

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 1:1-2:25 - Creation

What was the universe like before God created it? How was it after the creation? In what ways did it change?

Does God simply create things, or is there a structure and order to the things he creates? What clues in the passage point to this? How does God create? What does he do?

When creating man, God says “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” (1:26). Who is God speaking to? Who is the “us” in God’s statement? (Father, Son & the Holy Spirit)

Is the creation of man different from the creation of other things? If so, how is it different?

What do we learn about man’s creation in Genesis 2 that we do not learn from Genesis 1? What are some of the differences?

What relationship does God have with the man and the woman? What relationship do they have with each other?

Genesis 3:1-24 – The Fall

How does the serpent tempt Eve? Describe the temptation.

How does Eve react? How is this the turning point in the story? Is temptation in your everyday life blunt and “in your face” or is it subtle and tricky?

We know from the creation story that man has a relationship with God, with other people, and with the entirety of creation. How does sin affect these relationships? What evidence can you find in Scripture to support this?

When God confronts Adam and Eve about their sin, he punishes them. Is it because God is upset and wants vengeance, or something else? Did they bring it on themselves? What are the punishments and how are they relevant?

What does God say to the serpent?

Exodus 3:1-4:17 - Burning Bush

The passage says that it was “the Angel of the Lord” who appeared and spoke to Moses in the burning bush, and yet he speaks as if he is God (for example: 3:6). Why does the Angel speak in this way? Who is the Angel?

When Moses asks for God's name, he gets an interesting response. What is God's name? What does the name mean to you?

God calls Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. What is Moses' response? Why does he react this way even after seeing some of God's wonders? How does God view this? Have you ever reacted this way when asked to do something you did not want to do? How did you deal with it?

The Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians for over four hundred years, constantly crying out to God for salvation. Why did it take so long for God to respond? When we think God is taking a long time to respond to our needs, how can the lessons in this passage help us deal with the delay?

Who did God provide to Moses and how was he going to help? Has God ever provided you with someone when you were in need?

Exodus 12:1-41 – The Exodus

How does the sacrifice and use of blood point to Christ?

Why was the Feast of Passover to be celebrated every year by the Israelites? Why is this an important event in their history?

Why did the Israelites leave Egypt?

What can we learn about God's faithfulness from the Exodus of the Israelites? What virtues can this story inspire in us?

Judges 2:6-3:6 - Israel's Disobedience

What does this passage say about Israel's disobedience to God? Do you ever find yourself disobeying God's commands? If so, in what ways?

This passage speaks about the Lord and retaliation. Does God hurl punishments against his people to get even? If not, what else might be going on here? Can you relate to this in any way?

What does this passage say about the relationship between God and his people? What is the allure of other gods, especially when the Bible makes it clear that they are just idols with no real existence? What are some of the "idols" in your life?

I Samuel 16:1-18:16 - David and Goliath

When Samuel thought that Eliab was the anointed one and future king of Israel, what did the Lord tell Samuel? How should the Lord's words affect the way we look at people?

In this passage, we find David playing songs on his harp, some of which can be found in the book of Psalms. Are there any Psalms that speak to you? Do you ever relate to music during tough times?

On behalf of Israel, David confronts the giant warrior, Goliath, in what seems like an unfair battle. Think about David's vulnerability and weaknesses compared to the giant's strengths. What does David have that Goliath doesn't? What can we learn from this story when we face struggles that seem overwhelming?

How does David's success change Saul's attitude towards David? In what ways does Saul change? How do we react when those we love enjoy greater success or blessings in life than we do?

I Kings 16:29-19:18 - Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

In what ways did God provide food and drink for Elijah? What does this teach about how God cares for us?

Describe the "contest" between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. What was the decisive element(s) that made Elijah's sacrifice acceptable and demonstrated that his God was the true God?

We often speak of God as a God of love, and yet he does not prevent Elijah from killing the false prophets, nor does he punish him. Why do you think it was necessary for Elijah to kill them? Why do you think God "let it slide"? What message is there for us in this incident?

When Elijah goes to Mount Horeb, he encounters the Lord in a "gentle breeze." In what ways do you encounter God through nature?

Isaiah 51:1-53:12 - The Suffering Servant

The Israelites were waiting for the Messiah to come. In this chapter, what do you learn about the Messiah, who is described as a suffering servant? Why is he coming?

The Messiah described in this passage is very different from the Messiah envisioned during Jesus' time. What was that Messiah like, and what makes this one different?

What is the role of the prophets? How do the prophets and their writings proclaim Jesus Christ in advance?

If you only had this passage, would you be able to explain the story of Jesus' suffering and death? Would you be able to preach the essential Gospel message with just this passage? What would you say?

Jeremiah 1:1-3:5 - Jeremiah's Call

The beginning of this passage describes the calling of Jeremiah to become a prophet. What do we learn about prophets? How are they used by God?

How did Jeremiah respond to God's call? What reasons do people give for resisting or accepting a call from God? Have you ever resisted a call from God?

The prophets often use imagery to help describe their message. What are some of the images used in this passage? How do they help Jeremiah illustrate his point?

Psalms 102 (103):1-22 - Praise the Lord

What motivated David to praise God in Psalm 102 (103)? What reasons do you have for praising God today?

What impresses you about the way God is described in Psalm 102 (103)? Does that description change how you think about God? How does the Psalm describe human beings and our relationship with God? How does this change the way you think about yourself and others?

Usually we ask God to bless us, but in this Psalm, we bless God. As human beings, what does it mean for us to bless God?

The psalms have been used in worship for thousands of years, and are still used today in the Orthodox Church. How do we use the psalms in worship? How can they help us in our personal prayer?

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Matthew 5:1-6:4 - Sermon on the Mount

What does Jesus define as the secret of happiness (blessedness)? How is that different from what we usually think will make us happy? What kind of "happiness" is he talking about?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes the Ten Commandments and other parts of the Law of Moses. Is it more difficult to follow the way of Jesus? Which teaching is the most challenging for you? How can you begin to apply one of these in your life?

What does Jesus say we should not do when helping others? How are we rewarded for helping those in need?

How would you explain the Sermon on the Mount to someone else?

Luke 10:25-37 – The Good Samaritan

Jesus uses parables not only to teach lessons in an understandable way, but also to preach the Gospel. Do you think there is more to this story than the question of morality? Does the Samaritan remind you of anyone in Scripture? If so, who, and why? How is the Gospel proclaimed in this story?

Who is the hero in the story of the Good Samaritan? Why was this a radical story for Jesus to tell?

What are some of the specific details Jesus gives in the parable of the Good Samaritan? What might they mean, and how do they add to the overall meaning and impact of the story?

Who is your neighbor? How could you be a “good Samaritan” in your life this week?

John 1:1-18 - The Word Made Flesh

How is this passage different from the beginning of the other Gospels? Does it remind you of the beginning of any other book of the Bible? In what ways?

Why is this Gospel passage read every year on Pascha (Easter)? How does it help us understand Jesus?

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory” (vs. 14). In what ways did Jesus dwell among us? The original word for “dwelt among us” really means “pitched his tent among us” or “tabernacled among us.” How does this affect your understanding of the phrase? John was one of the first disciples to behold Jesus’ glory. Have we beheld his glory? If so, how?

Who was the forerunner of Christ? How did he prepare the way for Christ? How can you prepare the way for Christ to work in this world?

John 9:1-41 - Healing a Blind Man

The disciples asked Jesus if the blind man could not see because of his sin or his parents’ sin. How does Jesus answer this question? What does it mean for us when we face difficult times? How does it help us comfort others?

What did Jesus do to heal the blind man? Why do you think Jesus heals the man in this way?

The blind man goes from darkness (blindness) to light (sight). How can we relate to this in terms of our spiritual lives and our understanding of Christ?

In John’s Gospel, what issues did the religious leaders have with the miracle of the blind man? What worried them so much about Jesus?

The blind man was eventually kicked out of the synagogue and shunned by his community for siding with Jesus over the Pharisees. Would you have the courage to choose Jesus, even if it meant losing friends or family? What would it mean in your life?

Acts 2:1-47 - Pentecost

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples were hiding and were fearful for their lives. How did the Holy Spirit change them?

After Peter's bold preaching about the death and resurrection of Christ, the listeners were "cut to the heart" and asked what their next step was. Have you ever been "cut to the heart" by the preaching of the Gospel? If so, what did you do after that experience?

When the first believers were baptized on Pentecost, they devoted themselves to four things (vs. 42). What are these four things? Do we devote ourselves to these four things? If so, how? Why are these things important?

Verses 43-47 describe the lives of the first believers. In what ways do our lives as members of the Church resemble this pattern? In what ways do we differ? How can we become more like they were?

Do you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life? If so, how?

Acts 8:26-40 - Sharing the Word

When Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading, he replied "How can I, unless someone guides me?" What is the role of the Church in helping us understand Scripture?

Philip was able to preach the good news of Jesus Christ using the passage in Isaiah. Do you see Jesus Christ when you read the Old Testament?

If you were asked to share what you know about Jesus, what would you say? Write out the basic truths of the gospel, the "Good News" about Jesus. Has God prompted you to share the "Good News" with someone? How was the experience?

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 - Love

What does real "love" look like? How is this different from the way people usually use the word? Which one of the words used to describe love in 1 Corinthians 13 is the most interesting to you? Any surprises in the list?

What would your world look like if you loved like this? How might people respond to you?

How do the descriptions of love given in this passage describe Jesus Christ? Think about how Christ lived while he was on this earth. In what ways can you express Christ's love to those around you?

In what ways have you experienced the descriptions of love in this passage?

I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 - The Coming of the Lord

What does St. Paul say to give us hope about believers who have already died?

For St. Paul, the coming of the Lord is a comforting event, a reunion of loved ones, but many are frightened about what Christ's return may mean. Why might this be? How can we change this way of thinking?

How is the return of Jesus described in this reading? As believers, how can we prepare for this?

Jesus' return sounds like an unexpected visit. How is your life different when you can plan ahead?

I Timothy 3:1-16 - Elders and Deacons

In your opinion, what qualities make up a good leader? Would these qualities be the same or different for someone holding a leadership position in the Church, at camp, at a retreat, etc?

Do you agree or disagree with the list of leadership qualities that St. Paul outlines for bishops/priests and deacons? Are there any qualities you would add?

What leadership traits do you most admire in this passage and in the leaders you know?

II Timothy 3:10-4:8 - All Scripture is God-breathed

Timothy was acquainted with the Scriptures from his childhood. Did this bear fruit in his adult life? How? In what ways can we start learning the Scriptures and the Faith from childhood?

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," says St Paul. What role does Scripture play in your life? Have you ever felt like God is teaching, correcting, and training you using Scripture? Do you read the Scripture and forget it, or do you remember and live it?

"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." Do we live in a time where this seems to be the case? Have you experienced this with anyone you know?