

Following Jesus Discipleship Program

for

JESUS Film Harvest Partners

Standard C

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**STANDARD C:
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PART OF THE PEOPLE OF
GOD?**

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STANDARD C WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PART OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

Lesson 1: What Is the Bible's Story?

Introduction

One Sabbath early in Jesus' earthly ministry, He went into the synagogue in Nazareth. A synagogue was one of the places where Jews worshiped God. Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, and He was very familiar with this synagogue.

While in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus stood up, unrolled a scroll, and read from the prophet Isaiah. It seemed to be Jesus' custom not only to worship in a synagogue, but to teach there also. The scrolls were the written forms of the books that now form the Old Testament. The scrolls were what we now call the Jewish Bible. The word Bible comes from a word that means a collection of writings. The Bible, as we have it today, is a collection of writings or "little books."

Jesus loved the Jewish Scriptures. More importantly, Jesus loved His Heavenly Father, who speaks through the Scriptures. In His words and deeds, Jesus fulfilled the promises and expectations of the Jewish Scriptures. The apostle Paul said that in Jesus, God proved himself to be faithful. Paul said Jesus is God's "yes," or God's confirmation, to all of His promises (2 Corinthians 1:18-20).

Sometimes when people read the Bible, they become confused. This is because the Bible is so big. It has many pages. Many people and events fill its pages. There are many strange names and places. The Bible covers thousands of years. We can easily get lost in its long history and in the many books it includes. The Bible contains different kinds of literature that are used to achieve different kinds of goals. The different kinds of literature work together beautifully to tell the whole story of God.

Many people who try to read the Bible become confused and stop reading. This lesson will introduce you to the Bible in a way that will help you understand it better. The Bible is not meant to confuse us. Instead, the Bible informs, guides, and inspires us. Reading the Bible should cause us to rejoice, sing, and shout because of God's majesty and nearness. There is much more to be learned beyond what this lesson contains. As long as Christians live, they should learn more about the Bible and more about God.

A. The Bible Tells God's Story.

Christians love the Bible. For them it is the most important book in the entire world.

We call the Bible the *canon*, which means "standard, norm, list, measurement, or rule." The Bible is our rule of faith and practice. It is our standard for understanding God. Anything not in the

Bible must not be received by Christians as true about God and His people. In the Bible Christians learn the story of God. In the Bible, God tells us about himself. Some of those important things are:

1. God tells us of His mighty deeds as Creator and Redeemer.
2. God tells us how He has been and continues to be with His people.
3. God tells us about the world He created.
4. God tells us how we are to live for Him.
5. God tells His people about the world's purpose.
6. God tells us of how He became one with us in Jesus of Nazareth.

Through all of this, we learn who God is. We learn what God is like. And we learn who He wants us to be. Therefore, God is the subject of the Bible. He is the reason for its existence. The Bible invites us to learn of God so we can be pleasing to Him in all ways. The Bible helps us learn how to be the people God wants us to be.

Christians do not study the Bible for its own sake. Rather, we study the Bible because it faithfully and truthfully introduces God to us. The Bible invites us to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).

Question: What is the Bible?

Question: Why is the Bible important?

Question: What are some of the ways the Bible tells us about God?

B. God's Story Has Several Parts.

One thing we need to know is the Bible is divided into two major parts. The first part we call the Old Testament. The second part we call the New Testament. Another word for testament is *covenant*. Covenant is the word the Bible uses to refer to the relationship God established with His people.

In the Old Testament, we learn the part of the story about God that happened before the birth of Jesus. In the New Testament, we learn the story of God that He tells through His Son, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, God tells the story of himself in a way that completes and fulfills the Old Testament. Both parts of the Bible are very important. In both parts, the one and only God tells His story. So, the God that we meet in Jesus is the same God who spoke with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets. In both parts of the Bible, we meet the gracious God who loves and redeems His creation.

Question: What is the general difference between the Old Testament and New Testament?

Question: What is the meaning of the word *covenant*?

C. The Old Testament

The Old Testament records the history of how God called the Jews to be His people. It tells of the covenants God made with them.

When we look at the Old Testament, we see a big collection of 39 books. The Old Testament has a long history by which the books that form it were written and collected. The books tell much of the story of Jewish history, both good and bad. It tells of Jewish worship, life, and wisdom. It tells of the many ways God chose to speak to His people and of their many responses to Him.

The way the Old Testament is organized in Protestant Bibles differs from the way the books were organized in the Hebrew Scriptures. The difference is one of organization, not content. Protestant Bibles have the order and content in the next section of this lesson. Since most Bibles are published by Protestants, we will look at this way of organizing the Old Testament.

Question: What does the Old Testament tell about God?

1. The Books of the Law

Another word for the books of the Law is *Pentateuch*, which means “five” or “five scrolls.” The books of the Law are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Hebrew word for these books is *Torah*, which means “law.” The Law is presented in the form of a story that extends from the creation of the universe to the time just before Israel entered the Promised Land. These books tell the story of how the Holy God, the Creator of heaven and earth, chose to become involved in the life of the Hebrew people. The heart of the story of the Law or Pentateuch occurs in the Book of Exodus. Exodus tells how God helped the Hebrews escape slavery in Egypt. It also tells about the time they spent at Mount Sinai where God gave His Law or Ten Commandments to them. There, the people gained a knowledge of who they should be. After that time, all Jewish history looked back to those experiences for instruction and correction.

Question: What do the Books of the Law tell about God?

2. The Historical Books

The books of history are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. These books present different and sometimes overlapping accounts of Israel’s ancient past. Each book is shaped by the conviction that God was committed to personal dealings with the descendants of Abraham. The writers of the historical books used many different sources for their accounts.

Question: What do the historical books tell about God?

3. The Books of Poetry and Wisdom

The books of poetry and wisdom are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. These books are very diverse. The Book of Job asks whether or not we serve God because it is profitable to do so, because God has been good to us, or freely and simply because God is God. The Book of Psalms presents the hymns or songs of Israel. The book is also called the Psalter. It is the songbook of ancient Israel. The Book of Proverbs consists of sayings that teach persons how to wisely follow God. They teach the difference between living wisely and foolishly. The proverbs or wise saying teach people how to faithfully follow the way of the Lord. They tell us that true wisdom comes from God. The Book of Ecclesiastes gives a rather grim picture of life and death. But the author hold fast to the need of reverence for God. The Song of Solomon contains love poems, or songs, of Israel.

Question: What do the poetry and wisdom books tell about God?

4. The Prophetic Books

The prophets were persons to whom the Word of the Lord came in a special way. The prophets knew the Lord had called and appointed them. The call of the Lord was basic to Hebrew prophecy. The prophet's inspiration and authority came from God, not from the prophet. God disclosed His will and message to the prophet. The prophet became God's personal agent to speak what he or she heard from God. God alone was the one the prophet much obey. Not all of the prophets wrote books.

We divide the prophetic books into two sections. The Major Prophets are the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Minor Prophets, or the Twelve, are the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The prophets, who spoke for God, are a diverse group of men representing a long period of time. They viewed religion, politics, society, and history through the eyes of faith. They refused to let their faith in God be dominated by a lack of faith and disobedience they saw around them. Through the prophets, God spoke against all forms of backsliding, fear, and idolatry. The prophets lived and spoke under God's rule, and they called upon their peers in all walks of life to do the same.

Question: What do the prophetic books tell about God?

D. The New Testament

The Old and New Testaments are not two separate and unrelated accounts of God and His people. Together, in unity, they form the Bible. In both parts, God speaks. In both parts, God is revealed to be the Creator and Redeemer, the only true God. The New Testament continues the story of God. In fact, in the New Testament we learn how God fulfilled promises He made in the Old Testament.

The New Testament tells the story of how God sent His eternal Son into the world to redeem it (John 3:16). It tells of Jesus' earthly ministry, His death on the Cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His return to heaven. The New Testament also tells how Christ called His disciples. It tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit and how the Church began. It tells about the growth of the Early Church. It tells about its successes and some of the problems the Church faced. In the Letters we are told what it means to be Jesus' disciples and members of His Church. The New Testament also tells Christians they are to be people of enduring hope, because the future belongs to God whom we meet in Jesus Christ.

Various teachers in the Early Church wrote the 27 books of the New Testament. They were written to Christian congregations and to individuals. One purpose for the books was to provide further instruction in the Christian faith. Another purpose was to correct abuses and turmoil that were occurring in some churches. The books of the New Testament were written in the common Greek language of that time.

Question: What does the New Testament tell about God?

Question: Who wrote the books of the New Testament?

The books of the New Testament are as follows:

1. The Gospels

The Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are known as the Gospels. The writers of the four Gospels show us how Jesus preached and illustrated the Kingdom of God and the Gospel message in His life, death, and resurrection.

2. The Acts of the Apostles

The Book of Acts tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit as Christ promised and of His activity in the Early Church. It tells about the missionary work of the apostle Paul and the spread of the Christian faith to other countries.

3. The Letters of Paul

Paul wrote letters to some of the young Christian churches. In the letters he instructed Christians and dealt with problems in the churches. The letters in the New Testament that have Paul's name attached to them are the books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

4. Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews was written to encourage some Christians who had been Jews before becoming Christians. The author is not known. The book has much to teach about who Jesus is.

5. The General Letters

The general letters were not written to specific churches. So, we call them general letters. They are the books of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude.

6. The Revelation

The Book Revelation was written to encourage Christians in some churches that were undergoing persecution. The book tells us Christ will have the last work in human history.

Question: What do the Gospels tell us about God and His Son, Jesus Christ?

Question: What do we learn from the Book of Acts?

Question: What do we learn from reading the Letters of Paul?

Conclusion

Christians believe the Bible is the Word of God. Christians believe that in the Bible God faithfully and without error shows us who He is and who we are supposed to be. But most important, Christians believe Christ is the Word of God. First and last, the Word of God is a Person, not a book. Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God. In Jesus Christ, the glorious God fully reveals himself. But the Bible is the book in which the story of God, including the wonderful story of Jesus, is told. It is the authoritative and inspired story of God.

Martin Luther, one of the great reformers of the Church, spoke of the relationship between Christ and the Bible in this way. He said the Bible is like the manger in which Jesus was laid. We worship the Christ who is in the manger, not the manger itself. Today, we worship Jesus, not the Bible who tells us about Him. But we also recognize we would not know Jesus without the Bible. And without the Church to love, defend, preach, translate, and transmit it, there would be no Bible.

Activity: If there are Bibles available, practice finding different books of the Old Testament and New Testament.

Activity: Think about how God's story helps you to understand your life. Talk with your pastor or teacher about your thoughts.

Activity: Think about the importance of the Bible, and discuss this with your discipleship group.

Activity: The *JESUS* film is Book of Luke in action. Tell your teacher what your favorite part of the film was.