

Small Group Guide: Torah in the Epistles

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Icebreaker Question: When you read the New Testament letters (epistles), do you typically think about the Old Testament background? Why or why not?

Introduction

This study explores how the Pauline and General Epistles can only be properly understood when we recognize the Torah storyline behind them. The letters address different audiences (Jews vs. Gentiles) with different expectations, all within God's unfolding plan for Israel and the nations.

Key Takeaways

1. Different Audiences, Different Messages

- **Pauline Epistles:** Primarily written to Gentiles—"Learn about the grace that has been brought to you"
- **General Epistles:** Written to Jewish believers—"Wait for the grace to be brought"

2. Israel's Expectations vs. Reality

- **Expected:** Messiah present, restoration to the land, blessing and removal of curses
- **Experiencing:** Messiah departed, scattered from the land, suffering from Jews and Gentiles

3. The Torah's Prophetic Pattern

- Messiah would be rejected by Israel
- God would turn to the Gentiles
- Israel would be provoked to jealousy
- Israel would rebel in their jealousy
- Eventually, God would restore Israel

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Context (15-20 minutes)

1. **Why is it crucial to understand the Torah storyline before reading the epistles?** How does this change your approach to reading these letters?

2. **The teacher mentioned that Gentile believers were "expecting nothing" before hearing the gospel.** How does this contrast with Israel's centuries of preparation and promises? What does this tell us about God's grace?
3. **Read Deuteronomy 32:21.** How does this verse help us understand Paul's mission to the Gentiles? Why was it so important that Gentile believers remain Gentiles rather than becoming Jews?

The Pauline Epistles (20-25 minutes)

4. **"Beware of the Judaizers" was a major theme in Paul's letters.** Why would it have been problematic for Gentiles to get circumcised and follow Jewish law? (Hint: Think about provoking Israel to jealousy)
5. **Read Romans 10:14-21.** How does Paul use this passage to explain Israel's rejection of the gospel? What is the actual context of "faith comes by hearing" (v. 17)?
6. **Paul says his ministry to the Gentiles is actually about saving Jews (Romans 11:13-14).** How does this reframe our understanding of missions and evangelism?
7. **Discuss the difference between these two statements:**
 - "Learn about the grace that has been brought to you" (Pauline epistles)
 - "Wait for the grace to be brought" (General epistles)
8. What different graces are being discussed?

The General Epistles (20-25 minutes)

8. **Read 1 Peter 1:1-7.** What words and phrases indicate that Peter is writing to Jewish believers? What are they waiting for?
9. **Why is suffering such a prominent theme in the General Epistles?** Who is doing the persecuting, and why?
10. **The teacher mentioned that 1 John addresses "antichrists" with the "spirit of Cain."** Read 1 John 2:18-19 and 3:11-15. Who are these antichrists, and why do they hate their brothers?
11. **Read Galatians 2:7-9.** How does this passage clarify the audiences of Peter, James, and John versus Paul? Why do we often miss this distinction?

Application & Reflection (15-20 minutes)

12. **Tyler said, "These authors are addressing unique circumstances with theology. The theology never changes. The circumstances are always changing."** How should this shape the way we apply Scripture to our lives today?

13. **What theological truths from these epistles remain constant regardless of our circumstances?** (Examples: God's faithfulness, the call to endure with faith, unity in Christ)
14. **Many Christians treat Bible passages as either "proof texts" or "problem passages" for their theological system.** Have you experienced this? How can understanding the biblical storyline help us avoid this trap?
15. **How does understanding the Jewish/Gentile dynamic in the early church help us think about unity in our diverse churches today?**

Closing Reflection

The Big Idea: The New Testament letters make sense only when we understand the Old Testament story. God has not abandoned His promises to Israel, and Gentile believers have been graciously grafted into something that was prepared long before we arrived.

Final Question: How does this study change the way you'll read your Bible going forward?

Closing Prayer

Thank God for:

- His faithfulness to His promises
- The grace that has been extended to us as Gentiles
- The privilege of being grafted into His story
- Jewish believers who endured suffering to bring us the gospel

Ask God to:

- Help us read Scripture in context
- Give us patience to endure with faith
- Bring about the restoration He has promised