

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to understand:

1. that the historical books in the Bible are different than the books of history in the world
2. that they have an important part in God's history of salvation in this world

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to stand in awe of the fact that God is a Person.

Theme: God is a Person

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

Psalm 115:2-8 and Exodus 3:1-12 contrast the One True and Living God with the gods made by men.

Psalm 115:2-8

² Why do the nations say,

“Where is their God?”

³ Our God is in heaven;
he does whatever pleases him.

⁴ But their idols are silver and gold,
made by the hands of men.

⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but they cannot see;

⁶ they have ears, but cannot hear,
noses, but they cannot smell;

⁷ they have hands, but cannot feel,
feet, but they cannot walk;
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

⁸ Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them.

Exodus 3:1-12

¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses

thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you (plural) will worship God on this mountain.”

➤ *The nature and influence of idols*

People make their own gods and these often resemble themselves! But although these man-made gods have eyes, they cannot see. Though they have ears, they cannot hear prayers. Though they have mouths, they cannot speak revelations. Man-made gods are dead!

The influence of these man-made gods is deadly, because they kill your spirit. The worship of any god in the other religions is completely useless, because those gods do not really exist! They have either been made by man or devised by man's mind. But they will never respond to man!

Even worse! The Bible warns that whoever makes a god, will become like his god. And whoever worships that god, will also become like that god (Psalm 115:8)! It does not matter whether he makes that god with his hands or with his philosophical or religious mind.

The opposite is therefore also true. If the worshipper is corrupt in his business practices, then the god he

worships is also corrupt. If the worshipper is a violent man, his god condones violence. If the worshipper is immoral, his god will also be immoral. The thoughts, words and deeds of people reflect the kind of 'god' they worship!

➤ *The nature and influence of the One True and Living God.*

In contrast to the worship of man-made gods of the religions in the world, people who worship the One True and Living God will more and more become like him! The Living God is alive and holy and whoever worships him will also become more and more alive and holy! Worshipping the God of the Bible transforms who you are, what you do and how you do things.

➤ *The One True and Living God has the character of a Person and functions as a Person.*

God is not an impersonal power, but has personal functions. He speaks clearly and understandably to us through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. That is why we can really know what God says. We can know God's thoughts, feelings, desires and will to the extent that he has revealed them to us.

God sees everything. He not only sees what we do, the outward visible things, but also what we think, the inward invisible things. He sees our misery, pain and every aspect of our heart.

God hears everything. He hears our discussions, whispering, our prayers and the cries of our heart for help.

God has feelings and emotions. He is concerned with our suffering and our wellbeing. God shows his love, but also his displeasure and indignation. He rejoices in what is right and sad about what is wrong.

God acts on our behalf by coming into his creation and into human history in order to save us. He involves us into his plan and gives us a meaningful life. He sends us to do a task for him, but he also comes with us to help us to do the task.

➤ *The One True and Living God created man in his image.*

God is not a human invention, a fabrication or projection of the human mind. On the contrary, we people are created in his likeness. God's personality is the basis for man's personality. Man has similarities with the personality of God: man speaks, because God speaks. Man thinks rationally, because God thinks rationally. Man can make choices and decisions, because God chooses and makes decisions.

Nevertheless, the likeness and being of man may not be used to explain the nature and being of God! The

personality and nature of fallen man is never the standard for the personality and nature of God. The divine nature of God is quite different than the human nature of man. While the nature and personality of man is limited (finite) and imperfect, the nature and personality of God is infinite and absolutely perfect.

The great difference in the being and personality of God and man is that within the unity of the divine nature (God) there exists an inner differentiation (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit), while within the unity of the human nature (man) there is no such inner differentiation. Man is 'a living soul (being)' that has two sides: a visible physical side (the body) and an invisible spiritual side (the spirit) (Genesis 2:7)! Man's body belongs to the created material world, but his spirit comes from God and reveals man as bearing the image of God.

➤ *The One True and Living God fellowships with man*
Because both God and man are persons they are able to fellowship with one another! They speak with each other, know each other, understand the feelings of each other and cooperate with each other in life. If God were only an impersonal being, a personal and confidential relationship between God and man would be impossible! But because God is a Person, such a personal and confidential relationship is the experience of millions of Christians on earth. God is highly exalted and majestic, but not in such a way that people cannot fellowship with him. "The LORD confides in (i.e. is a Friend to) those who fear him (know, revere, trust, obey and love him)" (Psalm 25:14).

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) as the unfathomable God, whom we may know as a Person.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: The historical books (Joshua)

Read or explain in your own words

The 12 historical books in the Old Testament are:

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

When we read the historical books in the Bible, then we must first understand what 'recorded history' in the Bible is.

1. The history in the Bible has a 'holy' character

The history in the Bible is a history that has been set apart from the ordinary history in the world, because God himself is the Maker of that history! The history in the Bible has really happened, but it points to another, higher reality.

The history in the Old Testament is not the ordinary history of the natural nation of Israel in the midst of the Gentile nations, but it is the history of God's people (not identical with the nation of Israel) in the Old Testament period. It is not secular history (history in which God has no part), but *salvation history* in the whole period from the creation to the first coming of Christ. This is the Old Testament 'dispensation' (a period of time determined by God). In the Bible there are only two dispensations: the Old Testament describes salvation history of God's people during the old dispensation and the New Testament describes salvation history of God's people during the new dispensation.

2. The history in the Bible deals with salvation and judgement

The 'history' in the Bible is a part of God's special revelation in which he reveals himself, his thoughts and his deeds to us. This he does through words, events and people. These are all historical facts. The 'history' in the Bible is the proclamation (or prophecy) of God's words and deeds about the salvation of his people and the condemnation of his enemies. The 'history' in the Bible is God's salvation history, in which he particularly reveals his plan of salvation. Thus, God reveals himself, not only through the Law (the books of the law), but also through the Prophets (the prophetic books). The historical books (from Joshua to 2 Kings) are called 'the early prophets' in the Hebrew Canon. The prophetic books (from Isaiah to Malachi) are called 'the latter prophets' in the Hebrew Canon.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: God's work through Joshua and the judges

Day 1	Joshua 3:1-17 Crossing the Jordan
Day 2	Joshua 5:13 – 6:27 The destruction of Jericho
Day 3	Joshua 23:1-16 Joshua's farewell to the leaders
Day 4 ^{BS}	Judges 2:1-16 Why God gave judges to Israel
Day 5	Judges 7:1-25 The judge Gideon defeats the Midianites

Day 6	Judges 16:1 – 31 God attains his goal by Samson's death
Day 7	Ruth 1:14-18 and 2:5-23 Ruth's commitment to God and acquaintance with Boaz
Day 8 ^{BS}	Ruth 3:1-18 and 4:1-22 Ruth's marriage proposal and marriage to Boaz
Day 9	1 Samuel 2:12-36 The misbehaviour of the judge Eli's sons
Day 10	1 Samuel 3:1-21 The calling of Samuel

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.

If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: The historical books

- What is the special meaning of 'history' in the Bible?
- What are the three most important types (illustrations) in the Old Testament and what do they represent?
- How is salvation depicted as a new creation?
- How is salvation depicted as a new exodus?
- How is salvation depicted as a new return from exile?
- What are the similarities between the book of Joshua in the Old Testament and the book of Acts in the New Testament?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

- "What is your share or what share would you like to have in God's history of salvation within the history of the world?"

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review previous Bible verses.

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse.

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS 1 Corinthians 10:6

Now these things occurred as examples
to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things
as they did

1 Corinthians 10:6 (NIV)

3. Memorisation of the Bible books.

The 12 minor prophetic books:

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: God's people in the world

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

Judges 2:1 – 3:4

Judges 2

¹ The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? ³ Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you."

⁴ When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, ⁵ and they called that place Bokim (means: weepers). There they offered sacrifices to the LORD.

⁶ After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. ⁷ The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

⁸ Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ⁹ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the LORD, the God of their

fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

¹⁶ Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. ¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them.

¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. ²⁰ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did." ²³ The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

Judges 3

¹ These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan ² (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience): ³ the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. ⁴ They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD's commands, which he had given their forefathers through Moses.

2. Emphasis

➤ *God remains faithful to his covenant*

God promised that he would never break his covenant of grace with his covenant people (2:1). His covenant continued throughout the Old and New Testament

period (1 Kings 19:18; 2 Corinthians 6:16) until its perfect reality at the second coming (Revelation 21:3).

➤ *The next generation may not know God and his covenant*

It is possible that the very next generation of God's covenant people grow up without knowledge of God and his works (2:10).

➤ *People are able to break God's covenant*

People, who are descendants of God's covenant people but follow false gods (2:11-12), break God's covenant (2:20; cf. Hebrews 8:7-9)!

➤ *People who break God's covenant are no longer regarded as God's people*

God no longer regards them as 'his saved people' (Hosea 1:9). They are again under God's wrath (2:13,20; cf. John 3:36; Romans 1:18).

➤ *People who break God's covenant are handed over into the hands of their enemies or into the power of sin*

God punishes them by giving them over into the power of their enemies (2:14) or by giving them over to their sinful practices (cf. Romans 1:24,26-28). God's hand is then turned against them (2:15).

➤ *God shows undeserved grace to people who have broken his covenant by appointing judges to save them*

God proves his undeserved grace to unfaithful Israel by appointing judges who saves them out of the hands of raiders (2:16; cf. Acts 26:16-18).

➤ *But God may not remove the consequences of their disobedience*

At the outset Israel had to destroy the godless and wicked Canaanite nations (Deuteronomy 7:1-2). Because Israel disobeyed God's command, he punished Israel by no longer driving these nations before them. These godless and wicked nations became the means to test Israel in order to determine whether Israel would follow God's way or not (2:22).

3. Explanation for the group leader

➤ *Israel and the Canaanite nations.*

A great part of the historical books in the Old Testament is the history of God's Old Testament covenant people (the theocracy) living amidst the surrounding unbelieving nations.

The book of Judges relates how God's people again and again strayed from following God and how God gave them over into the power of the surrounding Gentile nations (which in the New Testament is called 'the world'). God makes use of the people of the world to punish his covenant people when they stray from God.

The purpose of God's punishment is to ultimately bring his covenant people back to him and thus to save them from eternal judgement and punishment. Compare the trumpets of warning and judgement (Revelation 9:20-21)! God allows the unbelieving nations ('the world') to test his covenant people to see whether they would remain true to his covenant. The purpose of all trials is to train the believers in perseverance and to develop their character (Romans 5:3-4).

➤ *Who is the Angel of the LORD?*

He is not an ordinary angel of the LORD. The Angel of the LORD is an appearance of the LORD. He is the Person in whom God reveals himself visibly during the Old Testament period. He is one being with God and at the same time is differentiated from God. In some Bible passages the Angel of the LORD is directly identified with the LORD (JaHWeH) himself, while in other Bible passages he must be differentiated from the LORD. This fact points to the Triune God.

(1) The Angel of the LORD is the visible revelation of the invisible God (LORD).

He appears to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush (Exodus 3:2). He identified himself as 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' and said that his name is 'I am' (Exodus 3:14-16). This name says that God's being cannot be expressed in any name or in any definition. At the same time this name expresses that God is for ever faithful to his covenant (cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13). In Exodus 3 the Angel of the LORD is the visible revelation of the invisible LORD to his people.

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament who reveals the invisible God visibly to people (Matthew 11:27; John 1:18; 17:6; Colossians 1:15).

(2) The Angel of the LORD is the revelation of the presence of the LORD.

In Exodus 23:20-23 the LORD promised that an angel would go ahead of his people to protect them along the way and to bring them to the Promised Land. Note that God's Name or being is in him (verse 22). Note also that this angel and the LORD are interchangeable personalities, because the LORD says: "If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say" (verse 22)! Moreover, this angel can forgive sins (verse 21a), something only the LORD can do!

In Exodus 33:1-3,14-16 the LORD promised the same thing. This angel is 'the Presence' of the LORD that goes with his people. In Exodus 23 and 33 the Angel of the LORD is the revelation of the presence of the LORD with his people.

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament who is called 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23) and who "has authority on earth to forgive sins" just as God has (Mark 2:10a).

(3) The Angel of the LORD is the Saviour and Protector. In Judges 2:1 the Angel of the LORD says that it was he who had sworn to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to give them the Promised Land, that it was he who brought Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land (he saved them) and that it was he who promised never to break his covenant with them.

In Psalm 34:7 and Psalm 35:4-7 the Angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, drives their enemies away and delivers them. In Judges 2 the Angel of the LORD is the revelation of the salvation and protection of the LORD. He is the Saviour and the Protector.

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament who delivers his sheep out of the claws of their attackers and protects them (John 10:9-10).

(4) The Angel of the LORD is the Judge. In 1 Chronicles 21:11-30, God sent the Angel of the LORD as the destroying Angel with a drawn sword to destroy a part of Jerusalem with the plague, because king David had sinned against God. In 1 Chronicles 21 the Angel of the LORD is the revelation of the judgement of the LORD. He is the Judge who executes God's judgement.

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament to whom God entrusted all judgement (John 5:22) and who will judge all the unrepentant people at his second coming (Revelation 19:11-16).

(5) The Angel of the LORD is the Mediator between the LORD and his servants. In Zechariah 1:8-11 the LORD sent a group of riders on horses (angels) throughout the earth to inspect it. When they returned, they reported to the Angel of the LORD. In Zechariah 1 the Angel of the LORD is the Mediator between the LORD and his servants (angels).

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament who is the Mediator between God and people (1 Timothy 2:5).

(6) The Angel of the LORD is the Go-between (Intermediary) for people with the LORD. In Zechariah 1:12-13 the Angel of the LORD pleads with the LORD asking for mercy for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. In Zechariah 1 the Angel of the LORD is also the Intermediary (Mediator) for people with the LORD.

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament who as High Priest always lives to intercede for people who come to God through Christ (Hebrews 7:25).

(7) The Angel of the LORD is the Advocate for people with the LORD. In Zechariah 3:1-4 the earthly high priest (Joshua) stood with filthy clothes before the Angel of the LORD, while Satan was accusing him. In verse 2 the Angel of the LORD and the LORD are interchangeable personalities, because the Angel of the LORD is called 'LORD'. The Angel of the LORD, as the heavenly High Priest defended the earthly high priest, had his filthy clothes taken off and had him dressed with clean and rich clothes (festive clothes as symbol of his position of righteousness). The heavenly High Priest justified the earthly high priest! In Zechariah 3 the Angel of the LORD is the Advocate who defends those accused by Satan and justifies them.

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament who is the Advocate (Representative) of believers with God the Father in heaven (1 John 2:1-2), who clothes believers with his own righteousness (Romans 13:14) so that no one can condemn those whom God has chosen (Romans 8:33-34).

(8) The Angel of the LORD is the Mediator of the covenant of the LORD. In Malachi 3:1 the Angel of the LORD is called 'the Lord' (Hebrew: Adon; Greek: kurios) as an indication of his majesty as King (Ruler, Judge). He is also called 'the Angel of the covenant' (Hebrew: malak ha-berit), because he is the Mediator of the LORD's covenant with his people. In Malachi 3 the Angel of the LORD is the Mediator of the covenant in the Old Testament (Galatians 3:19) and the Mediator of the covenant in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15). The LORD would send his messenger (John the Baptist) to prepare the way before the LORD (verse 1a), that is, before the Angel of the covenant (verse 1b) (compare Isaiah 40:3 with Mark 1:3). This Angel of the covenant would be the Refiner or Purifier (verse 3). He will be the One destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel (and all other countries in the world) (Luke 2:34). He comes to save, but also to judge!

❖ Compare the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament who is the Mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6). He came to cleanse believers with his blood (1 John 1:7), but to accuse the unbelievers (Matthew 21:43-44). Jesus Christ came to save (John 3:17), but whoever rejects him will be judged (John 3:18; 12:48)!

Conclusion:

It is clear that the Angel of the LORD is not a created angel. The Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is the appearance of the LORD (JaHWeH) himself! He must be identical with Jesus Christ before his incarnation.

Just as the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament, so the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament is the second person of the Triune God, the Son of God, the visible image of the invisible God (John 1:1,14,18; Colossians 1:15; 2:9). After the first coming of Jesus Christ, the Angel of the LORD no longer appears!

Just as the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament, so the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament has been sent by God the Father.

They had similar tasks: to reveal, to mediate, to intercede, to lead, to protect, to save and to judge.

Just as the Angel of the LORD, so the Lord Jesus Christ is differentiated from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ took besides his divine nature also the human nature (Philippians 1:5-11).

Other references to the Angel of the LORD are: Genesis 16:7-14; 22:11-18; 31:11-13.

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.