

THE BIBLE: BASIC FACTS AND THE MISSION OR STORY OF GOD

Discussion starter question: What has been your understanding of the Christian Bible up until now? In other words, how have you understood the origin, purpose, nature, and character of the Bible?

Goal of lesson one: To learn the overall story and basic facts about the Bible.

Basic Facts about the Bible

The Bible tells us about the existence of God, his character, and his mission, the origin of sin, the origin of man, man's purpose, how God used Israel as a light to the nations, the way of salvation through Jesus, the church, how to follow Jesus today and man's destiny.

The Bible is made of 66 books – 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These books were written over approximately a period of 1,500 to 1,600 years by approximately 38 to 40 writers.

Time span of the writing of the Bible: Old Testament -- approximately 1446 B. C. to 430 B. C.

Approximately 480 years between the last book of the Old Testament (Malachi) and the first book of the New Testament (Galatians or 1 & 2 Thessalonians).

New Testament – 50 A. D. to 95 – 100 A. D.

Paul's books – 50 A. D. to 65 A. D. (Paul probably died around 66 A. D.)
(Paul's first books were Galatians and 1 & 2 Thessalonians written around 50-52 A. D.)

Basic time span of the Bible:

Time of creation to Abraham not certain.

Old Testament - Abraham – 2091 B. C. to end of Old Testament 430 B. C.

Between the Testaments – 430 B. C to the birth of John in 6 B. C.

New Testament – Birth of John the Baptist in 6 B. C. to the end of the New Testament – 95 AD - John's Revelation on Patmos.

Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem - A. D. 70

The Bible can be divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament.

Then it can be divided historically into five big parts: 1. Creation, 2. Fall, 3. Redemption and history, including the time of the church, 4. The return of Jesus and judgment, and 5. The new creation and eternal life.

The Mission of God and the Story of the Bible

The Old Testament and the New Testament are united by the one mission (or one story). God's plan or mission was to bless, save and redeem the nations through Israel, and later through the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and his church. His mission is also to use us to bless others.

The Old Testament - It was written mainly in Hebrew though some parts of Daniel and Ezra were written in Aramaic.

The Old Testament was written before Jesus came to this world. It is about God creating the world, the fall of man, Noah and the flood, the confusion of the languages and how all the people were spread over the whole world, the call of Abraham and God's promise to him and his descendants to bless them and make them a blessing to others. Abraham's descendants were called Israel. (**Call** in this context means that he was given a task to do by God.) It is always good to remember that there is the upper story (or level) of what God's mission and plan is and there is the lower story (or level) of how this all works out in history.

In one sense, the whole Bible is about God's **promise** to bless his people and make them a blessing to others. The promise was fulfilled in a limited sense in the life of Abraham, his son Isaac, Isaac's son, Jacob, and Jacob's son, Joseph. God's plan was to permit Joseph to be sold into slavery and taken to Egypt, to bless him (although through many trials) and use him to bless many people. Eventually, his father (Jacob) and brothers came to Egypt looking for food. At first, Joseph's brothers did not recognize him so he tested them in various ways and then eventually revealed himself to them, forgave them and was reconciled to them. They enjoyed favor with the Pharaoh as long as Joseph was alive. But then another Pharaoh came to power and began to persecute the people of Israel. They were in bondage in Egypt for 400 years. Then God called Moses to become a mighty leader who would lead them out of bondage to take them to the Promised Land.

God worked with his people and tested them in the wilderness (Psalm 66: 8-12; 136: 16). He gave them commandments to follow. He also planned that Israel would bless the other nations of the world and become a witness to them of God's power, love, compassion, forgiveness, faithfulness, justness and holiness (Jeremiah 32: 23; Psalm 106: 34; Daniel 9: 11). One way God demonstrated his power was by conquering the enemies of his people (Psalm 136: 17-20). As part of fulfilling the promise, God also acted and gave his people land, which represented living in the presence of God in a certain place and receiving his inheritance. The land even represented the spiritual concept of the security God gives to his children¹ (Joshua 24: 13; 32:

¹ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/61492036/8/The-Theological-Significance-of-the-Land>; <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/joshua/land.html> (accessed on August 20, 2012);

22; Psalm 105: 44; 136: 21, 22; 142: 5). (**Witness** means that they would testify to the glory, power, goodness, and faithfulness of God.)

God acted later in the story, in fulfillment to his promise to Israel, through judges, prophets and kings to lead them and tell them the Word of God (Nehemiah 9: 26, 32; Daniel 9: 6). Saul was the first king but he disobeyed God and lost his kingdom. David was then chosen by God to take Saul's place. God acted again as part of fulfilling his promise by giving a specific promise to David relating to the perpetual nature of his throne and the Messiah (Jeremiah 33: 14-18; Isaiah 9: 7; Amos 9: 11, 12 and Psalm 89: 35-37). But David's son, Solomon, who became king after David, was not faithful to God, and after he died, the kingdom was divided into the southern and northern kingdoms. The people sinned, God sent judgment on them, and their land was destroyed and Israel was sent into exile for a refinement process (Isaiah 48: 10). So, God acts in judgment, punishment and wrath (Nehemiah 9: 29-31). But God is a God who rebuilds so he brought Israel back to their land and left a remnant (Nehemiah 9: 31 and the whole book of Ezra). (**Perpetual** – lasting for all time; **Refinement** – This refers to the process of making their faith purer by struggles and trials. **Remnant** – A small part of something that remains after the rest has gone. **Exile** - unwilling absence from a home country or place of residence, whether enforced by a government or court as a punishment, or self-imposed for political or religious reasons.)

The New Testament - It was written in Koine (common) Greek.

God was not finished (Malachi 4: 5). As part of the continuing fulfillment of the promise, God had a plan to send John the Baptist as a prophet to prepare the way for Jesus by turning the hearts of the people of Israel back to God. He preached that people should repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Mark 1: 4). Then God sent his only Son, servant and Messiah, to the people to live among them and bless them by showing them love, grace, the power of God and that they should believe in him and repent of their sins (Mark 1: 15; John 3: 16-18). God's prophets foretold of the day when this would happen (Isaiah 7: 14; 9: 6, 7; 11: 1-5; 42: 1-7; 52: 13 through 53: 1-12).

But many of the people thought Jesus was an imposter so they rejected him and crucified him. Yet, by the power of God, he rose from the dead and appeared to many people (1 Corinthians 15: 3-8). Just before he went back to heaven he gave his apostles the great commission which says, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" Then he gave them this promise: "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28: 19, 20). This great commission was a continuation of the promise and mission of God to all the nations. (**Repent** – to turn away from sin and say yes to God's way. Repentance also involves confessing your sins; **Imposter** – one who pretends to be something he is not. **Grace** - unmerited favor referring to the infinite love, mercy, favor and goodwill shown to humankind by God through Jesus the Christ the Son of God.)

While Jesus was ascending back to heaven, two angels said to Jesus' disciples, "*Men of Galilee why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1: 11).

Nine days later Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his followers on the day of Pentecost as he had promised. He had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit to come on them and then they would be his *"witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). When the Holy Spirit came on them, they began to speak in the native languages of the people and tell others the good news of Jesus that he died for their sins, rose from the dead, and if they believed in him, repented and were baptized, they could receive forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and become part of a group called the church (Acts 2: 38; 1 Corinthians 12: 13). All this was a continuation of the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that through his offspring all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. The Bible says that Jesus blessed the people by turning them from their "wicked" ways (Acts 3: 25-26). The Bible also says that we can enjoy the benefits of this promise to Abraham through Jesus Christ (Galatians 3: 26-29). (**Holy Spirit** – a member of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are one in total unity but at the same time separate persons. The Holy Spirit is also called the comforter. The Holy Spirit comes to live in a person's heart when they believe in Jesus, repent and are baptized. Pentecost was 49 days after the resurrection of Jesus.)

Today God wants very much for you to come to him and believe in his Son, Jesus. He loves you more than you can imagine and wants you to be in close relationship with him. He wants to give you meaning and purpose in this life and hope for the life to come.

Discussion Questions:

1. If the story the Bible tells is really historical and true, what would this mean for our lives today?
2. Why do you suppose God revealed himself using so many types of literature like: history, wisdom literature, poetry, commands, songs, prophetic material, letters, gospels about Jesus, instructions, and end times material?
3. How could understanding your purpose and mission in life help in living your everyday life?
4. How can having hope through Jesus for eternal life after you die help you in this life?

Hebrews 2: 14, 15 is talking about Jesus. What does the writer say in these verses that gives at least one answer to this question, *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."*

