

***The following are study questions that were produced for an adult Bible study.  
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### **Study Questions for *The Drama of Scripture***

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#### ***The Drama of Scripture, Part 1: Old Testament***

#### **Introduction: the Bible as a Grand Story**

Suggested downloads from <http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/bluearticles.htm>:

1. Peters, Eugene, *Living Into God's Story*
2. Goheen and Bartholomew, *Story and Biblical Theology*

Topics/Questions to discuss:

1. What is the importance of “story” in getting to know someone? How is “story” better than a list of “true facts”?
2. Do you have a story? What is your story? If you wanted to get to know someone, what would you like to know?
3. Does *the world* have a story? What different stories are told about the world? What is the basic world-story told by adherents of modern Western secular culture?
4. How does your story fit into the story of the world? How does the story of the world (whatever it is) become part of your story?
5. How plausible is it to you to think of the Bible as the story of God’s involvement with the world? Would this make a difference to your reading and understanding of the Bible?
6. The Bible purports to be the *true* grand story of the world and of our lives. Do you agree?
7. How do the analogies of the “elephant” and the “cathedral” help illuminate the idea that the Bible is, despite the variety of its parts, still a *single* story?
8. Our authors suggest that the ideas of “covenant” and “the kingdom of God” represent the “keys” that unlock the biblical story. How are these ideas like “two sides of the same coin”?
9. Our authors argue that the Bible is not only the story of God and his involvement with the world, but also a “drama,” which in distinct stages or “acts” builds up to a climax. How do you respond to that idea?

## Act 1—God Establishes his Kingdom: Creation

Topics/Questions to discuss:

10. What do we learn about God from the significance of the names “Elohim: and “Yahweh Elohim”? (“The plural form (although used with verbs in the singular form) is likely a plural of majesty or perhaps of intensity, either of deity or of power to signify ‘highly or intensely powerful.’ The plural form is accommodating of the doctrine of the Trinity.”) What is the significance of the name “YHWH”? (“The meaning of the name YHWH may best be summarized as “present to act (usually, but not only) in salvation.”) See further <http://www.biblestudytools.net/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/> under the article “God, names of.”
11. How is the Creation Story in Genesis best understood as an argument against the various creation myths in ancient pagan Near Eastern cultures? What contrasts are there between the pagan myths and the Creation Story of Genesis? How does the latter provide the basis of a “faith for Israel”?
12. What would you say is the *central theme* of the Creation Story of Genesis ch. 1? (“It’s all about *Who?*”) How does this central theme set the stage for the rest of the biblical story?
13. Why is it important not to misread this story as a (primitive) scientific account? Should we draw any cosmological, geological, or biological conclusions from this account? Why is the story primarily and essentially *theological*?
14. As you read Genesis 1, what repeated patterns do you see? What is the significance of the elements of those, patterns?
15. What is the climax of the story in Genesis 1? How does this affect your reading of the earlier parts of the chapter?
16. What do you think it means for human beings to be created in the “image” and “likeness” of God? How do these words display both continuity with and distinctness from God? What are some of the ways in which human beings may be “like” God? On the other hand, what radical difference is there between God and human beings?
17. What mandate does God give to the human pair? How is their role in relation to the rest of creation like God’s role over the whole of creation? (See the von

Rad quote on pp. 36–37). Does this role give permission to human beings to exploit the environment, as some have charged?

18. What do you think may be the significance of the creation of human beings as “male and female” to the idea that human beings are created in the image of God?
19. How is the perspective of Genesis 2 different from the perspective from Genesis 1?
20. What is the significance of Adam’s “naming” the animals? What is significant about the *absence* of a suitable companion for Adam in the animal world? Why does God create Eve? What is the significance of her being formed from Adam’s own body?
21. Look at the diagram “A Biblical Understanding of Humanity” on p. 39. What do you learn about the *relationships* from which humans were created?
22. How would you sum up the central teaching of the Creation Story of the Bible in terms of the following:
  - Who God is
  - What human beings are
  - What the physical universe is
  - What the relationships among these three are.

## **Act 2—Rebellion in the Kingdom: Fall**

Topics/Questions to discuss:

23. What is the story of the fall in Genesis 3 meant to explain? Does it make a difference whether the story is symbolic only, or whether the fall “really happened”?
24. The “prohibition.” Look at Genesis 2:15–17. What is *permitted* and what is *prohibited*? What is the *consequence* of violating the prohibition? What is meant by the “knowledge of good and evil”? To *whom* is the prohibition given?
25. The “temptation.” Look at Genesis 3:1–5. Who are the characters in this part of the story? Look at Revelation 12:9 “...that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray...”). Is it significant that the woman—and not the man—was tempted?
26. What (according to B&G) is the *real meaning* of the temptation? See p. 42. Do you agree with their reading of the temptation?

27. What is the serpent's view of God's "real" reason for the prohibition? What is *attractive* about the alternative view, proposed by the serpent, of who God is and what man can be?
28. The "decision." Look at Genesis 3:6–7. What was it about the fruit that made it desirable to the woman, so that she chose to eat it? Is her husband any less involved (and thus responsible) in the act of eating the fruit?
29. What is the *immediate consequence* of the rebellious act? How did the man and the woman deal with that consequence?
30. What is significant about God's call (Genesis 3:8–9) to the man? What is significant about the man's response?
31. The "interview." Look at Genesis 3:11–13. What is significant about God's questions? What is significant about each of the answers he gets?
32. The "judgments." God pronounces a series of judgments against the serpent, the woman and the man. What are these judgments? How do they show that the relationships between humans and God, humans with each other, with themselves and with the physical environment have been damaged?
33. What glimmer of threat (to the serpent) and promise (to the woman and her offspring) is given in the midst of these judgments? What is the significance of this threat/promise?
34. What do you learn about God in his provision of clothing for the man and the woman?
35. Why does God want to prevent Adam and Eve from eating from "the tree of life"? Why does God not want man to "live forever"? (How do you think all this ties in with the Gospel promise of "eternal life" and the appearance—in Revelation 22:1–2—of the "tree of life"?)
36. In Romans 1:18–32 Paul tells (not a historical but) a *theological* story of the fall. How does Paul's story there complement the story of Genesis 3?
37. How do the stories of *creation* and *fall* help you to make sense of the human story throughout history? How do they help you make sense of your own *personal* story?

## Act 3—The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated

### Scene 1: A People for the King (Genesis)

Topics/Questions to discuss:

Beginning with Genesis chapter 4, we can divide the book of Genesis into two parts: (i) the *universal* period (chapters 4–11) and the *patriarchal* period (chapters 12–50).

38. How would you *in general* characterize the account of the universal period? What do you see as the basic themes there?
39. What aspects of the *original goodness of creation* are still evident in the story of humanity after the expulsion from the garden? At the same time, how is the *pollution of sin* very evident during this time? Illustrate with reference to Cain and Abel, Lamech and his sons.
40. Genesis 5 gives us the genealogy from Adam to Noah. By Noah's time, what had been the general moral direction of humanity? How does God respond? Genesis 6:8 is a significant verse. What does it tell us about God?
41. In what way is Noah like Adam? In what way will Abraham also be like Noah (and Adam)? How does the New Testament relate Christ to Adam (and thus indirectly to Noah and Abraham)? What does all of this say about God?
42. In Genesis 6 God informs Noah that he will destroy the earth and its living inhabitants with a flood, but will save him and his family and an animal pair of each species. In Genesis 6:18 God promises to "establish my covenant" with Noah and his family. Later in Genesis God establishes his covenant with Abraham. What is the *meaning* of a covenant? See discussion in B&G, p. 50–51: "a bond in blood sovereignly administered." How are each of these elements represented in God's covenant with Noah and later in God's covenant with Abraham? How is *creation* included in the covenant God makes with Noah? See further <http://www.biblestudytools.net/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/> under the article "Covenant."
43. How does the story of the tower of Babel illustrate the quest for human autonomy? What is significant about God's response?
44. Focus on God's call and promise to Abram, in Genesis chapter 12. What are the six components of god's promise? What is the "*climactic conclusion*" of God's promise to Abram? How is this important for Christians today?
45. How are the *blessings* promised to Abram reversals of the *curses* in Genesis 3–11?

46. Later God *establishes* his covenant with Abram (Genesis 15) and still later *confirms* his covenant with Abram (now “Abraham”). What are the promises of this covenant? How is circumcision meant to be a sign of this covenant?
47. How does Abraham’s life illustrate (despite some serious failures) the life of *faith*, i.e., trust in God’s promises?
48. The promise of God’s covenant is passed on to subsequent generations (to Isaac, but not to Ishmael; to Jacob, but not to Esau). What does this show about the character and purposes of God?
49. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob’s sons are more and more fraught with intrigue, deception, and evil doing. What does the “dark side” of these stories tell us about the character and purposes of God? However dark these stories are, what encouragement can you derive from them?

**Act 3—The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated**  
**Scene 1: A People for the King (Exodus to Deuteronomy)**

Topics/Questions to discuss:

50. At the beginning of the Book of Exodus, where are God’s people in terms of the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham? How is God using the brutal oppression of the Israelites as the occasion for setting a redemptive chain of events in motion?
51. How does God reveal himself to Moses? What is the meaning of “Yahweh”? How do B&G take the meaning of that name, and what implications do they see in it? (How might those implications be relevant for you today?)
52. Read and reflect on Exodus 6:6–7 (B&G p. 61). What is the importance of Israel knowing God as “Yahweh”? How does this promise relate to God’s covenant?
53. Consider the ten plagues. Whether or not God used natural occurrences to bring them about (Greta Hort in B&G pp. 61 and 62), how can these events nevertheless be understood as *God’s* actions and revelations of his power? What is the *theological* meaning of these plagues?
54. The event that constitutes Israel as God’s people by covenant is the Mt. Sinai event. Consider the following passages:
  - a. God’s *purpose* in calling Israel: Exodus 19:3–6. What is the meaning of “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation”? (In the NT see I Peter 2:9)
  - b. God’s call of Israel as a demonstration of his faithfulness and grace: Deuteronomy 7:7–9. How is God’s call related to his covenant promise to the patriarchs?

55. Biblical scholars have noted that the Sinai covenant (in this respect different from the covenant with Abraham) has strong formal similarities with Near Eastern vassal treaties. How does this similarity help us to understand God's role as a conquering, redeeming King (see B&G pp. 66–68)? In what way can the law God gives to his people be seen as continuous with the laws of the cultures the Israelites already know, and in what way can it be seen as the revelation of God's character and his creational intentions?
56. Consider the Ten Words (Commandments). How are these commandments "good news" (B&G p. 69)? Given the religious and social practices of the surrounding cultures, how do these "words" elevate the kind of life God wants his people to live?
57. In Exodus 24 there is a ceremony that formally ratifies the covenant. What is the "blood of the covenant" (cf. Jesus' words at the Last Supper), and what is its importance? What promise do the people collectively make to the requirements of the covenant?
58. What is the purpose of the construction of the tabernacle? Why is it central in the spiritual life of God's people?
59. How does the making of the "golden calf" constitute a "catastrophic error, comparable to Adam and Eve's mutiny in Genesis 3" (B&G p. 71)?
60. What is the function of the Levitical priesthood and the various kinds of sacrifices and festivals? Also, how does the division between the "clean" and the "unclean" (in diets and various other practices) represent God's call to *holiness*?
61. The book of Numbers (besides containing census numbers and other lists) records most of the forty years of "wandering in the wilderness," occasioned by the lack of faith of the Israelites. It also contains most of the stories of rebellion against Moses (and God). It is a story of judgment and promise delayed. What do we learn about God throughout this (often) depressing narrative?
62. Deuteronomy represents the "republication" of the Law to a new generation. Key passages are:
  - The *shema*. Deut. 6:4–5; also 6–9
  - Blessings and curses of the covenant (see B&G p.78 fig. 12)
63. Can you sum up what the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy teach about the character and purposes of God?

## Act 3—The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated

### Scene 2: A Land for his People (Joshua-Judges)

Topics/Questions to discuss:

64. Read Joshua 1:1–9 and compare Deuteronomy 31:7–8. What promise and what exhortation is given to Joshua at the beginning of the campaign to possess the land?
65. Joshua 3 and 4 is the wonderful story of the crossing of the Jordan River. Consider the following aspects of that story:
  - The fact that there is a river (at flood stage) to cross (3:14)
  - The fact that the ark of the covenant is to lead the procession
  - The command to step forth into the river *before* the waters are miraculously stopped
  - The twelve-stone memorial that is built to commemorate the crossing (4:20–24)
66. Joshua 5:13:15 records Joshua’s encounter with “the commander of the Lord’s army.” What is the significance of this encounter?
67. The destruction of the city of Jericho and its inhabitants (except Rahab) is a military high point for God’s people, but it is also one of many acts of war and annihilation that troubles many Christians (and others) today. Is this simply an “OT” vs. “NT” issue, or is there a way in which such acts can be seen as morally justified?
68. The story of the book of Joshua is a story of victory (Jericho and other settlements), disobedience and defeat (Ai), crime and execution (Achan), deception (the Gibeonites), failure to strictly obey God (Joshua’s treaty with the Gibeonites), battles against native populations (where the sun stands still—Joshua 10), possession and allotment of land, the institution of cities of refuge (Joshua 20). But there are also moments of consecration:
  - Joshua 8:30–35 (fulfillment of Deuteronomy 27:1–8): renewal of the Sinai covenant after entering the land
  - Joshua 23 and 24: Joshua’s “farewell address” and exhortation (Joshua 23) and the renewal of the covenant after possessing and settling the land (Joshua 24). The “choice” of Joshua 24:15.
69. The Book of Judges sees the twelve tribes of Israel settled in the land of promise, but there is no “happily living ever after.” There remain more Canaanites to drive out, but the Israelites fail to drive out pockets of indigenous people. Read the following passages:
  - Judges 2:1–5: Disobedience to God’s covenant and punishment
  - Judges 2:10–15: Apostasy of the new generation, and God’s judgment
  - Judges 2:16–19: God raises up judges, and the cycles of judgment (B&G p. 86)



- Judges 2:20–23: God’s purpose in leaving remnants of indigenous peoples.
70. Why were the Israelites attracted to the worship of Baal? See B&G p. 87.
  71. Deborah and Gideon are the two most remarkable of the judges, and their stories are told in full in the Book of Judges. How are they models of godly leadership? (Deborah: Judges 4 and 5; Gideon: Judges 6–8).
  72. The most colorful of the judges is Samson, who is a Nazirite. What is a Nazirite and what was important about being a Nazirite? How is Samson’s career a “mirror to the behavior of Israel itself” (quoted by B&G p. 87)?

**Act 3—The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated**  
**Scene 2: A Land for his People (Samuel, Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah)**

Topics/Questions to discuss:

73. Why does Israel demand a king? Why is this demand a sign of Israel’s rejection of God (I Samuel 8:7; cf. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 for “legislation” concerning kingship).
74. How does the “prophetic” role of Samuel provide a “check and balance” against a possibly overreaching kingship?
75. What, in terms of the flow of Biblical history, is the significance of the “anointing” of the kings?
76. Saul is a failure as a king, and provides a contrast to David. In 2 Samuel 7 God makes a *covenant* with David. Read especially vv. 8–16. What are the promises of this covenant (see B&G p. 92), and why are they significant (B&G, p. 93)?
77. Solomon begins his rule wisely—he contributes much of the “wisdom literature” of the Bible. He builds a magnificent temple for God, and the kingdom reaches its peak of prosperity and blessing under him. It seems that by the middle of his reign all God’s covenant promises have been fulfilled: great nation, extensive land, and Covenant relationship. Yet Solomon falls into idolatry and disobedience, and Old Testament history slides into ever worsening decline.
  - The kingdom is rent in two (northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah)
  - Idolatry is rampant, in general more seriously and rapidly in the Kingdom of Israel
  - Elijah and Elisha confront ever-deepening idolatry and apostasy in Israel.

- The deportation of the Kingdom of Israel by Assyria in 722 BC. Read 2 Kings 17:7–23 for an assessment of this. Does this mean that God has abandoned his covenant?
78. Judah’s decline into apostasy is much slower—there are two kings (Hezekiah and Josiah) that follow the Lord and obey his covenant, and the latter leads a revival of the covenant, but the history of Judah seems to come to an end with the Babylonian captivity (587/6 BC): the temple is destroyed and the people are departed from the land. It seems that God has utterly abandoned his people and his covenant—his purposes to bless and redeem his people and the world. Or has he? What is the significance of the voices of the prophets during Judah’s decline and during the Babylonian captivity? There are key prophecy strains
- the “Messianic” prophecies: Isaiah’s vision of the birth of a child (7:14), who possesses divine titles and who will sit on David’ royal throne (9:6–7); the “servant of the Lord” who brings universal justice (42:1–4); the “suffering servant” who is slain by the sins of his people and by whose suffering his people are restored to God (53:1–12).
  - Prophecies of spiritual renewal (Ezekiel 36:24–27) and the making of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

#### **Act 4—The coming of the King: Redemption accomplished**

*Read Mark 1–8; Drama pp. 129–154.*

Topics/Questions to discuss:

79. If you were asked, “What was Jesus all about?” what would you say? If you were asked, “What do the New Testament Gospels say Jesus was all about?” what would you say? Would your answer to this question be different from the first one?
80. What was the central theme of Jesus’ mission? How is this theme expressed (a) in Jesus’ *words*, (b) in his *actions* during his ministry period, (c) in his *death*, (d) in his *resurrection*, and (e) in his *ascension* into heaven?
81. How does the central theme of Jesus’ life and teaching “connect” with the expectations of the Jews of the first century? What were these expectations based on?
82. How do the Gospel writers take pains to situate Jesus in relation to the Old Testament, thereby portraying the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise? Does this way of seeing Jesus add to your appreciation of who he is?
83. In the Gospel of Mark, what is the very first recorded statement of Jesus? How important is this? What does that statement mean to you?

84. What is the role of Jesus' miracles in relation to his proclamation and his teaching? How do these acts of healing, exorcism, etc. reveal God's redemptive plan for his creation? How do these actions of Jesus differ from what the Jews might have expected from someone who proclaimed what Jesus did?
85. What is the source of Jesus' power?
86. A major theme in all the Gospels is the growing opposition between Jesus and Jewish leaders, especially the Pharisees. Who were the Pharisees, and why were they deeply offended by Jesus? Why do they denounce him and why does Jesus rebuke them as he often does?
87. Why is Jesus' proclamation directed first of all to *Israel*, and not to the gentile world? What significance does this have for the community that Jesus builds around himself? How is this reflected in the choosing of "the Twelve" to be Jesus' apostles ("sent out ones")? How does the "Sermon on the Mount" fit into Jesus' overall mission?
88. How do Jesus' teachings and actions "make it clear that those on the margins of Jewish society are welcome in the Kingdom of God" (B&G p. 144)? How do those teachings and actions contrast with the rules of the Pharisees?
89. John the Baptist and perhaps other followers of Jesus would have experienced confusion about who Jesus really is. What were their expectations and why would they doubt that Jesus really is the Messiah? How are Jesus' parables about the Kingdom intended to reassure his followers and focus on what the Kingdom is really like?
90. B&G identify *four* principles of the Kingdom of God that define the substance of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God (pp. 146-148). How do these four principles correct Jewish misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God?
91. The crucial question of the New Testament is Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?" Why is this question, and Peter's answer to it, critical to understanding Jesus' mission, and participating in his Kingdom? To be "christos" is to be the "anointed," i.e., the Messiah. Three Old Testament "offices" were initiated by an anointing. Which were they? How are these offices united in the person of Jesus? Again, why does Jesus not match the Messianic expectations of the Jews? Why would it be difficult for the Jews to adjust their expectations to fit the reality of Jesus?
92. What is the Old Testament resonance of the titles, "Son of God" and "Son of man"?

## Act 4—The coming of the King: Redemption accomplished (continued)

Read Mark 13–16; Luke 24; Drama pp. 154–170.

Topics/Questions to discuss:

93. Read Zechariah 9:9–13. What is the “Kingdom significance” of Jesus’ “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem? With what previous historically significant event would Jesus’ followers have connected his entry into Jerusalem? Despite their acclamation of him, did the crowd really recognize the character of Jesus’ kingship?
94. Read Mark 11:12–25 and Malachi 3:1–5. What is the “Kingdom significance” of Jesus’ coming to the temple to bring judgment and purification? How do Jesus’ acts of condemning the fig tree and cleansing the temple conform to prophecy and yet differ from what the Jews were expecting?
95. Read Mark 14:22–25. What is the new meaning Jesus gives to the components of the Passover meal? In particular, what is the Old Testament resonance of the phrase, “the blood of the covenant” (see Exodus 24:8, Zechariah 9:11)? What is the “Kingdom significance” of Jesus symbolizing his own death?
96. B&G, p. 160, state that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is “the *most* awesome of all God’s works of redemption.” What is the reason? Do you agree?
97. The sign above Jesus’ head reads, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” What would this have meant to the Romans? To the Jews? What is the “ironic truth” of this sign? How do the crowds mock Jesus’ kingship? How does the repentant thief acknowledge Jesus’ kingship?
98. What is the significance of Jesus’ being “forsaken” by the Father? What is the significance of the temple curtain being torn “from top to bottom” when Jesus completes his sacrifice?
99. Consider the picture on p. 162 of B&G. How does the figure of “Ass on the Cross” convey the *shame* of Jesus’ crucifixion? How did the early church “own” the crucifixion of Jesus? How, for most Jews, would Jesus’ crucifixion be definitive proof that he was *not* the Messiah?
100. To the Jewish and Roman cultures, the cross of Jesus represents *foolishness*, *weakness*, *humiliation*, and *defeat*. To Christians it represents just the opposite: the *wisdom* of God, the *power* of God, the *glory* of God and the *victory* of God. What explains this contrast?
101. What is the cosmic scope and purpose of Jesus’ death on the cross?

102. B&G, p. 164 describe significance of the cross as expressed in the New Testament letters in terms of a *victory*, a *sacrifice*, and Jesus as *representative man*. What is the meaning of each of these descriptions?
103. By the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the Jews' hope and expectation of resurrection was alive and well, "intricately woven together with the Jewish concept of the renewal of creation as a whole and the coming of the Kingdom of God" (B&G, p. 167). How did the resurrection of Jesus nevertheless fail to "fit in" with those expectations?
104. How do the New Testament writers and preachers (in Acts) interpret Jesus' resurrection? What new thing does it signal, and why is it of cosmic significance? How can it be said that Jesus *is* the resurrection (cf. John 11:23–25)? In what sense is the resurrection of Jesus "representative" of our own resurrection (and indeed the rebirth of the whole creation)? Discuss the ideas of Christ being the *firstborn* from the dead, the *firstfruits* of a harvest that is to follow, and the *pioneer* of our salvation.
105. What is the significance of Jesus' claim that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given" to him? How does it recall Daniel's vision of the "son of man" (Daniel 7:14)? How is this claim the basis of the commission he gives to his disciples?
106. Jesus ascends and disappears from view, *and nothing of cosmic significance has happened!* Jesus tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem, and promises that something momentous will happen. What does this mean for the kingdom of God?

## **Act 5—Spreading the News of the King: the Mission of the Church**

*Scene 1: From Jerusalem to Rome*

*Read Acts 1–9; Drama pp. 171–176.*

Topics/Questions to discuss:

107. The book of Acts is the "second volume" of Luke's account of Jesus' acts. How is this highlighted in his own description of his Gospel (his "former book")? What does this imply about how he views the events he is about to describe in the book of Acts?
108. What "kingdom question" (their last recorded question to Jesus) do the disciples raise? What is significant about Jesus' answer?
109. The ascended Jesus' position in heaven is described as "seated at the right hand of the Father." Read Psalm 110:1. What is the significance of this description? What was the Jewish expectation about how that description would be fulfilled? What is different about how Jesus actually fulfills it?

110. What is significant about the *name* given to Jesus?
111. B&G, p. 173, state that “this verse [Psalm 110:1] defines the mission of the exalted Christ: to subdue all his enemies.” What is different about the way Jesus actually “subdues his enemies” from Jewish expectations about how the Messiah would subdue his enemies?
112. What was the original meaning of the feast of Pentecost? By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC what had it come to mean? Why is this new meaning significant for what happens on that day as described in Acts 2?
113. As the Spirit descends upon the apostles, what *physical* manifestations of the Spirit’s presence and operation appear? What is the OT significance of these manifestations?
114. What is the “kingdom significance” of the apostles’ speaking in foreign languages they had not learned? How does Peter explain it as fulfillment of OT prophecy? What fact is the basis of his proclamation on this day?
115. Peter indicts his hearers of killing the Messiah! How do they respond? What “good news” does Peter have for them? What is their response?
116. Acts 2:37–47 tells of how Jesus through his Spirit forms a new community. Many churches (including our own) describe themselves as an “Acts 2” church. According to B&G (p. 176) this community is characterized by three qualities:
  - *Devotion*
  - *The manifestation of the “life of Christ”*
  - *Attractiveness to outsiders*
 What evidence is there in the early chapters of Acts for each of these characteristics?

## **Act 5—Spreading the News of the King: the Mission of the Church**

*Scene 1: From Jerusalem to Rome (continued)*

*Read Galatians; Romans 1–3; I Corinthians 1–2:5; Drama pp. 187–195.*

Topics/Questions to discuss:

117. Who is Paul? To whom does he write his letters? Why does he write them?
118. What is the picture of “Jewish Expectation” of the Kingdom of God that Saul/Paul had embraced as a Pharisee? (*Note: the captions under the diagrams on pp. 189 and 191 should be reversed*) How did his encounter with the risen Christ dramatically revise this picture?

119. What is the significance of the representative roles of “Adam” and “Christ” in Paul’s thinking about the coming of the Kingdom of God?
120. How does Paul view the resurrection of Jesus? How does the reality of the resurrection lead him to rethink the crucifixion?
121. Paul’s new thinking about the Kingdom of God is different from the view of Jewish expectation. Explain how it is different, and how it is similar to the view of the Kingdom of God taught by Jesus in his parables. What does Paul mean by the idea that in this age the Spirit is given as a “deposit” and as “firstfruits”? What is God’s purpose in permitting this “in between time,” in which the “present age” and the “age to come” overlap?
122. As B&G state (p. 191), Paul’s “first concern” is to proclaim the gospel. Consider Romans 1:14–15, and I Corinthians 9:16. In what terms does he describe that concern? Can you empathize?
123. Paul’s “second concern” is to bring communities of believers to maturity. Look at how such images as the *temple of God* (I Corinthians 3:16), the *body* which grows out of the head (Christ—Ephesians 4:15) and *God’s field* (in which they have been planted and are being watered—I Corinthians 3:5–9) vividly portray the nurture and growth of believing communities. What are these images intended to teach?
124. In Paul’s teaching, through the death and resurrection of Jesus God has given “new life.” What is at the heart of this new life? Explain the meaning of the terms Paul uses to describe this new life: (i) righteousness, (ii) reconciliation, and (iii) adoption.
125. Why might the new obedience Paul calls believers to be described as “totalitarian” (B&G p. 193)? Give examples of how this plays out, both in Paul’s teaching and in your own life.
126. What is the relation of the Old Testament law to the believers’ new life of obedience? How does Romans 8:3–4 speak to that issue? Explain in your own words.
127. What is characteristic of a life of obedience? What is its source?
128. As Christian communities engage the world, how should they conduct themselves, and why? What does it mean for Christians to be called to “shine like stars ... in a crooked and perverse generation”?
129. What, according to Paul, is the “great hope” of the church?

## Act 5—Spreading the News of the King: the Mission of the Church

*Scene 2: And into All the World*

*Read I Peter; Drama pp. 196–206.*

Topics/Questions to discuss:

130. What is the dominant story in our culture today? What would it be like to “live out” that story? How is the Biblical story a distinct alternative to our culture’s dominant story? What would it be like to live out the Biblical story? What would happen to the Biblical story if it is subordinated to the dominant story of our culture?
131. Consider the “five fundamental questions” raised by the authors cited on B&G p. 197. How would you answer these questions on from out of the Biblical story? (How would these questions be answered from out of our culture’s dominant story?)
132. B&G cite the analogy of completing a six-act Shakespeare play from which most of the latter part of Act 5 is missing. How would the authors “filling in” the missing part of the story be guided by the earlier acts of the play, as well as by the last act? How does this analogy work in terms of the Biblical story?
133. According to the Bible the story of the world (God’s creation) is the Kingdom of God. Since we are part of that world, in a particular place and at a particular time, we participate in the Kingdom story. How is the story of God’s call and promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3) relevant and direction-giving to us today?
134. Jesus’ kingdom mission can be described as bringing “salvation.” What is the rich biblical meaning and scope of this term, and how is it often misunderstood and misapplied? What is required of us in carrying out Jesus’ mission? (In contemporary terms, what is questionable about the frequently asked question, “What would Jesus do?”)
135. How would you describe the relevance of the terms “innovation” and “consistency” used by B&G and the author they cite (p. 200) in how the Christian community should carry out the mission of Jesus?
136. The mission of the early church, in the power of the Spirit, is to proclaim and “witness to” the good news of the Kingdom of God *globally*. How is this different from (though it includes) evangelism and cross-cultural missions? Read the contemporary testimony *Our World Belongs to God* and the paragraph that introduces it (p. 201). How do these ideas expand your view of what it means to be engaged in the mission of the Kingdom of God today?
137. The section in B&G pp. 202–205 titled “Living in God’s Story Today” give examples of what it means to witness to the Kingdom in ways that are



- strikingly different from what is ordinarily meant by “witness.” Study the stories of Gary Ginter and Peter and Miranda Harris told in this section. Would you consider the activities they were called to as “full-time Christian service”? Why or why not?
138. How do the authors’ fictional characters, Abby and Percy, come to see their vocations as Kingdom activities? Do you agree that their view of their vocations is correct, and clearly implied by the story of Scripture itself?
139. What is the importance of *living in hope* for the mission of the church today? What is the hope of the church, and what difference does it make in how it conducts its mission today?

### **Act 6—the Return of the King: Redemption Completed**

*Read Revelation 1–5, 21–22; Drama pp. 207–213.*

Topics/Questions to discuss:

140. Through a complex series of visions and commentary on those visions, the book of Revelation charts the equally complex but nevertheless certain trajectory of God’s redemptive purpose in bringing the history of his creation to its intended goal. The last two chapters vividly and movingly portray that goal: the descent of the Holy city, the “new Jerusalem” from heaven to earth. What is the significance of this descent, and how does it recall the God’s relationship to humanity and the creation prior to the fall?
141. How does the vision given to John in these chapters encourage the young 1<sup>st</sup> century churches under persecution? How does it encourage you?
142. In Revelation 4 John reports his vision of the throne room of God and the perfect worship of God that takes place there. In the next chapter John describes the entry of the slain Lamb (who is the Lion of Judah), who is proclaimed worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. What does the opening of the scroll represent? Why is the Lamb alone worthy to open it?
143. Do you agree that the (sometimes bitter) disputes carried on among Christians about the sequence of end-time events and related issues is a regrettable distraction from the “main event”? What is that main event?
144. Why is it important to understand the new creation as a *restored* or *renewed* creation (rather than a brand new creation that *replaces* the old one)? What is important about the *continuity* of the new with the old, despite the amazing differences between them?
145. The Biblical vision of redemption is nothing short of the restoration of the *whole* creation. What are some Biblical passages that clearly speak of the *cosmic scope* of the redemption that Christ has achieved (see B&G, pp. 212-

- 213)? Is this idea new to you? How do Christians sometimes shortchange this idea?
146. If Christ's redemption and restoration is truly cosmic in scope, what are the implications of this idea for how you view the various facets of human culture (politics, work, art, play, etc.) and how might it affect some choices you might make?
147. (Bonus question) Revelation 22:2 describes a "tree of life" whose "leaves are for the healing of the nations." Where, in the drama of Scripture, have you encountered the "tree of life" before? How is this tree a powerful symbol in the stories of *creation*, *fall* and now *redemption*?