



JUNIOR HIGH GROUP STUDY

THE OLD TESTAMENT

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General Editor



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How to Use the Uncommon Junior High Group Studies

Each *Uncommon* junior high group study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 2 stand-alone units of 6 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, or to use just one unit, or to present each session separately. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) for each session's student handouts are available online at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The handouts include the "Reflect" section of each study, formatted for easy printing, in addition to any student worksheets for the session. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each individual session begins with a brief overview of the "big idea" of the lesson, the aims of the session, the primary Bible verse and additional verses that tie in to the topic being discussed. Each of the 12 sessions is geared to be 45 to 90 minutes in length and is comprised of two options that you can choose from, based on the type of group that you have. Option 1 tends to be a more active learning experience, while Option 2 tends to be a more discussion-oriented exercise.

The sections in each session are as follows:

Starter

Young people will stay in your youth group longer if they feel comfortable and make friends. This first section helps students get to know each other better and focus on the theme of the lesson in a fun and engaging way.

Message

The Message section enables students to look up to God by relating the words of Scripture to the session topic.

Dig

Unfortunately, many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students look inward and discover how God's Word connects with their own world.

Apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. The apply section leads students out into their world with specific challenges to apply at school, at home and with their friends.

Reflect

This concluding section of the study allows students to reflect on the material presented in the session. You can print these pages from the PDF found at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_the_new_testament.zip and give them to your students as a handout for them to work on throughout the week.

Want More Options?

An additional option for each section, along with accompanying worksheets, is available in PDF format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_the_old_testament.zip.

UNIT I

In the Beginning

As a junior-higher, I loved hearing stories about myself when I was younger. I begged my mom to tell me about the puppet shows my brother and I did when we were five and seven years old. (I, of course, always had the lead role.) I eagerly listened as Mom told stories about the sheet forts we made in our living room to protect ourselves from the rolled up “sock bombs” we threw at each other (the more pillows and sheets the better). I was tickled when I heard about the time my third-grade class went whale watching and most of us ended up getting sick over the side of the boat (real high-class, junior high humor).

I don't think I'm the only junior-higher who delighted in hearing stories about myself. Sure, there are childhood memories I, and others, would rather forget, but most junior-highers enjoy reliving those funny, significant or memorable moments again and again and again. They love hearing about their own beginnings.

So, if all that's true, then why aren't young teens clamoring to hear more about the ultimate beginning? In Genesis, God has left us all sorts of fascinating stories about relationships, disasters and murders to retell and relive, and yet, most sixth, seventh and eighth graders greet them with a yawn.

Maybe it's because junior-highers think the chapters of Genesis are fables—that they are not really true. Given what they are taught about evolution in their science classes, they may have concluded that the stories of Genesis are just cute fairy tale stories.

But if the veracity of the Genesis account is really the reason behind junior-highers' lack of interest, why do they flock to the latest animated or computer-generated fables in the movie theatres? Or the newest fictitious computer game? Movie ticket revenue and merchandise sales suggest that a story doesn't have to be true to captivate junior-highers.

Influenced by the postmodern mindset surrounding us, many students seem to care less about whether something is *true* and more about whether it's *relevant*. And, frankly, too many junior high ministries have allowed the stories of Genesis to become remnants from a distant, flannel board past.

As junior high youth workers desiring something more, we've carefully designed this first unit to show junior-highers both the *truth* and the *relevancy* of the beginnings in Genesis:

- **Vivid illustrations:** We've provided easy-to-do and hard-to-forget visual illustrations to reinforce the main points of each session.
- **Clear applications:** No junior-higher should be able to walk away wondering what difference sin or faith or deliverance makes in his or her life. As their leader, you have two creative and tangible application options to choose from for each lesson (a third option is available in the "additional options" pdf found at www.gospellight.com/uncommon_jh_the_old_testament.zip).
- **Three-dimensional characters:** We will intentionally show you the humanity of Adam and Eve and the mistakes Joseph made. The heroes of Genesis weren't superhuman saints but ordinary people who tried, and sometimes failed, to follow an extraordinary God—just as your junior-highers do (and, frankly, just as you do).

Thank God for the wonderful beginnings He gave us, first in Genesis and second in Jesus Christ.

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SESSION I

GOD: THE BEGINNING OF CREATION

THE BIG IDEA

God specially designed all of creation, including us!

SESSION AIMS

In this session you will guide students to (1) establish that God alone created the universe; (2) feel affirmed that they were specially and carefully designed by God; and (3) accept the challenge to enjoy a living relationship with their Creator this week.

THE BIGGEST VERSE

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2).

OTHER IMPORTANT VERSES

Genesis 1:1-31; 2:7; Job 41:1; Psalms 24:1-2; 74:13-14; 121:7-8; 139:13-16; 148:5; Isaiah 27:1; Jeremiah 31:3; Matthew 11:28; John 1:1-3; 17:23; Romans 1:19-20; Hebrews 11:3,6; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Peter 3:10-13

Note: Additional options and worksheets in 8¹/₂” x 11” format for this session are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_the_old_testament.zip.

STARTER

Option 1: Tangled Yarn. For this option, you will need three different-colored strands of yarn, each approximately 36 inches long. You will also need three keys and a whistle. Ahead of time, attach a key to one end of each strand of yarn and loosely tangle all three strands of yarn together (leaving the other ends *without* keys attached hanging out) to form one large ball. (*Note:* The yarn needs to be tangled only enough to make it difficult to remove the ends that have the keys attached while keeping the keys well hidden.)

Welcome students and announce that you're beginning this session with a contest. Divide the students into three teams and assign each team a color corresponding to the yarn you've tangled. Line students up single file, and instruct them to sit down in that order. When you blow the whistle, the first person on each team will come forward and try to find the beginning of his or her team's assigned color of yarn by untangling it from the rest of the colors (only you know that there's a key attached). Allow 15 seconds for team members to attempt to free their colors. Blow the whistle again for them to stop, at which time the next three contestants come forward. Repeat the process until every student has come forward or until one team untangles the yarn and locates its key.

Congratulate the winning team and ask the following questions:

- What was the hardest part about untangling your team's yarn? (*Not knowing where the yarn began or ended; it was all tangled with the other teams' yarn.*)
- What needed to happen in order to find the key on the end of the yarn? (*You needed to figure out where the yarn piece started.*)

Explain that there are a lot of tangled ideas out there about the way life began. The key to unraveling the truth from all those ideas is to go all the way back to the beginning and get the facts. The Bible tells us that God specifically created this world (see Genesis 1:1). It wasn't by chance; it wasn't arbitrary. Today we're going to see that God made heaven and earth—including you—with special and careful thought.

Option 2: How Did It Start? For this option, you will need one copy of "How Did It Start?" (found on the next page) and a container (a small basket or a bowl—even a baseball cap works well). Ahead of time, cut apart the six endings from "How Did It Start?" and place them in the container.

HOW DID IT START?

STORY-ENDING ONE

Then Prince Charming put the glass slipper on her foot. It fit! His search was over! He took her back to the royal castle and married her and they lived happily ever after.

STORY-ENDING TWO

They marched around seven times, blowing their trumpets and shouting. The walls of the city came crashing down.

STORY-ENDING THREE

As they walked up the hill to the widow's house, Tom and Huck planned their next big adventure.

STORY-ENDING FOUR

He finally ate the green eggs and ham and thanked the pesky Sam-I-am!



STORY-ENDING FIVE

They threw her down, and her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot. When they went to bury her, they found nothing but her skull, feet and hands.

STORY-ENDING SIX

Jonah finally understood that God is merciful, wise and all-forgiving.

Greet students and ask if they think they could recognize a story just by hearing the end of it. Choose a volunteer to draw one of the slips of paper from the container and ask her to read it aloud to the group. Instruct students to raise their hands as soon as they recognize the story that the ending completes. Call on the first student. If his answer is not correct, ask another student whose hand is raised. (*Note: The story endings are from [1] Cinderella, [2] the battle of Jericho from Joshua 6, [3] The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, [4] Green Eggs and Ham, [5] Jezebel's death from 2 Kings 9, and [6] Jonah 4.*)

Continue the process until all six slips of paper have been selected and read, and then discuss the following:

- What made some of the stories easier to recognize than others? (*The easy ones were those in which we knew the beginning and the characters.*)
- How does knowing the beginning of something change your understanding of it? (*Knowing how something starts gives you a better idea of how everything fits together and why things are the way they are.*)
- Have you ever walked into a room in the middle of a discussion and had no clue what was being talked about? Or have you ever returned to class after being absent from school for a few days and felt a little bit lost? How did it affect your ability to join in? (*Felt clueless and confused; couldn't join in; didn't understand what was going on.*)
- How would you feel about being dumped into an advanced calculus class the day of the final exam? (*No fair. I'd walk. I'd call my lawyer!*)
- What would be tough about that? (*I wouldn't have studied the beginning but would be expected to produce results in the end.*)
- Okay, here's one for you: We see creation and life all around us. Where did it all come from? (*You should get some interesting responses, but don't affirm or discount any of them yet—that's for the next step.*)



Youth Leader Tip

Sorting through the issues of biblical faith and evolution is impossible in one session. The main point you want to stress is that the universe came about as the result of the purposeful will of the almighty God.

Transition to the next step by explaining that there is one story that they *need* to know from the beginning because it's how we came to be. It's the true story of creation from the first book in the Bible, Genesis. This is a book all about beginnings: the beginning of the universe, the beginning of people, the beginning of faith in God. In order to really make sense out of life today, we need to go back and look at how it all started, just as reading the beginning of a book allows us to really understand and appreciate the rest of it.

MESSAGE

Option 1: Something from Nothing. For this option, you will need several Bibles, two boxes filled with an assortment of odds and ends that could be used to create something (such as scraps of wood, rope, cups, bicycle inner-tubes, pieces from broken appliances, duct tape—basically, you need to raid a cluttered garage and see what you can come up with!), and one flower for each student, the more unusual the better. (*Caution:* Don't go picking Mrs. Brown's prized roses without asking her first!)

Divide students into two groups, and place one box in the middle of each group. Tell students to wait for your signal to dive into the contents of their boxes and try to construct something useful. Allow several minutes and then signal for groups to stop. Let each group present its creation and explain its use. After this amazing display of junior high genius, discuss the following:

- Were you satisfied with your creation? Why or why not?
- What would you change about it to make it even better?

Explain that when we think about the creation of the world, we often gloss over the immense power that God showed as He designed and crafted it and everything in it. *No detail was overlooked.* God made all things in a thought-out and meaningful way. Yet there was something even more remarkable about the way He created the world.

Read Genesis 1:1-2 and Hebrews 11:3 aloud and continue by stating that when the Bible says that God “created the heavens and the earth” (meaning everything), it literally means He made *something out of nothing*.¹ He didn't just scoop up some things from His heavenly garage and tinker around with them until He ended up making something that actually worked. He took emptiness and filled it. He caused things to exist that had never before existed. Illustrate this abstract idea by holding up the now empty boxes. Ask, “What if I had told

you to create something out of the contents of this empty box, would you have been able to do it? No!” Continue by stating that this is exactly what God did when He created the world—He created something out of nothing.

Ask volunteers to read the following Scripture passages aloud: Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:7, Psalms 24:1-2 and 148:5. Afterward, explain that one of the most obvious reasons to believe that God is the Creator of all things is the great design that exists in our world. As you talk, distribute a flower to each student. Continue by stating that the complexity of creation reveals that there was a master designer at work. Even something as simple as this flower shows the power and creativity of a designer. Our world didn’t just happen by accident. You and I are not here merely because some non-living chemicals bumped into each other and combined over a long period of time into a complex, completely amazing individual. Someone planned it and had the power to make it a reality. That someone is Jesus Christ. Conclude by reading John 1:1-3.

Option 2: Typing Blind. For this option, you will need several Bibles, a typewriter (the older the better), typing paper, three self-stick nametags, a felt-tip pen and three blindfolds. (*Note:* If you can’t find a typewriter, you could also use a computer and a printer.) Ahead of time, label the nametags Chemical A, Chemical B and Chemical C.

Show students the typewriter (some of them may never have seen one!) and insert a sheet of blank paper. Invite three volunteers to come to the front and give each of them one of the nametags to wear. Blindfold them and ask them to each place one hand on the typewriter keys and their other hand behind their back. When you give the signal, they are to begin typing at the same time. Let them type for about one minute, and then signal them to stop. Take the blindfolds off and invite them to return to their seats.

Distribute Bibles and explain that one of the key ideas behind the theory of evolution is that life came from nonlife; that nonliving chemicals randomly came together and somehow started a single-celled living organism. Over billions of years, these single-celled organisms evolved from one life form to another, until we ended up with a human being. Explain that this would be similar to what we just saw: some chemicals randomly assembling a message on this typewriter and ending up with the complete works of William Shakespeare. Now try to read what they wrote by sounding out the letters and exaggerating the process.

Hand the paper to a few students to see if they can read anything, and then discuss the following questions:

- Is evolution based on scientific fact? (*Science is wonderful—it brings us new and exciting discoveries every day. Scientific theories are based on interpretations of observations—and those theories might become accepted as scientific facts. For instance, a scientist who seeks to prove the basic theory of evolution—that all life is the result of a blind combination of time, chance and matter and that no Creator was needed—may only consider evidence that supports his or her theory and discount the awesome evidence that God is the Creator and Designer of every living thing.*)
- Can scientists prove any theory of evolution that excludes God as the Creator and Designer of all life? (*Science cannot disprove the existence of God in any area! The Bible clearly says God spoke and the world was created—His Word created everything alive [see Psalm 148:5]. We don't know exactly how He did it, but we can be sure that He is the one who did!*)
- Do fossils prove the theory of evolution? (*Nope! No one has ever dug up a fossil of an animal that hadn't quite finished evolving from a fish into a bird or an ape in the process of becoming a man. Genesis 1:24 says that God created "each according to its kind." God created a variety of plant and animal life, so there are all sorts of fossils to be found, but none of them can prove that one animal evolved from another.*)
- Why doesn't the Bible mention dinosaurs? (*Actually, the Bible does describe a huge creature called a leviathan in Job 41:1; Psalm 74:13-14 and Isaiah 27:1. This was perhaps a dinosaur, though no one can be absolutely sure. However, you won't find a platypus or kangaroo mentioned by name either! The Bible is not a science book—and it wasn't intended to be. Its purpose is to teach us about God and His awesome plan for us.*)

Read Romans 1:19-20, and then discuss the following:

- What does Paul mean when he says, "God has made it plain to them"? (*Creation itself shows us that some higher intelligence exists. No one can look at the world and honestly deny that there is a God who created it.*)
- What are some of God's invisible qualities? (*Things about Him we can't see except through what He created, such as His creativity.*)
- What part of God's creation demonstrates His power to you? His wisdom? His creativity?

Continue by stating that of all God created, the crowning work of His creation is humanity, which includes *us*! Only humans were made in His image. Read Genesis 1:1-3,26-27; 2:7, and then explain that being made in God's image doesn't necessarily mean that we look like God in our physical appearance. Rather, we have been given a spiritual nature that reflects, in a small measure, the character and nature of God Himself. This gives us the unique ability to have an eternal relationship with God. We are different from animals, stars and plants because we can enjoy fellowship with God, friend to friend. Read Genesis 1:31 and conclude by telling the group that each one of them is God's work of art.²

DIG

Option 1: Switch Up. For this option, you will need just this book and some talkative students! Read part 1 of the following scenario, but don't let students know that there are two parts.

James had been saving money since he could remember to buy a car when he turned 16. His birthday was two weeks away; and he had \$7,000 to spend—\$3,500 that he had saved, plus \$3,500 his dad had agreed to give him. He was really excited on Wednesday when he saw an advertisement for a local car dealer showing a used Camaro for \$6,500. His dad was very busy that week, but promised to take him on the weekend to look at the car. Anxiously, James prayed that it would still be there on the weekend.

James's best friend, Ricky, called on Friday to congratulate him on his new car, but James had no idea what Ricky was talking about. Ricky explained that he had seen James's dad at the car dealer looking at a new Mitsubishi Eclipse and a used Hyundai. Ricky was sure that the Hyundai was for James because he saw the price sticker on the window—\$3,500.



Youth Leader Tip

Always try to keep to the topic so that you can clearly finish the teaching. Encourage your group members' curiosity by having a time for questions on related topics at the end or after the session.

Later that evening, while his mom and dad were out, James was looking for a pen on his dad's desk when he came across two receipts: one for a brand-new Eclipse and one for a used Hyundai. He knew he should be grateful, but he couldn't help feeling disappointed. His dad was using the money he promised James on a new car for *himself!* The more James thought about it, the more hurt and angry he became.

Now discuss the following:

- How would you feel if you were James? (*Upset, angry.*)
- What would you think about the dad's actions? (*He's selfish; he didn't keep his promise.*)
- Based on the facts and what James's friend told him, he'd be pretty justified in feeling disappointed and upset, wouldn't he? (*Yes!*)

Now ask the group what they would think if you told them that James didn't really know the facts. What if you told them that he was making a judgment based on observation, not fact? Now read part 2:

When his parents arrived home, James was already in bed, pretending to be asleep. He heard them whispering and curiosity got the best of him, so he sat up and listened. His dad said, "I know he wanted the Camaro, but I really think this is a better deal in the long run."

James thought, *Well, it sure saved him a hefty amount, didn't it?*

"I know we should wait for his birthday, but I just can't. I'm glad we were able to pick it up tonight. And I'm so happy with mine! It'll be nice to have one of my own again," his mom replied.

My mom's getting the new one? I really rate around here, don't I?

James went to sleep, and when he woke up early the next morning, he went downstairs to eat. He sat in the kitchen, eating his cereal and thinking about how life isn't fair. Soon his dad and mom came into the kitchen. James grumbled, "Good morning," with a mouthful of cereal. His dad asked him to come out into the garage. *Here we go*, James thought. *I'd better act surprised.*

As he stepped into the garage, James saw a huge ribbon tied to the hood of the Eclipse with the words "Happy Birthday" written on the windshield! He couldn't believe his eyes! His mom and dad gave him a

hug, and his mom proudly showed him her new car too. She was so happy with her Hyundai—definitely more grateful than James had been when he thought it was his.

Explain that James reacted to what he believed to be the facts—but the only *true* facts are the ones that show what’s happened from every angle. The theory of evolution is like that. It’s a theory based purely on scientific observation—what scientists *see* as fact, substituting an anti-God belief for true science. God is the only one who can truly see all the facts from every angle, and we can ask Him to help us understand the truth.

Option 2: God’s Will and Other Questions. For this option, you will need just these questions! Discuss the following with the group:

- If God created everything perfectly, how can there be evil in the world? *(God designed and created everything perfectly, but when Adam and Eve sinned, they allowed God’s perfect world to become tainted by misery and sorrow. In 2 Peter 3:10-13, we read about a day when God will create a new heaven and a new earth, where the effects of sin will be wiped out and we will again enjoy a world in the way God originally intended.)*
- If I’m so wonderful, why do I feel so bad? *(Actually, there are a lot of things that affect how we feel about ourselves. A huge part of our emotional makeup is hormones—and junior-highers are full of those! We are also affected by what others tell us—rightly or wrongly—about ourselves. We need to recognize that God doesn’t base His love for us—or His approval of us—upon our own or others’ assessments of ourselves.)*
- If my purpose is to have a relationship with God, why do I feel He never listens to me? *(God is always listening. The problem might be that we need to sit down long enough to hear His answer! In addition, the hard part is realizing that His answer is sometimes “no” or “wait awhile.”)*
- How do I know if I’m doing what God wants me to do with my life? *(There won’t be a huge sign descending from heaven that says, “You go, girl!” But you will know that you’re doing what He wants you to do when you are truly seeking to please Him by glorifying Him with your life. You don’t have to go into paid ministry to serve God and have fellowship with*

Him every day. No matter what your job is or how old you are, you can serve Him with the gifts He's given you.)

APPLY

Option 1: How Much Am I Worth? You will need several Bibles, copies of “How Much Am I Worth?” (found on the next page), and pens or pencils.

This may be the first time that some of your students have ever really thought about their significance as God’s crowning creation. Challenge them to respond to this idea by looking a little deeper into the Word and reflecting upon what it says about their value to God. If possible, pair up stronger believers with those who are on the periphery of faith in Christ so that this exercise is a seed-sowing time.

Explain that you are very valuable to God and He loves you more deeply and faithfully than you could ever imagine. Distribute “How Much Am I Worth?” and allow approximately 8 to 10 minutes for students to look up the Bible references. Regroup and give students the opportunity to really know God’s love by accepting Jesus as their Lord. Close with prayer, asking God to affirm His love to each student there.

Option 2: The Combination. For this option, you will need a key for every student (unusable keys can be obtained, usually free of charge, from a locksmith). As an option, if you can’t locate enough keys, photocopy pictures of keys onto cardstock, cut them apart and give the key cards to students. Now read the following scenario:

Recently you got a new combination for your locker. After arriving home on Friday afternoon, you realize you’ve forgotten your history book in your locker and you have a huge assignment due on Monday morning, first period. You can’t go back to school and get your book because you’ve



Youth Leader Tip

You will have to set the tone for students to take this activity seriously. Set clear parameters for this time (no talking, no sleeping, no paper airplanes, no texting) and then lead by example!