

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

the two towers

study guide by michael poteet

for the novel by J.R.R. Tolkien



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The Two Towers Study Guide

A Progeny Press Study Guide

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Synopsis

The Two Towers, being Books III and IV of *The Lord of the Rings*, continues the story begun in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Following the breaking of the Fellowship commissioned to carry the One Ring to Mordor and destroy it, Aragorn, the heir to the kingdom of Men, Gimli the dwarf, and Legolas the elf begin a search for the hobbits Merry and Pippin, who have been abducted by evil Orcs. During the search, they encounter the Riders of Rohan, mounted warriors who warn them that the forces of Sauron—the Dark Lord searching for his lost Ring—and Saruman—the wizard who betrayed Gandalf and the rest of his order, hungry for power for himself—threaten King Théoden of Rohan, and the freedom of his people.

Simultaneously, Merry and Pippin, having escaped from the Orcs in the forest of Fangorn, meet Treebeard, an Ent, or “tree herder.” Treebeard informs them that Saruman has earned the forest’s wrath by destroying trees to fuel his war machinery. Merry and Pippin witness the Ents’ decision to go to war against Saruman.

These scattered members of the Fellowship—including one unexpected, but most welcome, returning member—reunite in the effort to free King Théoden and Rohan from the threat of Saruman. A greater threat presents itself, however, when Sauron’s forces begin their final assault on Minas Tirith, where the armies of Men will make a last stand against the evil forces of Mordor.

As the Fellowship rushes to the aid of Minas Tirith, Frodo the Ring-bearer and his loyal servant Sam seek a way into Mordor. They capture Gollum, who owned the Ring years before and who still desires it. Gollum agrees to guide them into Mordor by a secret way, but Frodo and Sam ultimately follow him into a situation that once more places the fate of their quest in jeopardy.

The Lord of the Rings concludes in *The Return of the King*.

Book III, Chapters 5–7

*No counsel have I to give to those that despair. Yet counsel I could give,
and words I could speak to you. Will you hear them? They are not for all ears.
I bid you come out before your doors and look abroad. Too long have you sat
in shadows and trusted to twisted tales and crooked promptings.*

Vocabulary:

Choose words from the word box to fill in the blanks, based on the clues provided. You will not use all the words in the word box. When you have finished, read the circled letters down to find the name of a key character in these chapters.

Word Box

sooth	haft	fastness	vanguard
hewed	sedge	swath	helm
gingerly	devices	corslet	fodder
hauberk	parapet	causeway	skulking

1. true; factual (adj.)

_____ (O) _____

2. piece of protective armor (n.)

(O) _____

3. elevated road or path (n.)

_____ (O) _____

4. food for animals (n.)

_____ (O) _____

5. cut as with a sword (verb, past tense)

_____ (O) _____

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6. cautiously; warily (adj.)



7. front part of an army (n.)



Questions:

1. How is Aragorn's choice in the valley of the Eryn Muil regarding the future direction of the Quest—to not follow Frodo but to remain together and rescue Merry and Pippin—affirmed in Chapter 5?
2. After his return, Gandalf calls himself “Gandalf the White.” What does this self-identification signify?
3. What is Gandalf able to tell Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli about Frodo?
4. Who is Gríma Wormtongue?
5. Why was Éomer imprisoned upon his return to Edoras? What does Éomer do upon his release from prison? What does this tell us about Éomer?

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6. Who is Éowyn?

7. Why do King Théoden and his men ride toward Helm's Deep?

8. How is Saruman's army defeated at Helm's Deep?

Thinking About the Story:

9. In your understanding of the text, did Gandalf really die, or did he escape actual death? List examples from the text to support your answer.

10. In their discussion of Fangorn, Gimli says to Gandalf, "But you speak of him as if he was a friend. I thought Fangorn was dangerous." Gandalf responds,

"Dangerous!" cried Gandalf. "And so am I, very dangerous: more dangerous than anything you will ever meet, unless you are brought alive before the seat of the Dark Lord. And Aragorn is dangerous, and Legolas is dangerous. You are beset with dangers, Gimli son of Glóin; for you are dangerous yourself, in your own fashion. Certainly the forest of Fangorn is perilous—not least to those that are too ready with their axes; and Fangorn himself, he is perilous too; yet he is wise and kindly nonetheless."

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What is Gandalf trying to communicate to Gimli? How can someone be perilous and wise and kindly at the same time?

What times has Gimli become dangerous? What makes Gimli and the others dangerous at some times and not at others?

11. Read Psalm 33:18–22, Luke 12:4–9. How do these passages reflect the same conflict or paradox as Gimli notes concerning Fangorn, or Treebeard, in the question above?

12. In Chapter 5, as Gandalf speaks with Aragorn and his companions in Fangorn, he tells them, “War is upon us and all our friends, a war in which only the use of the Ring could give us surety of victory.” A few sentences later he says, “No,” he said in a soft voice, “it has gone beyond our reach. Of that at least let us be glad. We can no longer be tempted to use the Ring.” What paradox lies in these two sentences? Why is Gandalf glad the Ring is beyond their reach?

13. Though portrayed as ghastly and terrible, the battles presented in these chapters also seem to be invigorating for some of the characters. Gimli and Legolas, for example, banter with each other about the number of Orcs each has killed; indeed, as Chapter 8 begins, Legolas will refer to their body count as “the game.” King Théoden’s strength is renewed as he rides to war, and at one point,

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while besieged in the Hornburg, he longs to feel “the joy of battle.” How do you react to such remarks and incidents? Why?

Dig Deeper:

14. Do you think that Gandalf’s return establishes him as a Christ-figure in *The Lord of the Rings*? Why or why not? Read Luke 24:13–35. Read about Jesus’ struggle with Death in Ephesians 4:8–10; 1 Peter 3:18–22; and Revelation 1:17, 18. Note John’s description of the risen Christ in Revelation 1:14–16. What similarities and differences do you note between the biblical texts and Gandalf’s return in Chapter 5? What significance might these comparisons and contrasts hold? Consider also Gandalf’s appearance at the end of the battle of Helm’s Deep in light of Revelation 19:11–16.
15. Wormtongue calls Gandalf “Stormcrow” and “*Láthspell*,” or “Ill-news.” How is his reception of Gandalf similar to King Ahab’s reception of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:16–18? How is Gandalf’s rebuttal similar to Elijah’s? How might Ahab’s situation relative to the prophets of Baal parallel that of Théoden relative to Wormtongue?

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16. Wormtongue mockingly asks Gandalf, “Do you bring men? Do you bring horses, swords, spears? That I would call aid; that is our present need.” How do Psalms 20 and 146 and Isaiah 31:1–3 respond to those who think as Wormtongue does?

17. Once Gandalf has helped Théoden escape from the influence of Wormtongue, he orders Wormtongue, “Down, snake! . . . Down on your belly!” Compare Gandalf’s words to God’s words in Genesis 3:14, 15. What does the allusion to Genesis imply about Wormtongue? How does Wormtongue’s name reinforce this truth?

18. How might the change we witness in Théoden illustrate Jesus’ words recorded in John 8:32? From what falsehoods has Jesus set you free? From what falsehoods do you feel you must still be set free?

19. The “wild men of the hills” allow themselves to be misled by Saruman because of their hatred of the lords of Gondor held over from ancient perceived wrongs. What current world conflicts can you point to in which the conflict has erupted because “old hatreds” have been inflamed?

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Read Matthew 6:14, 15; 18:21–35; Romans 12:17–20; Colossians 3:12–15. According to these verses, how are we supposed to respond to grievances and wounds inflicted by others? Why?

Optional Activity:

Literary Research: Research the motif of the Fisher King, especially as found in Arthurian legend, and compare and contrast it with Tolkien's presentation of King Théoden. Present your findings in written, dramatic, or multi-media form.

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Thinking About the Story:

7. Responses and opinions will vary. Tolkien may be pointing out that demonizing stereotypes are hateful propaganda that can be used to incite anger between peoples. The dominant historical example is Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda that drove the Holocaust. Other examples may be propaganda portrayals of Japanese in World War II, or the way in which Islamic extremist groups portray the United States or Jewish people. Possible ways of combating stereotypes include seeking out direct, personal experience with those whom we stereotype or hold stereotypes about and refraining from the temptation to judge those who are simply different. You may refer to verses such as Matthew 7:1–5, 12; 22:36–40.

8. King Théoden's view of the world is broadened by his encounters with Ents and hobbits. The king begins to realize that "the life of Men"—i.e., the life of his particular group—does not, in fact, comprise the sum total of "the way of the world." Other lives—relegated by Men to the "careless custom" of nursery songs—also shape and are shaped by the world. In fact, "the life of Men" plays only a small part, and what he and many others viewed as fairy tales and stories for children now are revealed as based on truth, and beings he thought imaginary or trivial are now shown to be powerful shapers of the world. As Gandalf says, "to them you are but the passing tale; . . . and all the deeds of your house but a small matter."

9. The old stories and knowledge about the Ents from the far past have been transformed into children's tales. They have disregarded the truth and consider the stories fit only to entertain children. The irony is that the children would have recognized the Ents for what they were; the children would have seen the truth.

10. This event describes the passage of the Huorns from the battlefield to Fangorn. Merry describes the Huorns as having "great power . . . and they seem able to wrap themselves in shadow: it is difficult to see them moving. But they do. They can move very quickly, if they are angry. . . . they have become queer and wild. Dangerous." He describes them as "rustling," and when they moved, "the air was full of creaking. . . . They moved at a great speed . . . and made a noise like a rushing wind." After Gandalf visits Treebeard, the Huorns leave to follow the orcs to Helm's Deep, moving with "rustlings, creakings, and a murmur like voices passing." The night before King Théoden's group arrives, Pippin says, "There was a noise in the night like a wind coming up the valley. I think the Ents and the Huorns that had been away came back then." This would have been the same night that "the darkness and the rumour" passed the party from Rohan at the Isen.

11. Answers will vary. Merry and Pippin do not use morally descriptive language for Huorns, which leaves them rather ambiguous. They describe them as "queer and wild. Dangerous." They are frightened of them.

Dig Deeper:

12. John sees "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1): in other words, God re-creates the world because this world has been scarred by sin and evil; it has "fallen" from God's original intentions for it. As Gandalf states, this world's evil "cannot be wholly cured." Yet God's action is a *re*-creation of what God originally created, not a *new* creation out of nothing: "I am making everything new!" says God (21:5). John's vision can be interpreted as a proclamation that, while human beings cannot completely eradicate evil from this world, God can, and will: "for the old order of things has passed away" (21:4). Consult commentaries as needed and appropriate.

13. Interpretations may vary; accept reasonable responses supported by the texts. Saruman took Isengard and, because of his pride, turned it into a twisted creation of his own, just as the men described in these verses refuse to accept the wisdom and provision of God, but turn to worshipping created things instead of the Creator. Saruman took it upon himself to improve things, to change the natural order of things to fit his own schemes and desires. The men described in Romans forsake the wisdom of God, though it is apparent to them, and turn instead to their own devices. Both end in darkness and foolishness.

Book III, Chapters 10 & 11

Vocabulary:

1. *suave*: smooth, agreeable; *embroiled*: involved in argument or hostilities
2. *parley*: hold discussion, particularly with an enemy
3. *gibbet*: a gallows or crosspiece structure for hanging an executed criminal for public viewing
4. *lot*: group of associated people; *reverend*: worthy of awe and respect
5. *sheen*: glistening, shiny, luster
6. *rankle*: irritate, cause resentment
7. *writhen*: twisted, contorted; *hale*: sound, healthy
8. *adamant*: impervious, unyielding; a stone once thought to be impenetrable