

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?



Cover artwork by anonymous Crossroads student

LESSON 1

The Story of the Bible



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INTRODUCTION

In this course, you will learn about the Bible. Most people think of it as one book, but it is actually a collection of books written over the course of about 1,500 to 2,000 years. You will learn how the Bible was written. You will discover that the Bible contains different types of writing. You will see how God used different writers to write one complete story through many books that all point us to Jesus.

Study Tools

Throughout this course, you will find extra tools to use as you study.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have included some spaces throughout the lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. You can write questions in them. You can write down thoughts that come to mind as you read and study. A mentor can also write back to you in these spaces.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, you will find a challenge called an **action step**. It asks you to apply what you have learned. If you would like some help or encouragement to complete it, write down what you plan to do. The mentor who reviews this lesson can ask you if you have done it.

Notes, Prayer Requests, and Comments

A large, empty rectangular area with a light gray background, intended for students to write their notes, prayer requests, and comments.

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to you. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. You will see an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears in the lesson.

Circumcision — Removal of the male foreskin as a religious act. For Abraham and his household, it was a sign of the covenant (see "**covenant**") God made with them.

Covenant — An agreement or contract between two people or groups of people.

Disobedience — The act of failing or refusing to follow rules, standards, or laws. The Bible tells us that disobedience to God happens when we follow our own will and desires instead of following God's will.

Exile — A period of time when a person is forced to leave his or her own country or community.

Generation — A group of people born and living during the same period of time or the members of a family born and living during the same period of time.

Humanity — All human beings; also called "the human race" or "humankind."

New Testament — The second part of the Christian Bible. It was originally written in the Greek language. It records Jesus' teachings and the stories of His life while He was here on earth. It includes the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (also called the Gospels), the book of Acts, twenty-one epistles (letters to the early faith communities), and the book of Revelation.

Old Testament — The first part of the Christian Bible. Its thirty-nine books come from the original Hebrew Bible, which Jews still follow. It was originally written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. It includes the law, history, prophecy (see “**prophecy**”), and wisdom literature of the ancient people of Israel.

Persecuted — Treated cruelly or unfairly, especially because of race, religious beliefs, or political beliefs. The early Christians were persecuted by the Romans because of their faith in Jesus.

Prophecy — A statement about something that will happen in the future. The prophecies that God gave to the prophets (see “**prophet**”) to give to His people always came true and will always come true.

Prophet — Someone who brought messages from God to His people. Many books of the Bible were written by prophets (for example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea). These books contain many promises God made to His people that came true years later.

Sinful — Being full of sin. Continually acting, thinking, or saying things that break God’s laws and go against God’s divine plan.

Testimony — A spoken or written statement that confirms a truth.

LESSON 1: The Story of the Bible

Lesson Focus:

The Bible tells one perfect and true story of God’s love for us.

The Bible is one of the most important books in human history. It explores the big questions about why we exist. It has inspired many people to do amazing things. It has also confused many people.

The Bible is a very long book. That is because it is actually sixty-six different books put together. Those books are divided into two main parts: the Old Testament* and the New Testament.* Together, the books cover more than 4,000 years of God’s history with His people.

Because the Bible is such a big book that contains so many different parts, it can be hard to see how it all fits together. However, through all its books, the Bible tells one true story about God. It is a testimony* of God’s love for His people and the world He created.

1. Which statement below best describes how familiar you are with the Bible? Put a check mark next to that statement.

- I am just starting to read the Bible.
- I have read most of the Bible’s main stories.
- I have read the whole Bible at least once.
- Other (please explain):

* An asterisk after a word or phrase indicates that it is defined in the Glossary of Terms on pages 4–5.

The Beginning

The Bible begins by telling its readers about God through a poem that celebrates who God is. The first sentence in the Bible says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Then it describes God’s creation of everything in the world. It celebrates God’s power to create something out of nothing. He made the heavens, the earth and all of the plants and animals. He brought order and beauty out of nothingness.

Read **Genesis 1:1–26**.

2. This passage tells us that after God had created each new thing, He “saw that it was good.” What do you think this means?

After God had created everything else, He made humans. He placed them in a garden called Eden. God created them to rule over His beautiful world as partners with Him. Their job was to care for the world and create even more beauty and order.



Read **Genesis 1:27–31**.

3. According to this passage, how are humans different from the rest of God's creation (see verses 27–28)?

God gave humans the ability to think. He gave them the ability to experience the same emotions that He experiences. He allowed them to make choices, and they felt the impact of their choices and actions. God gave them the ability to love and care for one another, just like He loved and cared for them. They lived in a relationship of perfect love with God. They walked and talked with Him every day in the garden. Everything was good.

But the humans faced an important choice. There was one tree in the Garden of Eden whose fruit God had told them not to eat. If they ate it, they would know the difference between good and evil, which only God knew. This knowledge would let them define what was good and what was evil without God's help. God warned them that eating the fruit from this tree would also kill them.

One day, the humans heard the voice of a serpent. The creature encouraged them to eat the fruit from this tree so they could gain its knowledge and power. Despite God's warning, they gave in to temptation and ate the fruit.

This act of disobedience* caused sin to enter the world. Because of their actions, all of humanity* would be born sinful* and would be unable to follow God perfectly. Their actions destroyed not only their close relationship with God but also all of humanity's relationship with God.

4. Have you experienced a time when you felt that your relationship with God was broken? Why did you feel that way?

God Chooses a Family

The first humans had children, and their children had children, and so on. Humanity became increasingly selfish and cruel. The people did not have a relationship with God. Without knowledge of God, most of them made their own decisions about what was right or wrong. They decided evil things were good. So God decided to separate humanity. He confused their languages so people couldn't speak to each other or understand each other. Through that act, God scattered the people all over the earth.

But God did not give up on His plan to save humanity. He chose two people, Abram and Sarai, to be His people, and He made a covenant* with them. He gave them new names—Abraham and Sarah—and a new future.

God promised He would be their God and bless their family. They also promised to keep their part of the covenant. Out of His great love, God told them that He would make them into a new nation, giving humanity another chance to follow Him in obedience.

Read **Genesis 17:1–27**.

5. List the specific promises God made to Abraham and Sarah and their family:

6. What promises did God ask them to make in return?

The rest of the book of Genesis is about God's relationship with Abraham and Sarah's family. Things did not always go well for them. The family grew into a nation called Israel, and its people were called Israelites. But each new generation* gave in to the temptation to define good and evil in their own way. They ignored God again and again.

Eventually, God chose leaders to rule over the people of Israel. But even when the best leaders were in charge, the people were not always faithful to God. The leaders who loved God and used the wisdom God had given them still struggled to obey Him.

Each passage below is about a leader of God's people who tried to follow Him but didn't always get it right because of their personal failures. Choose one to read. Put a check mark next to it after you have read it.

___ **Numbers 20:2–12** — Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt. But he disobeyed God along the way.

___ **1 Kings 11:1–10** — King Solomon was the third king of Israel. God gave Solomon incredible wisdom, but Solomon still made big mistakes.

___ **2 Chronicles 16:1–14** — King Asa ruled much later in Israel's history. He struggled to trust God.

7. In the passage you read, how did the leader fail to follow God or His laws?

Even though they were often unfaithful to God, God still cared for His people. He sent many prophets* (PRAH-fehts) to warn the people that their choices would lead to their ruin. The prophets shared God's words, warning the people that Israel would be destroyed by their enemies and that they would live as prisoners in exile.* And that is exactly what happened. Since the people did not change the way they were living, they ended up becoming prisoners in the nation of Babylon (BAB-ih-luhn).

8. Why do you think it was so hard for God's people to follow Him?

God Keeps His Promise

The prophets told God's people that He would not give up on them. God still loved them. He promised to send a new leader to save them. This leader would pay for their sins and failures. He would transform their hearts and minds so they could make the right choices and follow God. But God's people had to wait for that leader to come. In fact, the story of God's relationship with His people in the Old Testament ended before the promise came true.



God's people waited nearly 500 years before He sent the new leader to earth. The New Testament describes how God's promise finally came true. It begins by introducing Jesus. He was the leader and King that God had promised would arrive. He was part of Abraham and Sarah's family and the family of Israel's kings. Satan tried to tempt Jesus to take power and define good and evil on His own terms. But, unlike the leaders before Him, Jesus resisted the temptation.

Jesus showed people how to follow God. He traveled throughout Israel and taught people God's true definition of good and evil. He said that real power could be found in and through Him. He told them that people who loved their enemies and the poor would be blessed by God. He was able to do all this because He was a different kind of leader. He was God's own Son.

Read **John 13:34–35**.

9. What would your church or faith community look like if Christians truly followed this command?

Jesus did more than simply teach people how to live. He came to give all of humanity the gift of salvation and heal their relationship with God. Because Jesus was God's Son, born as a human, His life, death, and resurrection offered humanity new life.

God's people were given a choice: they could continue in their old, sinful ways or they could follow Jesus. If they accepted God's gift of salvation through Jesus, they would experience God's forgiveness and be able to live the way Jesus taught them to live. They could have a new relationship with God.



Those who decided to follow Jesus found a connection to God through His Holy Spirit and experienced God’s love. This made it possible for them to love and forgive others in return.

Read **Acts 2:42–47**.

10. What happened when people began to follow Jesus?

The Bible tells us that new communities of people who followed Jesus spread around the world. But Jesus’ early followers faced many problems. They were persecuted* from the outside. People in power arrested them, beat them, and killed them. They faced struggles from the inside too. They often fought and argued with each other as they tried to figure out their new faith. Following Jesus wasn’t easy.

The leaders of Jesus' first followers wrote letters to comfort and challenge these new communities. They encouraged them to stay faithful to the way Jesus taught them to live.

Read **Philippians 2:1–13**.

11. What encouragement did the writer give to the faith community in Philippi?

12. What encouragement did you find in this passage?

The Story Continues with Us

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, ends with a prophecy,* promising that Jesus will return and make all wrong things right. Evil will be destroyed. Humanity will once again perfectly partner with God to create beauty and order in God's new creation. They will once again have a perfect relationship with God.

But the Bible tells us we can begin to see that promise coming true right now. Through faith in Jesus, we can begin to live our new life in a new relationship with God. We can do this by obeying God's first and greatest command to love God and others. The Bible and the Holy Spirit teach us and remind us how to do that.

The whole story of the Bible is about God's love. Out of love, God created the world. Out of love, God gave His Son to die for humanity and restore humanity's relationship with Him. Out of love, God promises that everything wrong will be made right again.

13. Where do you see yourself in the story of God and His love for His creation?



ACTION STEP

Through faith in Jesus, we can have the same close relationship with God that Adam and Eve had. We can walk and talk with Him. Pray for one person you know who is far from God. Ask God to show you how you can reach out to that person and be an example of God's love to them. Write down what you did:

Please print your full name and address. (Please do not remove the covers. The information you provide below is the only way we can track your lessons.)

FIRST

LAST

ID#

INSTITUTION

HOUSING

STREET ADDRESS / PO BOX

CITY

STATE

ZIP

WANT TO DO **MORE?**

The book of Philippians was written by Paul, an early follower of Jesus, while he was in prison. He wrote it to the believers in Philippi to encourage them to continue to grow in their faith.

Read the book of Philippians (Philippians 1:1–4:23). What other encouragement did Paul give to them? What encouragement can you take from Paul's words?