

GOD'S PROMISE AND PURPOSE

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- discover the “back-story” of Jesus’ birth in the context of God’s plan for salvation
- identify the OT covenants that God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and eventually with all people
- appreciate God’s covenants as indicators of his plan for the salvation of all humankind
- see the continuity between God’s covenant promises of the OT with their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ in the NT
- stand in awe of God’s desire to initiate relationship with wayward humanity in order to reconcile us to himself
- hope and pray for the salvation of all people in Jesus Christ
- feel a personal need and gratitude for the salvation God has enacted through Jesus Christ
- purpose to show gratitude for God’s salvation by behaving according to God’s will (seeing the connection between “faith” and “obedience”)
- be assured that God acts faithfully on his promises
- become people whose hope for themselves and for the world is in Jesus Christ the Lord

[Process Objectives]

- develop skills in the inductive method of Bible study, by gleaning information from Scripture, understanding continuity and links between OT and NT and recognizing themselves as recipients of God’s story of salvation
- experience the fruit of meditative Bible reading
- desire to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- not be afraid to open up to the grand and personal themes of this study and discussion
- get to know their fellow adventurers at a deeper level
- take the risk and share one hope for which others can pray

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 10-13)

The general point of this lesson is that God has been working on a plan for the reconciliation of all people to himself since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. God initiated personal contact with Noah and then Abraham, as a way of declaring his presence (“I am your God”), establishing a relationship with a particular people (“You are my people”), and setting in motion a process

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by which all could be saved from the consequences of sin. God's relationship with Abraham and his offspring (known as the people of Israel) is the grand illustration of God's desire to relate to all people. When Jesus appeared on the scene, he was recognized as the Christ and Savior of the world. Wow! Through him, all the promises of God were and are fulfilled, and every person has the opportunity to be reconciled to the Creator.

PAGE 10 NOTES:

Luke 1 and 2 build anticipation for the Savior, through the prophecies and declarations of angels, priests and devout Jews. The word is that this baby Jesus to be born is "the salvation of Israel," "the Savior, Christ the Lord!" The promise and plan of God is to provide salvation through Jesus Christ, to bring people to repentance, to overcome evil and to reign forever. The promises are made to lowly people: Zechariah, Mary, shepherds, Simeon . . . and through them to all Jews first, and then to "all the people" (including Gentiles) in 2:31-32. That includes us!

PAGE 11 NOTES:

It is important to realize that the expectation of God's people for a saving Messiah goes back to the beginning of time. The lesson does not refer to very subtle Messiah sightings in Genesis 3:15 & 22, but picks up the redemptive story with Noah, then Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon. God made eternal promises to all these men, who themselves could not see that far ahead. It is interesting to note the frequency with which promises were made regarding a nation (Gen 12, Ex 19, 2 Sam 7), land (Gen 15, 2 Sam 7) and progeny (Gen 17:16, 2 Sam 7). But the key features of divine covenant are three-fold: God declares that a relationship exists between God and the Chosen (no human initiative "Gee, I think I'd like to get to know God better"—God spoke first!); God sees this as an "eternal covenant," that is, permanent; and, God expects us to act like people under covenant, following God's decrees and commands.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all these promises, coming to earth through the line of David to establish God's eternal kingdom. Jesus was sent by God to redeem his people from sin and reconcile them to God.

PAGE 12-13 NOTES:

This spiritual exercise is intended to give every participant the experience of meditative Bible reading, in which you put yourself into the story to observe and feel the events first-hand. Though not referred to specifically in the group discussion, this encounter might elicit insights among your members—and it would be good to inquire about how it went. If, on the other hand, your group found this exercise difficult or fruitless, listen for what might have thwarted its purpose and make this a subject for prayer.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGES 14 & 15)

Open your meeting with a short prayer for Christ's Spirit to guide you, and dedicate the time and discussion to the Lord's glory.

PAGE 14 NOTES:

The overarching problem? Sin and its consequences, including alienation from God, experienced both personally and corporately by all humankind.

God's plan of salvation was advanced as he took initiative to identify himself, chose a person (Abraham), and then chose a people (the Israelites) with whom to work to make YHWH and salvation known to "the nations." By establishing a relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God was illustrating in microcosm the choosing of people to be his own. Later, in Christ (prophesied by Jeremiah), this promise is extended to all people. Anyone, to be considered "chosen," would be expected to obey God's decrees and commands.

Jesus' part in God's redemptive plan was to appear in our midst, fully human and fully divine, to reconcile us to God. He redeemed human life by living it sinlessly himself, and he atoned for sin by his ultimate sacrifice on the Cross. Christ's resurrection from the dead enabled him to reign forever on "the throne of David."

Have we seen the end of the story? Yes and no. Yes, Jesus defeated all the powers that alienated human beings from God (sin and death); but no, people are still coming to know and believe in Jesus Christ, and the world must still be redeemed (Rom 8, Mt 24:14, 1 Cor 15:24).

PAGE 15 NOTES:

God's promise and purpose is that 1) God is our God—we won't ever discover a bigger or better one than YHWH; 2) God has done what was needed to reconcile us to himself; and (by implication) 3) God has done everything necessary to redeem *my* life and empower me to live in covenant gratitude and obedience.

The "take a leap" question is intended to help the participants see their own ministry as an extension of God's plan and purpose. For many, this is an entirely new thought. But think of it this way: if God intends to reach out to every single person, through belief in the Son of God, Jesus Christ the Lord, then wouldn't it make sense that those who have been reached and known by God would extend God's reach to others and widening the circle? For many "out there," the *only* contact they will have with God is through a person like you whose life has become an extension of God's redeeming love.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

The last question points to prayer needs that might have come up during the individual Bible meditation on Simeon (Luke 2:25-32). In order to set the expectation that lengthy, deep, personal sharing is not necessary (this is only the second meeting of the group), model a brief response to the question of “What promise are you waiting to be fulfilled?” Ask others to do likewise, following the bulleted questions, and then invite prayers for “the person sitting to your right.”