

Grow Track 4

Why the Bible is Amazing and How to Study It

Written and Compiled
by Marcia L. Gillis

Copyright © 2023 by **Marcia Gillis**. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.

Table of Contents

SELF-STUDY AND SMALL GROUP USE	
Student Syllabus	3
Teaching Plans (See Appendix)	
INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY	
Discover...Go Deeper...Disciple	6
MIRACULOUS NATURE OF THE BIBLE	
Amazingly Accurate Preservation	7
The Scrolls	8
Amazingly Preserved	9
Fulfilled Prophecies of Jesus	10
MORE ABOUT THE BIBLE	
A Library of Many Books	12
The Old Testament Books	13
A Startling Comparison	14
The New Testament Books	15
MORE ABOUT BIBLE STUDY	
Sound Principles of Bible Study and Interpretation	16
Bible Study Tools	19
Sources for Research on Some Topics	20
HOW IT FITS TOGETHER IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER	
A Bible Timeline	21
MORE ABOUT JESUS, CHRISTIAN BELIEFS AND THE GOSPEL	
The New Testament: The Central Focus on Jesus	22
God's Love Letter is Amazing: Basic Christian Beliefs	24
New Testament Figures	23
The Gospel Simply Put: One-Verse Evangelism	26
A NEW STUDY TO BEGIN	
John	28
ENDNOTES	27
APPENDIX	
Teaching Plans	33
Covenant	
Comparative Religion	47

Grow Track 4 – Student Syllabus

(For every meeting each student will need a laptop, phone and a hard copy of the Bible, plus the textbook.
Each student will need to purchase a notebook and some colored pencils)

Purpose – A study designed to provide group participants with information to build their faith and help them grow stronger as they learn to study the Bible and develop a daily habit of doing so.

The Textbook: “Lord, Teach Me to Study the Bible in 28 Days,” by Kay Arthur

Class Format:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

Section 3 – Discussion of Bible Study Assignments

The weekly homework assignments will include:

1. Doing, reviewing and applying the principles in the book and handouts and studying selected Bible portions from the book.
2. Memorizing specific Bible verses.
3. Writing out what God is doing in your life and what He is teaching you.

CLASS 1 - Introduction, Class Expectations and the Miraculous Nature of the Bible

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read handout, “Basics: Inductive Bible Study Approach.”
2. Read book introduction (“Lord, Teach Me to Study the Bible”).
3. Do week 1 studies, day 1-3.
4. Chart how you manage and use your time each day/hour during the next 7 days. (Include everything: Sleep, getting ready, job, driving, kid interruptions, appointments, calls, devotions, recreation, etc. Determine what will be the best time period in which to do your Bible study and make note of what you need to change to manage your time better.)

CLASS 2 – Bible Overview and Study Guidelines

ASSIGNMENTS

Review what you have learned, so far. Review Week 1, day 1-3 studies, and review at least one handout each day making note of how the knowledge you are gaining is impacting you. Complete week 1, day 4-7 studies.

CLASS 3 – How it Fits Together, Old Testament Overview and Sound Study

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Watch the “Overview of the Old Testament” video again
2. Review the “Bible Timeline” handout.
3. Memorize John 1:1-4.
4. Do Week 2 studies, Day 8-11.

CLASS 4- Bible Evidence and Original Language

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 2 studies, Day 12-14.
2. Review John 1:1-4, read Colossians 1:13-23, and memorize Colossians 1:15-16.

CLASS 5-Bible Evidence and Genre

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 3 studies, day 15-18.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-16 and memorize Colossians 1:17. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.

CLASS 6 – New Testament and Scripture Application

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 3 studies, day 19-21.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-17 and memorize Colossians 1:18-19. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.

CLASS 7 – Basic Christian Beliefs

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 4 studies, day 22-24.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-19 and memorize Colossians 1:19-20. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.
3. Review “Christian Doctrine” handout.

CLASS 8 – More About the New Testament

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 4 studies, day 25-28.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-20 and memorize Romans 3:23. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.

CLASS 9 – The Uniqueness of Christianity

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Review John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-20; Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.
2. Review the “One-Verse-Evangelism” handout.
3. Write down what this study has meant to you. What are the most important things you have learned? How has this course changed the way you have studied the Bible and will study going forward?

CLASS 10 – Continuing in John

Video: “Overview of John” (Bible Project, 3 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS

Continue studying John and then other books of the Bible, until you have read the whole Bible utilizing the tools you have learned. Be sure to obtain a good study Bible to help you.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

DISCOVER...GO DEEPER...DISCIPLE (Summarized from Precepts Ministry.)

“Inductive” means we use the Bible as the primary source of study to learn about God and what the Bible teaches.

The Method

The Inductive Study Method is an investigative approach to the Bible using three basic components:

Observation, Interpretation, and Application. In this approach, individual time spent observing Scripture to know what the Bible says and using sound principles of interpretation to understand what it means can result in a God-honoring and fulfilling life of application of the scriptures.

I. **OBSERVATION ...Discover what it says**

1. Begin with prayer.
2. Ask the “5 W’s and an H” (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?), then follow with careful observation and investigative interpretation.
3. Mark key words/key phrases (such as God, Christ, Devil, Suffering...) and phrases.
4. Identify/Make lists. (Make lists from key words and people – Compile in the margin.)
5. Mark/watch for contrasts and comparisons.
6. Note/Mark expressions of time.
7. Double underline in green all geographic locations.
8. Mark terms of conclusion.
9. Identify Chapter Themes.

II. **INTERPRETATION ...Discover what it means**

1. Remember that context rules.
 - a. Interpret the verse in light of the whole chapter/whole book/whole Bible. (This means you need to be reading the Bible through over and over again.)
 - b. Know basic background information that will help you understand the passage better. Consider the culture and the particular people/situation being addressed.
2. Always seek the full counsel of the Word of God.
3. Remember that Scripture will never contradict Scripture.
4. Don’t base your convictions on an obscure passage of Scripture.
5. Interpret Scripture literally.
6. Look for the single meaning of the passage.

III. **APPLICATION ...Discover how it works**

1. Ask: What does this mean in regard to our world?
2. Ask - How does this apply to me?
3. Ask: What needs to change in the way I think and act?

Amazingly Accurate Preservation

“Are the copies of the Old Testament writings we have today anything like the originals of so long ago? Amazingly, the answer is yes. We can be confident that what we have today is nearly identical to the ancient copies, for the reasons given below.”ⁱ

“The Scribes

“The copies of the scrolls of Hebrew scripture were made by a special group known as scribes. Israelite scribes learned their craft as a kind of holy profession in family-like guilds as is attested in the Bible that mentions “*Clans of Scribes* who inhabit Jabez” I Chronicles 2:55.

Scribe is from the Hebrew word *sofer*. Its root meaning is “to count.” Indeed, scribes were careful counters making sure every word and letter were accounted for. The conditions and regulations under which they worked were very strict. Today, their standards would be considered fanatical.”ⁱⁱ

They worked under rules designed to insure utmost accuracy.

- “No word or letter could be written from memory (the scribe had to say the word aloud).
- Before writing the sacred name of God, the scribe had to pause and wipe his pen.
- A scroll was discarded if spelling errors were found.
- Perhaps most important—after copying, every single word and every letter was counted to verify accuracy and to be sure they matched the original.
- Before beginning, a scribe would cleanse himself in a ritual bath—vivid evidence of the seriousness and sacredness of the task of writing a scroll. He was going to write the names of God and must do so with proper devotion and ritual purity.”ⁱⁱⁱ

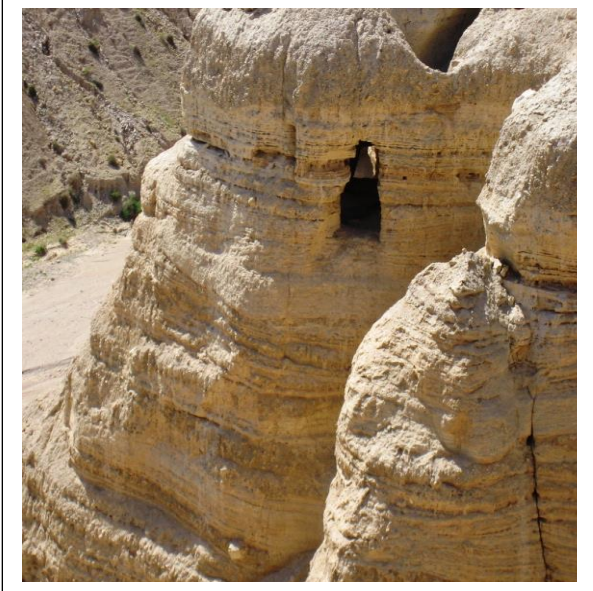


Artist's depiction of scribe copying manuscript



Copyright © 2023 by Marcia Gillis. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.

The Scrolls



The Dead Sea Scrolls

You may have heard the amazing story of how, in 1947, a Bedouin shepherd boy was out with his flock along the cliffs on the northwest side of the Dead Sea, when he thoughtlessly threw a rock into one of the caves.

When he heard something break, he investigated and found ancient scrolls stored in large pottery jars.

By mistake, this young shepherd had found the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. Many of these scrolls date back to before the time of Jesus, and they include copies of sections of every Old Testament book except Esther. There is an almost complete copy of the book of Isaiah. Until this discovery, the oldest available copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were from around 900 AD.

“These Dead Sea scrolls provided Hebrew text that was one thousand years earlier and would show if the text had been corrupted over ten centuries.” So it was a priceless opportunity to see if copies done so much later in any way resembled much earlier copies, which were closer to the originals.

So, just how well had the scribes done their job over so many generations? Scholars analyzed and discovered very few differences, primarily on small matters such as minor spelling variations. This is amazing and nearly impossible.^{iv} “The first ancient Qumran texts led to just thirteen minor yet clarifying alterations in the modern Revised Standard Version of the Bible.”^v



Section of scroll of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls

AMAZINGLY PRESERVED



The Bible is so readily available to us now in every conceivable format and in so many versions that we can easily overlook the marvel of how the Bible survived the centuries and the many attempts to destroy it from as early as 167 BC to our current time period.

The mad tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC decreed that "The books of the law (i.e. Jewish scripture) that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death."

Of Diocletian (284-316), the ruler immediately preceding Constantine, Eusebius, the historian said, "royal edicts were published everywhere, (Truth Magazine XIX: 31, pp. 483-485, June 12, 1975)

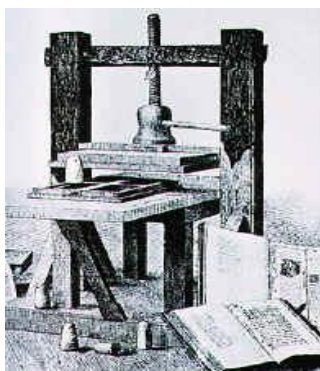
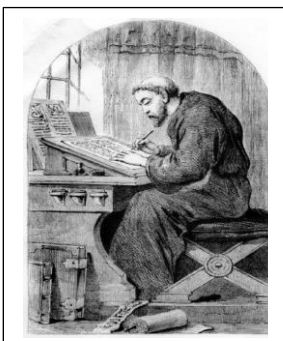
But God's Word prevailed!

Other obstacles also kept the Bible from the people, including illiteracy, language, cultural barriers and difficulty in making copies. The church in the middle Ages spread to diverse peoples who spoke different languages.

The monasteries carefully attended to the copying of the Bible, but it was a slow process, every copy was done by hand. A single copy of the Bible could take up to a whole year for a scribe to write.

But even if the Bible had been available, most of the population would not have been able to read it. For example in fourteenth and fifteenth century Europe, only ten percent of the population could read and only two percent could read effectively.

The invention of the printing press (1440) and the translation of the Bible into everyday language, by John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and re-formers like Martin Luther (1483-1546) brought about a reformation!



70 Major Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus

Copyright © 2023 by Marcia Gillis. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.

OT PASSAGE	PROPHECY	NT FULLMENT
Gen 3:15	God promises a Savior.	Gal 4:4-5; Matt 1:18
Gen 3:15	Born of a woman.	Gal 4:4-5; Matt 1:18
Gen 22:18	Descendant of Abraham.	Matt 1:1, Lk 3:34, Ro 4:13
Gen 26:1-5	Descendant of Ab's son Isaac.	Ro 9:7; Heb 11:18; Matt 1:2
Gen 28:10-14	Descendant Ab grandson Jacob.	Matt 1:2; Luke 3:34
Gen 49:10	Ab's great grandson Judah.	Matt 1:3; Luke 3:33
Is 11:1-10	Descendant of Jesse from Judah.	Matt 1:3; Luke 3:33
2 Sam 7:12-16	Descendant of King David, Jesse's son	Matt 1:6; Luke 3:31
Isaiah 11:1	To come after great destruction for Israel	Luke 3:1-23 (Babylon destroys)
Jer 23:3-6	After the regathering of the exiles.	Luke 3:1-23 (Jews return home)
Daniel 9:24-26	After the rebuilding of Jerusalem.	Luke 3:1-23 (Rebuilt when Jesus came)
Genesis 49:10	After a succession of rulers from Judah.	Matt 2
Ezekiel 21:26-27	After disruption to Davidic king.	Matt 2 (Zedekiah the last Davidic King)
Isaiah 7:13-14	To be miraculously born of a virgin.	Matt 1:18-26; Luke 1:26-36
Isaiah 7:14	Messiah to be called Emmanuel.	Matt 1:23
Daniel 9:26	Roman destruction of Jerusalem after.	Luke 3:1-23 (Rome destroyed 70 AD)
Malachi 3:1	He would arrive when Jeru had temple.	Matt 21:12 (Temple destroyed 70 AD)
Isaiah 40:1-9	There would be a forerunner before.	Matt 3:1-4 (John the Baptist)
Malachi 3:1	Messenger would prepare the way.	Mark 1:1-11
Daniel 9:24-27	483 years after call to restore Jeru	John 1:29-34 (Happened 457 BC)
Isaiah 61:1-2	Tells about Jesus' public ministry.	Luke 4:14-30
Isaiah 9:1-2	Ministry in Galilee, light to Gentiles.	Matt 4:12-17
Isaiah 35:4-6	Miracles to be performed.	Matt 4:23-25 (46 occasions of miracles)
Ps 78:1-2	Would teach in parables.	Matt 13:3, 13-15
Deut 18:15-18	He would be prophet, leader, deliverer.	John 5:45-47; 6:14
Isaiah 42:1-9	He would be humble and meek.	Matt 11:28-30
Ps 2:1-12	He would be the Son of God.	Matt 14:33
Isaiah 9:6-7	He would be called Mighty God.	Matt 1:23, John 10:30, 20:27-29
Zech 9:9	He would ride a lowly donkey into Jeru	Matt 21:6-9
Jer 31:31-34	A "new covenant" with sin-forgiveness.	Heb 8
Ps 41	The betrayal of Jesus.	John 13:18

OT PASSAGE	PROPHECY	NT FULLMENT
Ps 22:6	Messiah would be despised.	Luke 23:21-23
Ps 118:22-24	Rejected, though the cornerstone.	Matt 21:42-43
Is 53:1-3	Despised and rejected.	Matt 27:21-23
Dan 9:24-26	The timing of his rejection.	Mark 15:1-15
Is 53:7	Persecuted.	Matt 27:27-31
Isaiah 53:7	Silent before his accusers.	Matt 27:12-14
Is 50:6-7	Spat upon and beaten.	Matt 26:67
Ps 35:19, 69:4	Hated without reason or cause.	John 15:25
Is 53:12	Would be "numbered with the transgressors."	Luke 22:37, 23:32
Isaiah 50:4-10	Would willingly submit to God and abuse.	Matt 26:47-56
Is 50:4-10	Would serve God with perfect obedience.	Matt 26:39, John 8:28
Gen 22:1-18	Isaac near sacrifice foreshadows Jesus.	John 19:1-37
Ps 22	Mocked for his faith in God.	Matt 27:39
Ps 22:17-18	Stripped of his clothing.	Luke 23:34-35
Ps 22:18	Onlookers would cast lots for his clothes.	Matt 27:35, Luke 23:34, John 19:23
Ps 22:16	Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced.	John 19:37, 20:27
Ps 22:15	His suffering would include thirst.	John 19:28
Ps 22:1	The Messiah would cry out to God.	Matt 27:46
Zech 12:10	Piercing of Jesus.	John 19:34-37
Is 53:12	The Messiah would intercede for sinners.	Matt 10:32, Luke 23:34, Romans 8:34
Isaiah 53:4-9	He would suffer and die for sins of others.	John 19:1-37, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 John 4:10
Is 53:8-9	Cut from the land of the living (executed).	John 19:1-37
Daniel 9:26	"Cut off" (executed).	John 19:1-37
Gen 3:15	He would defeat evil at his own expense.	John 19:1-37, 2 Cor 5:21, 1 John 4:10
Isaiah 53:9	Buried in a rich man's grave.	Matt 27:57-61
Ps 16:8-11	He would be resurrected.	Jn 20:1-18, Acts 2:29-32, 13:32-37, 1 Cor 15
Isaiah 53:10-12	He would be resurrected.	John 20:1-18, Acts 1:8
Ps 110	To be seated at the right hand of God.	Matt 26:64, Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:1-12
Isaiah 11:10	Messiah would appeal to Gentiles.	Acts 1:8, 13:47-48
Isaiah 42:1-4	He would impact the world.	Matt 28:19-20, John 12:18-21
Isaiah 42:6	He would be a light to people around world.	Luke 2:22-40
Zech 9:9-11	Worldwide impact.	Acts 1:8, 13:47-48
Ps 110	Judgment Day and Kingdom of Heaven.	Daniel 7:13-14, 12:1-2; Luke 1:31 (Future)

MORE ABOUT THE BIBLE:

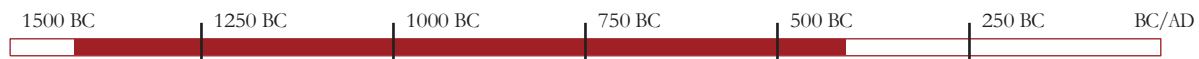
A Library of Many Books

It is divided into two major sections:

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1, 2 Samuel
1, 2 Kings
1, 2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

The Old Testament consists of 39 Books. In the Hebrew Bible some of those 39 books are combined into 24 books. The Hebrew Bible combines 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles and Ezra & Nehemiah into single books, and the last 12 (“Minor Prophets”) as one. The Old Testament covers thousands of years of history and was written over a very long time, at least a thousand years, from 1400-400 BC.



THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts of the Apostles
Romans
1, 2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1, 2 Thessalonians
1, 2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James
1, 2 Peter
1, 2 and 3 John
Jude
Revelation

There are 27 New Testament books. The New Testament was written over a much shorter time than the Old Testament. It was written over a period of about 50 years from about 45 to 95 AD.^{vi}



Clarification: Terminology and Format:

“Old” does not mean obsolete. It could be better called the “first” and “second” testaments, or “earlier” and “later”. Also, most Bible are not organized chronologically. For example, the prophets lived/the wisdom books were written during various time periods, described in the Historical books. (Besides the Bibles organized by “books”, there are also Bibles organized chronologically.)

Copyright © 2023 by Marcia Gillis. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.

The Old Testament Books.

LAW

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus,
Number, Deuteronomy

HISTORY

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and
2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1
and 2 Chronicles, Ezra,
Nehemiah, Esther

WISDOM – POETRY

Job, Psalm, Proverbs,
Ecclesiastes, Song of
Solomon

PROPHETS

Isaiah, Jeremiah,
Lamentations, Ezekiel,
Daniel

MINOR PROPHETS

Hosea, Joel, Amos,
Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,
Nahum, Habakkuk,
Zephaniah, Haggai,
Zechariah, Malachi

The first five books are called **the Law** or *Torah* or *Pentateuch*. Genesis contains the account of Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, and the calling of Abraham to father a great people, the Israelites. Ab's descendants go to Egypt to escape famine and are later enslaved. In Exodus through Deuteronomy, we are told how God used Moses to deliver them and of their wandering in the wilderness, before going into the promised-land. Also included, is the giving of the Ten Commandments and the various ritual and communal laws.

After Moses' dies the Jews are led by Joshua, and then by various judges. The people want a king. The other **historical** books give accounts of the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon, the division of Israel into two kingdoms, and the unfaithfulness of both Israel and Judah. Finally, the two kingdoms are captured: the North by Assyria in 721 BC, the South by Babylon in 586 BC. Ezra and Nehemiah tell of the return after 400 years of captivity to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem wall. (Note—The captivity and return were prophesied, ahead of time.)

The **wisdom** books focus on worship and wisdom. "The Psalms, known in Hebrew as "the book of praises," promote worship by declaring the works and attributes of God. Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon promote wisdom, telling God's people not only how to live, but to live with God's blessing."¹

The **prophet's** main duty was to speak forth God's message to His people in the historical context of what was happening. They warned against idolatry. They declared judgment on the people when they departed from God's ways, but they also spoke about the love and compassion of God to forgive, call His people back, establish a new covenant, send a promised Messiah and ultimately fulfill His purposes on earth.

The **Minor Prophets** are called minor because they are shorter books. These prophetic writers also speak of judgment and comfort. Through prophets, the Jews are constantly warned of the punishments for unfaithfulness to God's ways and God's faithfulness to restore his people, in spite of their sins. The prophetic books, themselves, often describe the high price these faithful mouthpieces paid for their unpopular and courageous declarations. Then, as now, people did not want to hear truth.

A Startling Comparison

The original New Testament writings were all completed before the year 100 AD, some within just a few years of Christ's resurrection. None of the original writings is known to exist today. What we have are copies of copies. Can we be confident that these copies are accurate copies of what was originally written?

Scholars have found a wealth of manuscripts, copies and fragments that substantiates the reliability of the New Testament writings far beyond that available for any other writings from the ancient world. The wealth of evidence is simply staggering.^{vii}

In the chart below you will see how the New Testament compares to other ancient famous literature, in regard to when the originals were written, the age and number of the copies. It's a staggering comparison!



Author	Title	Date Written	Earliest copy available	Interval	# of copies for comparison
Herodotus	History	450 BC	900 AD	1,350 years	8
Caesar	Gallic Wars	50 BC	900 AD	950 yrs.	10
Tacitus	Annals	100 AD	1100 AD	1,000 years	20
Pliny	Natural History	100 AD	850 AD	750 years	7
(Various)	New Testament	50-100 AD	250 AD	200	5,000+

The Bible is a very ancient book. Its antiquity is a wonder. It is a marvel that the Bible has remained until the present time. I am quite sure it would not have, had it not been that God had purposed that it should never be destroyed. Relatively few books survive the decade in which they are printed. Very, very few survive for a century. Their make-up is such that the elements tend to destroy them. Age and water rot them, insects eat them, careless handling destroys them, ink fades, and covers pull loose. But the Word of God remains.

The New Testament

GOSPELS

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

HISTORY

Acts of the Apostles

PAUL'S LETTERS

Romans
1 and 2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 and 2 Thessalonians
1 and 2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon

GENERAL LETTERS

Hebrews
James
1 and 2 Peter
1, 2 and 3 John
Jude

APOCALYPSE

Revelation

The four Gospels are narrative accounts of Jesus' life. Though they cover much overlapping material, they are written from different perspectives. Matthew targets a Jewish audience; Mark is a briefer, fast-action gospel; Luke, a Gentile doctor, writes more for the Greek mind; John goes into more personal and theological reflection than the others.

The Acts of the Apostles is introduced by its author, Luke, as being a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. It is the history of the early Christian church from the time that Jesus ascended into heaven, and the Day of Pentecost, until the time of Paul's imprisonment in Rome, around the year 60 AD.

Paul's Letters were written to various churches and individuals, generally in response to a crises. Some were written to address problems in churches he had founded (e.g. I & II Corinthians), or to encourage his close co-laborers (e.g. I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon). Some of were written while he was a prisoner (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). Paul's passionate writings generally include doctrinal material, apocalyptic themes and Christian teachings with practical applications for everyday life. A repetitive underlying theme in Paul's writings is to know Christ and make Him known.

The General Letters are those written by others besides Paul. They were usually written to churches or groups of Christians to deal with needs, problems or questions that had arisen. In these letter, believers are encouraged to stand strong in the faith, even though they were dealing with many difficulties. They also warn against false teachings that were threatening the churches' sound Gospel foundation.

Revelation was written by John, while a prisoner on the Island of Patmos, approximately 85-95 A.D. Its purpose is to give encouragement and hope for all Christians to continue watching for the return and triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also is to warn of the Final Judgment that nonbelievers will endure at the end. Revelation is full of wonderful God-given visions.

Copyright © 2023 by Marcia Gillis. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.

BIBLE STUDY

SOUND PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY/INTERPRETATION (HERMENEUTICS)

Doctrine and teaching must follow sound principles of biblical interpretation to avoid error.

Copyright © 2023 by Marcia Gillis. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.

The Bible itself is the primary source of study to learn about God and what the Bible teaches. To get to know God, we must study the Bible, His revealed Word.

It is very important that Christians learn to properly study the Bible. There are sound principles that must be followed to avoid bizarre interpretations, based upon inadequate foundations. Faulty interpretations are most likely to take place when verses are taken out of context of the whole, symbolic meaning is read into verses meant to be taken literally, historical context is not considered, Scripture is not used to interpret Scripture and original language is not considered for difficult passages and concepts.

Below are some basic principles which must be followed:

CONTEXT RULES

1. You must consider the historical, geographical, political, literary genre and cultural context, in relation to the passage/chapter/book.
2. Develop a personal habit of reading the Bible through regularly each year, so that you have a context in which to base your understanding on what a particular passage means. (Download the spoken Word on to your Phone and listen to it while you work or drive, to continue build/refresh your knowledge of the whole of Scripture. Invest in a respected study Bible.)
3. As you study, ask: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
4. Consider the relationship of various chapters and verses to each other to determine meaning.
5. Don't base your interpretation/doctrine on a single verse, but on the whole of Scripture.

SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE

1. Obscure passages must be understood in the light of clearer ones.
2. Remember that no part of the Bible can contradict any other part. If one passage seems to contradict another, one of the passages is being misinterpreted, or even both.
3. As God's Word, the Bible must be consistent with itself.
4. Don't base your convictions on an obscure passage of Scripture.

INTERPRET SCRIPTURE LITERALLY

1. Scripture is to be read in its literal sense.
2. Understand God's words just as you would interpret the language of normal discourse.
3. Look first for the literal meaning, not some mystical, deeper, hidden, secret or spiritualized interpretation.
4. If there is symbolic meaning, use Scripture to interpret Scripture..

CONSIDER GRAMMER/ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TO DETERMINE MEANING

1. Be aware of the sequences of the words and phrases, tenses, and part of speech (verb or noun), to determine meaning.
2. Often it is necessary to consider the original language to fully understand the passage. (Today, there are Greek/Hebrew lexicons, Bible study software, or free sites like www.blueletterbible.org , www.biblegateway.com, etc. that can help you understand.)

CONSIDER THE “TYPE” OF LITERATURE (GENRE)

Historical Narratives: (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua through to Esther. Parts of the Gospels, and the book of Acts.) These describe specific actual historical events from God’s perspective. They tell us what God is like (His character and nature), what God likes/dislikes, how He deals with people who obey and honor Him, and those who disobey and hate Him, and give principles and lessons. The Gospels take excerpts from the life of Jesus.

Poetry and Songs: (Primary Psalms and Song of Solomon, although Job and some other books contain poetic portions) These are expressions of emotion to God: happiness, joy, love, worship, trust, hope, security, discouragement, guilt, repentance, suffering, fear, anger, despair and repentance. When it comes to exposition of biblical poetry it is important to understand figures of speech, types of parallelism in Hebrew poetry and the different types of Psalms. (1. *Simile* – comparison using “like” or “as”; 2. *Metaphor* – Comparison where one thing represents another; 3. *Allegory* – Extended metaphor around a specific theme; 4. *Metonymy* – Substitutes one object or concept for that of another; 5. *Synecdoche* – a part is made to represent the whole or visa versa; 6. *Hyperbole* – Exaggeration for dramatic effect; 7. *Apostrophe* – Addresses absent/imaginary person as if there, Personification, “Lift up your heads, O gates,” Psalms 24:7; 8. *Antropomorphism* – Speaks of God as having human body.)

Legal Writings: (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Wisdom/Wise Sayings) These writings indicate God’s high moral standard, His idea of justice, principles of commonsense government, health and safety, and His pattern and order for acceptable worship. They are not meant to be legalistic instructions and commands to Christians. They indicate God’s view of wisdom as opposed to man’s view of wisdom. They contain wise sayings, and practical advice on how to live life and avoid trouble and hardship.

Wisdom literature: can be found primarily in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. (Note: Proverbs teach probable truth, not absolute truth.)

Prophecy: (Old Testament, from Isaiah to Malachi) It is God’s message to a particular person/group and sometimes to all humanity. Sometimes, but not necessarily foretelling the future. The vast majority speaks of the present (at the time of the prophet).

Teachings of Jesus: (Gospels) These are direct statements of truth from Jesus concerning the nature and character of God, the kingdom of God, heaven, what God expects of us, principles of righteous living, and the ways in which Jesus fulfills the OT prophecies.

Parables: Stories with a punch line. Most parables have only one message or central idea, and even if multiple messages are present, one of them will be the chief idea. Note also that they are not perfect analogies. They are found in parts of the Gospels.

Epistles: (Romans to Jude) Letters written with a clear purpose to an identified audience. The epistle writer presents arguments to correct, rebuke, defend, instruct, praise and encourage the readers.

Apocalypse: (Revelation, and large parts of Ezekiel and Daniel) These describe prophecies in which God “reveals” His hidden future plans and is a view of God’s relationship to human history. Rather than work within it, God radically intervenes from outside it. The book Revelation is a vision of warning and encouragement to the early church as it was going through immense persecution.

APPLY BIBLICAL TRUTH

1. The Scripture is meant to be applied to life, not just read.
2. Ask: How does this apply today? How does this apply to me? What needs to change in the way I think and act?

We strongly recommend that all Bible students invest in one or two respected study Bibles. Be sure to make one of your study Bibles the Fire Bible (Global Study Edition) and, also, include an ESV Study Bible or an NASB Study Bible (Ryrie, Zondervan, or Inductive). The NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible (compiled by Jack Hayford), is also a great resource. All study Bibles include Bible book background information, cross references, maps, timelines and basic commentary, which is very helpful when study time is limited. Students, who want to go deeper, may wish to invest in some respected Bible study software.

BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

<https://www.youversion.com/apps>

Bring the beauty and truth of the Bible into everyday life. With the **YouVersion Bible App**, you can read, watch, listen, and share on your smartphone or tablet, and online at Bible.com

<https://www.biblestudytools.com>

Use our free online **Bible** to grow deeper in the Word. Read verses by topic, **study** Scripture while you highlight or underline verses and use a large library of popular resources.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/tools>

Bible study resources at Gospel.com. **Bible** studies and related resources will help you to grow in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word. View **Bible** studies · View Devotionals · View Daily emails · View **Bible** Reading Plans. **Bible** Gateway. Help. FAQs/Tutorials.

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/>

Get guidance for your personal **Bible study** time. Inspirational and popular trending articles focused on making **Bible study** life-changing.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

Read and **study** God's Word with **Bible study** software that has in-depth resources such as commentaries, Greek and Hebrew word **tools**, concordances, and more.

(See the APPENDIX for additional helps.)

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH ON SOME BIBLICAL TOPICS

<https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers>

Some Topics include:

- Baptism in the Holy Spirit
- The Doctrine of Creation
- Church Mission and Peacemaking
- Divine Healing
- Divorce and Remarriage
- End time Revival — Spirit-Led and Spirit-Controlled
- Eternal Punishment
- A Biblical Perspective on Gambling
- Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity
- Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Authority of Scripture
- Kingdom of God
- Positive Confession, The Believer And...
- Rapture of the Church
- Sanctity of Human Life - Abortion and Reproductive Issues
- Sanctity of Human Life - Suicide and Euthanasia
- The Security of the Believer
- The Role of Women in Ministry
- Worship in the Bible
- (Many other topics are included at this url under "topics.")

LOCAL PLACES FROM WHICH YOU CAN RECEIVE HELP

CELEBRATE RECOVER GROUPS (Help for addictions of any type: alcohol, pornography, gambling, etc.)

To locate a Celebrate Recovery group, go to: <http://locator.crgroups.info/>

MARRIAGE SUPPORT GROUPS

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/divorce-and-infidelity/when-your-marriage-needs-help/indications-you-need-help-for-your-marriage>

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/divorce-and-infidelity/when-your-marriage-needs-help/marriage-needs-help-booklet-overview>

To gain online help, go to: <https://relationship.supportgroups.com/>

There are many local counselors that can help you.

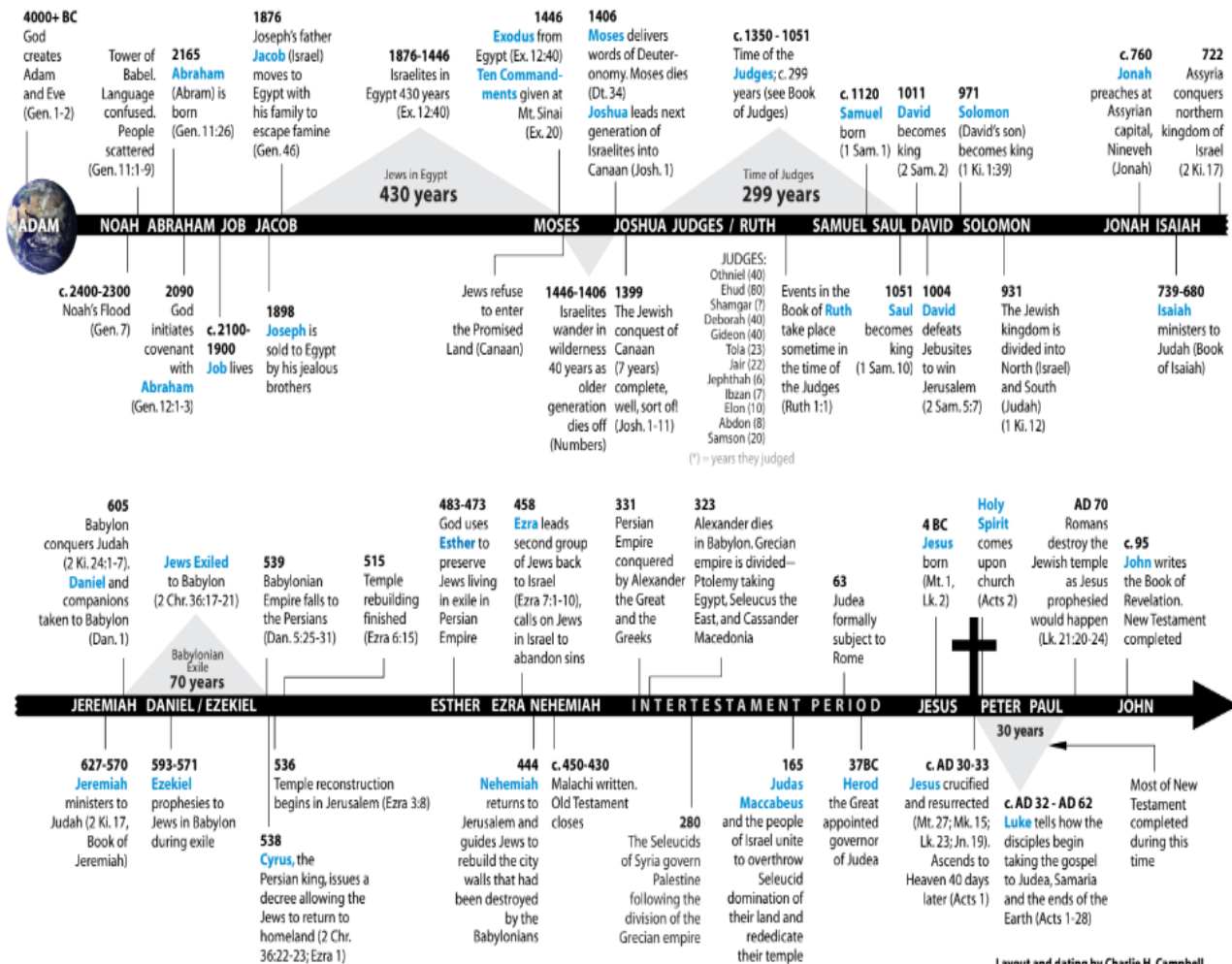
DIVORCE RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUPS

To locate a Divorce Recovery group, go to: <https://www.divorcecare.org/>

A TIMELINE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

~Major Events From Creation to the Completion of the New Testament~

c. = circa/about



Layout and dating by Charlie H. Campbell
Additional copies can be found at AlwaysBeReady.com

The New Testament: The Central Focus on Jesus

Copyright © 2023 by Marcia Gillis. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.

*...the life, character, and teaching of Christ
...constitute the most fascinating feature in the
history of Western man.*

Historian Will Durant



Jesus is seen as fulfillment of the promises

There are at least fifty predictions in the Old Testament about a coming Messiah, or Savior-Deliverer, that the New Testament writers saw fulfilled in Jesus. Here are just a few.

Old Testament Prediction	New Testament Fulfillment	Subject
Micah 5:2 Isaiah 7:14 Isaiah 35:5-6 Zech 11:12	Matthew 2:1 Matthew 1:23 Matthew 9:35 Matt 26:14-15	Born in Bethlehem Born of a virgin Cure deaf and blind Sold for 30 pieces of silver Betrayed by a friend Killed amidst criminals
Psalms 41:9 Psalm 2:16	Mark 14:17-21 Luke 23:33	

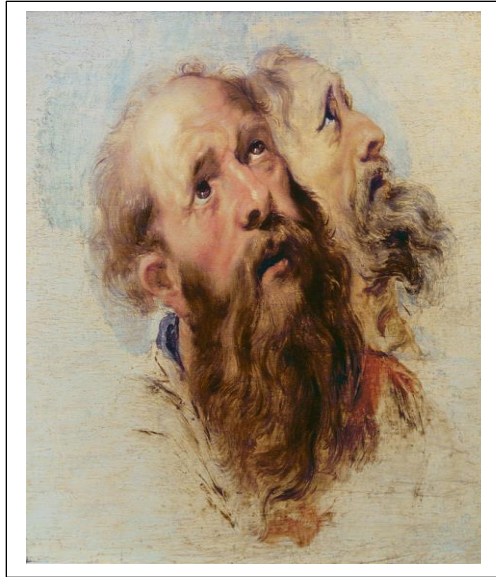
Jesus' life, ministry, and words were written down and passed on by His main followers. They spread this message throughout the world, in spite of terrible persecution. "The Gospel of Christ was boldly proclaimed as God's ultimate word, God manifested in human flesh. Christ, they said, came to show us what God was like, how He would save us, and how we should live." For many it seemed crazy. For the thousands who believed, —this message completely changed their lives, just as it does today.

The New Testament writers present Jesus as more than a great religious leader. He is presented as the personal fulfillment of centuries of promise, prophecy, waiting, and hope that is woven throughout the Old Testament, whose last book was written some 400 years before Jesus' birth. "And the New Testament also clearly and repeatedly speaks of Jesus coming again, a second time, to establish a kingdom of justice, love, truth and righteousness."

"The Jesus of the New Testament is seen offering an invitation to every human being on the face of the earth. The invitation is to repent of our sins, turn to God, accept Christ's death on the cross in our place for our sins, turn to Him in love and faith, make Him central in our lives, and seek His strength to live our lives in a way that will please God."^{viii}

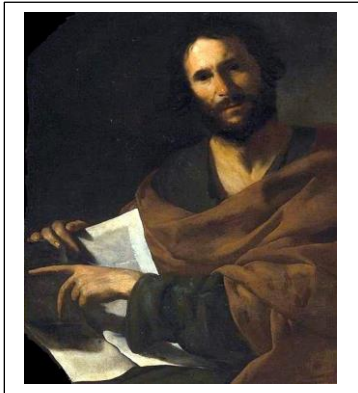
Other New Testament Figures

Copyright © 2023 by Marcia Gillis. Permission to duplicate for personal or small group use, but not for resale.



Peter was a fisherman and one of the first disciples Jesus called. He is a major figure in the four Gospels and key in the Acts expansion of the early church. He is also credited as writing two New Testament books and is likely the eye witness source for Mark's gospel. Christians identify with Peter because of his obvious flaws, impulsiveness and outright failures. Instead of being forgotten as a "loser," he found forgiveness, renewed faith and anointing to provide critical leadership for the early church.

Paul began as a persecutor of the church. He was a Roman citizen and Pharisee, trained by Gamaliel. His dramatic conversion led him to become perhaps the greatest missionary in the history (read it in Acts 9:1-12) of the church. He is credited as the author of almost half of all the New Testament, far more than anyone else. Paul's role was critical in interpreting how the Gospel was a universally available for all people, in all places and all times.



John is credited as the author of five of the New Testament books. When on the cross, Jesus asked John to take care of his mother. John appears to be the only apostle who did not die a martyr's death. Historical documents indicate that he wrote most of his books near the end of his life, and became the last man/Apostle standing. He lived into the AD 90's to provide important leadership for the churches in Asia Minor and other regions. John refers to himself as the *Apostle whom Jesus loved*. Certainly, his Gospel gives us the most personal account of Jesus.

GOD LOVE LETTER IS AMAZING!

About the Bible and God's Solution

The Bible has been translated into various languages from ancient scrolls, thousands of years old! Those scrolls were written on parchment, papyrus or copper. There are 66,000 ancient Bible manuscripts in existence! An early and popular English Bible translation, from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, is the King James Bible, completed in 1611 AD. Many people have a hard time understanding the old form of English used, in that translation. Today there are many great English translations that utilize more modern English, and so are easier to understand. Highly respected translations include: The New International Version (NIV), The English Standard Version (ESV), and the New American Standard Version (NASV). There are other helpful Bibles, like The Message which isn't a translation from the original Greek/Hebrew, but a version that attempts to further simplify the Bible language by paraphrasing the verses in an actual translation (like those already listed).

A STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

These Creeds state basic Biblical Christian beliefs that ALL Christian churches agree on. Religious groups that do not support all of the beliefs below, are NOT Christian groups.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.^{ix}

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

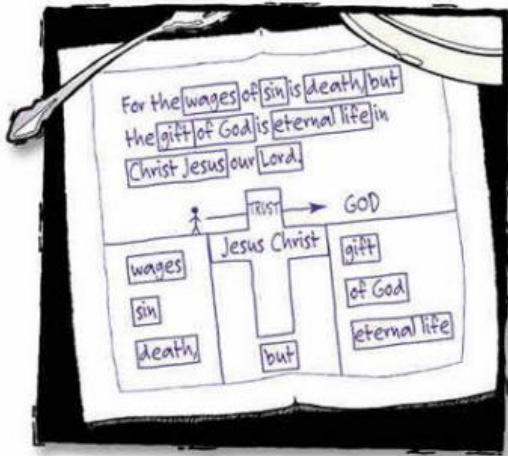
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.^x

ONE-VERSE EVANGELISM

(The following material is used by permission of Navigators for small group use. It summarizes the Gospel and can be used when you are trying to explain the Gospel message.)

ONE-VERSE EVANGELISM

How to Share Christ's Love Conversationally & Visually



By Randy D. Raysbrook

Many people feel that to be effective in evangelism they must memorize a complex illustration and a multitude of verses. But the Gospel is most powerful when shared with love, clarity, and simplicity.

One-Verse Evangelism® is a simple, interactive way to share Christ's love conversationally and visually. It is based on asking questions and sharing. It's easy to learn because it uses just one verse. One-Verse Evangelism® is also sensitive to peoples' busy schedules because it can be shared in just 10 or 15 minutes.

Here's a brief look at how it works. Let's say God's leading you to share the Gospel with your neighbor, Jeff. Write out Romans 6:23 on a piece of paper or a napkin: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NIV). Then put your Bible away. Ask Jeff if he would like to see a simple picture based on this verse that will explain God's relationship with people.

wages

Circle this word and ask, "How would you feel if your boss refused to pay you the wages that were due to you?" Deep down, we all know that it is only right that we get what we deserve. Similarly, we earn wages from God for how we have lived our lives.

sin

Draw a circle around "sin," asking your friend what he thinks when he hears this word. You might explain that sin is more an attitude than an action. It can be either actively fighting God or merely excluding Him from our lives. You can ask, "Has God ever seemed far away?" If he says "Yes," add that that's one of the things sin does—it makes God seem far away. Now draw two opposing cliffs with a gap in between.

death,

Circle this word and ask what thoughts come to mind. Explain that death in the Bible always means some kind of separation.

but

While circling this word, mention that it is important because it means that a sharp contrast in thought is coming. What we have just looked at is bad news; what follows is good news.

gift

Draw a circle around this word. Ask, "If wages are what a person earns, then what is a gift?" Remind your friend that someone must purchase every gift.

of God

Circle this and explain that the gift you are talking about is free. It is from God Himself. It's so special that no one else can give it. Ask, "How do you feel when someone gives you a special gift?"

eternal life

Circle these two words next, and then ask, "How would you define these words?" Contrast one side of the cliff, death, with the other side, eternal life. Ask, "What is the opposite of separation from God?"

Christ Jesus

Draw these words so they create a bridge between the two cliffs. Help your friend to consider that every gift has a giver, and only Jesus Christ can give the gift of eternal life.

TRUST

Write this word over the bridge you just drew.

Explain that friends trust each other, and tell your friend that Jesus wants a trusting friendship with him. All he has to do is admit that he is responsible for the "sin" of either fighting or excluding God from his life. That is what trust means—trusting that Jesus wants to forgive us for rejecting Him from our lives. At this point, you can ask him if he wants to start a relationship with God that will last forever. If he says "Yes," invite him to pray a short prayer in his own words, asking Jesus to forgive him.

Close by reminding him that this simple illustration shows what God is like: Someone who really cares about people, especially him. Invite him to read all about it in the Bible, perhaps beginning in the gospel of John.

Adapted with permission from One-Verse Evangelism, © 2000 Randy D. Raysbrook. All rights reserved. To order the booklet, contact Dawson Media at http://home.navigators.org/us/dawson/index.cfm?Entity=15&Department=267&Dept_Order=2&This_TopicOrder=2&This_SubtopicOrder=5, call (719) 594-2100, or write to Dawson Media, a ministry of The Navigators, P.O. Box 6000, Colorado Springs, CO 80934.

¹ Apostles Creed

¹ Episcopal Church *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), *The Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated. 2007. pp. 326–327. Retrieved 2013-02-18.

¹ Utilized the format contained in the online pdf at www.visionvideo.com/files/DTB_ColorBookLR.pdf. Content from commonly known information and study of the Bible.

¹ <https://www.westernseminary.edu/transformedblog/2016/09/29/the-story-of-the-bible-the-wisdom-books/>

¹ Utilized format and content from www.visionvideo.com/files/DTB_ColorBookLR.pdf

¹ Ibid. (This information is also available in many other sources.)

¹ Ibid

¹ Ibid

¹ Ibid

¹ Ibid

¹ Ibid

John, chapter 1 (NIV)

Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^a it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8** He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11** He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **12** Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13** children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”) **16** Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and^b is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

John the Baptist Denies Being the Messiah

19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders^c in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. **20** He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”

²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"^[d]

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with^[e] water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John Testifies About Jesus

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."^[f]

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter^[a]).

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe^{ἵνα} because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." ⁵¹ He then added, "Very truly I tell you,^ἡ you^ἡ will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on'^ἡ the Son of Man."

Appendix

Teacher Lesson Plans

Covenant

Comparative Religion

Grow Track 4 – Teaching Plans

(For every meeting the leader will need a laptop, and a large screen tv or projector, with hook-ups.)

Purpose – A study designed to provide group participants with information to build their faith and help them grow stronger as they learn to study the Bible and develop a daily habit of doing so.

The Textbook: “Lord, Teach Me to Study the Bible in 28 Days,” by Kay Arthur

Class Format:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

Section 3 – Discussion of Bible Study Assignments

The weekly homework assignments will include:

1. Doing, reviewing and applying the principles in the book and handouts and studying selected Bible portions from the book.
2. Memorizing specific Bible verses.
3. Writing out what God is doing in your life and what He is teaching you.

STUDENTS WILL NEED TO BRING A HARD COPY OF THE BIBLE EACH WEEK AND PHONE OR LAPTOP FOR CLASS RESEARCH.

CLASS 1 - Introduction, Class Expectations and the Miraculous Nature of the Bible

Needed:

Video: “How We Got the English Bible” (3 minutes)

Handouts: Papyrus Samples, “Dead Sea Scrolls” and “Basics: Inductive Bible Study approach.”

Other: Power point visuals to go with lecture. (Available free at www.ChurchAriseNow.com)

Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

Show the video. Pass out handouts and give the Power Point lecture at www.ChurchAriseNow.com resources tab “Amazing Bible...”.

I. Introduction

In the next ten weeks we will provide you with a foundation and tools you will use for the rest of your life. These tools will help you learn to feed yourself from God's Word and grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, the only one who can save you. It is important that you are diligent in doing the weekly homework assignments. Our hope is that you do the assignments out of a deep desire to learn more about God, His Word, Plan, Son and Love. As you do this you will become more excited about Him, grow, overcome the things that hold you back and be used of Him to share His love with others. He has a wonderful destiny planned for you, as you grow in His strength.

II. Video: "How We Got the English Bible" (3 minutes)

III. General Statement:

Our Bible can be compared to no other book. Only those who have not read and studied it would dare to compare it to others. In all ways it is miraculous.

Years ago, I was a children's pastor and, later, a preschool director. Each time I taught I would hold an open Bible and say, "The Bible is special because it is from God who made everything in the world. Many stories you hear are pretend stories that didn't really happen, but the Bible stories are true. They really happened. In the Bible we read how much God loved us, and sent His Son, Jesus, to show us that love. (Then, I would hug the Bible.) I love God's Word and want to read it as much as I can."

When we read the Bible on our cell phones, our children may think we are just looking at face book. They need to see us reading a hard copy of the Bible, and we need to tell them why the Bible is special, and about the ONE who died for them.

IV. Power Point Lecture

DISCUSS - What has really stood out to you today as a result of what you have learned? Has your thinking changed in any way?

ASSIGNMENTS

Read handout, "Basics: Inductive Bible Study Approach."

Read book introduction ("Lord, Teach Me to Study the Bible").

Do week 1 studies, day 1-3.

Chart how you manage and use your time each day/hour during the next 7 days. (Include everything: Sleep, getting ready, job, driving, kid interruptions, appointments, calls, devotions, recreation, etc. Determine what will be the best time period in which to do your Bible study and make note of what you need to change to manage your time better.)

CLASS 2 – Bible Overview and Study Guidelines

Needed:

Video: “Overview of the Bible” (17 minutes)

Handouts: “Old Testament,” “New Testament,” “Covenant,” “Sound Principles of Bible Study.”

Other: Lecture Power Points

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. Watch “Overview of the Bible.”
2. Quickly go over the Old and New Testament handouts, spending the most time on “Covenant”.
3. Allow time for questions and discussion.

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

Pass out the “Sound Principles...” handout and have a class member read the section on “Context.”

Section 3 - Discussion

DISCUSS what students learned as they completed the week 1, day 1-3 studies, using questions in back of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

Review what you have learned, so far. Review Week 1, day 1-3 studies, and review at least one handout each day making note of how the knowledge you are gaining is impacting you. Complete week 1, day 4-7 studies.

CLASS 3 – How it Fits Together, Old Testament Overview and Sound Study

Needed:

Video: “Overview of the Old Testament” (3 minutes)

Handouts: “Bible Timeline” and “How to Study...”

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. Show “Overview of the OT” video
2. Review “Bible Timeline” and talk about the chronology of the Bible.

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

Have students take turns reading segments of the “Sound Principles...” handout #2 Scripture Interprets Scripture, and #3 Interpret Scripture literally.

Section 3 - Discussion

DISCUSS week 1, day 4-7 studies using questions in back of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Watch the “Overview of the Old Testament” video again
2. Review the “Bible Timeline” handout.
3. Memorize John 1:1-4.
4. Do Week 2 studies, Day 8-11.

CLASS 4- Bible Evidence and Original Language

Needed:

Handouts: “Messianic Prophecies,” and “Sound Principles...”

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. Briefly review some of the key points from class 1.
2. Have class members take turns looking up/reading out loud some of the Old Testament Messianic Prophecy verses and fulfillment verses in the New Testament.

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

1. Have a volunteer read #4 Consider grammar and #5 original language to determine meaning from the “Sound Principles...” handout.
2. Using Bible software resources to do word studies – www.blueletterbible.com (Don to show application examples in current chapters being studied.)

Section 3 - Discussion

DISCUSS week 2 studies, Day 8-11 using questions in back of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 2 studies, Day 12-14.
2. Review John 1:1-4, read Colossians 1:13-23, and memorize Colossians 1:15-16.

CLASS 5-Bible Evidence and Genre

Needed:

Handouts: “Sound Principles...”

Other: Prepare visuals of some archeological find confirming biblical accounts.

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. Class members shout out Bible evidence already discussed.
2. Present picture examples of some archeological finds that confirm biblical accounts (Don).

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

Have class members read out #6 Genre principle. Share an example of bible poetry that can't be taken literally, for example, the description of the daughter of Pharoah in “Song of Solomon.”

Section 3 – Discussion

1. Have students together recite John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-16 from memory.
2. **DISCUSS** week 2 studies, Day 12-14, using questions from end of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 3 studies, day 15-18.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-16 and memorize Colossians 1:17. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.

CLASS 6 – New Testament and Scripture Application

Needed:

Video: “Overview of New Testament” (3 minutes)

Handouts: “Sound Principles...”

Other: Pictures of some New Testament archeological finds.

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. Show “Overview of New Testament” video.
2. Ask group members, “What stood out to you as you watched the video?” Draw their attention to key points.
3. Show pictures of some New Testament archeological finds.

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

What principles were applied as you completed this week's studies?

Section 3 – Discussion

DISCUSS week 3 studies, Day 15-16, using questions from end of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 3 studies, day 19-21.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-17 and memorize Colossians 1:18-19. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.

CLASS 7 – Basic Christian Beliefs

Needed:

Video: "Christian Doctrine" (3 minutes)

Handouts: "Christian Doctrine"

Other: Pictures of some New Testament archeological finds.

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. Show "Christian Doctrine" video.
2. Ask group members, "What stood out to you as you watched the video?" Draw their attention to key points.
3. Pass out "Christian Doctrine" handout emphasizing that any religious organization that does not subscribe to these basic beliefs is not part of the Christian Faith (For example, Mormon).
4. Show pictures of some New Testament archeological finds.

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

What principles were applied as you completed this week's studies?

Section 3 - Discussion

DISCUSS week 3 studies, Day 19-21, using questions from end of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 4 studies, day 22-24.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-19 and memorize Colossians 1:19-20. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.
3. Review "Christian Doctrine" handout.

CLASS 8 – More About the New Testament

Needed:

Video: “How We Got the New Testament” (3 minutes)

Handouts: “Sound Principles...” and “Messianic Prophecies.”

Other: Pictures of some New Testament archeological finds.

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. Show “How We Got the New Testament” video.
2. Ask group members, “What stood out to you as you watched the video?” Draw their attention to key points.
3. Ask students to read some of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies and the New Testament fulfillment passages.
4. Show pictures of some New Testament archeological finds.

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

What study principles did you apply this week?

Section 3 - Discussion

DISCUSS week 4 studies, day 22-24, using questions from end of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do week 4 studies, day 25-28.
2. Review John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:15-20 and memorize Romans 3:23. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.

CLASS 9 – The Uniqueness of Christianity

Needed:

Video: “Comparative Religion” (3 minutes)

Handout: “One-Verse Evangelism”

Lesson Plan:

Section 1 – Bible Overview, Evidence and Uniqueness

1. What is some of the evidence we’ve learned that make the Bible stand out as being supernaturally created and true?

2. It's been said that there is a scarlet thread running throughout the Bible, "Someone is coming, someone came, someone is coming again."
3. What would you say makes Christianity unique from other religions? Is Christianity actually about religion, or is it about relationship?
4. Religion is about what man tries to do to win favor, become perfect or enter a state of *Nirvana* (Religious enlightenment. It comes from the Sanskrit meaning "extinction, disappearance" of the individual to the universal. Achieving nirvana is to make earthly feelings like suffering and desire disappear.)
5. Christianity is about what God did in sending His Son to take the punishment for our sin. It's about His free gift that we can receive or reject.
6. Pass out and review "One-Verse Evangelism" handout.

Section 2 – Bible Study Principles

Section 3 - Discussion

DISCUSS week 4 studies, day 25-28, using questions from end of book.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Review John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-20; Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23. Keep repeating memorized verses throughout the week.
2. Review the "One-Verse-Evangelism" handout.
3. Write down what this study has meant to you. What are the most important things you have learned? How has this course changed the way you have studied the Bible and will study going forward?

CLASS 10 – Continuing in John

Needed:

Video: "Overview of John" (Bible Project Ap or YouTube, 3 minutes)

Handout: "John 1."

Lesson Plan:

1. Allow some of the group members to share what the course has meant to them.
2. Repeat the memorized verses together.
3. As time permits, read a portion of John, chapter 1 verse-by-verse and observe, interpret, apply the text.

ASSIGNMENTS

Continue studying John and then other books of the Bible, until you have read the whole Bible utilizing the tools you have learned. Be sure to obtain a good study Bible to help you.

COVENANT IN THE BIBLE

(This summary is from the Bible Project.

<https://bibleproject.com/articles/covenants-the-backbone-bible/>)

Covenants are one of the most important themes in the Bible—they are the key to God's redemptive plan to restore humanity to its divine calling. Starting in Genesis, God enters into one formal covenant after another with various humans in order to rescue his world. These divine-human partnerships drive the narrative forward until it reaches its climax in Jesus. To tell the story of God redeeming humanity through Jesus is to tell the whole story of God's covenantal relationship with humans.

So what is a covenant? And how does the covenantal story of the Bible begin?

What's a Covenant?

A covenant is a relationship between two partners who make binding promises to each other and work together to reach a common goal. They're often accompanied by oaths, signs, and ceremonies. Covenants define obligations and commitments, but they are different from a contract because they are relational and personal. Think of a marriage—a husband and wife choose to enter into a formal relationship, binding themselves to one another in lifelong faithfulness and devotion. They then work as partners to reach a common goal, like building a life or raising children together.

Covenant relationships are found all throughout the Bible.

The Beginning of the Covenantal Story

The covenantal story began when God created humans in his image to partner with him in spreading goodness throughout the world. The word "covenant" (Heb. *berit*) isn't explicitly used in Genesis 1, but the details of the relationship are similar to later covenants in the text.

God invites Adam and Eve to be priest kings and represent his generous rule on Earth. They could enjoy and reproduce blessings of eternal life as long as they continued to trust and partner with him. But as God lays out the terms of their relationship, he warns them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it would bring the curse of death on humanity.

In their first test of covenant faithfulness, humans failed.

A Quick Guide to Five Key Covenants

There's no consensus on the exact number of covenants between God and humanity. However, there are five foundational covenants that God makes with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, before establishing the new covenant through Jesus.

by the time we come to the story of Noah, sin has enveloped the whole world. In response, God sends a flood, making way for a restored creation that will begin with Noah and his family.

God enters a formal relationship with Noah and all living creatures, promising that, despite humanity's corruption, he will never again flood the earth (Genesis 8:20-9:17). He will preserve the world and rescue humanity through the "offspring of woman" (Genesis 3:15). God then invites humans to partner with him in filling and ruling his world. God's covenant with Noah is unconditional, and his promise is accompanied with a sign of his faithfulness, the rainbow, to remind future generations of this Covenant.

Abrahamic Covenant

Evil continues to ruin the world. Genesis 9-11. God's rescue plan continues, and he calls Abraham into a covenantal relationship (Genesis 12, 15, 17). He promises Abraham descendants like the stars of the sky and land and says He will bring universal blessings to all humanity, through Abraham.

this covenant is also accompanied by an outward sign, a reminder to Abraham and his ancestors. God commands the men to be circumcised (Genesis 17:9-14), a symbol that sets Abraham and his family apart and shows their fertility and future lay in God's hands.

God tells Abraham to leave his land and follow wherever he leads, train his family to do what is right and just, and practice circumcision in every generation. This covenant is both conditional and unconditional. God and Abraham each have a part to play, but ultimately, God will keep his promise to give Abraham a family who will inherit the land and bless the world.

Mosaic Covenant

Exodus opens with Abraham's offspring multiplying rapidly in Egypt, which threatens the new Pharaoh's ego. He enslaves God's people, and they cry out to God to rescue them. God hears them, sending Moses to be his instrument of divine power to lead the people out of Egypt and toward the land God promised to Abraham.

After many miracles and a harrowing escape, the people reach the foot of Mount Sinai, where God shows up to revisit the promises he made to Abraham. Moses ascends the mountain to hear the terms of God's covenant with the people. God promises to make Israel into a holy kingdom of priests that will spread his blessing and glory to all the nations.

God instructed Israel to obey all the laws given at Mount Sinai, promising to bring blessings if they followed his commands and curses if they ignored them (see Deut. 28). Israel's allegiance to God will be reflected in the way they live, keep the commands and observe weekly Sabbath rest.

Davidic Covenant

God's people enter Canaan (the promised land) and eventually demand a king, in their desire to be like other nations. (Already, we are seeing the people lose sight of their covenant at Mount Sinai.) Saul is anointed as Israel's king, but he fails to obey God and is rejected. God then chooses David as king over Israel. David becomes a successful

leader, overcoming Israel's enemies and restoring order. He wants to build a temple for God to dwell with his people again. God makes a covenant with David, promising to make his name great and raise up a descendant from David's line, whose throne and kingdom will last forever (2 Samuel 7, Psalms 72, 89, 132).

David and his descendants must remain faithful to God, following the covenantal laws. However, despite David and his sons' failures, God keeps his promise to provide a faithful descendant of David to reign.

All of these covenants thematically build on one another. After God's covenant with David, as readers, we are left waiting for the great deliverer, the Messiah from David's line, who will make right the fractured relationship that began in the garden.

The New Covenant

For generations, Israel ignored the terms of their covenant with Yahweh, breaking commands and living by their own definitions of good and evil. Amidst rebellion and exile, the Hebrew prophets spoke of a new covenant, through which he would bring forgiveness of sin and "write His law within their heart" (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekial 36:22-32). Then....came Jesus! (Matthew 26:26-69, Luke 22:19-22).

Each covenant builds upon another to form a complete redemptive story.

God preserved the world through Noah,
Initiated redemption through Abraham,
Established the nation of Israel through Moses,
Promised an eternal shepherd-king through David, and then
Fulfilled all of his covenants through Jesus!

With each covenant, God's promises and plans to save the world through woman's seed clarifies until it becomes clear that men can only be redeemed through Jesus.

Jesus is the Covenantal Climax

Jesus perfectly succeeded at every point where humanity failed. He is the guarantor and mediator of the new and better covenant with all who trust in Him alone (Hebrews 7:22, 9:15).

(Whitney Woollard is a writer, speaker, and Bible teacher in Portland, OR. She holds her M.A. in biblical and theological studies from Western Seminary and loves sharing her passion for the Bible with others. You can check out her work at her website, whitneywoollard.com.)

A Comparison of the 5 Major Religions

Hinduism and its beliefs

Most Hindus worship one Being of ultimate oneness (Brahman) through infinite representations of gods and goddesses. These various deities become incarnate within idols, temples, gurus, rivers, animals, etc.

Hindus believe their position in this present life was determined by their actions in a previous life. Hinduism therefore provides a possible explanation for suffering and evil in this life. If a person's behavior before was evil, they might justifiably experience tremendous hardships in this life. Pain, disease, poverty or a disaster like a flood is deserved by that person because of their own evil actions, usually from a previous lifetime.

A Hindu's goal is to become free from the law of karma...to be free from continuous reincarnations. Only the soul matters which will one day be free of the cycle of rebirths and be at rest.

Hinduism lets a person choose how to work toward spiritual perfection. There are three possible ways to end this cycle of karma: 1. Be lovingly devoted to any of the Hindu deities; 2. Grow in knowledge through meditation of Brahman (oneness)...to realize that circumstances in life are not real, that selfhood is an illusion and only Brahman is real; 3. Be dedicated to various religious ceremonies and rites.



Hinduism... infinite manifestations of God

New Age Spirituality and its beliefs

New Age Spirituality promotes the development of the person's own power or divinity. When referring to deity, a follower of this type of spirituality is not talking about a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, but is referring to a higher consciousness within themselves. A person pursuing spiritual development would see themselves as deity, the cosmos, the universe. In fact, everything that the person sees, hears, feels or imagines is to be considered divine.

Highly eclectic, New Age Spirituality is a collection of ancient spiritual traditions, taught by a vast array of speakers, books and seminars. It acknowledges many gods and goddesses, as in Hinduism. The Earth is viewed as the source of all spirituality, and has its own intelligence, emotions and deity. But superseding all is self. Self is the originator, controller and power over all. There is no reality outside of what the person determines.

New Age teaches eastern mysticism and spiritual, metaphysical and psychic techniques, such as breathing exercises, chanting, drumming, meditating...to develop an altered consciousness and one's own divinity.

Anything negative a person experiences (failures, sadness, anger...) is considered an illusion. Believing themselves to be completely sovereign over their life, nothing about their life is wrong, negative or painful. Eventually a person develops spiritually to the degree that there is no objective, external reality. A person, becoming a god, creates their own reality.



New Age... believes we ourselves are God

Buddhism and its beliefs

Buddhists do not worship any gods or God. People outside of Buddhism often think that Buddhists worship the Buddha. However, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) never claimed to be divine, but rather he is viewed by Buddhists as having attained what they are also striving to attain, which is spiritual enlightenment and, with it, freedom from the continuous cycle of life and death.

Most Buddhists believe a person has countless rebirths, which inevitably include suffering. A Buddhist seeks to end these rebirths. Buddhists believe it is a person's cravings, aversion and delusion that cause these rebirths. Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one's heart and to let go of all yearnings toward sensual desires and to oneself.

Buddhists follow a list of religious principles and adhere to personal restraint, fasting and very dedicated meditation. When a Buddhist meditates it is not the same as praying or focusing on a god, it is more of a self-discipline. Through practiced meditation a person may reach Nirvana -- "the blowing out" of the flame of desire.

Buddhism provides something that is true of most major religions: disciplines, values and directives that a person may want to live by.



Buddhism... believes
no god or gods exist

Islam and its beliefs

Muslims believe there is the one almighty God, named Allah, who is infinitely superior to and transcendent from humankind. Allah is viewed as the creator of the universe and the source of all good and all evil. Everything that happens is Allah's will. He is a powerful and strict judge, who will be merciful toward followers depending on the sufficiency of their life's good works and religious devotion. A follower's relationship with Allah is as a servant to Allah.

Though a Muslim honors several prophets, Muhammad is considered the last prophet and his words and lifestyle are that person's authority. To be a Muslim, one must follow five religious duties: 1. Repeat a creed about Allah and Muhammad; 2. Recite certain prayers in Arabic five times a day; 3. Give to the needy; 4. One month each year, fast from food, drink, sex and smoking from sunrise to sunset; 5. Pilgrimage once in one's lifetime to worship at a shrine in Mecca. At death -- based on one's faithfulness to these duties -- a Muslim hopes to enter Paradise. If not, they will be eternally punished in hell.

Islam teaches that there is one supreme deity, who is worshiped through good deeds and disciplined religious rituals. After death a person is rewarded or punished according to their religious devotion. Muslims believe that giving up one's life for Allah is a sure way of entering Paradise.



Islam... devoted to one
transcendent God

Christianity and its beliefs

Christians believe in one eternal God who is creator of all that is. He is viewed as a loving God who offers everyone a personal relationship with himself now in this life.

In his life on Earth, Jesus Christ did not identify himself as a prophet pointing to God or as a teacher of enlightenment. Rather, Jesus claimed to be God in human form. He performed miracles, forgave people of their sin and said that anyone who believed in him would have eternal life.

Followers of Jesus regard the Bible as God's written message to humankind, and a historical record of Jesus' life and miracles. The Bible reveals His personality, His love and truth, and how one can know and relate to God, as to a friend.

Christians believe that all people sin, including themselves. They see Jesus as their Savior, as the Messiah who was prophesied by all the prophets of the Old Testament, in the Bible. They believe that Jesus Christ, out of love for us, paid for the sin for all of humanity by dying on a cross. Three days later, he rose from the dead as he promised, proving his deity.



Christianity... an
infinite & personal God

Each Major Religion is Very Different.

- Hindus acknowledge multitudes of gods and goddesses.
- Buddhists say there is no deity.
- New Age Spirituality followers believe they are God.
- Muslims believe in a powerful but unknowable God.
- Christians believe a loving God who created us to know him.

Are all worshiping the same God? New Age Spirituality teaches that everyone should come to center on a cosmic consciousness, but it would require Islam to give up their one God, Hinduism to give up their numerous gods, and Buddhism to establish that there is a God. Of these, only one affirms that there is a loving God who can be known now in this life.

Each Major Religion Requires Different Things.

Most of the world religions place an individual on their own, striving for spiritual perfection. In Hinduism a person is on their own trying to gain release from karma. In New Age a person is working at their own divinity. In Buddhism it is an individual quest at being free from desire. And in Islam, the individual follows religious laws for the sake of paradise after death. With Jesus Christ, you see God offering us a relationship with himself, not based on our efforts, but based on what he did for us.

All religions are working on the same problem.

We're all aware of personal failings and the need to be better. This is what leads to the creation of religions. We also want to feel at peace, fulfilled and having inner strength. And so we practice meditation, religious rituals, self-help books, fasting, prayer, personal sacrifice, pilgrimages, etc.

However, when it comes to connecting with God who is there and created us, our problem is not lack of personal effort. Our problem is our sin. No amount of good works is going to cover up those times we've acted contrary to God's holy ways.

It's interesting that Buddha never claimed sinlessness. Muhammad also admitted that he needed forgiveness. "No matter how wise, no matter how gifted, no matter how influential other prophets, gurus, and teachers might be, they knew they were imperfect just like the rest of us."¹

God tells us that our sin stands as a barrier between us and him. We sense that separation, that distance. That's what leads to religious practices.

God acknowledges this separation between us and him and provided a solution to it. He said the payment for sin is death...eternal spiritual separation from him. Yet out of love for us, Jesus Christ, God himself, came in human form to pay for our sin for us.

Jesus took all of our sin on himself, suffered on a cross, and willingly died in our place. The Bible says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us." (1 John 3:16)

"For the wages [payment] for sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 6:23)

God is offering us complete forgiveness because of Jesus' death for us. This means forgiveness for all our sins...past, present and future. Jesus paid for them all. God, who created the universe, loves us and wants to be in a relationship with us. "This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9)

"For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Christ offers us real freedom from our sin and guilt. He does not leave a person's failures on their shoulders, with a dim hope of becoming a better person tomorrow. In Jesus Christ, God reached toward humanity, providing a way for us to connect with him.

God wants us to know him.

Jesus said, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty...and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." (John 6:35) Jesus called people not only to follow his teachings, but to follow him. He said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life." (John 14:6) In claiming to be the truth, Christ goes beyond mere prophets and teachers who simply said they were speaking the truth.⁸

Jesus identified himself as equal to God, and even gave proof. Jesus said that he would be crucified on a cross and that three days after his death, he would come back to life, and he DID! He didn't say he would reincarnate someday into a future life. On that third day, Jesus' tomb was found empty and many people testified that they saw him alive again. He now offers eternal life to us.

Unlike many world religions...

This is not a commitment to a method of self-improvement like the Eightfold Path, the Five Pillars, or meditation, or good works or even the Ten Commandments. Those ways become a burdensome striving for perfection, and connection with God is still distant.

With Jesus Christ it's a two-way interaction between you and God. He welcomes us to go to him. "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth."⁹ You can communicate with God, who will answer your prayer, give you greater peace and joy, provide direction, show you his love, and transform your life.

Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."¹⁰ It will not mean that life will become perfect and free of problems. But it means that in the midst of life, you can relate to God who is willing to be involved in your life and faithful in his love.

Our hope is not in following laws or standards, but in knowing a Savior who fully accepts us because of our faith in him and his sacrifice for us. We don't earn our place in heaven by religious efforts or good deeds. Heaven is a free gift to us, when we begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Would you like to be totally forgiven and personally come to know God's love for you?

Beginning a relationship with God.

In the world's religions a person has a relationship with teachings, ideas, paths, rituals. Through Jesus, a person can have a relationship with the loving and powerful God. You can talk with him and he will guide you in this life now. He doesn't just point you to a path, a philosophy, or a religion.

He welcomes you to know him, to experience joy, and to have confidence in his love in the midst of life's challenges. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God."¹¹

You can begin a relationship with God right now. It is as simple as sincerely asking him for his forgiveness of your sin and inviting him to enter your life. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him."¹²

Would like to begin a relationship with the God who created you, who deeply loves you? You can do so right now, if it is your heart's desire: "God, I ask you to forgive me and invite you to enter my heart right now. Thank you Jesus for dying for my sins. Thank you for coming into my life as you said you would."

If you sincerely asked God to come into your life, you have begun a personal relationship with him. It is like you have just met God and he wants you to know him better.

ⁱ Utilized format and content from www.visionvideo.com/filesDTB_ColorBookLR.pdf

ⁱⁱ Ibid. (This information is also available in many other sources.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ibid

^v Ibid

^{vi} Utilized the format contained in the online pdf at www.visionvideo.com/files/DTB_ColorBookLR.pdf . Content from commonly known information and study of the Bible.

vii Ibid

viii Ibid

ix Apostles Creed

^x Episcopal Church *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), *The Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated. 2007. pp. 326–327. Retrieved 2013-02-18.