

## Welcome to *The Return of the King* Summer Reading Study Guide: A Journey into the Captivating World of J. R. R. Tolkien's Masterpiece.



### Why do we read the great books and join the Great Conversation?

When we read great books and join the Great Conversation, we gain understanding of the world we live in, and we gain a wider perspective. These books strengthen our moral code by illustrating both good and bad—and the consequences we may face, whether physical, mental, or spiritual. They show us how we are connected to all humanity—past, present, and future. “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight” (Proverbs 4:7).

This summer and fall, your role is crucial as we join in the Great Conversation with Tolkien’s epic story, *The Return of the King*. Your insights and interpretations will shape our collective understanding as we conclude our reading of J.R.R. Tolkien’s epic masterpiece of good versus evil, personal struggle, and redemption in *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*. This study guide will be your companion as you prepare for the 9th grade fall quarter. It's designed to enhance your analytical

and writing skills, preparing you for insightful discussions. Remember, each task is a step towards deeper understanding, so let's dive in!

If you have any questions or need an explanation as you work on this, please contact me (Mrs. Shoemaker) at [cfshoemaker@genevaschool.org](mailto:cfshoemaker@genevaschool.org). I will respond as quickly as I can.

### Requirements (Please read carefully):

- **Purchase** a personal paperback copy of *The Return of the King* ([ISBN:978-0358380252](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0358380252)). The cover looks like the image above. This book is the only one used for this assignment.
- A **composition notebook**, college-ruled, has been purchased for you for 9th grade English class. Please use your 8th grade English composition book for the summer reading. Mrs. Shoemaker gave it back to you the last week of 8th grade. All your work for this study guide should be written in your 8th grade composition notebook.
- If you are new to Geneva and do not have this composition book, please write all answers neatly on college-ruled notebook paper and place them in a page protector to keep them clean and wrinkle-free.

- This study will be written in **black or blue ink—no Flair pens. Please use erasable pens or white-out to correct mistakes.**
- Handwriting must be neat and in **cursive**. Proper printing is expected if you are new to Geneva and do not write in cursive. No block letter printing allowed (this means all caps).
- Please be attentive to **spelling and punctuation**.
- Answer all questions in **complete sentences**.
- **Drawings and sketches** can be completed in the composition notebook or on a separate piece of plain paper and then fixed in your notebook.
- **Highlight answers in the literature book** and provide page numbers for answers along with the written responses in your composition book; notes should be made in the book (annotations).

#### **Facts:**

- This study guide is a homework grade.
- The grading rubric begins at 90.
- Points will be added for well-written answers that are insightful and detailed.
- Points will be deducted for missing key events and information, for wrong information, and missing chapters.
- Late packets, wrong format, or incomplete answers will be docked points.
- **Completed study guides are due Tuesday, Aug 19, 2025 .**

#### **Helpful hints:**

- Answer questions for each chapter immediately after reading.
- Do not watch the movies. These do not follow the book and can confuse you.
- If you are having difficulty following the story, do the following:
  1. Read aloud or use Audible, but follow the story in the book.
  2. Read the comprehension questions before you start reading.
  3. Discuss with a parent or fellow student.

#### **BOOK V CHAPTERS 1–3: Minas Tirith, The Passing of the Grey Company, and The Muster of Rohan**

1. Both Eowyn and Merry are duty bound to remain behind when they wish to go with companions they love—both when Aragorn leaves each of them and later when Théoden rides to Minas Tirith. Do you think Merry does the right thing when he decides to join Theoden’s company secretly? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever been torn between conflicting duties, loyalties, or obligations? How did you resolve the conflict? Read 1 Kings 3:7–12; Proverbs 3:5–7; and Romans 12:1–2. How do these Scriptures help someone seeking to discern the correct action? What criteria should we use when deciding how to choose among competing duties, all of which may be good in their own right?
3. How might the situation of the Oathbreakers—“the Dead” who travel with the Grey Company to Pelagir upon Anduin—parallel the situation of sinful, fallen humanity as described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 5 (particularly Romans 5:6, 8–11, 18, 19, 21);

6:23; and 14:9? How might Aragorn be a symbol of Christ? (Note Eowyn's words to Aragorn when he tells her he will take the Paths of the Dead and Theoden's description when Merry asks about the Paths of the Dead.)

#### **BOOK V CHAPTERS 4–7: The Siege of Gondor, The Ride of the Rohirrim, and The Battle of Pelenor Fields**

4. The narrator tells us that Sauron uses “dread and despair” as weapons in his war against the races of the West. Why are dread and despair so terrible? Read the story of the siege of Samaria in 2 Kings 6:24–7:20. What parallels can you draw between the biblical story and Tolkien's story of the siege of Minas Tirith? Do these stories give us alternatives to despair?
5. Denethor's despair:
  - a. What are the consequences of Denethor's despair? Why do you think despair is often considered a sin in Christian thought? (Consider the common thread linking Genesis 18:14; Matthew 16:24–26, and Luke 1:37.) How do Scriptures such as Psalm 130, John 16:33, and 2 Corinthians 4:7–10 present an alternative to despair? (See also Philippians 3:7,8; Romans 8:18–21, 24–28, 31, 35–39.)
  - b. Have you ever felt despair or a similar emotion? How did you deal with it? How did the situation look to you later, after it had passed? What would you say to someone feeling despair?

#### **BOOK V CHAPTERS 8–10 : The Houses of Healing, The Last Debate, and The Black Gate Opens**

6. Aragorn tells Pippin that Merry will never forget his grief, “but it will not darken his heart, it will teach him wisdom.” What does Aragorn mean? How can grief teach us wisdom? How does 2 Corinthians 7:8–13a relate to Aragorn's statement?
7. Legolas says that Aragorn's company's journey on the Paths of the Dead will remain a great deed “though none be left in Gondor to sing of it in the days that are to come.” What makes a deed great? Gandalf tells Merry that he may have great deeds to do in the final defense of Minas Tirith if their army falls in the attack on Mordor—would such a defense be a great deed, even if hopeless? Do you agree with Legolas that the rightness or greatness of a deed does not depend upon others recognizing it? Explain your answers. Read Matthew 6:1; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17, and 1 Peter 4:11. How do these scriptures fit into the discussion above?

#### **BOOK VI CHAPTERS 1–4: The Tower of Cirith Ungol, The Land of Shadow, Mount Doom, and The Field of Cormallen**

8. Describe the specific temptation Sam faces when he puts on the Ring at Cirith Ungol. What similarities or differences do you see between this temptation scene and the temptations of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13? What do Sam and Jesus' temptations suggest about the right and wrong uses of power? Consult Matthew 20:20–28 when thinking about your answer.

9. What does Sam see high above the Ephel Duath one night that changes his perspective on his and Frodo's circumstances? How does his perspective change?

**BOOK VI CHAPTERS 5–6: The Steward and the King and Many Partings**

10. How do you react to the kindness that Gandalf and the hobbits attempt to express to Saruman? Do you think Saruman is worthy of their pity? Read Luke 6:36; Romans 5:6–8; 1 Corinthians 13:5–6; Colossians 3:13. What motivates a Christian to show pity or mercy to others? According to these verses, can a Christian ever say that someone “doesn’t deserve” mercy and kindness? How should Christians react when their attempts at mercy and kindness are rebuffed, as Saruman rebuffs the attempts Gandalf and the hobbits make? Read Matthew 10:11–14 for guidance.

**BOOK VI CHAPTERS 7–9: Homeward Bound, The Scouring of the Shire, and The Grey Havens**

11. How does Frodo's reasoning for refusing to have Saruman slain reflect the apostle Paul's teachings in Romans 12:17–21 and 1 Thessalonians 5:15?
12. Why does Saruman respond to Frodo's mercy by saying, “You have grown, Halfling .... You are wise and cruel. You have robbed my revenge of sweetness, and now I must go in bitterness, in debt to your mercy. I hate it and you!”?