

Beginner's Bible Study

This three-part Bible study provides a good foundation of the basics of Christianity. Great for those new to the Christian faith, especially international students. This study was originally published in *Chi Alpha's International Student Friendship Ministry* handbook.

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Lesson 1: Introduction

Overview of the Bible

What kind of books do you enjoy reading? What have you heard about the Bible? The Bible is a unique book.

- Written by over 40 men: shepherds, doctors, priests, tentmakers, kings
- It was written over a time period of around 1600 years (~1500BC to ~AD100).
- Parts were written on three different continents (Asia, Europe, & Africa) and in Hebrew and Greek.
- Big Book with 66 smaller books.
- Its influence on our world and on many people's lives has been tremendous. It's the most translated book ever. Portions translated in over 2,000 languages (Shakespeare is 50).
- A living document with power to change the reader. The Author is alive and meets us as we read.

Look at the Bible's table of contents to see the Bible's two main divisions.

1. The Old Testament books were written hundreds of years before Christ. Show God's plan of redeeming the world, God's dealing with ancient Hebrews.
2. The New Testament books were written after Jesus' earthly life. They show Jesus' ministry and the founding of the Christian community.

Christianity: What is it?

What were your impressions of Christianity before you came to America?

1. Christianity is NOT:
 - a. Just a code of behavior. Going to church, doing good things, living a moral life. Some who do these things are not Christians. Eph. 2:8–9
 - b. Just a philosophy of life: Believing the right things; the right mental attitude. Some people have good philosophies of life, but are not Christians! (Mt. 7:21–23)
 - c. Just a way to get to heaven; a decision; only a way to relieve our fear of death. Christianity affects a person's daily life now and their eternal future.
 - d. Just an American religion; Simply a part of American culture or family tradition. It began in the Middle East. There are more Christians in S. America & Africa than U.S. Many Christians come from families that are not Christian.
2. Christianity IS: A RELATIONSHIP with God.
3. A true Christian is: A person who has CHOSEN to believe in Jesus, RECEIVE Him, and let Him be THE LORD/BOSS of their life.

God: Who is He, and what is He like?

Read Genesis 1:1.

- If God made the material universe, what does this tell us about God what He is like?

Read Genesis 1:26–30.

- Verse 26 says people were made in the image of God. In what ways do you think God and man are alike? In what ways are they different?
- How does God relate to and treat the first people? (See verses 28–30.)
- What gives God the right to tell people what to do?

Read Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24.

- The poet writes of how much God knows him and that God has placed His hand on him.

How does the writer think and feel about God? How does it make YOU feel?

For further reflection

- If God is as we have looked at here today, how does that make you feel about Him?
- Why do you think God wants a person to do more than just believe in his mind that there is a God?
- Was there anything in the talk on Christianity that was surprising to you? Any questions?

Lesson 2: After creation, what went wrong?

Broken Covenant

1. COVENANT: another name for Testament is covenant.
 - How would you define a covenant? A strong agreement between two people wanting to form a relationship.
 - God who created man wanted to form a relationship with Man...a very personal God!

Read Gen. 2:16–17.

- God provided all food they could ever want.
- God made just one rule in the covenant for relationship.
- Adam/Eve broke the covenant by disobeying that one rule.

Read Gen. 3:1–7.

2. SIN: to miss God's standard which breaks the relationship.
 - Obeying God's rules is the standard. When we disobey God, we are in rebellion to God. When Adam disobeyed, the covenant relationship was broken. Adam & Eve realized they were naked and ashamed.
3. SEPARATION: sin causes a separation from God.

Read Gen. 3:8–10.

 - God asks, "Where are you?" Why do you think he asks that?
 - God knows the relationship is broken; the closeness with God is no longer available. We cannot overcome the gap between God and man in our own efforts.
4. RECONCILIATION
 - What does reconciliation mean? To restore a broken relationship. Bringing 2 parties together. When he made man, God could have forced man to be in a relationship with Him. Why do you think He did not?
 - God throughout history wants man to come back into relationship with Him. God could have killed Adam when He sinned, but instead He provided for him.

Read Gen. 3:21.

- The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. God still cared about them.
5. GOD'S PLAN
 - Creator God had a plan from the beginning to reconcile man...He promised to send someone who would pay the penalty for sin so that we can be brought back into relationship. Jesus, who was God and perfect, would come to earth as a man. When He died on the cross, He would bridge the gap between Man and God so we would have a way to enter relationship with God.

What is the rest of the Old Testament about?

1. After creation, the people continued to multiply. God chose Abraham and his descendants to be God's people through whom Jesus would be born. This nation of Israel was to have a covenant relationship with God.
2. The Old Testament tells the history of the people of Israel, the Jews. Creator God

provided special laws for them to follow and gave them kings and prophets to direct them on how to live. He wanted them to have faith in God that would lead to obedience. Much of the time they failed. Creator God continued to tell them that a Promised one, a Messiah, would come and pay the full penalty for their sins. These Jews were then supposed to tell the rest of the world about the One True God and the opportunity to be reconciled and have an intimate relationship to God. That was God's plan.

3. Prophecies: Jeremiah was a prophet that let them know there was coming a new covenant, not based on obeying laws, but on God's forgiveness.

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. Discuss.

- Look at the sheet of prophecies written in the Old Testament hundreds of years before Jesus was born. (born in Bethlehem, of a virgin, pierced side, etc.) Creator God prophesied what would happen ahead of time so that when Jesus came, they would recognize Him and enter in the new covenant with God. Next week we'll talk about Jesus in the New Testament.

Reflection

- What strikes you about these prophecies? Since Jesus fulfilled the prophecies perfectly, what do you think that tells us about God and His plan? Do you have any questions about what we discussed?

*Content adapted from Storyteller's Bible Study (Bill Perry, Multi-Language Media, 2002) and "Discover Jesus" study (Kelly Brown)

Lesson 3: Life of Jesus in the New Testament

Review last week. Who do people think Jesus is in your culture?

Jesus fulfilled the Covenant

1. Jesus' Birth: Glorious plan, not accident
 - Luke 1:26–38 miraculous conception
 - Micah 5:2 Birthplace foretold—fulfilled prophecies.

2. Jesus Life/Ministry/Teaching/Claims
 - Healed people, taught them about God, claimed to be the Savior. His life and ministry reflects God's desire to have a relationship with us.
 - a. His example: By His example we see a:
 - Humble servant: washed disciples' feet
 - Holy One...without sin
 - Friend to the friendless: tax collectors, prostitutes, doctors
 - b. His Teaching: By His teaching we see:
 - He honors the authority of Scripture... "Thus it is written"
 - Reveals the truth about life. He did not misrepresent for popularity.
 - c. His ministry: (Our Need-Meeter)
 - Compassionate: healed lepers by touch, blessed children
 - Met big & small needs (sickness/death vs. the hairs on our head)
 - Powerful: even raised the dead!
 - d. His claims: He said, "I AM the..."
 - Savior, Son of God, The Bread of Life, Light of the World, The Way, the Truth, the Life, etc.

3. Jesus' Death
 - At Passover, Jesus said, "This cup...is the new covenant in my blood." Luke 22:20.
 - His death was NOT accidental or man's idea.
 - Jesus told Pilate, "For this reason I have come..." (to lay His life down).
 - Jesus was Redeemer...man's final payment/punishment for our sin.

4. Jesus' resurrection
 - Jesus came back to life! He conquered death! Soon after His resurrection, Jesus spoke to 2 discouraged disciples..."And beginning with Moses & the prophets, He explained things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." The prophecies were fulfilled!
 - Resurrection shows God's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice for man. Jesus returned to heaven and is available to us through prayer.

Covenant Relationship

- God's reconciliation plan is far older than 2,000 years. He's been calling "where are you?" from the beginning. The way back to God came by Jesus' death & resurrection.
- Plan: to win us back into an intimate Covenant relationship with God forever. We come to relationship by faith in His grace. Can't be good enough or pay debt.
- Made new life possible by His plan. 2-way COVENANT:
 - Our part: We must choose to repent (confess & turn from sin). We must accept His free gift of salvation and follow Him.
 - His part: He will forgive us, fulfill our lives, and allow us to be with Him forever.

- Read John 3:16–17 and John 14:6. What do these 2 verses tell us about Jesus? After this talk, what new impressions do you have about Creator God? About Jesus? Would you like to study His life?

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