



The Bible - A short introduction

The Bible is an amazing book. Its writings are a rich mixture of history, enchanting poetry, great wisdom, and the future foretold. It is the foundation of both the Jewish and Christian faiths and it has played a major part in the development of world civilization and social values.

This booklet provides a brief introduction to the wonderful writings contained in this Bestselling book of all time.



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What does the word 'Bible' mean?

The Bible is widely recognized as the world's best-selling book of all time, but did you know that the Bible is actually a collection of many books? In fact the word 'bible' comes from a Greek word *biblia* that simply means "books".



The Bible is one volume but it contains sixty-six (66) distinct books. These books were written by many different authors who came from diverse backgrounds including Kings, shepherds, prophets, teachers, lawyers and doctors. These authors lived in ten different countries and wrote their respective books over a 1,600 year time span in three different languages (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic). Yet the message that they deliver is amazingly consistent. The Bible claims that these writers were all inspired by God to write

down his message to the world.

The Books of the Bible

The Bible is divided into two sections: the *Old Testament*, which contains thirty-nine books, and the *New Testament*, which contains twenty-seven books. A testament is an agreement between two parties...in this case between God and people.

The *Old Testament* tells of events from the creation of man to about 400 years before Jesus Christ was born. The majority of the writings can be broadly classified into two major parts:

Law: The first five books contain the early history of the ancient world and the laws that God gave to the nation of Israel via Moses. These books lay the foundation for all future books.

Prophecy: The Bible is full of miraculous prophecies that accurately foretold much of the dramatic history of Israel and nearby nations. These prophecies were inter-woven with constant warnings to the Israelites to give up wickedness, to be true to God and to show love to their neighbors. In particular these books predicted the coming of a great leader who would bring peace, justice and prosperity to the entire world.

The *New Testament* builds on the Old Testament writings and is about God reaching out to people through Jesus Christ – the promised leader. The books of the New Testament can be broadly classified into two parts:

Gospels or "Good News" books: The first four books present the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as recorded by four different authors.

Record of the Early Christian Church after Christ's departure: The 'Acts of the Apostles' is a dramatic record of how belief in Jesus Christ spread throughout the Roman world despite violent opposition from Jewish and Roman leaders. Many of the New Testament 'books' are letters which were written by special witnesses of Christ to encourage and instruct Christians in different parts of the Roman empire. (E.g. Paul's letter to the Corinthians)

The fundamental message of the Bible

The Bible reveals the character and purpose of God through his dealings with people. The Bible teaches us the way of love, justice and peace.

These two statements summarize the message of the Bible:

1. Love the God who has given us life and the marvelous creation around us. ¹
2. Love the people around us as brothers and sisters because God created them just like us. In other words, 'treat others as you would like them to treat you'. ²

³ 'Love' means to be patient, kind, truthful, humble and forgiving towards our fellow human beings.



¹ Matthew 22:37 (ie Matthew Chapter 22 verse 37)

² Matthew 22:39

³ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

A Sample of Key Bible Topics & Passages

The Beginning

The Bible opens in the book of Genesis with the words *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"*.



Despite the theory of Evolution being widely taught as 'fact', it remains an unproven THEORY. The fact is that many, many scientific discoveries actually support the Bible's claim that the world was created by a masterful designer. For example, recent scientific discoveries around the 'genome' and DNA demonstrate the impossible odds of our complex human bodies coming into being by chance. The genome is the complete list of coded instructions needed to make a person. There are 3.1 billion letters in the DNA code in every one of the 100 trillion cells in the human body. If all of the DNA in the human body were put end to end, it would reach to the Sun and back more than 600 times. This marvelous and complex design of our own bodies and the living world all around us endorses the Bible's claim of creation by an all powerful God.

The Character of God

In the second book of the bible (Exodus), God reveals his Character as: *"merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth,...forgiving wrong-doing and sin; but by no means clearing the guilty."*⁴



The Bible makes it clear that God does not discriminate between people on basis of color, race, sex or status. For example, in the book of Acts we are told *"God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation, the man who has fear of him and does righteousness is pleasing to him"*⁵. The book of Acts also tells us that he desires to be worshipped in human hearts and not in fancy buildings: *"The God who made the earth and everything in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, is not housed in buildings made with hands; And he is not dependent on the work of men's hands, as if he had need of anything, for he himself gives to all life and breath and all things;"*⁶

Righteous Laws that Promote Peace and Justice

One of the many Laws in the book of Exodus taught people to show kindness even to an enemy: *"If you find an ox or a donkey that has wandered off, take it back where it belongs, even if the owner is your enemy"*⁷. Imagine how much of the hatred and conflict that we see in the world could be solved if people would follow the simple principle of this law.



The Law of God also promoted justice and denounced corruption. For instance the book of Deuteronomy instructed people: *"You will not corrupt justice. You are not to be moved in your judging by a man's position nor will you take a bribe; for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and corrupts the words of the righteous"*⁸

⁴ Exodus 34:6-7

⁵ Acts 10:34-35

⁶ Acts 17:24-26

⁷ Exodus 23:4

⁸ Deuteronomy 16:19

Wisdom and Philosophy in the Bible

The Bible contains wonderful words of wisdom, philosophy and truth for everyday life. For example King Solomon writes in the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes:

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but depression drains one's strength"⁹

"I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all"¹⁰

"Go to the ant, you hater of work; give thought to her ways and be wise: Having no chief, overseer, or ruler, She gets her meat in the summer, storing up food at the time of the grain-cutting. How long will you be sleeping, O hater of work? when will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little rest, a little folding of the hands in sleep: Then loss will come on you like an outlaw, and your need like an armed man"¹¹



⁹ Proverbs 17:22

¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 9:11

¹¹ Proverbs 6:6-10

Promises made by God

A King will come



God has made many wonderful promises to mankind, which are recorded in the Bible. Ultimately these promises show us that God has a wonderful future planned for the world.

God has promised to establish his own worldwide kingdom on earth – a ‘heavenly’ kingdom where people of all nations will enjoy goodness and peace under the ruler ship of one great King - Jesus. The book of the prophet Isaiah tells us how different this King will be to current world leaders: *“This king won’t judge by appearances or listen to rumors. The poor and the needy will be treated with fairness and with justice. His word will be law everywhere in the land, and criminals will be put to death. Honesty and fairness will be his royal robes”*¹². Those days will be wonderful times for the people as the prophet Isaiah further proclaims *“No child will die in infancy; everyone will live to a ripe old age. Anyone a hundred years old will be considered young, and to die younger than 100 will be considered a curse”*¹³

Whilst God made these promises a very long time ago, and the world has continued in a state of corruption and conflict, God has reconfirmed his promises down through the generations. One may ask why haven’t these promises been fulfilled yet? Peter, a disciple of the Lord Jesus, answers this question in one of his letters:



¹² Isaiah 11:3-5

¹³ Isaiah 65:20

“..keep in mind this one thing, that with the Lord one day is the same as a thousand years, and a thousand years are no more than one day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his word, as he seems to some, but he is waiting in mercy for you, not desiring the destruction of any, but that all may be turned from their evil ways.”¹⁴

The nation of Israel and the Bible

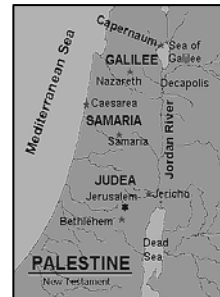
Have you ever wondered why there is so much violence in the land of Israel today? The ancient history of Israel and the source of the conflict between Jew & Arab can be found in the Bible. It is not possible to detail the history in this short passage, but here is a pointer:

Hundreds of years before Israel existed as a nation, God promised a single man, Abraham, that *“I will make of you a great nation”¹⁵* and *“I will give the land to you in which you are a stranger, and to your descendent after you, all the land of Canaan (which later became Israel), for an everlasting possession”¹⁶*. But



God also told him about many troublesome events that would unfold before he or his family would enjoy this inheritance.

The Bible tells that Abraham did not receive the Promised Land in his lifetime, and yet he died confident that he and his descendents would one day live in this land forever. In fact God began to fulfill these promises several hundred years after Abraham's death in the following way: Abraham's descendents moved to Egypt because of terrible drought in their land. There they prospered and became so great in number that the Egyptians saw them as a threat. Pharaoh forced them into cruel slavery for 400 years, and even resorted to killing all newborn Jewish babies. But according to his promise, God raised up a deliver – Moses, who rescued the Jews (Abraham's descendents) from their Egyptian masters with great miracles and brought them through the desert to the Promised Land (Israel). This was the beginning of the fulfillment of the promises of God. The long-term promise of “*everlasting possession*” is yet to be seen and will be fulfilled through the greatest of Abraham's descendents - Jesus Christ.



God made Israel his ‘special’ nation because of his promises to their faithful ancestor Abraham. God helped the people of Israel to become a nation by destroying the wicked people who were living in the land at the time. However in the book of Deuteronomy he tells the Israelites: *“it is not for your righteousness or because your hearts are upright [that you] are going in to take their land; but because of the evil-doing of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and to give effect to his oath to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”¹⁷*.

Many of his descendents were very unfaithful and rebellious despite the special blessing that God had given them. God makes it clear that salvation does not come by birth but by faith and good works. (Note: The word ‘Israel’ is another name of Jacob, who was the grandson of Abraham)

The Bible tells the future of the World

God has the power of foreknowledge – that is the power to know exactly what is going to happen in the future. Down through the ages, God has consistently foretold all kinds of catastrophic and miraculous world events in great detail. God has revealed these future events to humanity through chosen prophets, who told the people of their day, and also recorded the words of prophecy in the Bible for future generations.

¹⁴ 2 Peter 3:8-9

¹⁵ Genesis 12:2

¹⁶ Genesis 17:8

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 9:5

God has three main reasons for sharing his foreknowledge with us: Firstly to prove to humans that he is the all-powerful God, secondly to give people a hope for the future, and thirdly to warn people how to be saved from the terrible calamity and destruction that will come on the earth. For example, in the book of the Prophet Isaiah, God proves his power by saying: *“See, the things I said before have come about, and now I give word of new things: before they come I give you news of them.”*¹⁸

The book of the prophet Amos says *“Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless he reveals his secret to His servants the prophets”*¹⁹. However, the people frequently ignored and disbelieved God’s words of warning and ill-treated the messengers. For example the book of Chronicles tells us that *“the God of their fathers sent to them (warnings) by His messengers, rising up early and sending, for He had pity on His people and on His dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God and despised His words, and ill-treated His prophets until the wrath of God arose against His people, until there was no healing”*²⁰

Most importantly, the Bible foretold in detail about the Birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, events which were fulfilled 2000 years ago. But the Bible also foretells that Jesus will return to the earth with absolute power to save the world from corruption and death. We can be confident in this promise, because God has consistently and miraculously fulfilled his earlier promises.

Many of the other Bible prophecies concern Israel and the surrounding nations. The ancient nation of Israel was destroyed by the Romans and disappeared off the map around A.D. 70. However, nearly 2000 years later (in 1948) the nation was recreated and Jews who had been scattered all over the world have since returned to the land of their ancestors. The amazing thing is that these events were foretold in detail by God thousands of years before they occurred!

After the death of Christ, the Roman Empire completely crushed and destroyed Israel and dispersed the Jews all over the world including India. This was God’s punishment on Israel because of their rejection and murder of his son Jesus. However after almost 2000 years of living in scattered exile, the Jewish people today are a nation again! Jews began flowing back to this land just as God had foretold thousands of years before, through numerous prophets, including Jeremiah: *“I am angry at the people of Jerusalem, and I will scatter them in foreign countries. But someday I will bring them back here and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”*²¹

It is obvious from the terrible conflict in Israel today, that this prophecy is not completely fulfilled. In fact Bible prophecy shows that the conflict will become worse, and involve many nations before Jesus finally returns to bring peace and justice.

Life and Death

The Bible gives genuine, meaningful answers to questions about life and death. While there is great joy when a new baby is born, there is also immense sadness when a loved one dies. Very few people accept that death is final. In fact most religious leaders in the world teach the appealing idea that people are not really mortal – that a part of us goes on living even after we are put in the grave.

However the Bible teaches that we really are mortal. It compares the end state of humans to the withering of a blade of grass *“As for man, his days are as grass: his beautiful growth is like the flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone”*²².



¹⁸ Isaiah 42:9

¹⁹ Amos 3:7

²⁰ 2 Chronicles 35:15-16

²¹ Jeremiah 32:37

²² Psalm 103:15-16

Every day we see evidence of how fragile life is, and we know that we will all die within a limited number of years. However the Bible tells us that this wasn't always so. It tells that mortality (ie death) came as a result of human sin, when the first man Adam, disobeyed God.

But the Bible also offers great hope. It offers something supernatural: a way to overcome death, and to get a wonderful new life that never dies or ends. This is a gift of eternal, peaceful life that God offers to people who believe in him and follow his teachings of love. The first person to receive his gift of resurrection and immortality was Jesus Christ. God has also extended the promise of this gift to all who follow Jesus Christ. *"For as by man came death, so by man there is a coming back from the dead. For as in Adam death comes to all, so in Christ will all come back to life. But every man in his right order: Christ the first-fruits; then those who are Christ's at his coming"*²³

Death and all the things that lead to it like pain, suffering, diseases, injustice, natural catastrophes etc. will all be rid off when the Christ returns to establish God's fair and righteous rule on earth. God gives all people free choice to live the way they choose to live now. We can choose to follow God's way and gain eternal life, or we can just do our own thing and get eternal death.

Archaeology and the Bible



The Bible is an excellent source of history and information. For example, the book of Kings records in detail the life and events of the various kings that ruled the land of Israel, and numerous incidents in the ancient history of nations around Israel such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon etc. Archaeological discoveries over the last 150 years have revealed numerous parallel historic records, and other archaeological evidence which authenticate many amazing events recorded in the Bible. A couple of examples are given below:

Babylon: At the beginning of the 20th Century, archaeologists unearthed numerous bricks in the ruins of ancient Babylon, which bore the inscription of King Nebuchadnezzar. Until these were found, the name Nebuchadnezzar was unknown outside of the Bible. Also the discovery of an ancient Babylonian chronicle provides a description of Babylon's attack on Jerusalem in 598-597BC which agrees exactly with the biblical description in the book of Kings (2 Kings 24:10-17)

Moabite Stone: In the late 1800's archaeologists discovered the "Moabite Stone" which told in detail about the King of Moab's wars with Israel. This exciting discovery again affirmed the truth of the Bible because it gave a parallel account of the wars to Biblical history recorded in 2 Kings, chapters 1 and 3.

Concluding Remarks

The Bible is a book for all, no matter what your color, age, religion, or your social status. Human existence has been marred by injustice and conflict, almost since time began. When we see violence and corruption today, it is nothing new under the sun. However, the Bible lays out a solid and sure promise that the earth will one day be restored to the perfect state intended by God. It tells what people must do to have a part in God's promises, and to enjoy life in this future world of peace, justice and prosperity.

²³ 1 Corinthians 15:21-23

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