

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WHOLE BIBLE STORY

Chapters 1—5 (From Creation to the Promised Land)

1. Why do you think Adam and Eve believed Satan's lie that if they ate the forbidden fruit they would not die but become like God? Would you have eaten the fruit if you were in their place? Why or why not?
2. The story of Noah tells of sin, judgment, and faith. What is foreshadowed in this story? What lessons can we learn?
3. What did Joseph believe about God that enabled him to forgive his brothers and recognize that God could use their evil intentions to accomplish his perfect will?
4. What difficult circumstances have you experienced that God has been able to use for his good purposes?
5. Does anything in Moses early life (before the burning bush) surprise you? Why do you think God chose him for this mission?
6. In inflicting ten plagues on the Egyptians, the text states five times that Pharaoh hardened his heart and five times that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart (See Exodus 7—11). Discuss the tension in this passage between divine sovereignty and human freedom. Note: This is not a tension that we can necessarily resolve.
7. After they left Egypt, God guided the children of Israel with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. How does God guide believers today?

8. God was very detailed in the law he gave to the Israelites. What are the similarities and differences between ancient Israel and how God should rule in our lives today?
9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "People complain because they focus on what they don't have rather than what they do have." Give one example from the account of Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, and one example from your life.

Chapters 6—9 (The Judges through Solomon)

10. Do you think it was right for Rahab to lie to the guards of Jericho when they asked if foreigners had come to her house? Are there situations today where it might be better for a believer to lie than to tell the truth?
11. Should believers today use some kind of "fleece test" as Gideon did to determine the will of God? How can a believer know God's will today?
12. In the book of Hebrews, Samson is considered a hero of faith. Does this surprise you? What can we learn from his life?
13. When Samuel complained that the people had rejected him by asking for a king, the Lord told him to grant their request because they were rejecting Him, not Samuel. Does God sometimes give believers what they want even though it may not be best for them? Why or why not?
14. As you read through the actions of Saul and David, what are some similarities in their personalities? What are the differences? Why was Saul rejected by God and David considered a man after God's own heart?

15. David vs. Goliath is one of the most popular stories in the Bible. Did anything surprise you when you read it this time? What can we learn from this narrative?
16. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan confronted David and exposed his sin. How does God convict believers of sin today?
17. Though polygamy was practiced in the Old Testament, the consequences were always disastrous. Solomon is a classic example. His foreign wives influenced him to worship other gods. What are some lifestyle choices that believers might make today that would be damaging to their devotion to the Lord?

Chapters 10—12 (A Kingdom Divided and Exiled)

18. During the Divided Kingdom Period, who were the two best-known speaking prophets? After answering the question, read Luke 4:16-30. Why did Jesus refer to these two men when he spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth? How did the people respond? Why?
19. What competing religion did Ahab introduce into Israel (the Northern Kingdom)? Who influenced Ahab to practice this religion? What are some of the religious and secular practices that compete with the worship of the Lord in the Western world (culture)?
20. Discuss the following statement: "The Book (Story) of Jonah has been called the John 3:16 of the Old Testament." Why? List two or three characteristics of God that are evident in the story of Jonah. Can you identify a nation today that is similar to the Assyrians (Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire)?
21. In the parade of kings in the Southern Kingdom, only eight were godly and the rest were evil. Review the account of Ahaz and Hezekiah, and discuss why Hezekiah was a godly king when his father Ahaz was ungodly.

22. While restoring the Temple during the rule of Josiah, Hilkiah, the high priest, found the Book of the Law. When he read it to the king, Josiah ordered the nation to obey the Law. How important do you think it is for the United States to follow biblical principles? Are we or are we not a Christian nation?
23. List three religious reforms that were initiated by the kings of Judah. What are three spiritual reforms needed in our nation and the Church today?
24. What prophet advised the kings of Babylon during the exile? List three of his spiritual practices/commitments and discuss how you can develop these in your life.
25. When Mordecai appealed to Esther for help, in a memorable statement he said, "And who knows, maybe you were placed in your position for a time just like this." Ask the members of the group to tell about a situation in which they believe God has specially placed them to minister to others.
26. After the exile, who organized the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? In addition to rebuilding the walls, what spiritual reforms did this leader initiate? How important were the spiritual reforms for the rebuilding of the nation after the exile? Why?
27. What motivated Nehemiah to lead the Jews in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem? Do you think his motives were more God-centered or self-centered? How can we determine if our motives are more God-centered than self-centered?

Chapters 13—16 (Jesus' birth and ministry)

28. In addition to Mary, how many women are part of the story of Jesus' birth and his dedication in the Temple, and what were their roles? Discuss the role of women in the Christian mission.

29. When Jesus was twelve, what happened when Mary and Joseph made the annual trip to Jerusalem? When Mary scolded Jesus, how did he respond? What is significant in his answer about his awareness of his relationship with God?
30. What two significant events occurred when Jesus was baptized? Read Acts 10:38 and discuss why Jesus needed the Holy Spirit before he began his ministry.
31. After the Samaritans heard Jesus for themselves, and not only the report of the woman at the well, what did they say about him? How should this influence our view of Jesus' mission and our mission in the world today?
32. Why was Jesus rejected in the synagogue at Nazareth? Why do you think people reject Jesus today?
33. When Jesus first predicted his death and resurrection, how did his disciples respond? Why? Why and how is the resurrection important for Christianity?
34. Why did Jesus weep at the tomb of Lazarus? What did Jesus say to Martha that should give believers comfort when those we love have died?

Chapters 17—18 (Jesus Death and Resurrection)

35. When the religious leaders asked Jesus if he were the Messiah, what question did he ask them? Why did Jesus say he wouldn't answer their question? If an unbeliever asks a question about Christ, when would it be appropriate to not answer their question?
36. When he taught in an upper room before his arrest, Jesus told the disciples that their love for one another would show the world they were Jesus' followers. Discuss how believers can love one another and how this would be a witness to unbelievers.

37. Why did Peter deny Jesus? What are some of the ways believers deny Jesus today?
38. Why did Pilate give in to the demand of the Jewish leaders to crucify Jesus, even though he was convinced he was innocent? Discuss whether there is a little bit of Pilate in all of us.
39. One of the reasons Peter denied Jesus is that he failed to pray. How important is prayer in resisting temptation?
40. Make a list and discuss each of the events in the first three hours and last three hours of Jesus' death on the cross.
41. Discuss the theological significance of Jesus' statement from the cross, "It is finished!" In addition to his own life being over (he was dying), what else was finished?
42. Why do you think God so ordered events that women were the first to discover the empty tomb? Why did the angel command the women who discovered the empty tomb to tell men that Jesus was alive?
43. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and discuss the importance of the resurrection for Christianity, then and now.
44. One of the theories about the resurrection is that it was a myth created by the early church including some who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' crucifixion. Discuss three reasons why this theory is improbable.

Chapter 19 and Epilogue (The Apostles and the Early Church)

45. What gift did the resurrected and exalted Lord give to his followers on the day of Pentecost? Tough question: is the gift of the Spirit different today (in the church age) than in the Old Testament (the era of the Law)? If so, how?
46. What is the ministry of the Spirit in the life of a believer today? Read Galatians 5:16-26 and discuss what it means to “walk in the Spirit.”
47. Discuss the differences in the motives of Barnabas, who sold property and gave a gift to the church, and Ananias and Sapphira, who sold property, promised a gift to the church, but then kept for themselves some of the money promised to the church. Keep in mind that their giving was voluntary not compulsory.
48. Why do you think the Sanhedrin reacted so violently to Stephen’s speech? Take a moment to pray for the persecuted Church today.
49. Compare Stephen’s death with the death of Christ. List specific similarities. What similarity in the deaths of these men do you think is the most significant/surprising?
50. Peter rebuked Simon the magician for his attempt to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do you think Simon was a true believer? Why or why not?
51. Who was the first person to announce the gospel to the Gentiles, and what was the event that prompted him to go to the house of Cornelius?
52. Herod Agrippa ordered James arrested and executed. When he realized how much this pleased the Jews, he ordered Peter arrested and planned to execute him. God, however, rescued Peter. Why do you think the Lord allowed Herod to kill James but

rescued Peter? This question involves the mystery of God's sovereignty but addresses a problem we all struggle with: "Why does God allow some believers to suffer and others to enjoy blessed lives."

53. The Jerusalem Council (pp. 273-4) has been termed "the triumph of Grace over Law." Discuss what this means and why it is important for Christians today.
54. Who were the three converts at Philippi on Paul's second missionary journey, and what were the circumstances of their conversion? How were these similar to/different from your own conversion experience?
55. In Acts 20:7-12, Luke gives a description of the Gentile church at Troas. Compare the Gentile church at Troas with the Jewish church Paul describes in Acts 2:42-47. What features of the two churches can and cannot be duplicated in the church today?
56. Read the section of Paul's defense (testimony) before Felix and Festus, the Roman governors at Caesarea. Discuss the common elements in his two speeches. Then, discuss the differences.
57. On the voyage to Rome as a prisoner, Paul emerges as a courageous Christian. He is confident that God will protect those on the ship, but he also encourages them to eat bread. Discuss the statement by a commentator who has described Paul as "a man of God and of action, and a man of the Spirit and common sense." How important is it for Christians to be led by the Spirit but also to use common sense? What does that mean in your life?
58. Compare the ending of Acts with the beginning. What was the theme of Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem and Paul's teaching in Rome? How should we think about the kingdom of God as it relates to our own lives?

59. Read Acts 1:8 and briefly summarize the growth of the Church from Jerusalem to Rome, noting both its geographical and ethnic expansion. How is the Church growing today?

Epilogue

60. While he was in exile on the island of Patmos, Jesus appeared to John on the Lord's Day. Either using *The Whole Bible Story* or the Bible (Revelation 1), list features of the description John gives of the Lord, and discuss the significance of each feature. For example, the description that his hair was "white, like wool, like snow" symbolizes Jesus' infinite wisdom.