places where heaven and earth overlap once again – the coming of God’s – those who are sick are restored, the oppressed are set free, and people’s hearts are turned towards God in love.

Through Jesus God’s mission is re-established. Jesus begins to restore what is broken, but also points to a time when this healing will be complete, and God will be all in all. He sent His disciples to join in the same work: “Go! I am sending you... When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”(Luke 10: 8-9).

Jesus also becomes the..... – the Lamb of God – whose death means that evil, sin and death are absorbed and defeated, not as a temporary solution, but possible for all people, time and space.
God’s **grace** is made accessible to all.

CHURCH, SPIRIT, FUTURE HOPE

**Key Books: Acts,
letters, Revelation.**
**Characters: Mary, the
disciples, Paul.**
Dates: 33AD - ?



As God’s covenant people, Jesus’ disciples are called out (the meaning of church) to continue this work of the reconciliation of all things and people. They are given God’s presence (Spirit) to begin to rule creation once again in His image.

While they long to see God face-to-face, their **hope** is not to leave the earth when they die, but to be with God forever in a renewed creation, in which heaven and earth overlap completely once again, and humanity rule in the love and power of God. The end of the Bible looks forward to a time when this restoration will be complete.

While they look for this creation, joining in with the restoration God began most fully in Christ, they still experience the “death throes” of evil, chaos and mortality in the world. The world itself is still groaning like a woman in childbirth longing to be “liberated from its bondage to decay”. God’s mission of restoration continues in the context of this struggle, but with the hope and that one day the kingdom will be fully “on earth, as it is in heaven.”