



**INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR BIBLESTUDY LEADERS  
PREPARING THE BIBLESTUDY  
2018-2019**

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## Preface

In this preface we want to clarify two things. Firstly, we want to outline the purpose of this document (and give you some guidelines for the good use of it) and, secondly, what the overarching theme for the year will be. All the Bible studies in this guide explore different aspects of this theme.

1) Based on feedback from the 2015 small group survey we are using a new approach for the small group guide. This document is intended to be used as a guideline for small group leaders to help them study the text and prepare the Bible studies. It is not a ready-made Bible study booklet but a tool for preparing a Bible study. It will help you as a small group leader to study the passage well and to inspire you when preparing a Bible study that fits the needs of your small group.

2) During the academic year 2018-2019 Ichtus Flanders' year theme is 'RecoverReally?'. In the book of Revelation God says, "I am making everything new!". The theme of 'making new', 'recovering' is important across the Bible. Ever since it all went wrong in Genesis and all relations became tainted and broken, God has been working on his recovery plan. Paul states that Christ in himself has reconciled the entire universe with itself and marks us as the ambassadors of that reconciliation. To which my son Rafaël replied: "Oh, so that kind of makes us Jesus' colleagues". Indeed, we are Jesus' colleagues when it comes to working out that recovery, that reconciliation. In the coming year, not only do we want to reflect on what is wrong with our society, our field of study and our relationships (even though a thorough analysis of those is surely needed too). We also want to see in what ways Jesus' work has brought and could bring reconciliation and recovery. In addition, we want to see how we as a small group, as an Ichtus group, as an Ichtian can contribute to recover what is broken.

When selecting Bible passages<sup>1</sup> to study, we have chosen texts from both the Old and the New Testament that deal with several aspects of relationships. There are 12 Bible studies compiled in this booklet. We know many Ichtus groups do not have 12 small group study nights. We hope that while selecting the topics, you will be brave enough to choose some of the lesser known passages.

To help write this booklet we have consulted a limited amount of Bible commentaries. It is tempting to consult a range of commentaries, but you might find yourself lost in translation eventually. We advise you to decide for yourself on a couple of good commentaries and to consult them after studying the passage itself in depth first. Different people have prepared different chapters in this booklet. Even though we have tried to present them as a unity, you will notice differences between the chapters. We hope that this will but add to the whole of this year's studies.

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<sup>1</sup> All bible passages are copied from the *New International Version* (NIV) unless otherwise specified.

## **How to prepare a bible study?**

With this guide we want to help you with studying the Bible in preparation for leading your small group. For each text we suggest a certain approach, but the base line remains the same:

### **Study the passage in depth**

The entire IFES movement (the umbrella organisation of which Ichtus is a member) affirms “inductive” Bible study as the way to approach a Bible passage. This means your starting point is the passage itself, and not your assumptions about what it means. A good way of digesting the text is by applying the “Manuscript method” (see next chapter).

### **Extract the core from the text**

Once you have discovered the key thought of the passage you are studying, it will be easier for your small group to discover it too. You will be able to focus better and decide how much time to spend on digressions during discussions.

### **Reflect on how you can guide your small group to the core**

Many small group leaders assume that once the exegesis (i.e. explaining the text) is done, the study will be a success. They couldn't be more wrong.

Once you have drawn out the key thought of the passage, you will need to reflect on how your group will discover this for themselves: how will you help them work towards this? Many people think the easiest way is a didactic conversation (Q&A), but that is a tricky one, because it is hard to predict how group members will respond. Often you will get an answer you weren't expecting, and it isn't easy to come up with more questions. We advise you as a group leader to leave the conversation as much as possible to your group members (80/20 rule).

# Manuscript study

This method is a useful way to study the Bible and can be used for preparing a passage but also for leading a small group. It consists of three steps:

## Observation

In this phase you get a grip on the story (what is the author telling us?). Print a hard copy of the passage and make sure you leave plenty of white space around the text but also in between the lines. If possible, make it a plain text by leaving out the paragraphs and verse numbers.

Go through the passage and mark anything that stands out to you, raises questions, indicates a structure or that is mentioned several times, ... Use pens and colours for marking words, structuring the passage and for indicating themes and connections.

A few more tips for questions:

### Like a journalist

- **Who?**
- **What?**
- **Where?**
- **When?**
- **How?**

### Connect the dots

- **Repetitions**
- **Similarities**
- **Contrasts**
- **Cause – effect**
- **From general to specific**
- **From specific to general**
- **Main thoughts**
- **Secondary thoughts**

### Identify with the characters

- **What do you see, hear, smell, feel?**
- **Become a character in the text**

- What kind of literature is this? A story? A dialogue? Poetry? Side notes by the author?<sup>2</sup> Note that one Bible passage may contain several genres.
- Mark signal words: because, for, therefore, since, so that, but, etc.
- Mark the logical units in the passage (which parts belong together?): Coherence in themes, times, places, thoughts, actions, etc.
- Write down things that strike you in the passage, that you hadn't expected or find unusual, things that surprise/puzzle/irritate you.
- Are there links or associations with other Bible passages? Read the passages in their own contexts (not only the individual verses) and ask yourself why they are mentioned here.
- Is there anything that raises questions? Anything that irritates or surprises you or which you find difficult? Write it down!

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<sup>2</sup> The genre of the text or the kind of text will also influence the way to approach the passage. You read a law text in a different way than a story or a letter.



## Interpretation

In this phase you try to answer the questions: What is this passage trying to tell me? Where do all my observations lead me? What is the core meaning of this passage?

Key element is this commission: To convey the meaning of the passage by answering the question: What does the author intend to communicate through the passage?

The following questions may be helpful:

- Ask questions in light of your observations.
- Ask questions about the linguistic and textual connections you found. For example: Why is the author repeating this word? Why does he set this particular contrast? Ask yourself 'Why (...)?' and 'What is the meaning of (...)?'
- Take another look at the linguistic and textual connections in the passage. What are the main connections and the main topics?
- Focus on the essential questions. These are (1) questions that rise from the text; (2) questions that cover a large part of it; (3) questions that relate to the main idea of the passage.
- Now try to answer the questions you wrote down. Try finding them in the passage itself, then in the immediate context of the passage, i.e. the surrounding passages within the Bible book, in connection to other Bible passages, and eventually by using a Biblical dictionary, commentary or other helpful book or comment.
- Ask yourself 'the big question': What message was the author trying to convey to his original readers? What do you think the key points are, or the main point of the passage is? Why is this passage here?
- Try to summarize the key thought of the text in one sentence.

## Application

In the final phase we spend some time reflecting on the importance of this passage and its meaning for our lives. This can be a practical application (something that needs to be done) or a transforming application (something that needs to change) or an informative application (an increase of knowledge), etc. Make sure you avoid easy answers. Remember that the Bible was primarily written to groups of people (people and churches, not individuals), so the applications are mostly about what we need to do as a community. The personal applications flow from these (since you as an individual are part of said community).

Central is this: connect the passage with your own life and the world in which we live.

The following questions can be helpful:

- Can you see the connections between the passage and your own life and our world? (E.g. Can you see yourself in one of the main characters in the text? How does the message of this passage connect with your life?)
- Do you feel that God is specifically addressing your small group or you in relation to one aspect of your life/lives in particular? How?
- Are there particular commands, promises, examples or counter-examples in this passage that speak to you?
- Are there any specific steps you need to take to put this passage into practice? Be honest and specific. (Make sure to bring a diary to make notes and remember to come back to this next time you get together as a small group)
- Is there anything in this passage that is important for my relationships with other people, with our group, our community or our society?
- Are there specific things which we, individually or as a group, need to address?
- What does this passage tell you/us about God?
- Does this passage have anything to say about the way I live, think or act as a student? Does this passage cast a new light on what I am learning at university?



## Lectio Divina

The second method that can be an invaluable help to studying a Bible passage is the *lectio divina*. This is a contemplative, intuitive way of reading the Bible - a refreshing alternative to our knowledge-based approach. This method helps us listen to God speaking into our hearts. One person leads the small group, the others do not need a Bible - they need to merely listen.

Read the passage aloud once. Do this slowly. After reading the passage, be quiet for a few minutes to allow for further reflection.

Step 2: Say to the group: "During the next reading, what do you notice? It could be word, a phrase or part of a sentence. If there is nothing in particular that stands out to you, don't worry.<sup>3</sup>" Read the passage aloud for a second time. Be quiet for a moment and allow everyone to take turns in sharing what they noticed (if anything). As the leader you need to make sure group members only share what they noticed without further reflections or explanations.

Step 3: For the third reading, give your small group this question: "Ask yourself why you are noticing this. Often the things we notice indicate a link between the passage and our individual lives. Is there a connection? Again, it is no problem if there isn't a clear connection." Read the passage for a third time. Be quiet and allow time for sharing about people's connections between the passage and their lives. As a group leader, ensure your members do not elaborate for too long.

Step 4: Say to the group: "Is there anything God is trying to make clear to you through this passage? God still speaks through his Word and maybe that is what he is doing now. Sometimes God will not speak instantly, or we do not understand him. That is not a problem." Read the passage for a fourth time. Be quiet and allow the readers to take turns in sharing what they feel God is telling them through this passage. Again, make sure this is done concisely.

Step 5: You have the choice of reading the passage for a fifth time, or taking time to share more elaborately, and to pray for each other.

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<sup>3</sup> Do emphasize this, so that no one feels uncomfortable when they do not notice anything special. It is not a problem when this happens.



## The entire Bible

Nearly every Christian from the Protestant-Evangelical background will agree that the Bible consists of both the Old and the New Testament. Both are an essential part, and both are the Word of God. Still we seem to favour the New Testament, or the Old Testament passages that clearly refer to Jesus.

In Ichtus we want to put our conviction, that the whole Bible is the Word of God, into practice. We must deal with the consequences too.

First and foremost, we want to deepen our knowledge of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was the bible of the first Christians. Paul's first letters were written 20 years after Jesus had walked the earth and the New Testament is full of references to and images of the Old Testament.

By studying the Old Testament, we will gain a deeper understanding of the New Testament. We will see the bigger picture of God's plan and will understand how Jesus and the Church fit into that plan. We will also begin to understand that the New Testament is not at all 'new', but an unexpected continuation of God's plan. It contains some new elements, but the common thread runs through both.

By knowing the New Testament well, we will gain a better understanding of the Old Testament too. We will see how prophetic texts yearn for Jesus' coming. We will understand God's ways better from Jesus' perspective.

Secondly, we want to dig into the entire Bible. Certain parts of the Bible – both in the Old and the New Testament - are less popular than others. We want to shine some light on books like Leviticus, Isaiah, Hosea and the letter of James. We do this out of the solemn conviction that God inspired these writers to teach us something about his character, his plan and his Son.

This also means that we will not avoid difficult passages. Texts that raise questions and debate, texts we do not necessarily understand – either from a logical or an emotional point of view. Why did God do something that seems horrible to us? Does this passage conflict with modern science?

Thirdly, we long to see where we fit in this big story. A better understanding of the salvation history helps us to find our own space in it. We can identify with Habakkuk, Ruth and Lydia, but we also see where the differences are and in what way our century is different from theirs. We can translate their struggles and questions to our time.

In all of this we want to see Jesus. If we believe that he is God's Word, then God's 'other word' (i.e. the Bible) is all about him. He was there when it all begun and the entire Bible – from cover to cover – is his story with mankind. Studying the Bible is not a goal in itself. It is a means to deepen our relationship with the Son of God – which in effect will affect our relationship with ourselves, our neighbour and creation.



# 1 // I Kings 18:1-19:18

## Bible passage

After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: “Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.”<sup>2</sup> So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria,<sup>3</sup> and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord.<sup>4</sup> While Jezebel was killing off the Lord’s prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.)<sup>5</sup> Ahab had said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so we will not have to kill any of our animals.”<sup>6</sup> So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

<sup>7</sup> As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?”<sup>8</sup> “Yes,” he replied. “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’”<sup>9</sup> “What have I done wrong,” asked Obadiah, “that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?”<sup>10</sup> As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you.<sup>11</sup> But now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’<sup>12</sup> I don’t know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the Lord since my youth.<sup>13</sup> Haven’t you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the Lord’s prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water.<sup>14</sup> And now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’ He will kill me!”<sup>15</sup> Elijah said, “As the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.”

<sup>16</sup> So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.<sup>17</sup> When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”<sup>18</sup> “I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Baals.<sup>19</sup> Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

<sup>20</sup> So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.<sup>21</sup> Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing.<sup>22</sup> Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.<sup>23</sup> Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it.<sup>24</sup> Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

<sup>25</sup> Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.”<sup>26</sup> So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.<sup>27</sup> At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be



awakened.”<sup>28</sup> So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.<sup>29</sup> Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.<sup>30</sup> Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down.<sup>31</sup> Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.”<sup>32</sup> With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed.<sup>33</sup> He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”<sup>34</sup> “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again. “Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time.<sup>35</sup> The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.<sup>36</sup> At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.<sup>37</sup> Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”<sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.<sup>39</sup> When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”

<sup>40</sup> Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

<sup>41</sup> And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.”<sup>42</sup> So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.<sup>43</sup> “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked. “There is nothing there,” he said. Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”<sup>44</sup> The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’”<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.<sup>46</sup> The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

**19** Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.<sup>2</sup> So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”<sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,<sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”<sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.”<sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.<sup>7</sup> The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.”<sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.<sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”<sup>10</sup> He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”<sup>11</sup> The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and

shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.<sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.<sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"<sup>14</sup> He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."<sup>15</sup> The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.<sup>16</sup> Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.<sup>17</sup> Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.<sup>18</sup> Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

## Note

If this is the first time that you use this small group guide, do make sure you read the preface well. You may need the information given there!

## How does this text relate to this year's theme?

Elijah's action on Mount Carmel makes Israel realize that God is the Lord Almighty. With his action he restores the relation between God and his people and restores Israel as a nation. Moreover, the text gives an insight into the brokenness of man (esp. Isaiah) and how his self-image needs to be rebuilt.

## Key thought/ central message

God shows the people and Elijah that He is the Lord Almighty.

## Working methods and questions for small group leaders

### ▪ **Introduction**

Watch the video from Bible Project 'Kings': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVFW3wbi9pk>

Our passage is covered only briefly, but still the video provides a good context for the book of Kings and explains what a prophet is.

### ▪ **Reading**

- a) Read through the text a couple of times. It is a long passage, so it may take a while to get familiar with its contents. Do try to read the passages before and after at least once.
- b) Is there anything that strikes you? Anything that raises questions?
- c) Who are the key players? Describe their character (throughout the story).
- d) Describe the people and how they evolve throughout the story.
- e) There are a lot of contrasts in this story. Trace them. Trace also the repetitions.
- f) There are a lot of natural elements mentioned in this story. Trace them.
- g) Divide the roles in this passage: Narrator, Elijah, Obadiah, the people, the Lord, Ahab and Jezebel, ... Read the passage out loud (several times) as if it were a theatre play. Ask one another about their choice of intonation etc.
- h) Try to find the main theme and key thoughts.

### ▪ **Understanding**

- a) Elijah wants the people to make a choice. What is at stake?
- b) Why does Elijah repair the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down? What symbolism is reflected there?
- c) Why was Elijah feeling miserable? Was he quite rightly so?
- d) What was God trying to achieve with the episode of storm, earthquake, fire and still breeze? Did it work?
- e) Why has God three people anointed? What did it mean to Elijah?
- f) Try to summarize the passage in one sentence. Check your phrase against the text. Does it cover it all?

- **Application**

- a) What can you learn about God and God's character in this passage?
- b) Do you recognize yourself in one of the characters? Now what?
- c) What do you learn about worship and how God reveals himself? What can you do with that knowledge as a small group, an Ichtus group?
- d) What would it mean for you to "repair the altar of the Lord" in your life?
- e) Has God ever asked you "What are you doing here?"
- f) When was the last time you cried out "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"
- g) This passage deals with the brokenness of Elijah. Do you see brokenness in yourself, in other members of your small group, ...? What are you to do about it? What are you to do about it as a small group? What can you do in the light of "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"?
- h) Elijah needs to learn that God uses him, but that God also works in ways that Elijah doesn't see or through other people. Have you learned that lesson yet? If so, how did God make it clear to you?
- i) By repairing the altar and by his action on Mount Carmel Elijah gives the people back their identity as God's people. Try this dream exercise as a small group or during your preparation. Imagine: What would my country, my city look like if the people would turn to the Lord and cry out "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"?
- j) Some might consider Obadiah a coward, because he serves the Lord secretly and is involved in underground resistance and rebellion, whereas Elijah's actions are public. Discuss these and other examples. When do you do what? How is your service to the Lord: public or in secret? Why?

### Clarification of difficult words/passages

- **Introduction: background information**

As already mentioned, the Bible Project's video about the book of Kings gives a good overview and shows the passage in a bigger perspective.

- **Reading: background information**

In the previous chapters we can read that Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians. He begins to serve Baal and even builds him a temple. Elijah is in hiding and God takes care of him by sending ravens to feed him. He also lives with a widow in Sidon for some time and is able to do some miracles there.

Obadiah fears Ahab. In the previous chapters there is no indication that Ahab is particularly cruel, but it does state that with his idol worship he did more evil than any of the previous kings of Israel.

Elijah calls God 'the Lord of the heavenly forces'. This whole passage is about showing God's power versus Baal's lack of power. The lack of rain is a forecasting of this.

Elijah invites them to Mount Carmel. This is intentional because this mountain was associated with Baal. He also summons priests of Baal described as "the prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table". It is striking that she is the benefactor who supports the priests and their worship.

In verse 22 Elijah says that he is last remaining prophet. Unless the prophets that were hidden by Obaiah have died, this is incorrect. We should read this as a rhetorical exaggeration. Elijah is trying to make a point.

Baal is often pictured with a lightning bolt in his hand. Fire from heaven or lightning was associated with him.

Elijah commands people to pour water over his altar until this is completely covered. This could be a way to contrast the years of drought. On the other hand, the Mediterranean Sea isn't far from Carmel so this could have been saltwater. In both cases he makes his challenge that bit more difficult.

Notice (verse 38) that the fire comes from the Lord, without a cloud in the sky.

Whether Elijah's command to kill the priests - a motif in this passage - is from God or not we don't know. No further comment is made in the text. This kind of violence isn't common for us and much has been written about it. A book which covers this kind of violence and similar difficult passages is 'God behaving badly'.

Elijah ran ahead of Ahab. This doesn't necessarily mean that he caught up with him or ran a lot faster than Ahab's carriage. No, he goes in front of him as part of the king's consort, like a royal herald. By the power of the Lord he goes like a herald before Ahab and announces the king's loyalties have changed. In Hittite texts it is often the deity that goes before the king, so this makes Elijah a representative of God himself.

Elijah runs all the way to Barsheba, all the way down south, nearly outside the country border. Does he also believe that God is merely a regional god, with no power outside of the country?

The 'whisper of a gentle breeze' does not do justice to the enigmatic Hebrew. It is more like 'the sound of silence'; implicating that God shows his glory when he comes in silence after all the big things have passed.

'Those that have not kissed him'. On a black stela of Salmanassar III we can see the Israelite king Jehu kiss the ground in front of the Assyrian king. This was a common way to portray submission to a deity or king.

- **Understanding: background information**

The competition between Baal and the Lord. It is about demonstrating that God is not just a local god (e.g. the mountain where Moses received the law, Mount Horeb) or an aspect god (who only wields power over a certain aspect of life) but an almighty God. A god who controls the elements wins. Fire in the first instance is an indicator of the presence of God (such as the burning bush). On top of this Baal was associated with lightning. So the Lord is showing his power and presence in the domain of Baal. Fire also represents the acceptance of a sacrifice. Burnt offerings like this are also commonly accompanied by a question. The question here is clearly to end the droughts. If both groups had prayed for this then rain could have been sent by both gods. The competition is about which god responds with fire. The subsequent rain can then be attributed to the correct deity. Both answers with fire and rain and key to this passage.

Elijah rebuilt the destroyed altar of the Lord and used 12 stones to do this. The covenant with the Lord, the identity of Israel as God's people, Israel's worship and all of Israel was at stake here. This act is a very loaded and very symbolic. Read Joshua 4:6-8.

When the people cry 'the Lord is God' they don't just recognise him as a god among many but as the Lord Almighty.

God asks Elijah twice what he is doing there? And twice Elijah gives his dejected answer which clearly shows he overestimates himself and underestimates God or at least can't always see what God is doing.

- **Application: background information**

Now discuss how the small group leader can responsibly link the observation and interpretation to today's application.

Not seeing that God doesn't just work through you (or your 'kind' of Christians), that he can work in ways he had not realised were possible can lead to negativity, fanaticism and arrogance. This passage is a good way to show people that they are precious, and that God can use them as a individual or as a group, but that he is also working in endless other ways through many different types of people.

## Preparing for small group

This is a very long Bible passage, which you will have to take into account in your own preparation time but also for your small group

- **Your own preparation:**

Start on time. It is better to prepare your observations over a few days. Keep coming back to the passage and read it again.

- **For your small group:**

- a) You could send them the passage beforehand, so your small group members have read it already (and perhaps can bring along some of their own observations)
- b) You can spread the content over two small group evenings
- c) You can chop the text into smaller pieces (find logical breaks in the text) and split your small group into smaller groups. Each little group can go through different steps and you can bring it all together at the end.

Where do you start your small group prep as a small group leader using this resource? Start by setting the goal for your group: what is the key message of the Bible passage and what is your small group goal? How do you link this to the year's theme? Did you read the passage thoroughly and can you see how 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' link together? Have you worked through the background information? Now you're ready to start the preparation of your working methods and questions for your Bible study. We strongly recommend using 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' as the main structure for your study time. This is a basis for responsibly using the Bible and to ensure you will reach your small group goal.

There are a lot of working methods that can help you with your preparation and that could also help your small group. A few are recommended in this resource, but you know your group and the best approach for them.





## 2 // I Corinthians 3:4-4

### Bible passage

4 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? 5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. 9 For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

16 Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”<sup>[a]</sup>; 20 and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”<sup>[b]</sup> 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas<sup>[c]</sup> or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

4 This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

6 Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! 9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but

you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

## Note

If this is the first time that you use this small group guide, do make sure you read the preface well. You may need the information given there!

## How does this text relate to this year's theme?

Much of what is broken in the world today relates to ego, destructive leadership and a twisted perspective. Paul presents us with a different view and calls us to follow him.

## Key thought/ central message

Only God can judge, and his judgement is the only one that counts. Be careful in your judgement of yourself and others.

## Working methods and questions for small group leaders

### ▪ Introduction

a) Watch this video about the first letter to the Corinthians by the Bible Project: <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/1-corinthians/> This video gives you a good overview and outlines the problems Paul is addressing through his letter.

b) Whilst preparing for the Bible Study it is best to read the chapters preceding this passage. Reading Acts 18 would also be useful. These passages will help you understand more about Paul and the problems he faced in the city of Corinth.

c) This Bible passage is a letter. Generally speaking a letter only shows you one side of the conversation and you can't always see what certain comments are in response to.

d) To illustrate this for yourself or your small group use this exercise: open your inbox on your mobile. Read some of the messages you received. Do you still understand what others were responding to?

e) Belgium's national motto is 'Unity makes strength'. What does this mean? What could it mean? Reflect on this in your preparation or reflect on it with your small group.

f) Look at the news and look at the leaders that are prominent in news stories at the moment (Trump, Orban, ...). Compare their style of leadership with what Paul is describing.

▪ **Reading**

a) Read the text aloud.

b) It is a letter to a church. The original audience would have listened to it as a group. Therefore, the appeals are aimed at a group. Read the whole passage again (aloud) and imagine the 'you' addressing your group.

c) What have you noticed? What is repeated?

d) Find connections and divide the text into logical sections.

e) Pay attention to the times Paul says 'you are...'

f) Paul compares himself with different sorts of people. What are these people?

▪ **Understanding**

a) If you had to give this passage a title, what would it be? Does the text allow for this? Use arguments from the text.

b) What do the images mean that Paul uses? Why does he use the images of 'servant', 'field', 'foundation', 'temple' etc?

c) How does your reading and understanding of this passage change when you look at it from a group perspective? For example: 'Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?'

d) What does the passage say with regards to judging (yourself or others)? How does he build his argument?

e) Which image does Paul give of himself and his mission as an apostle? Why does he do this?

▪ **Application**

a) What did you learn about God and about Jesus? Which new insights have you gained about the character of God?

b) This passage is about division, about judging, disregarding people, forming exclusive groups, etc. At the end of your preparation or whilst discussing with your small group it would be good to read chapter 13 of the same book.

c) Are there lessons your own small group or your Ichtus group can learn from this letter regarding leadership?

d) It's an election year. Look at the leaders of the different parties that are coming forward. Compare them with how Paul describes himself.

e) Paul calls the church in Corinth and us to follow him. What does this mean for you and your small group?

f) The well-known prayer by St Francis 'Let me be in instrument for your Peace' is very applicable here. You could pray this prayer as a group into areas where there is 'hate', 'injustice' etc. and together think about how you can be a better instrument of peace.

## Clarification of difficult words/passages

- **Introduction: background information**

As already mentioned, the majority of the necessary background information can be found in the preceding chapters and in the passages in Acts about Paul's journey to Corinth and the relationship of Paul and Apollo with Corinth. Peter (Kefas) also seems to have visited Corinth (see 1 Cor 1:12).

- **Reading: background information**

Verses 19-20: Paul makes reference to Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11.

Everything is yours: see I Cor. 1:4-7

- **Understanding: background information**

We have to understand that in Paul's day a person's role was determined by their social status. The rich and powerful had a preference for a religious and philosophical teacher like Apollo. They looked down on manual labour and therefore struggled with Paul, who provided for himself by making tents. Because of this Paul wasn't seen as a moral teacher. Throughout the letter you can see that social differences played an important role in their society and these influences had entered the church.

Paul is very deliberate when he describes himself as a servant. He uses farming metaphors to describe both himself and Apollo. This job would be regarded as inferior by the Corinth elite. And they had no right to boast as God has given them both the same task, which they had carried out.

In chapter 4:7 Paul asks a lot of questions that are intended to end the boasting by Christians and he uses a healthy portion of irony. In the following verses he compares the Christians in Corinth with the apostles.

- **Application: background information**

Nothing much has changed. We are still just as sensitive to following the wrong examples. We still have the wrong image of ourselves and others. Discuss leadership and the consequences of good and bad leadership. Think about leadership in Ichtus. Think about our celebrity culture and how certain Christian leaders in certain churches and Christian communities are almost worshipped for their ministry.

## Preparing for small group

Where do you start your small group prep as a small group leader using this resource? Start by setting the goal for your group: what is the key message of the Bible passage and what is your small group goal? How do you link this to the year's theme? Did you read the passage thoroughly and can you see how 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' link together? Have you worked through the background information?

Now you're ready to start the preparation of your working methods and questions for your Bible study. We strongly recommend using 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' as the main structure for your study time. This is a basis for responsibly using the Bible and to ensure you will reach your small group goal.

There are a lot of working methods that can help you with your preparation and that could also help your small group. A few are recommended in this resource, but you know your group and the best approach for them.

### 3 // Mark 5:21-43

#### Bible passage

21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. 22 Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. 23 He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." 24 So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"

36 Overhearing<sup>[a]</sup> what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." 40 But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. 43 He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and told them to give her something to eat.

#### Note

If this is the first time that you use this small group guide, do make sure you read the preface well. You may need the information given there!

#### How does this text relate to this year's theme?

This passage is about Jesus giving physical recovery to two separate women. Once you dig deeper into the text you will find that as well as physical recovery Jesus also gives them societal recovery.

## Key thought/ central message

Jesus brings recovery to all.

## Working methods and questions for small group leaders

The working methods and questions have been divided into 'introduction', 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application'. This supports the group leader in the first instance to study the text independently. Afterwards you can read through the background information to further deepen your understanding before preparing for your Bible study.

- **Introduction**

- a) Read the passage a few times.
- b) Watch <https://www.bible.com/nl/videos/3179-mark-5-21-43-from-lumoproject-dot-com>
- c) Read the passage in another version or in one of the other Gospels (Luke 8:40-56 and Matthew 9:18-26)
- d) Watch this video to gain an overview of Marks Gospel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGHqu9-DtXk>

- **Reading**

- a) In the introduction of this resource you will find a list of general observation questions (see 'manuscript study'). Print off Mark 5:21-43 and study the text using those questions. Make notes.
- b) Who are the main characters in the story?
- c) What can you notice about the structure and build up?
- d) What happens?
- e) Are there any contrasts? Or comparisons?
- f) What emotions can we see in the story?
- g) What kind of text is this?
- h) What words are repeated?

- **Understanding**

- a) What can we learn about Jesus in this passage?
- b) Take a sheet of paper and draw two columns: one for Jairus' daughter and one for the bleeding woman. Which similarities or comparisons are there? List them.
- c) Why does Jesus request secrecy of the witnesses in Jairus' household?
- d) Why is the bleeding woman fearful when Jesus asks who touched him?
- e) Why 12 years old? Does this number have significance?
- f) What role does faith play in this text?
- g) How does this passage relate to the year theme?

- **Application**

- a) Look at the general application questions in the manuscript study
- b) What social status do you think you have in society or in your university?
- c) How important is social status and people's opinion to you?
- d) Who do you find most like yourself: Jairus' daughter or the bleeding woman? Why?
- e) What stops you getting closer to Jesus (in public and in secret)?
- f) Where do you see a need for societal recovery around you? Why are today's social outcasts (you could create a newspaper collage)
- g) Why do you look down to? (academically, socially, background/ heritage)
- h) Where can you see links with your own life?

## Clarification of difficult words/passages

- **Introduction: background information**

### *Author, place and date:*

The Gospel of Mark is probably the oldest gospel in the Bible. Many scholars believe that this gospel was written between 60 and 70 BD. It is likely to have been written by John Mark, someone who worked with the apostle Paul, Barnabas and Peter. We can read about him in Acts 12:12. The early church believed that Peter was the most important source of information for John Mark's version of the gospel. An important witness for this was church father Papias (70-160 AD) who, when discussing authorship, writes that Mark "meticulously wrote down everything Peter remembered but not in order (...)" (History of the Church 3.39.15). The gospel probably originated in Rome (where according to tradition Peter was crucified), which can be noted from several Latin words used in the original text.



## *Audience*

In writing the gospel Mark had a specific audience in mind.

The readers do not know Aramaic and have a lack of knowledge regarding Jewish custom. The many Greek translations create the assumption this was written for non-Christians. (examples of translations and explanations are 5:41; 7:1-4,11,34; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22,34,42). However, Mark doesn't translate everything, so they must be familiar with some Jewish customs (e.g. 1:13; 3:23 or Hosanna 11:10).

The target audience likely spoke Latin or Greek with Latin influences. This can be deduced from the words borrowed from Latin in his gospel. In 12:42 Mark mentions Quadrans coins. These coins were only used in the west and in the Roman Empire, not in Palestine.

Another assumption regarding the original audience for Mark's gospel is that they were persecuted Christians (Keener, 1993) and some of them had renounced their faith. Mark's writing style and education point to this (8:34-38; 10:30; 13:9-13; 14:27-31).

Despite all these indications there is no certainty regarding the target audience. According to various researchers all the gospel authors sought to address a wide and varied target audience in the Roman Empire and not necessarily a specific church congregation.

## *Central theme of the gospel*

The central theme of Mark's gospel is the life of Jesus. Unlike the other gospels Mark focuses on the death of Jesus.

The messianic secret is a clear topic within the gospel of Mark. Jesus hides his true identity, that he is the Messiah, to the public. Apart from this the failing of the disciples is also a much-debated topic.

## *Genre:*

The four gospels are old biographies about Jesus' life.

## *Structure:*

Mark's gospel can be divided into five parts.

- Prologue (1:1-13)

The coming of the Messiah is announced by John the Baptists.

- Narratio (1:14-6:13)

Chapter four is central to this part. It narrates the similarities. These chapters also serve to introduce Jesus. What is he doing? His actions and words get all the attention.

- Argumentatio (6:14-10:52)

The question "Who is Jesus?" is central to this part. Jesus is constantly misunderstood by the people around him. In chapter 8 we can see Jesus finally being recognised. This recognition is linked to the call to follow Jesus.

- Denouement (11:1-15:47)

In the denouement the story is told of what happens to Jesus and how it is going to end. His final weeks on earth are described.

- Epilogue (16:1-8)

The Gospel of Mark ends with the announcement that Jesus has risen from the dead.

- **Reading: background information**

*The messianic secret*

In Mark's Gospel Jesus never explicitly says he is the Son of God. This is called the messianic secret. In this gospel Jesus waited until God revealed his identity to the crowds and apostles. Jesus only publicly admits to being the Messiah at the court in front of the high priest. The reader is taken on a journey by the author as a disciple of Jesus who, together with the apostles, works towards the climax of the final week where the reader discovers throughout the story that Jesus really is the Messiah.

*Additional information from John and Matthew*

Much of what is described in this chapter is also described in Matthew and John. It can be very interesting to compare the stories in the different books of the Bible and it can shed a light on different aspects of the story. You can also read the story of the bleeding woman and Jairus' daughter in Luke 9:40-56 and Matthew 9:18-26.

*The 'suffering, dying and resurrection' as a biography*

This gospel devotes almost half of the book on the final week Jesus is on earth. In the Greco-Roman tradition it was common for biographies to spend a lot of attention on the person's final hours and the way they died if the person was of importance. It usually provided some description of the hero's character and wisdom. It is only during this part that Mark shows Jesus as the Christ (= Messiah or 'anointed king').

- **Understanding: background information**

*Jewish synagogues and their leaders*

When the people of Israel grew in number and spread out over the Promised Land it was no longer possible to gather together as a group and study the Law. They started meeting in smaller, more local, groups. Every community or village started a meeting place led by appointed leaders, often the village elders. These meeting places were called synagogues and were places for education and worship but also social occasions.

Over the years these synagogues grew into institutions of their own with different social roles:

- Pharisees:

The Pharisees studied the Law. They believed in life after death, the importance of rituals, the resurrection of the body ... The Pharisees were respected by the people for their piety (Zavada, 2017).

- Sadducees:

The Sadducees were a group of people who identified with the priestly aristocracy. They rejected the traditions of the elders that were upheld and highly respected by the Pharisees. The Sadducees preferred to study the Torah (Wilson, 2018)

- Scribes:

The Scribes were the teachers of the Law. They could belong to the Pharisees or the Sadducees. Scribes were respected teachers and often had a student whom they studied the law with. Scribes could also create legal documents (Wilson, 2018).

- Elders

Elders carried the general leadership with regards to religious affairs of their communities.

- Leader of the synagogue

The leader of the synagogue was the highest-ranking citizen. He carried the immediate supervision of religious services. He appointed preachers and people to lead the prayers, was responsible to ensure appropriate conduct during the services and was overseer for the building (Mitchell, 1900).

- Alms collector

The alms collector was responsible for the collection and to give out alms to the poor (Mitchell, 1900).

- Minister

The minister was responsible for the care of the Holy Scriptures, the handing over of the scrolls during the service, teaching the children, lashings ... (Mitchell, 1900).

### *Uncleanness*

In Jesus' time society was still ruled and shaped based on the Old Testament laws. In these laws there are rules, for example, about women when they are bleeding (Leviticus 15:19-30).

When a woman had her monthly menstruation, she had to seclude herself because she was now unclean. Only when the bleeding had stopped, and she had undergone the cleansing ritual a woman was allowed back in society. If someone had touched this woman, they would also be considered unclean.

In Numbers 19:11-22 we can also find laws and rules around corpses. Touching a dead person was supremely unclean.

### *Laying on of hands*

Laying on of hands appears in the Old and New Testament. The meaning is different in each setting.

Moses lays hands on Joshua to make him his successor. In Numbers 8:10-14 we can read about laying on of hands to honour God. In Exodus and Leviticus it is used to anoint priests and sacrifices. In the New Testament we can see laying on of hands to give a blessing, in prayer, in surrender (Vandenberghe, 2016).

In the New Testament laying on of hands is often occurs when healing the sick or to heal sins (Luke 13:13; Mark 8:23-25). We can see that Jesus extends his hand to the sick who are bedbound to pull them up (Mark 1:30 and also Jairus' daughter). Jesus' gesture is usually accompanied with words. To the leper Jesus says "I say to you become clean". To Jairus' daughter he says "Talita Koum - little girl, rise".

### *12 years*

In Jesus' time the age a woman would expect to get married is 12. Jairus' daughter had reached an important time in her life and her family's lives.

The number 12 often occurs throughout the Bible and points to completion or wholeness. Jesus had 12 disciples, Jacob has 12 sons, Israel's 12 tribes, the new Jerusalem was to have 12 city gates (Revelation 12:1).

### *Social status*

In Jesus' time the poor, the sick and orphans were all part of the lowest classes in society. They were ignored and outcast. Not only in daily life but also in religious aspects.

The landowners, government officials and army officers as well as the religious leaders enjoyed prestige and belonged to the highest classes. They made the decisions in society and were recognised.

### *Faith*

"By Your faith you are saved" is a sentence Jesus often uses when someone asks him for healing. The leper (Luke 17,19), the lame (Mark 2:5) as well as the bleeding woman.

Despite her uncleanness the woman makes her way over to Jesus. It is clear that it was Jesus' power that healed her (verse 30), however, Jesus references her faith. Her faith caused her to act.

When the messages arrive that Jairus' daughter has died, Jesus tells him to keep the faith.

- **Application: background information**

We can take the two stories of Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman in many different directions. Several (current) themes lend themselves: social recovery, physical recovery, social status, humility, faith (public and secret).

In the following section 'preparing for small group' we will only focus on one of these topics. During your preparation reflect whether this topic is suitable for your small group. Maybe you have noticed on your previous small group evenings that one of the other themes is more applicable for your group. If this is the case do find other working methods that suit your theme and perhaps ask another student leader for help.

## Preparing for small group

- a) Study the text by reading it several times and mark the things that stand out. Read the questions with the text. Ask your own questions and write these down.
- b) Find answers to your questions in the text. For any answers that cannot be found in there look at the footnotes in your Bible, however, try and find them by yourself first. If you cannot find the necessary answers there you could always consult a commentary. However, not all background information is necessary to reach your key message.
- c) Use the previous two points to find the key message for the passage. What is the passage about and what is its relationship to the year theme.
- d) From the key message you can start to prepare your small group evening. You do this by leading your group to the key message. There are lots of good ways to do this but ensure you use the 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' method. These elements are necessary to use the Bible in a responsible way. Using the working methods isn't just didactically recommended but it can certainly help you find the key message.
- e) With your application pay attention to the individual, your small group, the diverse fields of study, your Ichtus group and society. Maybe your application doesn't apply to just the individual but to all of society.
- f) Possible applications for your group:
- g) You could re-enact the story. Divide up the parts and put yourself in the story.
- h) Divide your small group in 2 groups at random (an outer circle and an inner circle - all facing inwards). Don't count yourself as small group leader in either group but sit within the inner circle.  
Group 1: these people are the lowest in society. They are in the outer circle. When they want to share, they have to put up their hand and wait to be allowed to speak.  
Group 2: they are prominent ones in society. They sit in the inner circle and can take part as normal to the conversation and enjoy some food and drink that is within reach.
- i) Make a small group collage of newspaper cuttings that talk about social status and social exclusion.

## 4// Lamentations 1

Bible passage

1 [a]How deserted lies the city,

once so full of people!

How like a widow is she,

who once was great among the nations!

She who was queen among the provinces

has now become a slave.

2 Bitterly she weeps at night,

tears are on her cheeks.

Among all her lovers

there is no one to comfort her.

All her friends have betrayed her;

they have become her enemies.

3 After affliction and harsh labor,

Judah has gone into exile.

She dwells among the nations;

she finds no resting place.

All who pursue her have overtaken her

in the midst of her distress.

4 The roads to Zion mourn,

for no one comes to her appointed festivals.

All her gateways are desolate,

her priests groan,

her young women grieve,

and she is in bitter anguish.

5 Her foes have become her masters;

her enemies are at ease.

The Lord has brought her grief

because of her many sins.

Her children have gone into exile,

captive before the foe.

6 All the splendour has departed

from Daughter Zion.

Her princes are like deer

that find no pasture;

in weakness they have fled

before the pursuer.

7 In the days of her affliction and wandering

Jerusalem remembers all the treasures

that were hers in days of old.

When her people fell into enemy hands,

there was no one to help her.

Her enemies looked at her

and laughed at her destruction.

8 Jerusalem has sinned greatly

and so has become unclean.

All who honoured her despise her,

for they have all seen her naked;

she herself groans

and turns away.

9 Her filthiness clung to her skirts;

she did not consider her future.

Her fall was astounding;

there was none to comfort her.

“Look, Lord, on my affliction,

for the enemy has triumphed.”

10 The enemy laid hands

on all her treasures;  
she saw pagan nations  
enter her sanctuary—  
those you had forbidden  
to enter your assembly.  
11 All her people groan  
as they search for bread;  
they barter their treasures for food  
to keep themselves alive.  
“Look, Lord, and consider,  
for I am despised.”  
12 “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?  
Look around and see.  
Is any suffering like my suffering  
that was inflicted on me,  
that the Lord brought on me  
in the day of his fierce anger?  
13 “From on high he sent fire,  
sent it down into my bones.  
He spread a net for my feet  
and turned me back.  
He made me desolate,  
faint all the day long.  
14 “My sins have been bound into a yoke**[b]**;  
by his hands they were woven together.  
They have been hung on my neck,  
and the Lord has sapped my strength.  
He has given me into the hands  
of those I cannot withstand.  
15 “The Lord has rejected  
all the warriors in my midst;

he has summoned an army against me  
to**[c]** crush my young men.  
In his winepress the Lord has trampled  
Virgin Daughter Judah.  
16 “This is why I weep  
and my eyes overflow with tears.  
No one is near to comfort me,  
no one to restore my spirit.  
My children are destitute  
because the enemy has prevailed.”  
17 Zion stretches out her hands,  
but there is no one to comfort her.  
The Lord has decreed for Jacob  
that his neighbours become his foes;  
Jerusalem has become  
an unclean thing among them.  
18 “The Lord is righteous,  
yet I rebelled against his command.  
Listen, all you peoples;  
look on my suffering.  
My young men and young women  
have gone into exile.  
19 “I called to my allies  
but they betrayed me.  
My priests and my elders  
perished in the city  
while they searched for food  
to keep themselves alive.  
20 “See, Lord, how distressed I am!  
I am in torment within,  
and in my heart I am disturbed,

for I have been most rebellious.	so they may become like me.
Outside, the sword bereaves;	22 "Let all their wickedness come before you;
inside, there is only death.	deal with them
21 "People have heard my groaning,	as you have dealt with me
but there is no one to comfort me.	because of all my sins.
All my enemies have heard of my distress;	My groans are many
they rejoice at what you have done.	and my heart is faint."
May you bring the day you have announced	

## Note

If this is the first time that you use this small group guide, do make sure you read the preface well. You may need the information given there!

## How does this text relate to this year's theme?

The theme for this year is 'RecoverReally'. This passage from Lamentations fits in perfectly. Lamentations chapter 1 is about Jerusalem's exile to Babylon and compares Jerusalem with a woman who is afflicted and hurting. Where is Jerusalem's recovery? How does this passage relate to today's news stories of war-torn countries? How can recovery become reality today?

## Key thought/ central message

When there is great loss, as a group or individually, it's good to bring your complaint and emotions to God. God's plan of recovery begins when you recognise the reality of the situation.

## Working methods and questions for small group leaders

- **Introduction (look up: [www.jointhebibleproject.com](http://www.jointhebibleproject.com) )**
  - a) To help you understand this Scripture better watch the videos of the 'Read Scripture' series. They will provide you with some context for the passage:
  - b) Video 1: a summary of the book of Kings  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVFW3wbi9pk>
  - c) Video 2: a summary of the book of Lamentations  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8GDFPdaQZQ>
  - d) What kind of text is Lamentations?
  - e) How does the style of writing influence how we read this text?
  - f) Which audience was it originally written for?
  - g) Where does this fit into the overarching story of Israel's exile? What happens just before? What happens after?



▪ **Reading**

- a) In the introduction of this resource you'll find a list with general observation questions (see 'OIA - method'). Print off Lamentations 1 and study the text using those questions. Make some notes. Pay special attention to the use of emotive language.
- b) Who is meant to be the narrator of this passage?
- c) This passage has 2 clear parts to it. One part is the narrator, the other part is lady Jerusalem. Both parts appear intertwined.
  - Print off part 1 (verses 1 to 10) and give this to one half of your group
  - Print off part 2 (verses 11 to 22) and give this to the other half of your group
- d) Let both groups analyse their text using the OIA method. Let the first group share their findings with other group adding what similarities or differences they found.
- e) To help you understand the passage you can ask the group to put themselves in the shoes of the people of Jerusalem. You could picture this passage as a scene in the theatre. The narrator (the choir) gives an introduction, whilst a woman sits on the ground and is lamenting her losses. Who will comfort her? Let the group get into the text by dramatising some of the verses. One person can narrate, another can pretend to be the distraught woman.
- f) Who is being addressed in this passage?

▪ **Understanding**

- a) Why does Jerusalem lament? Why is she being punished?
- b) When did the exile take place?
- c) What image of Jerusalem before the exile does the poet describe?
- d) What image of the current Jerusalem does the poet describe?
- e) Which emotions recur throughout the text?
- f) What is the poet hoping to achieve? (Are there any glimpses of the future?)
- g) Does this passage provide any hope? To answer this question also consider the end of 2 Kings (see background information)

▪ **Application**

- a) Look at this picture of a sculpture by George Minne. What do you see? What emotions do you think it conveys? Which of these emotions can be found in Lamentations chapter 1?



- b) You can make a similar comparison with the song below. In which ways does it express emotion? Which of these can be found in the passage of Lamentations and which are different?
- Song: Oh God, where are you now? - Sufjan Stevens
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdvfGwkp7CM>
- c) Which wars are waging in the world today? How can we apply this passage to those?
- d) What is our responsibility when events like that happen? How can we focus attention on these problems?
- e) Where is God in Lamentations chapter 1? Where is God today? Why does God allow wars to happen?
- f) The passage describes what is going wrong. Can we complain to God?
- g) What is the role of complaining/ lamenting and how can it help in recovery?
- h) Is there a place for mourning in church services?
- i) Look at the different subjects your small group members are studying. Are there any health care professionals, social workers, psychologists etc? How do they read this text? What stands out to them? How would they approach this passage?
- j) Exile and returning from exile are two major themes throughout the Bible. We can read God's plan in the Bible as a working towards returning from the ultimate exile - in which we can take part - so what does that mean to us? In light of our own lives, in light of the refugee crisis, in light of the constant wars?

## Clarification of difficult words/passages

### ▪ **Introduction: background information**

#### *Author*

It is generally accepted that the book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah. The author is not mentioned in this poetic book.

#### *Audience*

Israel, in a state of powerlessness and a loss of independence.

The intended audience for the book could be expanded to include anyone living in a war zone or who is oppressed.

#### *Central themes for book*

- The fall of Jerusalem
- Exile and slavery: God freed Israel from Egypt but now they are going to Babylon to be slaves again.
- Mourning: despair and sadness accompany great loss
- Hope and trust

#### *Book structure + placing the passage within wider structure*

- Lamentations is a book that consists of five poems. The first four are written as an acrostic poem<sup>4</sup>
- Alphabetic acrostic poem: a poem where the first letter of each verse is alphabetical. There are 22 verses which correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Although the content of the book of Lamentations is heavy, they used this poetic technique to bring beauty in the midst of pain.
- Content: In chapter 1 the prophet lets his thoughts wander over the great suffering that the city has endured. The city 'sits like a lonely widow who sits alone and weeps'. In chapter 2 these devastations are described with their national sins that caused all of this. Chapter 3 describes the hope for God's people. The punishment is only there to cause recovery. Better days are coming. Chapter 4 laments the destruction of the city and the temple but blames the sins of the people. Chapter 5 is a prayer that Zion's punishment may turn into the repentance and recovery of the people.

### ▪ **Reading: background information**

As explored in the working methods and questions this passage gives a voice to different characters. A narrator and Jerusalem/ Zion itself.

### ▪ **Understanding: background information**

#### *Chronology*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Walton, J.H. – Matthews, V.H. – Chavalas, M.W., *The IVP Bible background commentary: the Old Testament*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic (2000), p. 686.

<sup>5</sup> The Bible Project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVFW3wbi9pk>

Judah's exile had been ongoing for roughly ten years before the city and the temple were destroyed. This text talks about this last event from 587 BC.

2 Kings chapter 24 - 25 gives a better insight into the context around the fall of Jerusalem. Despite despair the book of Kings ends with the story of the final king who receives grace and can eat at the royal table. Can we see a glimpse of hope that God has not abandoned Israel?

### *Video*

Exile in the Bible. What is exile? You can watch this clip yourself or show it to your group. It explores how exile and return from exile is a theme running through the Bible and can help us understand our story too.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSua9\\_WhQFE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSua9_WhQFE)

- **Application: background information**

This poem is about grieving, loss and despair. It is appropriate to help the group focus on mourning as a group, people, country. We are often inclined to read each text like it is written for us personally. However, the intended audience here is the people of Israel. Therefore, let's think as a group, despite the individualistic society we live in.

### Preparing for small group

Where do you start your small group prep as a small group leader using this resource? Think about the following:

- a) Start by setting the goal for your group: what is the key message of Lamentations 1 and what is your small group goal? Do they correspond?
- b) How do you link this to the year's theme? How can we better understand the recovery God gives from this passage and how does this reflect in your group?
- c) Did you read the passage thoroughly and can you see how 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' link together?
- d) Have you worked through the background information? Please be aware that you do not need all this information for one small group evening. Choose what is most appropriate for your group's set up.
- e) Look through the different working methods on offer (poems, video, song etc). What can you use and what is less appropriate? What will best help your small group to think through the passage and reach a life application?

Now you're ready to start the preparation of your working methods and questions for your Bible study. There are a lot of working methods that can help you with your preparation and that could also help your small group. A few are recommended in this resource but you know your group and the best approach for them. We strongly recommend using 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' as the main structure for your study time. This is a basis for responsibly using the Bible and to ensure you will reach your small group goal.

## 5 // Colossians 1: 1-24

### Bible passage

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,<sup>2</sup> To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. <sup>3</sup> We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,<sup>4</sup> because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— <sup>5</sup> the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel <sup>6</sup> that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. <sup>7</sup> You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,<sup>[c]</sup> who is a faithful minister of Christ on our<sup>[d]</sup> behalf, <sup>8</sup> and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, <sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you<sup>[f]</sup> to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. <sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. <sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of<sup>[g]</sup> your evil behaviour. <sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>23</sup> if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. <sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

### Note

If this is the first time that you use this small group guide, do make sure you read the preface well. You may need the information given there!

### How does this text relate to this year's theme?

The book of Colossians poetically depicts Christ's position as the origin of creation, the keeper of the universe and the ultimate goal of our reality. The text highlights how our thoughts about the universe are inseparable from our thoughts regarding Christ unless we lose some of its value. Without Christ the universe is just a fragmented chaos, with him it is a valuable creation.

## Key thought/ central message

Christ's work is focused around the recovery of all of creation: he is the origin of everything and everything is focused on being brought back into his kingdom. He is the one who brings true meaning and value to everything.

## Working methods and questions for small group leaders

- **Introduction**

- a) Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTXIDxQsvc&t=1s> It is an excellent introduction to the letter and highlights how the themes of the first chapter are threaded through the rest of the letter.
- b) Who is Christ? How is he discussed, what is said about him in our popular culture or our (worship) songs? You can answer this question by looking through some songs from Opwekking, Hillsong, Bethel, ... as a group and finding out how the image of Jesus is portrayed.

- **Reading**

- a) Find all the prepositions in the text. As a working method you could remove them from the original text and let your small group members fill in the blanks. During 'interpretation' you can compare their suggestions with the original text and see if there is much difference between the two. It can help the group read the passage more carefully.
- b) Give the text a structure. Which are the subsections in this the text?
- c) Find any indications of time, either used in conjugations or in words that indicate time.

- **Understanding**

- a) What is said about Christ in this passage? Use the prepositions you found earlier.
- b) What does it mean when Christ is the image of (the invisible) God?
- c) Twice Christ is mentioned as the first born. What is meant by this?
- d) What does this text say about the reach of the gospels?

- **Application**

- a) At the inauguration of the Free University of Amsterdam Abraham Kuyper said “In the total span of a human life there isn’t a square centimetre of which Christ, who majestically stands above all, doesn’t claim “This is mine!” In this passage is mentioned that everything is in Christ. Have a look at your week or your diary and analyse what you spend most of your time on.
- b) What would it mean for these uses of time if they were Christ’s?
- c) What would it mean for your field of study if it were Christ’s?
- d) Put together a liturgy or piece of worship - either spoken word, song, image, other - that reflects what is said about Christ in this passage.
- e) Use verse 15 to 20 as a lectio divina.

### Clarification of difficult words/passages

- **Introduction: background information**

#### *Authorship*

The letter to the Colossians was probably written by Paul himself or dictated to a scribe. This means the dating of the letter would have been in Paul’s lifetime as otherwise there would have been some sort of tribute to him. It therefore seems unlikely it was written by one of Paul’s students after his death. For this study we will presume Paul wrote is the author.

#### *Audience and goal*

Colossae was a minor, less important city. In 61 AD it was hit by an earthquake that destroyed most of the city. It is generally accepted this letter predates this event. The young church in Colossae, although started by one of Paul’s disciples, was strongly influenced by Jewish-Greek mysticism, Greek philosophy and an intensity with which religion was often accompanied in this region. Although it is too early for any gnosticism to be an influence, it is possible that this school of thought had started to develop already. The author of this letter is reacting to legalism, asceticism, ecstatic religious experiences and sophism. It appears these problems are not so much present within the church, but the author has decided to provide an underpinning to the faith of the Colossians in order to prevent these influences corrupting them. Finally, the letter also discusses the practical outworking of Christian faith in daily life.

- **Reading : background information**

### *Hymn*

Verse 15-20 is seen by scholars as a direct quote from a hymn because of its cadence. It may have been a hymn the church was using at the time<sup>6</sup>. Paul uses familiar words perhaps because this church does not know him personally - Epaphras would have been the one sent on the mission to Colossae. It demonstrates that they share the same basis of faith. By doing this he shows himself as a servant of Christ and to have the authority to teach them something through the rest of this letter<sup>7</sup>.

### *Present perfect*

Please note that in this passage, when it talks about reconciliation and proclamation of the gospel, it is assumed these have already happened. You are now reconciled, and the gospel is already been proclaimed to all creation.

- **Understanding: background information**

### *Image*

The phrase that Christ is the image of the invisible God evokes a similar phrase in creation mythology: mankind is created in the image of God. Hence, Christ is presented as the perfect man, a so-called second Adam. In the idea of him being the image of God he represents his character and especially his lordship over the rest of creation. The human reflection of God's image was distorted - and in this way God was also invisible in mankind - but Christ completes God's perfect image<sup>8</sup>

### *First born*

It is not a physical claim that Christ is the first born. He is not the first product of creation. What is meant is the social position that came with being the first born: the heir. As God's heir the whole universe belongs to Christ. By using the word 'first born' twice the reader's attention is brought to creation and a new creation. Christ is the first one back from the dead to start this recovery of creation.<sup>9</sup>

### *Kings, rulers, might and power*

The idea of this section is not to create a hierarchical list of spiritual beings but simply to emphasize that nothing is outside of Christ's domain.

### *Head*

this word could point to authority or origin.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This cannot complete be proven nor denied. BBC, p. 572.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Foundation-Faith-Gods-Grace>

<sup>8</sup> H. Peskett – V. Ramachandra, *The message of Mission*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press (2003), p. 19-20. (hierna: MOM)

<sup>9</sup> MOM, p. 20, 23-24.

<sup>10</sup> BBC, p. 573.



### *Has been declared to all creation*

the recovery Christ brings isn't just the relationship between God and mankind but between God and all of creation. All of creation will benefit from this recovery.<sup>11</sup>

Paul is using this also to avoid any false teachings arising around hidden knowledge - the central thought which fuels the later gnosticism. His statement that everything which was to be revealed has been revealed, has the consequence that everything is available to everyone and not just to the 'happy few'.

- **Application: background information**

### *Christ is the lord of everything*

This statement is more than just working out how to be a good Christian in your field of study. What does it mean that your whole field of study is entirely under Christ's reign? What does this mean for your study goal?

### Preparing for small group

Where do you start your small group prep as a small group leader using this resource? Think about the following:

- f) Start by setting the goal for your group: what is the key message of this passage and what is your small group goal? Do they correspond?
- g) How do you link this to the year's theme? How can we better understand the recovery God gives from this passage and how does this reflect in your group?
- h) Did you read the passage thoroughly and can you see how 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' link together?
- i) Have you worked through the background information? Please be aware that you do not need all this information for one small group evening. Choose what is most appropriate for your group's set up.
- j) Look through the different working methods on offer. What can you use and what is less appropriate? What will best help your small group to think through the passage and reach a life application?

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<sup>11</sup> N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Cambridge, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans (1986), p. 85.

## 6 // Genesis 11:1-9

### Bible passage

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

8 So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel<sup>[c]</sup>—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

### Note

If this is the first time that you use this small group guide, do make sure you read the preface well. You may need the information given there!

### How does this text relate to this year's theme?

After the fall the world seems to go from bad to worse: the first murder, the first polygamist relationship. Man does everything God hates. God uses the flood to bring restoration but immediately after sins are being committed again such as the first drunkenness. Building the tower of Babel is an attempt to gain power and represents the ultimate disobedience to God's mission to fill the earth and spread out (Gen 1:28 9:1,7). God again brings restoration by bringing confusion.

### Key thought/ central message

God wanted man to spread out at any cost, so they would take care of the earth. Their own ambitions cannot stop his plan.

## Working methods and questions for small group leaders

### ▪ **Introduction**

- a) Watch this video from the Bible Project:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQI72THyO5I&t=5s> The Babel story is explained 6 mins 18 secs into the video. It would be very helpful to watch all of it because it gives a good overview of the structure of the book of Genesis, covering main themes, lead characters and where all of it takes place.
- b) Put a big piece of paper in the middle of the room and let the group brainstorm God's Mission. Don't give them too much guidance but if there is any questions you could point out that it's not about their individual mission from God but God's overall mission for mankind. They could add in Bible verses if they like.

### ▪ **Reading**

- a) Point out the repetitive and contrary statements in the text.
- b) List the actions of the different characters involved.
- c) What reasons does the text give for the mission not to stay in one city?
- d) Compare the passage to Acts 2:1-11 and Revelation 21. What differences and similarities can you find?

### ▪ **Understanding**

- a) Let each person draw the story. This can be a literal or abstract version of events. Go around the group letting people share what they have drawn. What questions does this raise about this passage?
- b) Can you see why mankind does not want to spread out?
- c) Why does God want people to live all over the earth?
- d) The word Babel means 'confusion', because God brought confusion there. Why did he do this? Why were they not allowed to communicate?
- e) Can you think of any other passages in the Bible where God 'came down'? Are there any differences or similarities with this story?

- **Application**

- a) On the drawing made earlier write what could be your 'tower of Babel'? This is about things that can stop you fulfilling God's mission or things that are only there to boost your status. This can be anything and doesn't necessarily mean something that in its own right is bad for you.
- b) Now try and do the same for you as a church group. What is stopping your group to fulfill God's mission and what is encouraging you to hold onto status?
- c) What is the mission that you, as an individual, and you, as a group, have? You can refer back to the brainstorming activity to start the discussion.
- d) The tower is never finished because God brings confusion in order for mankind to revert to what they should be doing. What intervention does your group need to be more engaged with God's mission?
- e) The 'ziggurats' or stairs were built so the gods could descend from heaven to bless the city. Yet God brings something entirely different. What would God see if he 'came down' to your life and your group's life?

## Clarification of difficult words/passages

- **Introduction: background information**

### *Authorship and the authority of the book of Genesis*

There is no agreement among scholars regarding the authorship of Genesis (meaning origin). This book is part of the Pentateuch, the authorship of which is usually attributed to Moses. In ancient times there wasn't so much emphasis on who the author was (author's names never appeared with their work) but on the authority of the text itself. The Jewish-Christian tradition generally attributes the text to Moses which traditionally gives this text authority as being God's Word.

### *Audience and date*

The Hebrews are the primary audience in the story of Noah. The only certainty we have with regards to the date this was written is that the Hebrew written tradition (of which Gen 11 is a part) was around from the 10th Century BC to the 4th Century BC. This means the story strongly reflects the Hebrew worldview of the time.

### *Central message and theological framework*

The story of the tower of Babel is set in the framework of Genesis 1-11 in which the covenant relationship between Yahweh and mankind is described. Man received a mandate to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1-3). However, mankind fell short of this mandate and as 'imago dei' (being the image of God - Gen 1:26-28), which is the cause for the flood (Gen 6:5-6). At this time Noah was the only one who lived in covenant with God and therefore receives another chance.

The theological framework of Gen 6-9 is 1) Noah's calling, 2) judgement, forgiveness and covenant, 3) the restoration of the original creation which is expressed through the concept of the flood and 4) a new chance for mankind through Noah's calling.

In Genesis chapter 10 Noah's descendants again receive the mission to populate the earth. However, in the next chapter they are already abandoning this mission.

### *Historical and literary context*

The book of Genesis is part of the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible, and therefore gives the context and background for the Law and the Israelite lifestyle.

The start of the book covers mankind as a whole and from chapter 12 the focus is on the people of Israel.

### *Structure of the book*

The structure of the book is linked to the history of the descendants of several families. This structure is generally found throughout the exegesis of Genesis.

1:1-2:3	Prologue
2:4-4:26	History of heaven and earth
5:1-6:8	Family history: Adam
6:9-9:29	Family history: Noah
10:1-11:9	Family history: Noah's sons
11:10-26	Family history: Shem
11:27-25:11	Family history: Terah
25:12-18	Family history: Ishmael
25:19-35:29	Family history: Isaac
36:1-37:1	Family history: Esau
37:2-50:26	Family history: Jacob

#### ▪ **Reading: background information**

#### *Repetition*

- one language and a common speech (v1 and v6).
- Confuse their language (v7 and v9).
- over all the earth (v8 and v9).
- Came down (v5 and v7).

#### *Contrasts*

- build a city (v4 and v5) versus stopped building a city (v8)
- Not being scattered (v4) versus being scattered (v8)

### *The word 'Babel' means confusion*

This passage can bring about some big questions regarding mankind scattering (especially when seen from several scientific viewpoints). Questions such as: how did this scattering work? Were the continents already shaped like they are now? However, we must bear in mind that this passage is not trying to convey a history lesson but instead it is trying to convey a message. The exact height of the tower, its location and duration are unknown. There is a lot of speculation regarding this. There are some sources that describe a tower near Babel that was 91 metres high, but it is unknown if this is the same tower described in this passage.

- **Understanding: background information**

There are different sources that mention language confusion caused by a deity. They can be seen as an ancient theme.

The use of bitumen was an expensive process which is why these early bricks (see verse 3) were only used to build very important buildings. These bricks were already waterproof and as strong as a rock.

In those days a city was not somewhere people lived but the houses were public places. There were also religious buildings and storehouses. All of these buildings were surrounded by a wall. For city dwellers there were great opportunities in living together. It allowed them to irrigate crops on a larger scale which increased the production of grain. For non-city dwellers it was important to keep spreading out. This is clear 2 chapters later when Abraham and Lot notice there is not enough grass for all of their combined livestock. It is not clear if this is the reason that God wants man to spread out.

The most important building in an ancient city was a temple. This building had ziggurats or 'stairs from heaven'. An example of one of these sets of stairs is in Genesis 28 when Jacob has a dream. These were built so gods could come down and bring blessing. These stairs were a part of Sumerian mythology. At the top of such a set of stairs was a room for the deity, furnished with a bed and table and also containing food. This food was replenished every now and then by a priest. This was sacred ground. These stairs are seen as an architectural representation of pagan religions.

### Preparing for small group

Where do you start your small group prep as a small group leader using this resource? Think about the following:

- k) Start by setting the goal for your group: what is the key message of this passage and what is your small group goal? Do they correspond?
- l) How do you link this to the year's theme? How can we better understand the recovery God gives from this passage and how does this reflect in your group?
- m) Did you read the passage thoroughly and can you see how 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' link together?

- n) Have you worked through the background information? Please be aware that you do not need all this information for one small group evening. Choose what is most appropriate for your group's set up.
- o) Look through the different working methods on offer. What can you use and what is less appropriate? What will best help your small group to think through the passage and reach a life application?

Now you're ready to start the preparation of your working methods and questions for your Bible study. There are a lot of working methods that can help you with your preparation and that could also help your small group. A few are recommended in this resource, but you know your group and the best approach for them. We strongly recommend using 'reading', 'understanding' and 'application' as the main structure for your study time. This is a basis for responsibly using the Bible and to ensure you will reach your small group goal.