

## Introduction to the Bible

Have you ever wondered what the Bible was? And why Christians read it so much? Have you ever tried to read it but didn't know where to start, or what it was all about? This material has been written to help to introduce you to the Bible. It will help you to find your way around it and give you a very basic idea of what it is all about.

### What is the Bible?

The Bible is a collection of books used by Christians. Christians believe that God speaks to men through His actions and words as they are written down in the Bible.

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word 'biblia' which means 'little books'. The Bible is actually a library of 66 books written by at 40 different authors over a period of at least 1500 years. The oldest book was written about 1500 BC or earlier. The last was written about 100 AD.

The Bible was originally written in the Hebrew and Greek languages. The New International Version (NIV) is an English translation of the Bible. The translators have made a special effort to use language that would be clear and suitable for both public and private use.

### The Different Sections of the Bible

The first thing to do is to look at the table of contents in your Bible. You will notice in the contents that the Bible is divided into two main sections: the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*. The Old Testament has 39 books. The New Testament has 27 books.

A 'testament' is another word for covenant, which is an agreement set up by God setting out the relationship between God and human beings.

In the Old Testament, the relationship was based on law. God chose a people for Himself and gave them his law. The people he chose was the nation of Israel, named after one of their ancestors. The history books in the Old Testament show the relationship based on law failed because people always sin and disobey God's law.

In the New Testament, the relationship between God and man is based on grace (God's free acceptance of us) and peace. Grace and peace come through Jesus Christ, God himself, who came to live among men. Jesus died in our place to pay the penalty required for breaking God's law. After three days, he rose up from the dead to give us eternal life.

### The Books of the Bible

Look at the list of names of the books in the Old and New Testaments. Some of the names will sound strange to you and be hard to pronounce. That's OK. Some of them are hard for English people to say too! Many of the books are named after their authors. Some books are letters named after the people they were first sent to. Other books are named after their subjects.

#### **Old Testament Books**

The books here are varied. There are books of history about the people that God called, government records, moral and religious law, poetry, songs and wise sayings. There are also books written by prophets. Prophets were men chosen by God to deliver his message. They also looked ahead to the coming of a servant and a king who would save his people. The special word used for this person was the Messiah, the one chosen to be king. The last Old Testament prophet wrote his book about 400 years before Jesus lived.

#### **New Testament Books**

The New Testament starts out with the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are all named after the men who wrote them. 'Gospel' means 'good news'. Each gospel describes the life, death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Greek word that means the Messiah, or the servant king looked for by the prophets of the Old Testament.

The next book in the New Testament, Acts, describes the 'acts' of Jesus' followers after Jesus had returned to heaven. The other New Testament books are all letters from Jesus' followers to early Christian churches or other Christians. These letters help us understand the good news of Jesus Christ and how to apply it to our own lives.

### Finding Things in the Bible

If you look at any of the pages in the New International Version you will find some paragraphs have a title that is in *italics*. These were added by the translators to help summarise what that paragraph is about. They were not in the original book.

Also, if you read any of the books, you will see that they are divided into chapters a page or two long. The chapters are all numbered. Each chapter is divided into short verses a few lines long. Each verse is also numbered. The books originally were not divided into chapters and verses. The chapter and verse numbers were added later to make it easier to find things in the Bible.

When quoting something from the Bible, people will identify the location of the passage by book, chapter and verse. You can look up the location of the book in the table of contents to find a page number for chapter 1. Then you look forward in the book to find the right chapter and verse.

### The Message of the Bible

The following verses describe some of the important things that God tells us in the Bible. Practice what we have just learned about finding passages in the Bible by looking up the verses:

**Romans 1:28-31** describes what people are like without God.

**Acts 17:24-28** describes how God intended things to be.

**Isaiah 59:1-2** and **Romans 6:23** talk about the results of man's disobedience to God.

**Isaiah 53:6**, **Romans 5:6-11** and **Romans 10:9-13** describe God's plan for bringing people back into a close relationship with himself.

### Reading the Bible on Your Own

God's word is meant to be read and understood. We encourage you to read the Bible on your own. A good place to start is Mark's Gospel. Read with a humble attitude, ready to learn, looking for what is true. John Stott, who wrote an excellent book called 'Basic Christianity', suggests a prayer for those who are reading the Bible that goes like this:

*"God, I'm an honest seeker after truth. I don't know if you exist, but if you do, please reveal yourself to me as you are. Show me if Jesus is your Son and Saviour of the world. If you bring this conviction to my mind, I will trust Jesus as my Saviour and follow him as my Lord."*