

CHURCH BOOKLET



EMPIRES
FALL

LOVE
SURVIVES

GOLDEN GLOBE® WINNER

OSCAR
ISAAC

CHARLOTTE
LE BON

CHRISTIAN
BALE

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

THE PROMISE

FROM THE ACADEMY AWARD® WINNING DIRECTOR OF *HOTEL RWANDA*
IN CINEMAS APRIL 28



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CHRISTIAN
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INTRODUCTION

These free resources, provided by Damaris Media, are designed to help churches and individuals think through the issues raised by *The Promise* (in UK cinemas beginning 28th April 2017). In this guide you'll find:

- Background information about the history behind the film.
- Group discussion questions for church groups to explore the film's themes.
- Suggestions for reflection and prayer.

Before you start, read through the guide to make sure you have everything you need. Please feel free to use whichever sections you think are most appropriate for your group.

See www.thepromisefilm.co.uk for more about the film. You can also [sign up](#) to Damaris Media's e-newsletter for updates about the latest Damaris Media resources.



ABOUT THE FILM

It is 1914. As the Great War looms, the mighty Ottoman Empire is crumbling. Michael Boghosian (Oscar Isaac) travels from his small Armenian village to the cosmopolitan hub of Constantinople to study medicine. Photo-journalist Chris Myers (Christian Bale) is there only partly to cover geo-politics - he is mesmerised by his love for Ana (Charlotte Le Bon), an Armenian artist.

When Michael meets Ana, their shared Armenian heritage sparks an attraction that explodes into a romantic rivalry between the two men. As the Turks form an alliance with Germany and the Empire turns violently against its own ethnic minorities, their conflicting passions must be deferred while they join forces to survive even as events threaten to overwhelm them.

The Promise is directed by Terry George, who co-wrote the script with Robin Swicord. It stars Oscar Isaac, Charlotte Le Bon and Christian Bale.

THE BACKGROUND

At one time, the Ottoman Empire was one of the most powerful and expansive empires in the world. From the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 until its demise after World War I, it ruled over a diverse set of ethnic groups, including Greeks, Jews, Arabs, Kurds and Armenians.

The Armenians - a Christian minority concentrated in their historic homeland in Eastern Anatolia - were largely tradesmen, craftsmen and merchants. Some also attained prominent positions in the Ottoman administration in the imperial capital of Constantinople and were well respected by their counterparts of other confessions.

As the Ottoman Empire began losing territory in the late nineteenth century, the ruling

elite was seized by a nationalist current that targeted Christian minorities, in particular the Armenians. Armenians in the Anatolian provinces were periodically subjected to violence and massacres, culminating in the Armenian Genocide beginning in 1915.

Once the Ottoman Empire entered World War I on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Young Turk regime began a propaganda campaign that depicted the Armenians as aligned with the opposing Russian Empire. By government order, the Armenian population of Anatolia was either killed on sight, or sent on death marches toward the Syrian desert. It is estimated that 1.5 million Armenians died as a result of this orchestrated campaign of annihilation.

Each year, the Armenian Genocide is commemorated around the world on April 24, the day recognized as the start of the genocide during which hundreds of Armenian intellectuals were arrested and later executed.

The Armenian Genocide is considered the first genocide of the 20th century, though its occurrence predates the invention of the term. The term was coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, who based the concept on the example of the Armenian Genocide. To this day, the Turkish government does not acknowledge that a genocide took place.

More information can be found at www.armenian-genocide.org

FILM CHAT

The first thing we all like to do when we leave the cinema is talk about the film! This is your chance to chat together as a group about your reactions to *The Promise* as a cinematic experience before digging deeper into the themes. You might want to [watch the trailer](#) together to refresh your memories before you begin talking.

1. What was your initial reaction to the film, and why? What were you expecting when you went in?
2. What was most interesting to you about the film's setting? Which historical details stood out, and why?
3. How did the film balance its fictional love story with a portrayal of real-life events? Which parts of the story were most captivating to you?

4. What did you think of the casting of the film? What qualities did each lead actor bring to their role?
5. What sort of emotional journey did the film take you on? What emotions were you left with when the credits rolled?



DIG DEEPER

The Promise shines a light on a chapter in history that many people won't be familiar with - and in the process, raises questions for the world we live in today. In this part of the guide the group will dig deeper into the themes of the film, before engaging in action, reflection and prayer. **This section of the guide is designed to be used in a group meeting after watching the film.**

Did you know anything about the Armenian Genocide before seeing *The Promise*? If not, why do you think this is? Why might it be important to learn about events like this - even when they happened a long time ago, or a long way away?

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION TODAY

Religious persecution is one of the root causes of many of the crises filling news headlines from countries like Iraq and Syria. It's a daily reality for millions of people.

If you lived in one of these countries, it would mean not being able to choose or change your religion, or to practise it freely in your daily life. You could be denied promotion at work because of your beliefs; your children could be bullied or penalised at school; or you could be harassed or excluded from your community.

But it might not end there. You could face interrogation, arrest, imprisonment, violent attacks, torture or even death.

It's sobering to reflect on the freedom we take for granted.

Driven out of their homeland: Since October 2016 at least 97,000 Rohingya Muslims have been officially disowned by the Burmese government and are stateless. Forced to flee, many are now in horrific conditions in makeshift camps, on the brink of starvation because humanitarian aid is being denied access.

Christians under attack in central Nigeria: The Fulani and Christian communities lived relatively peacefully side by side for many years. But since 2010, Fulani militants have been forcing non-Muslim communities off their land and seizing it for grazing their own cattle. At least 53 villages have been attacked in southern Kaduna in recent violence, over 10,000 people have been displaced, and more than 800 people have been killed.

Information provided by CSW
www.csw.org.uk
[@csw_uk](https://twitter.com/csw_uk)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you feel about the film's portrayal of the refugee experience? Which scenes did you find particularly powerful or moving?
2. Why do you think *The Promise* takes the time to portray the characters' normal lives, including Michael and Ana's love story, before their circumstances change? How can we remind ourselves, and others, that refugees are ordinary people?
3. What makes *The Promise* an important film for our times? Were there any moments or images in the film which particularly reminded you of today's headlines?
4. How did you feel when the mayor in the film roused this Christian community to take up arms to defend themselves if Turkish militants attacked them again? How do you think Christians in similar situations around the world today should respond?
5. Journalist Chris calls himself 'a witness to history.' As Christians, do you think we have any particular responsibilities as we watch and read the news? In what sense are we all 'witnesses to history' in times when persecution or genocide are taking place?
6. Can you name any figures from the Bible who were forced to become refugees, or to leave their home in some way? Why do you think exile is such a common theme in the Bible?
7. What promises does the Bible make to those who are without a home, either literally or spiritually? What does God have to offer those who've lost everything?



RESPOND: TAKE A STAND AGAINST INJUSTICE

In *The Promise* you witnessed several characters take a stand against injustice. You can do the same thing today - your voice holds the power to change and save lives. This is your group's chance to respond to all you've seen, heard and discussed...

If you've got 5 minutes:

#StandWithNigeria

Protect Nigeria's Christians from further attacks; all it takes is an email. Send an email to call for protection for Christians and calling for the attackers to be brought to justice.

If you've got 10 minutes:

Real Change for Refugees

Help Burma's Rohingya Muslims on the brink of starvation - email the Burmese embassy to demand that restrictions on aid are lifted, and the root causes of the crisis are tackled.

We need to listen to the echoes of history, and learn the lessons of past atrocities.

Make sure the world doesn't ignore the suffering of religious minorities today: stand against injustice.

For information see:

www.csw.org.uk/thepromise



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REFLECTION: WELCOMING THE STRANGER

The Promise is a film with the power to change people's perspective on refugees, at a time when compassion and justice are badly needed around this issue. As Christians, we have a special calling to extend God's love towards refugees. **This section of the guide is designed to be used in a group meeting or by individuals, after watching the film.**

Take a time of reflection after the group discussion. Alone, or with your group, read the Bible passages below (or other suitable passages of your choice).

- **Deuteronomy 10:17-19**
- **Psalms 105:7-15**
- **Matthew 2:13-15**
- **Matthew 25:35-40**
- **Ephesians 2:19-22**

You may want to read them aloud, or to write out your favourite verse and jot down your thoughts around it. As appropriate, you could ask questions like:

- What does the verse say about God's character, and God's attitude to the vulnerable and the displaced?
- Is God asking something of his people here? What might this verse look like in practice for me as an individual, or for my church community?
- Does this verse make any promises, and for whom? How might this verse make me feel if I were a refugee?



PRAYER

Alone, or with your group, spend some time praying over the issues that you've touched on in your meeting. You may wish to sum up with the prayer below.

Lord God, thank you for your incredible compassion towards those who've been forced to flee their homes because of violence or persecution.

We know that you are passionate about justice, and that you care about every life. We pray for every refugee in the world today, that they'll find safety and a home where

they can rebuild their lives. We're sorry for the times that we've turned a blind eye to their suffering, and we ask you to help us become more like you. Amen.



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