

A Reel Ministry Bible Study

Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back

Group Leader Guide

By
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Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back
Directed by: Irvin Kershner
Screenplay: Leigh Brackett & Lawrence Kasdan
Story by: George Lucas
20TH Century Fox/Lucasfilm
1980

Reel Ministry Presents:

The Empire Strikes Back

What is the purpose of Reel Ministry?

Group Leader Notes

The left-hand column of each page will contain any Group Leader notes, such as exercise instructions or points to highlight.

This Group Leader Guide is intended to assist you in presenting this information. Keep in mind that you know your audience and their Biblical and Film foundation better than anyone.

The Bible verse commentaries found within the Group Leader notes are strictly the opinions of the creative team behind Reel Ministry and designed to assist the Group Leader in facilitating an effective, collaborative, thought provoking, and exciting Bible Study. We strongly encourage you to seek out a Study Bible and gain additional perspective on these important verses.

Feel free to relate any points in this Bible study to current events and/or recent events in your life. This will make the content more relevant to your group members.

Reel Ministry Bible Studies offer individuals and small groups a unique way to engage topical issues found in popular films. These innovative studies will engage Biblical knowledge and broaden the scope of one's understanding of Scripture.

While a summary of the films will always be included within the bulk of each Bible study, it is my hope that the individual or small group will watch the movie being studied. By doing this, Christians will have a better understanding of the material; thus, they will be much more confident in engaging friends and co-workers about these varied topics.

It is vitally important that we engage our culture with the paramount truth that Jesus Christ is "...the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Suggestions for all Participants

What You'll Need

- Bible
- Study Bible
- DVD or Blu-Ray Player
- TV
- Rent/purchase film in which Bible Study is covering
- Open Mind

Questions? Email us at:

biblestudy@reelministry.org

- 1) Pray before you begin each study. Ask for God to speak through the Word.
- 2) Come prepared. Watch the film and/or the scenes before you engage in the study.
- 3) Be willing to participate. This Bible study has been designed to help you discover what Scripture is saying via motion pictures. You'll find three types of questions: *Scene Observations* – these are questions taken directly from the film in discussion; *Reel To Real* – these are interpretation questions which further delve into the film by trying to discover real world applications; *Director's Chair* – these are questions geared towards bringing a better understanding of filmmaking to the group.
- 4) Stick to the topic being discussed. Answers should be based on the scenes viewed and the Bible verses given. These studies focus on particular passages of Scripture, so try not to refer to other verses. By sticking to the verses chosen within the Bible studies, this will allow an equal footing for all members involved.
- 5) Don't dominate the discussion. Participate, but leave room for others to engage the questions. Always be affirming to others in the group. Remember, there is no wrong answer here.
- 6) Please note that anything said within the group discussion should be considered private. Many times in these group settings, people share private thoughts and feelings that shouldn't be discussed outside of the discussion.
- 7) Prepare to be challenged. The whole nature of Reel Ministry is to allow Christians the opportunity to engage secular issues with Biblical answers.

Bible Study Agenda

Introduction

Central Theme

Key Verse

Film Summary

Part One:

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Scene 2.

“...from Reel to Real...”

Director’s Chair

Part Two:

Scene 3.

Scene 4.

“...from Reel to Real...”

Director’s Chair

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Scene 6.

“...from Reel to Real...”

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Scene 7.

Scene 8.

“...from Reel to Real...”

Director’s Chair

Introduction

Generally regarded as one of the best sequels ever produced, Irvin Kershner's "The Empire Strikes Back" (1980) is a technically dazzling accomplishment. The filmmakers took the mythos which had been brilliantly introduced in "Star Wars" (1977) and escalated the entire saga into an unforgettable cinematic achievement. With its strong focus on loyalty, self-sacrifice and struggles against the forces of darkness, "The Empire Strikes Back" presents a unique opportunity for an intensive Biblical study.

Central Theme

While loyalty is oftentimes considered to be a true test of character, it's the tension between doing what is right and doing what is easy that exposes the heart. While Luke Skywalker learns to accept his destiny, he discovers that his ultimate fate will center on the importance of choosing allegiances and the consequences of betraying ideals.

Key Verse

"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

– Proverbs 18:24 (NIV)

Film Summary

After successfully destroying the Imperial Death Star in the previous entry (“Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope”), the surviving members of the heroic Rebel Alliance have taken refuge on the ice planet Hoth. During a routine scouting mission, Luke Skywalker is captured by the Wampa --an indigenous carnivorous predator – and barely escapes its clutches. During this escape, Luke encounters the ghostly visage of Obi-Wan Kenobi who informs his pupil that he must travel to Dagobah in order to complete his training with Yoda, a Jedi master.

Meanwhile, Darth Vader has issued the release of hundreds of Imperial probe droids across the galaxy in an attempt to locate the whereabouts of Luke Skywalker. One of those probes lands on Hoth and the location of the Rebel base is subsequently divulged to the Empire. This leads to a full-scale Imperial assault against the base, which results in the separation of the film’s core protagonists: Luke Skywalker and R2-D2 escape together to Dagobah; while Han Solo, Princess Leia, Chewbacca, and C-3PO flee in the Millennium Falcon.

After crash landing on Dagobah, Luke Skywalker and R2-D2 encounter a small, green, old creature who turns out to be Yoda. During his subsequent training, Luke is taught by Yoda to control his fear and to recognize that the Dark Side of the Force is very powerful. During one of his tests, Luke enters a dark cave and engages in a lightsaber duel with Darth Vader. Vader is decapitated, while Luke is horrified to discover that it’s his own face underneath Vader’s helmet.

Meanwhile, Han Solo and his companions evade capture from Darth Vader and the pursuing Imperial Star Destroyers by engaging in a death-defying chase through an asteroid field. This eventually leads them to a floating mining colony called Cloud City. This establishment is operated by Lando Calrissian, an old smuggling friend of Han’s. Unfortunately, Lando reveals that he’s already made a deal with Darth Vader and the group is taken prisoner by Imperial forces. Han is subsequently tortured as a way to lure Skywalker to come to Cloud City and into a trap. Vader then orders Solo to be placed in carbon freeze, where he is to be delivered to Jabba the Hut by the bounty hunter, Boba Fett. Before he is frozen, Han and Leia confess their love to one another. While Han is taken away by the bounty hunter, Lando switches allegiances and helps Chewbacca and Leia escape Imperial clutches.

Back on Dagobah, Luke senses that his friends are in peril. He sees a vision of Cloud City and confesses to Yoda that he must go and help them. Yoda informs Luke that he needs to complete his Jedi training first or he won't be able to defeat Darth Vader. Thinking of only rescuing his friends in need, Luke makes the decision to leave.

Upon arriving at Cloud City, Luke battles Darth Vader. They engage in a lengthy lightsaber duel, which results in Luke having his right hand seared off. It is during this moment when Vader reveals to Luke that he is actually his father. Vader then asks his son to embrace the Dark Side of the Force and offers him the chance to rule the galaxy together as father and son. Instead of accepting this option, Luke hurls himself down an air chute and is ultimately rescued by the escaping Millennium Falcon. Safely back with the Rebel Fleet, Skywalker absorbs the information about Vader's true identity while Lando and Chewbacca embark on a rescue mission to save Han Solo.

Part One

DVD Chapters

“The Empire Strikes Back” Blu-ray/DVD is separated into 50 chapters. Both the timing and the chapters will be hereby referenced in brackets.

- Chapter 4: 07:57 – 08:10
- Chapter 7: 13:00 – 13:38

Scene 1.

DECK OFFICER: Sir, Commander Skywalker hasn't come in through the south entrance. He might have forgotten to check in.

HAN: Not likely. Are the speeders ready?

DECK OFFICER: Not yet. We're having some trouble adapting them to the cold.

HAN: Then we'll have to go out on Tauntauns.

DECK OFFICER: Sir, the temperature's dropping too rapidly.

HAN: That's right. And my friend's out in it.

The Bible tells us that Abram immediately gathered his forces and went out after the men who had kidnapped Lot. Spiritually, emotionally and physically, we're called by God to protect those whom He has placed closest to our hearts.

Being loyal to friends and family is a Biblical mandate. Read Genesis 14:11-14. When he found out his nephew had been taken captive, what did Abram do?

The two apostles left the Sanhedrin and began proclaiming the name of Christ. When warned not to preach about Jesus, they disobeyed because sharing their faith was worth the cost. Like Han, Christians need to willingly face the freezing cold of persecution.

Even though Han Solo was being told not to brave the elements to find his missing friend, he made the decision to go anyway. Read Acts 5:40-41. When Peter and John were ordered by the Sanhedrin not to speak the name of Jesus in public, what was their immediate response?

Scene 2.

BEN: Luke... Luke.

LUKE: Ben?

BEN: You will go to the Dagobah system.

LUKE: Dagobah system?

BEN: There you will learn from Yoda, the Jedi Master who instructed me.

Jonah literally ran away from the Lord and fled in the opposite direction. When God gives us instructions from the Bible, our natural tendency is to also run. Much like Jonah, there's a price to pay when you purposefully move away from the desires of God.

God has a tendency to send His people to places they don't want to go. Read Jonah 1:3. What was the prophet's reaction when God told him to go to Nineveh? How is this also mirrored in the lives of many believers today?

Paul's encounter with Jesus resulted in a true conversion. He acknowledged Christ was Lord, confessed his sins, and surrendered his life. There are moments when Jesus will meet us on our own Damascus Road and ask us to go wherever He sends us.

Obi-Wan Kenobi appeared directly to Luke Skywalker in order to give him a new direction for his life. Read Acts 9: 3-6. Paul had an unexpected encounter with the risen Christ while on the road to Damascus. How did this encounter significantly change Paul's own life direction?

“...from Reel to Real...”

Now it's time to engage your small group with the “...from Reel to Real...” segment of this week's lesson.

These questions pose a great opportunity to launch topical discussions and foster relationship building amongst the members.

One of the motivating circumstances in the life of Han Solo is an unpaid debt that he owed Jabba the Hutt. Always on the run and forced to keep looking over his shoulder, Han is a perfect example of how a debt can totally control somebody's life. Have you ever experienced this? How do you think debts (financial, emotional) could keep you from reaching your God-given potential?

Director's Chair

A fun and unique aspect of this series, the questions posed in the “Director's Chair” segment of these lessons offer the members of your group the chance to engage in film-based discussions.)

Of all the many technical achievements in “Star Wars,” one of the most innovative aspects can be found in the editing. On “The Empire Strikes Back,” George Lucas invoked old-time adventure serials and the classic samurai films of Akira Kurosawa with creative uses of “wipes.” Why was this editorial decision so successful to this film series?

Wipes are an editing technique used to make a gradual transition between two different shots. Typically, one image is replaced by another with a distinct edge, giving the impression of one image “wiping” another off. Lucas famously used editing wipes to propel his narrative between two or three concurrent different storylines; thus, allowing the audience to visually absorb the quick transition between scenes with minimal confusion.)

Part Two

“The Empire Strikes Back” Blu-ray/DVD is separated into 50 chapters. Both the timing and the chapters will be hereby referenced in brackets.

DVD Chapters

- Chapter 13: 25:25 – 25:48
- Chapter 20: 38:40 – 39:00

Scene 3.

DACK: Feeling all right, sir?

LUKE: Just like new, Dack. How about you?

DACK: Right now I feel I could take on the whole Empire myself.

LUKE: I know what you mean.

Samson had the Spirit of the Lord. Even though he was outnumbered a thousand-to-one, Samson was given the strength to break loose from his binds and slay his enemies. When we feel overwhelmed and helpless, it is the power of Christ which can bring about victory in our lives.

Just like Dack, there are times when we feel invincible against our foes. Read Judges 14:15-17. Even though he was bound and outnumbered, what was the secret weapon that Samson carried?

Paul was reminding Timothy of not only his teachings and way of life, but also preparing the young pastor for the intense persecutions that were coming. Much like Luke Skywalker, Paul had flown through the spiritual trenches and knew just how difficult the upcoming battle would be.

When Luke heard Dack’s comment about taking on the whole Empire, it made him reflect on a similar experience in his own youth. Read II Timothy 3:10-12. What life experiences was Paul trying to impart to Timothy?

Scene 4.

LEIA: What are you doing? You're not actually going into an asteroid field?

HAN: They'd be crazy to follow us, wouldn't they?

LEIA: You don't have to do this to impress me.

THREEPIO: Sir, the possibility of successfully navigating an asteroid field is approximately three thousand, seven hundred and twenty to one.

HAN: Never tell me the odds!

Moses and the Israelites were seemingly trapped between the Red Sea and the approaching enemy forces. There seemed like no chance of escape! But God parted the waters of the Red Sea and allowed His people to cross safely. Although there are times when we're seemingly caught in a no-win situation, God can always provide a way out.

When he was being pursued by an overwhelmingly superior Imperial fleet, Han Solo made the decision to navigate the Millennium Falcon directly into an asteroid field. Read Exodus 14:21-28. When being pursued by Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian army, what unorthodox escape method did Moses use to lead his people to safety? Why is this lesson important to us today?

Jesus was teaching Philip that there's no impossible task that God ever requires of you. If we put limits on what God can do, then we don't show the necessary faith. Andrew brought Jesus all that he had. That's an important lesson because if we offer God nothing in our lives, then He won't have anything to use. We must strive to be like Andrew and be willing to offer Christ whatever resources we have.

Even though he was an experienced pilot, Han Solo's closest friends doubted his ability during a difficult situation. Read John 6:5-11. When faced with the gathering multitude and limited resources, the disciples began doubting how thousands were going to be fed. What was the importance of the question Jesus asked Philip? Why is Andrew's response a central passage for all believers?

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During the exciting asteroid chase, Han Solo makes a daring landing in a cave. Later on in the sequence, he discovers that the cave is, in fact, the mouth of a giant space slug. This mirrors many circumstances in our own lives where we think we're heading into one specific area of life, only to discover something radically different has occurred. Can you think of a moment where this has happened to you? Was it a positive or negative experience?

Director's Chair

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Phil Tippett used “stop-motion” technology. This is a process where the camera records an object frame-by-frame in successive positions, which allows the object to appear like it is in motion. The Imperial Walker sequence from “Empire Strikes Back” took Tippett over four months to shoot.

The greatest special effects in “The Empire Strikes Back” are contained in the Hoth battle, where giant AT-AT Walkers advance on the Echo Base. While many of the large-scale action sequences were filmed on-location in Norway, the actual Imperial Walkers were miniatures created by Phil Tippett. Conceptualized before the advent of computer graphics, what old-fashioned filmmaking technique did Tippett use to make his models come to life?

Part Three

DVD Chapters

“The Empire Strikes Back” Blu-ray/DVD is separated into 50 chapters. Both the timing and the chapters will be hereby referenced in brackets.

- Chapter 28: 1:02:35 – 1:03:06
- Chapter 31: 1:10:21 – 1:13:20

Scene 5.

LUKE: There's something not right here. I feel cold, death.

YODA: That cave is strong with the dark side of the Force. A domain of evil it is. In you must go.

LUKE: What's in there?

YODA: Only what you take with you.

Being sealed in a lion's den was a death sentence; yet, Daniel went willingly, believing that God would protect him. Yoda wisely counseled Skywalker that circumstances can be altered by attitude and belief, which is precisely what enabled Daniel to lay down with the lions in total confidence. No matter what frightening moments we're experiencing, we can experience immeasurable peace knowing God will deliver us.

Paul understood that God uses difficulties to build our character. The more suffering we experience, the more faith we develop, and the more we become confident about the future. We might be scared walking into those dark caves in our own life; however, we have the assurance that we will walk out as stronger believers.

There are moments in our lives where we feel uncomfortable or frightened in the places we find ourselves. Although Luke Skywalker sensed something wrong about the cave, Yoda cautioned that the only real danger was in how his young pupil would respond to it. Read Daniel 6:16-23. How does Yoda's teachings and Daniel's faith correspond with each other?

Even though he understood there was danger to be found within the Dagobah Cave, Yoda sent Luke inside to face what was there. Read Romans 5:3-4. Why does Paul urge believers to find comfort in difficult circumstances?

Scene 6.

LUKE: I can't. It's too big.

YODA: Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you? Hmm?

LUKE: You want the impossible.

(Yoda turns toward the X-wing fighter. With his eyes closed and his head bowed, he raises his arm and points at the ship. Soon, the fighter rises above the water and moves onto the beach.)

LUKE: I don't... I don't believe it.

YODA: That is why you fail.

Perspective makes all the difference. While others gazed across the battlefield and saw a frightening giant, David saw a man who had defied God. Even though he was being mocked because of his desire to fight Goliath, David knew the importance of standing up for his beliefs. Seeing things from God's vantage point gives believers courage to face giant obstacles.

Luke Skywalker was discouraged by the giant obstacle that was before him; yet, Yoda told him the size of the problem shouldn't be an issue. Read I Samuel 17:41-50. Even though he was just a shepherd boy facing a warrior giant, what was the unique perspective David had? What did David do in the midst of disbelief and mockery?

The disciples lacked sufficient faith to cast out the demons. They had attempted to drive them out with their own abilities and had failed. Having faith enough to move mountains is exactly the point Jesus was attempting to make with His disciples. When we face those immovable mountains in our life, we have to cast our eyes on Christ and pray for additional faith.

Luke Skywalker struggled with disbelief to such an extent that he was unable to complete the tasks that Yoda had charged him to do. Read Matthew 17:15:20. Even though Jesus had granted His disciples the authority to cast out demons, why weren't they able to do it? What does Jesus tell them about the power of faith?

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Everything that Luke Skywalker experienced on Dagobah seemed to be contrary to all of his expectations. Instead of a new world filled with the promise of adventure, he (literally) found himself stuck in the mud. But by the time Luke left this world, he had found himself changed in ways he never would have anticipated. Think of similar circumstances in your own life. Was there a time when a promising situation turned out to be nothing but an emotional swampland? Did things turn out better than you had originally thought?

The conflict between fathers and sons has been used a plotline in countless films, books, and television programs. In real life, this family conflict usually stems from the child feeling that he or she doesn't have the understanding or support of the parents. Can you recall moments from your own childhood where this happened? And if you are a parent yourself, how did those experiences shape how you deal with your own child?

Director's Chair

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A noted history buff, director Irvin Kershner was attempting to make subtle comparisons to the American Revolution in order to provide the audience with additional subtext.

In the film, director Irvin Kershner went to great pains to ensure that every Rebel Alliance character spoke with an American accent, while the Imperial Officers would speak with British accents. Why did he insist on this?

Part Four

DVD Chapters

“The Empire Strikes Back” Blu-ray/DVD is separated into 50 chapters. Both the timing and the chapters will be hereby referenced in brackets.

- Chapter 35: 1:21:45 – 1:22:15
- Chapter 46: 1:50:25 – 1:51:00

Scene 7.

HAN: How's the gas mine? Is it paying off for you?

LANDO: Oh, not as well as I'd like. We're a small outpost and not very self-sufficient. And I've had supply problems of every kind. I've had labor difficulties... What's so funny?

HAN: You. Listen to you -- you sound like a businessman, a responsible leader. Who'd have thought that, huh?

LANDO: You know, seeing you sure brings back a few things.

HAN: Yeah.

The man's neighbors were in total disbelief of the miracle Jesus had performed. Some of them even doubted that it was really the same man. When faced with Jesus, either you learn to accept Him or you must reject Him. When a person has fully accepted Christ, friends and family should also see such a drastic change that they, too, might be convinced that this is no longer the same individual.

Isaiah was enthusiastic because he looked ahead to the future glory of God's promises in the lives of his people. As Christians, we also share in that same excitement because we understand that we've been delivered from death by the redemptive power of the Cross.

Many people find it difficult to fully accept changed lives in others. Read John 9:8-9. After Jesus returned sight to the blind man, what was the reaction of the people who knew him? How does that mirror the response non-believers have when they encounter a friend or family member who has become a Christian?

Much like Lando's experience, pushing forward with new endeavors in our life can be exciting adventures. Read Isaiah 43:19. How does the prophet's enthusiasm for the upcoming exodus of his people compare with the joy of a believer in Christ?

Scene 8.

VADER: There is no escape. Don't make me destroy you. You do not yet realize your importance. You have only begun to discover your power. Join me and I will complete your training. With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy.

LUKE: I'll never join you!

VADER: If you only knew the power of the dark side...

Vader was offering Luke a false peace. He wanted Skywalker to join him so they could rule the galaxy together. In Scripture, Satan was presenting Christ with an earthly kingdom. In both instances, the key to their deception was an attempt to shift perspectives away from the truth. As Christians, our goals should never be centered on materialism and power. We need to resist what the devil offers us by choosing to serve God alone.

One of Satan's greatest tools of temptation is the promise of earthly power. Read Matthew 4:8-9. How is Darth Vader's offer to Luke Skywalker similar to what Satan had promised Jesus?

When believers are undergoing intense persecution and suffering, that's when they are the most vulnerable to satanic attacks. It is during these periods when we should be alert and watchful for spiritual danger. Peter referred to Satan as a "hungry lion" because the devil is constantly on the prowl to take down those believers who are weakest in the faith. Spiritual warfare is a very real danger.

One of Vader's threats was promising total destruction if Luke didn't yield to his demands. Read I Peter 5:8. Why is Peter cautioning Christians to be alert? Did Peter believe that Satan has the power to destroy a believer?

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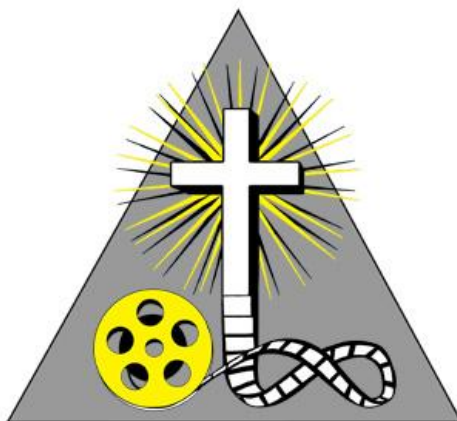
“The Empire Strikes Back” features one of the greatest plot twists in film history: the true identity of Darth Vader. While there's not a moviegoer alive today who doesn't know that Vader is Luke's father, the startling revelation caused a worldwide stir back when “Empire Strikes Back” was originally released. Think back to your own childhood. Was there something you discovered about your own parents that surprised you? How did you deal with it?

Director's Chair

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Directors oftentimes choose close-ups to emphasize the intensity of a scene, as well as to spotlight the importance of the dialogue. Kershner worked with his writers very carefully to make the story of this film more emotional, so he wanted to shoot the movie in such a way that it felt more like a drama and less like an adventure film

When Irvin Kershner agreed to take over directorial duties from George Lucas on “The Empire Strikes Back,” one of the stylistic choices he insisted on was the inclusion of more close-up shots of the principal actors than had been featured in the original “Star Wars.” Why was this important to Kershner?



Be sure and check out www.ReelMinistry.org for additional resources and study materials.

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