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The Story of Jesus Christ

An Overview

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible

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What Famous People Have Said About Jesus

Napoleon Bonaparte

French General, Politician and Emperor

“I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but what foundation did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.”

Blaise Pascal

French Mathematician, Writer and Scholar

«There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus Christ.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Indian Political Leader

“A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.”

Albert Einstein

German-born Physicist

I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. Jesus is too colossal for the pen of phrase-mongers, however artful.”

Charles Dickens

British Writer

“I commit my soul to the mercy of God, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I now most solemnly impress upon you the truth and beauty of the Christian religion as it came from Christ Himself, and the impossibility of going far wrong if you humbly but heartily respect it.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Swiss-born Philosopher

“Socrates died like a philosopher; Jesus Christ died like a God.”

What is this Book?

This book is the story of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. People have different reactions to Jesus. Some are curious: why do people still pay attention to this wandering preacher who lived 2000 years ago? Others are skeptical: aren't miracles and resurrections the stuff of fairy tales? Others are searching: could knowing about Jesus be helpful for me?

So, what is this book you hold in your hands? First, we will say what it is not. It is not a Bible. The Bible has over a thousand pages; this book about 60 pages (with pictures). It is not meant to replace reading the Bible. It also is not meant to explain how everything written in the Bible could have happened. This book gives very little commentary on the Bible stories; however, you will find a few explanations that make the stories a bit more understandable. And this book does not cover church practice or history outside of what is in the Bible (except for a few notes at the end).

This book is a summary of key Bible stories and themes as related to Jesus Christ. If you would like to read the original stories and ideas from the Bible, one of the appendices- "Chapter by Chapter with Bible References" - will tell you where to find them. However, some of the smaller ideas in this book will not be referenced, or the book would be too long.

This biography of Jesus Christ is a summary of the main plot of the Bible: that there is a loving, righteous God whose desire towards mankind is to rescue them from sin and death through his Son, Jesus. If you read this book first, then when you start to read the Bible itself, you'll see how what you are reading ties into the big picture. Or you could think of this book as kind of a simple map. Looking at a map is not the same as looking at the real thing, but it can help orient you.

Another thing: the Bible is not always written chronologically, but this material is in chronological order; one story, focusing on the Jesus moments. It is His story. We see many 'pictures' of Christ, even in the Old Testament, the part of the Bible written before Christ's birth.

Finally, the author has chosen to highlight the stories and ideas which all Christians would hold as true, whether Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant.

The Bible is more than just a history book, or handbook of a world religion. The Bible centers on God's relationship with people and vice versa. And Jesus is at the very center of this relationship. This book will give you background understanding about Jesus Christ and the Bible, and in so doing help you connect your story to God's story.

Are you ready? Let's go!

Introduction: Before Creation

Normally when you read a biography you start with a person's birth or maybe talk a little about their parents or grandparents. But a biography of Jesus has to go way back in time, actually even before time, because the Bible teaches that Jesus is divine. He is actually God. You may wonder, "Hold on! How can Jesus be God? People who believe they are God are usually locked up in a psychiatric hospital." When Jesus claimed to be God, it didn't get him put away in a hospital; it got him nailed to death on a cross.

Jesus is a member of the Trinity. The Bible shows us a picture of God that Christians call the "Trinity", which means one God but in three persons; three in one. It's not three gods. It's not one God in three different roles. It's three persons making up one God. You could say: $1+1+1=1$. It's truly a mystery that no one can fully understand. The names for the three persons of the Trinity are God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit. In the Bible we see them often appearing one at a time, but on a few occasions, all three persons of the Trinity show up together, like when Jesus was baptized. We also see that the members of the Trinity have a loving relationship with each other. God didn't need to create us because he was lonely, but to share his love with us.

A few other things to know about God is that he is all-powerful (to make the universe, that would come in handy), he is all-knowing (he even knows our thoughts) and he is everywhere at once. He also is holy. This means he is pure, does not sin, and will not ignore sin. Now, this would be a pretty scary God, one who could read our minds and is with us every moment of the day and doesn't put up with our faults. However, another important characteristic of God is that he is love. He created us, has a deep love for each of us and wants to be in relationship with us.

It's also important to know that God created other beings before mankind. We do not know all that God created before he created Earth and everything on it, but we know about angels. Angels are very powerful creatures created to serve and worship God. There are millions of angels. At the beginning they were given free will to choose to obey God or not. One particularly beautiful and powerful angel rebelled. He was very prideful and decided he didn't want God telling him what to do. He decided he wanted to be God, and one third of the angels sided with him against God. God had to punish this mutiny and cast them out of heaven to earth, where now they work against God and his plans for good. This rebellious angel is known as Satan (or the devil) and the fallen angels are called demons.

Other good angels show up throughout the Bible. Two we know by name are Michael and Gabriel. They are messengers and warriors for God.

Chapter 1: The Creation & Flood

Now we are ready to begin at the beginning of the Bible, with the creation of our world. God speaks and things come into being out of nothing: the universe, planets, the sea, plants, animals and lastly, people. How exactly God does this and how long it takes are the subjects of many books and would be too long to discuss here. But one thing that the Bible says is that all three members of the Trinity are involved: The Spirit of God hovers, God speaks, and the eternal Son acts to bring everything on our earth into existence. When it's time to create man, God refers to Himself as 'us' and says 'Let US make man in OUR image.'

God creates the first people- Adam and Eve- and puts them in a beautiful garden called Eden. He walks and talks with them. It's wonderful! However, there is one tree called "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil", from which they are not allowed to eat. If they eat from it, they will know the difference between good and evil, and their disobedience will lead to death.

Well, one day Eve is by that tree and a serpent approaches to make conversation with her. I don't know if it was normal at the beginning of time to have a conversation with a snake, but Eve is curious about what he has to say. The snake is actually the devil, and he tempts Eve to doubt God's warning and to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree. When she sees the fruit looks tasty, she takes it and eats some, and then offers some to Adam. At that moment they know the difference between good and evil. They know that they had sinned, and they try to hide from God. Up to that point they had been walking around naked and thought nothing of it, but now they feel ashamed and try to hide themselves by making clothes out of fig leaves.

When God comes around for their evening walk, he already knows what has happened and that the couple is hiding from him. When he asks them about eating from the tree, Adam blames Eve for tempting him, and Eve blames the serpent for tempting her. The results of that first sin are still felt today. The most serious is death; now all people have to die. If Adam and Eve had never sinned, they would have lived forever. God warned that their disobedience would bring death, and God always keeps his word. Other results of the first sin affect us every day, as well. Giving birth is now very painful, and we struggle much harder to grow food. In short, the whole creation is cursed when sin enters it.

But then God says something that brings hope to Adam and Eve (and us), but is disastrous for Satan. This hope comes in the form of a little story. God says that in the future, the snake (Satan) will bite the heel of a child of the woman, but that this child will crush the head of the snake. I'm sure Satan understood that having his head crushed represented his complete destruction. But by whom? From then on, Satan has been on the lookout for that person, in order to not just 'bite' but destroy him, before he himself can be destroyed. Knowing the whole story, we know that Jesus would be the one to come and fulfill this prophecy.



Adam and Eve are tempted by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit

As the generations progress after Adam and Eve, people become more and more wicked. Scripture says that all their thoughts were only bad and God regretted that he had created man. He decides it is time to punish the whole world for their sins, and destroy all people in a world-wide flood. Satan would have been glad to have all mankind killed, but God notices that there is one man who is disturbed by all the evil and is trying to do right. That man is Noah.

God comes to Noah and commands him to build an ark (a specially-designed, large boat) so that his family and two of every animal can survive the coming flood. For many years, Noah builds the ark, and when it's time, God brings two of each animal to the ark. When they have all entered, God Himself closes the door. It rains for 40 days and nights until the whole earth is covered with water. All living things die, except the people and animals on the ark. Then, the water subsides back into the oceans and the ark comes to rest on Mountain Ararat, located in modern-day Turkey.

A worldwide flood raises lots of questions. Is there any evidence for such a catastrophe? Again, much has been written about this topic. It is interesting to note that seashell fossils have been found on top of high mountains, and that two thirds of our planet is still covered with water.

In the ark we also see a picture that looks forward to Jesus Christ. Those who believe what God says – who 'enter by the door', which is Christ – will not be destroyed in the judgement at the end of time.

Chapter 2: Abraham Believes God

After the flood, Noah's family has children and with time, repopulates the world. Once again, evil grows – people continue to selfishly do what they want instead of obeying God. This time God decides to choose one family to become a blessing to the whole world – the family of Abram. God appears to Abram in Mesopotamia and tells him to pack up his family and servants and move to a land far away. God promises to lead him and show him the way. So, Abram packs up his possessions and together with his wife, Sarah, his father, nephew and others, they head out.

Abram arrives in the land that is Israel today. When he was 99 years old, God tells Abram that he will greatly increase his descendants. He also changes Abram's name to 'Abraham' (meaning 'father of many nations'). Probably in the back of his mind, Abram is thinking, 'How is all this going to happen?' because he and Sarah had never been able to have children.

But several years later, three guests show up at Abraham's tent. Somehow, he realizes that these were not ordinary guests and that one of them is God Himself. He hurries to them, bows down and begs them to stay for dinner. One of the guests tells Abraham that by this time next year he will have a son. Sarah overhears this conversation and laughs to herself, because she is about 90 years old and Abraham is about 100 - way past child-bearing years! But God's words come true, and a miracle child named Isaac is born.

Many people wonder if Abram's guest, the one that announced the birth of the child, may have been Jesus, because later, when Jesus was on earth, he said that, 'In his day, Abraham rejoiced to see me.'

So Abraham's family is chosen to be the family of the promise that God uses to bless the world. For the next few centuries, we see evidence of Satan trying to destroy Abraham's descendants and turn them away from God.

Several years after Isaac is born, God does something totally unexpected. God comes to Abraham and asks him to sacrifice the son of the promise, Isaac. Abraham has such incredible faith in God's promises that he obeys. He takes Isaac, some firewood, fire and a knife up a mountain. As they depart, Abraham assures his waiting servant that, "We" – himself and Isaac – "will come back to you." He also assures Isaac – who notices there is no lamb for the sacrifice – that "God will provide the sacrifice."

Abraham prepares the altar and lays Isaac on top of it. At the last moment when Abraham raises his knife, God stops him, telling him not to kill his son. Immediately, Abraham sees a ram stuck in a bush; the ram is God's provision for the sacrifice. God commends Abraham for being willing to sacrifice his own son to Him. This is a very unusual story (especially since later in the Bible we find out that God detested the ancient practice of human sacrifice).

This story is one of the clearest pictures of Jesus in the Old Testament. Abraham shows us the hard thing that God the Father had to do in allowing God the Son to be sacrificed on the cross for the sins of the world. Isaac carries the wood for the sacrifice on his back, like Jesus carried his cross. Isaac is already old enough to run away, but like Jesus, he allows himself to become a sacrifice. And finally, the provision of the ram is a picture of God providing the sacrifice: God meeting his own demands for the payment of sin.



God stops Abraham from sacrificing Isaac

As we read the Bible, it turns out we are following the line of ancestors through which Jesus would be born into the world. Abraham's son Isaac has twin boys. Both of them become great nations, but the younger son (Jacob) God renames 'Israel.' Jacob (Israel) has 12 sons whose families became the 12 tribes of Israel. One of the 12, Joseph, becomes the favorite of his father but is resented by his brothers.

One day Jacob sends Joseph to check up on his brothers, but out of envy they throw him into a pit. Then, his brother Judah sells him for twenty pieces of silver to some merchants who passed by, who later re-sell Joseph, this time as a slave in Egypt. God watches over Joseph even when he unjustly ends up in prison. God gives Joseph understanding of dreams, and one day Joseph is asked to interpret a dream for Pharaoh. The dream is a warning from God that throughout the entire region there will soon be seven years of good harvests, followed by a devastating seven years of famine. Pharaoh rewards Joseph by making him second in command of Egypt and putting

In Joseph's life we see a picture of Jesus. Just as Joseph was sold by his brother Judah for silver, so Jesus was sold by his friend, Judas for silver. And even though this was meant for harm, God turned it for good and the salvation of many people. This is another time when the family line of Jesus is miraculously protected from destruction by God.

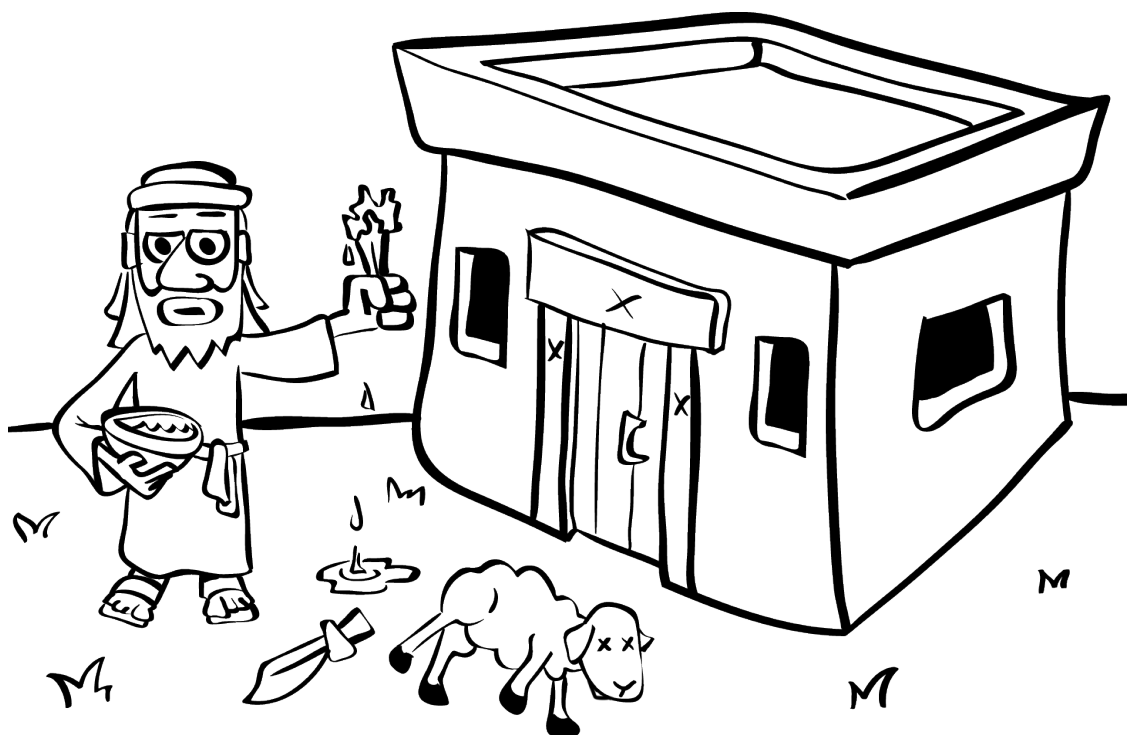
him in charge of famine preparation. In an amazing turn of events, Joseph's brothers end up at his mercy, as they too are victims of the famine and come to Egypt for grain. Joseph forgives his brothers and invites his father, brothers and their families to move to Egypt since there is no food to eat in their home country.

Chapter 3: Which Way Back to the Promised Land?

Jacob (Israel) and his family end up staying in Egypt for the next 400 years, and during that time they multiply to a group of around 2 million people, now referred to as the Israelites. This worries the Egyptians – that many Israelites could take over the country – so they make them slaves and treat them cruelly. When this doesn't solve the problem, the Egyptian pharaoh decides to kill all of their male babies. (Note once again: Satan would have been pleased if Pharaoh had succeeded in killing the offspring that might one day destroy him). However, the Israelite midwives refuse to obey Pharaoh's command. One baby that is hidden away and survives is named Moses. Moses grows up and leaves Egypt, fleeing to the desert, where he becomes a shepherd.

After many years, God appears to Moses in a burning bush and tells him to return to Egypt. He is to tell Pharaoh to let God's people go. Moses returns to Egypt and when Pharaoh refuses to release the Israelites from slavery, God sends great plagues against the Egyptians, including disease, locust, frogs, darkness, hail and other calamities. Pharaoh keeps refusing, until God releases the tenth and most disastrous plague of all: an angel of death passes through Egypt and kills the first-born son in every family. However, God provides protection for Israelite families. They are saved by putting the blood of an innocent lamb on the top and sides of their doorframes. This sign causes the angel of death to pass over their homes. Finally, Pharaoh allows the Israelites to leave, and they begin their journey back to the land God promised their ancestor, Abraham. The feast celebrating this 'Passover' is celebrated by Jews to this day.

Again, God was not only saving his people from slavery in Egypt, but also painting a picture of salvation for people for generations to come. Throughout the Bible, Jesus is often referred to as the "lamb that was slain." Just like the Israelites were saved by the Passover blood, those who believe in Jesus will not be slaves to sin and will not die for their sins. God will look on Jesus' blood and "pass over" them, granting them eternal life.



Painting blood on the doorposts for the first Passover

This last plague, the killing of the firstborn sons, results in Pharaoh allowing the two million Israelites to leave Egypt. Led by Moses, they head out into the neighboring desert where God personally guides them with a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Of course, the desert is not the best place to find water and food for so many people. The Israelites complain and some even want to return to Egypt, but God takes care of them. He miraculously provides water and sends a special sort of bread, which covers the ground. They call this bread “manna”.

When they arrive at a desert mountain named Sinai, Moses goes up the mountain and receives God’s Law to his people. Included in this Law are ten commandments, including “don’t worship other gods or make idols”, “don’t use God’s name lightly”, “don’t steal”, “don’t kill”, and others. God is showing His people how they should live.

God also knows that they can’t keep all those laws (when we break a law, we call it “sin”), so he provides a way for the Israelites to ask his forgiveness when they sin. This usually involves the sacrifice of a perfect animal, spilling its blood and burning part of its flesh on a fire. Over the next centuries, thousands of animals die as God’s people ask for forgiveness. This may sound barbaric to us; after all, the poor animal didn’t do anything wrong! But God created this picture to prepare His people for what Jesus would do later. Jesus lived an innocent life and then was killed, once for all, for the sins of the world. No more animals would have to be sacrificed.

One other event in the wilderness needs to be mentioned, because of how it points to Jesus. One day the Israelites are complaining (again) about how hard it is to travel in the desert, and God sends poisonous snakes among them to bite them. As the people beg for deliverance, God tells Moses to make a snake of bronze and put it up on a pole. Moses holds that snake up and anyone who believed God and looked at the bronze snake on the pole lived, but those that refused to look died. Again, we see another picture of Jesus on the cross. Anyone who believes God and looks to his Son and his death on the cross will receive eternal, spiritual life, while those that refuse will remain spiritually dead.

Because of their disobedience and complaining, God allows the nation of Israel to wander around in the wilderness for 40 years, until at last they are ready to go into the land that God had promised Abraham hundreds of years before. Moses dies, and a new leader, Joshua is called to lead the Israelites in many battles to take over the land. Before they entered, a person identified as the ‘Commander of Lord’s Army’ meets Joshua, who falls down to worship Him. This is another appearance of God to a human being, and very possibly it was God the Son – Jesus.

Chapter 4: A King Who Will Reign Forever?

With God's help and some miracles, the Israelites take over and settle into the Promised Land. But the future generations get comfortable and forget all that God has done for them. They start worshiping the gods of the neighboring tribes of people. We see that whenever this happens, God causes an enemy to rise up against Israel. Then Israel returns to God, begging for His deliverance, and God sends a leader (a judge) who leads the army and saves Israel. This cycle: people sin – enemy attacks – people pray – God delivers, happens over and over again.

Finally, the Israelites say, "You know what, we need a king to lead us, like the other nations." Their first king, Saul, starts humbly enough but eventually turns away from God. When he dies in battle, a very special king named David is chosen by God to lead Israel. Although David sometimes fails, even committing adultery and murder, he always returns to God and begs forgiveness. In his lifetime, David wrote worship songs to God, tried to follow God's Law given to Moses, and even desired to build a beautiful temple for God. God called David a "man after His own heart".

Then God makes an incredible promise to David. God tells him that his dynasty will never end: a son of David will sit on the throne forever! Whoa! How is that going to happen? Well, it's complicated. God is talking about Jesus. Even though Jesus is God the Son in heaven, in his humanity, he would be born into this world as a descendent of King David. Jesus is the King who will reign forever and ever. God had said the coming Savior would be a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and now he limits the field, saying that this great leader would come from the line of David.



A descendant of King David will be on the throne forever

Of course, this new information does not go unnoticed by Satan. David's grandson, Rehoboam nearly loses the throne. He does not follow the Lord and is cruel to his subjects, and Israel decides they don't want a son of David on the throne. The kingdom splits into two parts with only two tribes - Judah (David's tribe) and Benjamin - following Rehoboam. The other ten tribes find a new king for the remaining territory of Israel.

There is one other time when the line of David is hanging by a thread. The evil queen mother Athaliah decides to seize power for herself and kill all the royal heirs to the throne. She would have succeeded, except that a priest takes a baby, Josiah, from the royal family and hides him in the temple for seven years. At seven years old, Josiah is presented to Judah as the rightful king! The line of David is saved.

Chapter 5: The Messiah is Coming?

During the times of the Israelite kings, God spoke to people through prophets. The prophets warned the people of Israel to turn from their sins to God, but also promised them that a great deliverer was coming. The Hebrew word they used for this deliverer was “Messiah” which literally means “the Anointed One”. In those days, when a king was chosen, oil was poured on his head; he was anointed. Later, after Greek became the widespread language, they used the Greek word for the anointed one – the “Christ”. Some people may think that when we say “Jesus Christ”, that “Jesus” was his first name and “Christ” was his family name, but we are really saying “Jesus, the one anointed by God to save the world”.

One of the prophets who writes many prophecies about this coming Messiah is Isaiah. He prophesizes that the Messiah would come not as a conqueror but as a suffering servant. He claims that the Messiah would take our sins upon Himself, suffer the punishment for them and bring us forgiveness. Isaiah also says that the Messiah would be born of a virgin girl, and that a great prophet would come before the Messiah, telling people to get ready for his arrival. Another prophet named Micah even names the town where the Messiah would be born: Bethlehem, the hometown of King David.

One thing that makes Bible prophecies a bit unclear is that Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago as a servant, but he also promises to come back a second time as a conqueror. The prophecies about his first coming and his future coming are both included in the Bible. So, most of the Jews were expecting the Messiah to come the first time as a conqueror, not as a servant coming to die for the world’s sins. They got confused about the first and second comings.

In the books written by the prophets and other books of the Old Testament, scholars have counted up to 40 or 50 prophecies about the Messiah coming to earth. They were written hundreds of years before Jesus came, like signposts pointing to this Savior. And of course, Satan noticed each of them, but not being all-knowing, he still did not know the time nor which person from the line of David to expect. Someone might say, “Maybe these are not prophecies at all. Maybe all these prophecies about Jesus were written after he came and are just pretending to be written beforehand.” This idea is not even possible because the Old Testament including the prophecies were written in Hebrew, and then translated into Greek in the 3rd century BC. So, all these prophecies were written at least a few centuries before Jesus was born.

Chapter 6: Israel into Exile

The prophets not only foretell the coming of the Messiah but they also warn the people if they didn't stop worshipping idols and treating others unjustly, they would be punished. All of these prophecies also came true. First, the wickedness of Israel's kings leads to a split and Israel becomes two countries: Israel and Judah. The situation gets worse and worse, until the Assyrian Empire invades and takes the Israelites into exile. A few years later, the Babylonians did the same thing to Judah. God's people are now scattered and living in slavery.

The Bible includes stories of God's people who remain loyal to him even while they are in exile. For example, we learn that in Babylon, the exiles from Judah (where they were called Jews) were expected to worship the Babylonian gods. This violated the first of God's commandments. Three young Jewish men refuse to worship an image set up by the king, and are thrown into a fiery furnace as punishment. The furnace is so hot, that it kills the servants who throw the Jews in. But when the king looks into the furnace, he sees the three men walking around in the flames, unharmed! And there is a shining fourth man with them who looks like a "son of the gods." This was very possibly another Old Testament appearance of God the Son, Jesus. The young men are saved and eventually, this Babylonian king worships the God of Israel.



The three Jews unharmed in the fiery furnace

Another near-destruction of the nation of Israel and the line of David happened during exile. The Empire of Persia becomes very powerful and takes over the Babylonian Empire. When the Persian king, Ahasuerus, is looking for a new queen, he orders a nationwide beauty contest and chooses Esther, a stunning Hebrew girl. One of the King's advisors, Naaman, hated the Jewish exiles ('foreigners') and he tricks the king into signing a royal order to annihilate them. Queen Esther cunningly devises a way to reveal Haman's treachery and begs the king for her life and the lives of her people. The king could not revoke his order, but he publicly executes Haman and makes a way for the Jews to defend themselves and avoid annihilation.

Eventually, many Jews are allowed to return home. Another Persian king, Cyrus, has compassion on the Jewish nation in his country and allows those who want to return to Jerusalem to go, rebuild their temple and the city. The Bible describes the return of God's people to their land.

The last prophet, Malachi, wrote 400 years before Christ came to earth. After Malachi, God did not speak directly to his people through a prophet again until Jesus' birth.

Chapter 7: God the Son Comes into Our World

It's time! It's time for God the Son to step down from his throne in heaven and come to earth to be born as a little baby. This is called the "incarnation," meaning "in the flesh" and it is a great mystery. God Himself in a human body. What do we know from the Bible about it? First, it was a very humbling experience. God the Son set aside many of his divine powers, yet he still remained 100% God. He could work miracles, forgive sins, accept worship, etc... But at the same time, he was 100% human. He was born in the normal way – through physical birth - to a Jewish girl named Mary. However, there was no human father involved in his conception. The incarnation is accomplished by God the Spirit. This way, Jesus truly is the 'son' of God. Yet as a human, Jesus experienced all the same fears, difficulties and temptations as we do, and yet he never sinned.

The Bible also says that Jesus came at just the right time in history. Not long before Jesus' birth, the Greek empire had unified people of Jesus' time with a common language. Because of the "Pax Romana" (the peace of Rome) and the way Rome firmly controlled all the civilized world, there were no wars. The Romans had also built an amazing system of roads across the empire, which they protected. This allowed information and news to spread more quickly than ever before in history.

Mary is the young girl chosen to give birth to Jesus, the Son of God. The angel Gabriel comes to bring her the news, and of course she is very shocked, because she is still a virgin. Gabriel explains that God's Spirit would bring this miracle to pass.

One difficulty for Mary is that she is engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. When he gets the news that Mary is pregnant, he naturally decides it is time to quietly break off the engagement, since he knows he is not the father. However, an angel comes to Joseph too, and says that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because the child is from the Holy Spirit. Joseph marries Mary, but they refrain from sexual relations until after Jesus is born.

During this time, the Romans require that all families go to their hometowns to be registered for a census. Mary and Joseph live in the town of Nazareth, but now must travel to Bethlehem. They are from the family line of King David, and Bethlehem was David's home town. They arrive near the time for the birth and find that the town is very crowded and there is no room for them in the inn. So, they end up staying in a very humble place meant for animals, where Mary gives birth to the Messiah and lays him in a feeding trough, or manger. They name him Jesus as they had been instructed by the angel. This name comes from the Hebrew word "to rescue", and Jesus would rescue people from their sins.

That night, not many people knew that in this humble corner of Bethlehem was born the Savior of the world. However, God let a few people in on the secret. The first is a group of shepherds who are watching their sheep out in a field. A company of angels appears, saying, "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, good will to men!" They tell the shepherds that the Savior was born and is lying in a manger. Right away they leave their flocks and go to worship this baby.



The shepherds worship baby Jesus

The second group that God lets in on the secret is a group of wise men (“Magi”) from the East. They notice a very bright new star in the sky, and according to their studies, this meant a great king had been born. They gather up precious gifts for this baby king and head off in the direction of the star. When they get to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, they ask King Herod – the ruler of the region - to tell them where this great king had been born. The religious leaders are called in, and they tell Herod and the Magi of the prophecy of Micah: the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Herod does not like the idea of a great king (other than himself) being born in his territory. He cunningly sends the Magi to Bethlehem, and tells them to report back when they find the child, so “he could go and worship the child, too.” However, his plan is really to destroy the child, which would have pleased Satan immensely. But after the wisemen find the child and worship him, an angel warns them in a dream not to return to Herod, so they leave by another route.

When Herod realizes he has been tricked, he is furious. Rather than search for this mysterious baby king, Herod decides that since the star had first appeared two years ago, he would just kill all the baby boys two years of age and younger in Bethlehem. Once again, an angel warns Joseph in a dream to flee, and the family escapes to Egypt just in time.

Jesus and his family stay in Egypt until Herod dies. They then decide to move back to the town of Nazareth. The Bible doesn’t tell us much about Jesus’ youth. We know that when he is twelve, his parents lose him on a trip to Jerusalem; after searching for three days they find him having serious discussions with the religious teachers in the temple, who were amazed at his understanding, even at just 12 years old.

Chapter 8: The Baptism of Jesus and Temptation by Satan

After 400 years of silence from God, a wild-looking man named John comes out of the desert, speaking words from God. He baptizes people in the Jordan River, calling on them to confess their sin and get ready for the coming of the Lord. People begin asking “Is this man the Messiah?” John responds, “No, but my job is to tell everyone to get ready. The Messiah is coming after me and I am not even worthy to untie his sandals.”

Jesus is now 30 years old and ready to start his mission of saving the world from the power of sin and the devil. The first thing he does is to go out to John to be baptized. John recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah; he declares that Jesus should be baptizing him! But Jesus persists, and when Jesus comes up out of the water, a loud voice from heaven says, “This is my beloved Son and I am very pleased with him.” The Holy Spirit then comes down in the form of a dove and lands on Jesus. This is one of the clearest places in the Bible where we see the presence of all three members of the Trinity at the same time.



Jesus' baptism

Satan now knows full well: Jesus is the One predicted thousands of years before, who would “crush his head”. After attacking the family of Abraham and then the line of David to keep this from happening, he now narrows his sights to the specific person who threatens his power. This time, Satan steps out of the shadows and decides to do the job himself.

After Jesus’ baptism, God’s Spirit leads him out to the desert for 40 days of fasting. There Satan confronts Jesus face-to-face. His goal is to tempt Jesus to sin, which would disqualify Jesus from dying for others’ sins. Jesus is hungry from fasting and Satan tempts him to turn stones into bread. But Jesus refuses, using a verse from the Old Testament, “Man cannot live on bread alone, but on everything that comes out of God’s mouth.” Then Satan takes Jesus to a high place on top of the temple in Jerusalem. He tempts Jesus to jump off; to prove God would save him from getting hurt. Satan himself even quotes Scripture, “God will not let you strike your foot on a stone, but his angels will lift you up.” Jesus refuses, adding his own Scripture quotation, “You should not test the Lord your God.” Finally, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth and offers them to him, if Jesus will simply worship him. Jesus refuses and once more uses Scripture, “You should only worship the Lord your God.’ Satan then leaves, and angels come to comfort and strengthen Jesus. He is now ready to begin his public ministry.

Chapter 9: The Rabbi Chooses his Disciples

Jesus is called by many names during his time on earth, but the most frequent is “rabbi” which means “teacher”. In the Bible He is called “teacher” 60 out of 90 times he was addressed by someone else. He teaches in the synagogues (houses of prayer) on the Sabbath, but more often he teaches wherever people are: in homes, on the seashore, along the road, up on the mountains.

It was a common practice in those days for a teacher to gather a group of disciples who would follow him from place to place and learn from him.

Jesus begins his ministry by calling people to follow Him. Four of the first are fisherman who fish the Sea of Galilee, not far from Nazareth. Their names are Peter and Andrew (two brothers) and James and John (also two brothers). Fishermen from Galilee were not high on the social ladder of the time, but Jesus sees them for what they would become. He calls them away from fishing for fish; instead, with Jesus, they will be “fishing for men”.



Jesus calls his first disciples

Another unlikely disciple that Jesus invites to follow him is Matthew - a tax collector. In those days of Roman occupation, some Jews were employed to collect the taxes for the Romans. These tax collectors were allowed to overcharge and keep the extra for themselves. They were hated by the Jews because of their cooperation with the occupying power, and their greed. However, Jesus chooses Matthew to follow him.

The time came when, following an entire night in prayer, Jesus chooses twelve men to be his special group of disciples. Besides Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew, we don't know a lot about the background of the other seven disciples. Thomas was a twin. Simon was a Zealot – a faction of Jews working passionately against Roman rule. It seems likely that Simon the Zealot and Matthew the Tax Collector may not have started out the best of friends. There was also Philip, Bartholomew, a second James (son of Alphaeus), Judas (son of James), and a second, more famous Judas (Iscaiot). These were the twelve disciples Jesus was especially training to continue his ministry later as 'apostles,' a name indicating that they were going to be sent out with a message.

However, Jesus has many other disciples. One time he sends out 70 disciples to various cities to preach and heal in his name. The Bible also mentions women who follow Jesus. Mary and Martha are two sisters who let Jesus stay at their house when he passes through the area. Mary Magdalene is a woman who had been possessed by seven demons. After Jesus delivers her, she becomes his follower. Jesus' mother, Mary, also becomes one of his followers, along with some wealthy women who believe in Jesus and provide financially for him. The Pharisees were the Jewish religious leaders of the time and are usually thought of as the 'bad guys'. They were jealous of Jesus and did not see him as their Messiah. However, we know that at least one Pharisee, Nicodemus, became a believer of Jesus.

What about Joseph? Since the Bible doesn't mention Jesus' father Joseph after his childhood, there is speculation that maybe Joseph had died by this time. This is why in many paintings of Mary and Joseph, Joseph is painted like an old man.

Chapter 10: Wow! He Does Miracles

Throughout Jesus' three and half years of ministry, He does many miracles. This confirms to people that he is not just a man, but also God the Son. The first recorded miracle occurs in a town called Cana at a wedding that Jesus attends with his mother and the 12 disciples. Before the wedding celebration is over, the wine runs out (a huge embarrassment to the host). Mary turns to Jesus for help. Jesus responds that it is not time yet for him to do miracles, then he goes ahead and miraculously turns the water in six large stone jars into very delicious wine.

Jesus also heals many people with illnesses. Ten men come to him with a dreaded skin disease called leprosy, which in those days meant that they had to live outside the town and stay away from other people. Jesus heals all ten of them instantly. Another time Jesus is teaching in a very crowded house, and four people cut a hole in the roof of the house in order to lower a crippled friend down in front of Jesus. The man had been crippled his whole life. Jesus sees the faith of this man's friends, and heals him. The man picks up his mat and walks home. One lady had a problem with bleeding that had lasted 12 years. While Jesus is in a crowd of people, she quietly reaches over, touches his robe and is healed instantly. Jesus heals people of blindness, withered limbs, and many other sicknesses. Once a Roman soldier asks Jesus to heal his servant, still sick at home. The servant is healed at the very time that Jesus declares the healing- even before the soldier returns home!

These healings were predicted centuries before by the prophet Isaiah, when he wrote, "The eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue will shout for joy."



Jesus heals the paralyzed man

Jesus also delivered people from evil spirits. It was already mentioned that Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene. Another time Jesus is in the territory of Gennesaret, and a 'crazy' man comes running out of some tombs, naked. He calls himself, 'Legion' because there are many demons living in him. The demons recognize Jesus as God the Son and are very frightened. They beg him not to send them to "the abyss" (the place of punishment for fallen angels). Instead he casts them out of the man and into a nearby herd of pigs. The pigs rush down the hill into the water and are drowned.

We see that Jesus is God and not only has power over disease and demons, but that Jesus has power over death. One time, entering the town of Nain, Jesus approaches a funeral procession for the only child of a widow. Jesus takes compassion on this widow and brings her son back to life. Another time one of the synagogue leaders, Jairus, comes to Jesus to heal his daughter, but the daughter dies before they get home. When Jesus arrives, people are loudly mourning over the young girl's death. Jesus tells them not to mourn because "the girl is only sleeping." They laugh, because they know dead, and this girl is dead. Then Jesus goes into her room and raises her back to life.

One of the last great miracles of Jesus was the raising to life of his friend, Lazarus, who had died and already been in the tomb for four days. Jesus orders the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. But Martha, Lazarus' sister objects, saying that Lazarus has been dead for four days and will already stink from decay. But Jesus insists and then commands, "Lazarus come out!" To everyone's amazement, Lazarus comes out of the tomb alive, still wrapped in his burial clothes.

Of course, as news of these miracles spreads, more and more people want to see Jesus. Some believe in him; others are just hoping to see a miracle. Early in his ministry, over 5000 men (plus women and children) gather to see Jesus and listen to his teaching. They are with him all day and Jesus is concerned that they had not brought food to eat, so Jesus tells his disciples to feed them. The disciples object that eight months' wages would not be enough to give each person even one bite. So, Jesus asks what food they had on hand. Andrew finds a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus has the people sit down in groups. He blesses the food and then has the disciples pass it out. From that small lunch, all the people have plenty to eat and there are even 12 baskets full of food scraps when the meal is over. Jesus later repeats this miracle with a crowd of 4000.

In the Bible there are also accounts of Jesus having power over nature. One night the disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat and Jesus comes out to them, walking on the water. Another time, Jesus is with his disciples in a boat when a great storm comes up. The disciples, many of whom were experienced fishermen, are very scared that they would sink. Jesus stands up and tells the storm to cease. Immediately it becomes still. One time after teaching the people from one of Peter's boats, Jesus tells Peter to go out a little from shore and let down his nets. Peter said, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they do what Jesus asks, they catch so many fish that their nets start to break. The Bible tells us about even more miracles that Jesus did. The disciple John wrote that "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

Chapter 11: “He Who Has Ears, Let Him Hear!”

Jesus was known as a “rabbi”, a religious teacher. He taught some very new and complicated ideas, but even the simple people loved to hear him teach. He did not come across like the other teachers of that time; he taught with real authority. When he taught the Law, he didn’t just explain it, but took it to a whole new level of commitment.

Jesus wanted people to think for themselves. Often someone would come to him with a question such as, ‘Which commandment is the greatest?’ and he would answer with a question – “What do you think?” He would arouse curiosity with unusual ideas like, “being born from above” or “drinking water that would never leave a person thirsty again.” And people just had to know more about it. He would say, “He who has ears, let him hear!”

This short book can’t go into all of Jesus’ teachings, but in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) you can read more. One of the main topics that Jesus taught on was about who he was. He would often start with the words, “I am...”

- “I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.”
- “I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will not perish.”
- “I am the way, the truth and the life”.
- “I am the bread of life come down from heaven like the manna that came down during the time of Moses.”
- “I and the Father are one; if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”

One time Jesus gave his disciples a test. He asks them, “Who do people say that I am?” They answer, “Many people say that you are a prophet.” And then Jesus asks, “But who do you say I am?” The disciple Peter answers for the group, “You are the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One), the Son of the Living God.” Jesus says, “Blessed are you...for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”

Another favorite topic of Jesus was the Kingdom of God (the Kingdom of Heaven). In this Kingdom there are two aspects: the “now” and the “not yet”. Jesus came to earth the first time to set up a kingdom of people who would follow him. This Kingdom exists now. However, it is not a Kingdom with physical boundaries, rulers, or an army; it is a spiritual kingdom. People all over the world in every nation who follow Jesus as King make up this Kingdom. But there is a ‘not yet’ to this Kingdom, because in the future after the end of this world there will be a literal Kingdom, ruled by God.

Jesus’ main method of teaching about the Kingdom was with parables- short stories from ordinary life that have a second, spiritual meaning about the Kingdom. Here is one of the shortest parables:

“The Kingdom of God is like a man who found a perfectly formed pearl for sale. He went and sold all he had so that he could purchase it.”

The meaning of this parable is that being part of God’s Kingdom and following Christ is so important, that we should be willing to give up all we have in order to get it. Another parable

tells the story of a master who puts his servants in charge of his house before going away on a long trip. He's gone a long time and the servants get lazy and don't fulfill their responsibilities. When the master returns, he is not pleased and punishes the servants. Jesus was encouraging his followers to be faithful after he leaves them because someday he will return and set up his visible, earthly Kingdom.

Other parables describe a person's relationship with God and how much he loves them. The parable of the prodigal son tells us about a young man who takes his father's inheritance early and goes to a far country where he squanders the money on "wild living" until his money runs out and his friends run away. In poverty, he takes a job on a pig farm where he is forced to eat the same food as the pigs. He decides to return home and ask his father if he could work as one of his servants. The father is watching the road. When he sees the son, he runs to him, kisses him, brings him new clothes, and welcomes him back with a huge celebration. Like the father in the parable, God wants very much to have a relationship with his children and he is always waiting for their return.



Prodigal son welcomed home by his father

As the disciples understood more and more about who Jesus was and about the Kingdom of God, he began to add a new topic to his teaching: his own suffering, death and resurrection after three days. At first Peter rebuked Jesus, and told him not to talk like that. This is not what the disciples wanted to hear. But interestingly, Jesus rebuked Peter's words as coming from Satan, who clearly did not want Jesus to die for the sins of the world. This would mean a defeat for his plans of capturing all men for Himself.

On another occasion, the Jews demanded some kind of proof from Jesus that he had special authority. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days". Impossible! the temple had taken 46 years to build. Jesus was not talking about the temple building however, but about his own body, which would die and in three days come back to life.

Chapter 12: Why Wasn't Jesus Accepted by Everyone?

If Jesus performed such wonderful miracles of healing and taught people how to know God and be part of his Kingdom, why would anyone stand against him, let alone want to kill him? As we have seen, Satan was the real enemy. He did not want to see Jesus fulfill his role of saving mankind and defeating him. From the very beginning, Satan was out to destroy Jesus, and he used his power to turn people against him - even one of Jesus' own disciples.

The main group of people who opposed Jesus were the Jewish religious leaders. The ruling council was called the Sanhedrin, and within the council were two main groups: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were very strict in their observance of the Jewish Law and they were very anti-Roman. The Sadducees didn't care much about the supernatural, but they saw the advantage of cooperation with the Romans.

The Sanhedrin was allowed by the Romans to oversee the religious life of Israel, which gave them prestige and power. They were not about to share any of this influence with a traveling preacher from Nazareth. One of the main reasons that they opposed Jesus was out of jealousy. As Jesus became more and more popular with the people, their opposition to him grew.

Moreover, the Pharisees considered Jesus a lawbreaker. Over and above the 613 commandments of the Law given to Moses, the religious leaders gradually added more and more laws that were supposed to clarify the Law. But in reality, they were simply adding human laws. These additional laws became known as the "Mishnah".

Especially famous were their Sabbath Day laws. In Moses' Law, the Sabbath was to be a day of rest and not work. But what is work and not work? The Mishnah prescribed very clear rules regarding what weight items could be carried on the Sabbath, the distance one could walk, how many letters one could write, and many, many more. The Pharisees also took great pride in how holy they were, because of how many of these rules they kept. And if they wanted to break a rule, they were the "experts" and could always find a loophole.

Over and over, Jesus was constantly breaking their man-made religious laws. He would heal people on the Sabbath - such as a woman who was bent over and couldn't stand up straight. Another time, he healed a man who was crippled. Jesus told him to "get up! Pick up your mat and walk." The Pharisees barely noticed that an invalid was miraculously healed; instead, they were upset that he was carrying his mat on the Sabbath!



Jesus heals a bent-over woman on the Sabbath

Jesus was also criticized for hanging out with ‘unclean’ people. The Pharisees would have no association with anyone that they considered a sinner, or with anyone who was not a Jew. They could not touch them or enter their homes, much less share a meal. Jesus did all these things, which in their eyes made Jesus a lawbreaker. Jesus’ answer to them was that he did not come to abolish (get rid of) the Law but to fulfill it. This is a very important point and we will come back to it later.

Another charge by the Sanhedrin against Jesus was blasphemy, which means that Jesus, a man, was making Himself equal with God. Some people have noted that Jesus never openly said, “I am God.” This is true, but he said things like, “If you see me you have seen the Father,” and “I and the Father are one.” He allowed people to worship him. (Much later in the book of Revelation, the author is rebuked when he begins worshipping an angel. Only God can receive worship.) Jesus told people that their sins were forgiven. The rulers were offended, saying, “Only God can forgive sins.”

There were attempts on Jesus’ life and Satan would have been glad to see Jesus not make it to the cross, but each time Jesus eluded them. Once in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus is reading a text from the prophet Isaiah about the work of the coming Messiah. When he finishes, he states, “Today has this prophecy been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus had grown up in this small town, and the people are so upset that he claims to be the Messiah that they take him to a high hill to throw him off, but he escapes. Another time people pick up rocks to stone him to death, but again Jesus gets away. Toward the end of his time on earth, Jesus can’t move around freely, because people are watching for him, to report him

to the Sanhedrin. Jesus knows that He is to die soon, but it has to be in God's way, at God's time.

The one event that seals Jesus' death sentence is when Jesus miraculously raises his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. This miracle takes place in Bethany, a town just outside of Jerusalem. Many people had come to mourn the death of Lazarus, so there are many eyewitnesses to this unheard-of miracle. When the religious leaders hear about this, they decide that Jesus has to die; and they want to kill Lazarus too. Their justification? "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Another conclusion of the Sanhedrin was this: "It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

Chapter 13: The Last Week of Christ's Life

There is quite a bit written about the last week of Jesus' life. In fact, the Bible's description of this one important week (called 'Passion Week') occupies about one-third of the total story of Jesus' life. This was the week of Passover, the most important Jewish holiday. Since the Jewish temple was in Jerusalem, the city would be filled to overflowing with people who had come for the celebrations. One of the questions on everyone's mind was, would Jesus show up for this celebration, in spite of the leaders trying to arrest him?

On the Sunday before Passover, Jesus shows up. He enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey. A huge crowd gathers and begins chanting "Hosanna!" which means "God saves". They cut palm branches and begin waving them, and people lay their coats down on the road for Jesus to ride over. The leaders unhappily remark, "Look, the whole world has gone after Him!" Jesus continues to the temple and finds merchants selling animals (for sacrifice) in the courts where non-Jews are supposed to worship - and at exorbitant prices. Jesus overturns the money tables and drives out of the temple all who are doing business there. He says, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers."

Jesus spends the nights in the home of friends outside of Jerusalem, but each day he returns with his disciples to teach in the temple courts. The city is packed with people from all over the world. The leaders want so badly to arrest Jesus, but they are afraid of what the crowds might do.

But then, their opportunity comes - from an unlikely source. Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples, goes to the leaders and offers to let the leaders know when they can find Jesus alone, so they can come and arrest him. The deal is struck and Judas receives thirty pieces of silver.

When it comes time for the traditional Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples secure a room in which to celebrate. There is no servant there to wash their dusty feet, so Jesus takes water and a towel and begins washing the feet of his friends. Peter refuses, declaring that Jesus is their master, not a servant! But Jesus replies, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Jesus wants his followers to understand that they are also to humbly serve others.

The Passover meal is full of meaning; each part representing something from the time the Israelites were delivered from Egypt. Jesus brings some new symbolism to this meal. He takes the bread and calls it his own body that would be broken for them. He breaks the bread and has them eat it. Then he takes a cup of wine and calls it his blood that would be shed for them. He passes them the cup so that they can drink of it. He tells them this is the last time He will celebrate the Passover until they celebrate it in the Kingdom of God. Jesus says that after he is gone, they should continue to take bread and wine in remembrance of his sacrifice. Today most churches continue this tradition in communion services.

Remember: Passover was the celebration of the time in Egypt when the Israelites killed lambs and painted the blood on their doorposts, so that the angel of death would 'pass over' and the family would be saved. This event then led to the freedom of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

As they eat together, Jesus alarms his disciples by announcing that one of them will betray him. Each one wants to know, "Is it I, Lord?" At one point, Jesus tells Judas, "Go quickly and do what you are going to do."

Following the meal Jesus and his disciples walk to the Garden of Gethsemane, just outside of Jerusalem. Jesus takes three disciples - Peter, James and John - further into the garden to pray. Jesus longs for his friends to pray with him, but they keep falling asleep. As Jesus prays alone, he recognizes that the time of his suffering and death has come. He is in such agony that he sweats drops of blood.

As Jesus finishes praying, an angel comes and strengthens him, (just as they had after his temptation in the desert).

Soon soldiers sent by the high priest arrive at the garden to arrest Jesus. Judas identifies Jesus by greeting his master with a kiss. Peter pulls out a sword, ready to defend him, but Jesus tells him to put it away and then surrenders himself willingly to his captors.

Jesus is taken first to the Sanhedrin, where all kinds of accusations are made against him. Their testimonies are inconsistent, yet Jesus refuses to defend himself. The high priest finally demands, "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is as you say. But I say to you all: in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

In their minds this is clear blasphemy: by making himself equal with God, Jesus deserved to die. However, since Israel is under Roman rule, only the Romans can hand down the death penalty. So, the Jewish leaders take Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Since Pilate is not a Jew and thus 'unclean,' the Jewish leaders stay outside while Jesus goes in to be questioned. Jesus does not answer the charges, and soon Pilate understands that the Jewish leaders are jealous of Jesus. He has done nothing deserving death. Pilate even sends Jesus over to King Herod, to see if he can help. After Jesus refuses to defend himself to Herod, Herod has him beaten and sent back to Pilate, who tries to convince the Jewish leaders to drop the charges; instead they incite the crowd to shout, 'Crucify him! Crucify Him!' Pilate realizes that a riot is breaking out. Pilate wants to avoid a riot at any cost, so he signs the order for Jesus to be crucified.

Chapter 14: Mission Accomplished - The Cross and Jesus' Death

Jesus is led away to the barracks of the Roman soldiers; there they beat him, spit on him and mock him for claiming to be a 'king.' They make a crown out of thorns, push it on his head and then beat him again. They put a robe on him and bow down, pretending to worship him. Then, giving him back his own clothes, they lead him out to be crucified.

At first, Jesus is made to carry His own rough, heavy cross through Jerusalem. Many people gather on the streets to watch, and some cry. Jesus is in such a weakened state by this point that a man from the crowd is forced to finish carrying his cross.

Jesus is taken to a hill just outside Jerusalem called Golgotha. His hands and feet are nailed with spikes to the cross, which is then raised up between two criminals also being crucified. Pilate orders a sign placed at the top of Jesus' cross. It reads, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The Jewish leaders ask Pilate to change the sign to say that "This man said, 'I am King of the Jews,'" but Pilate refuses. It's about noon when Jesus is crucified, but even though it's the middle of the day, the sky grows very dark. As Jesus is dying, the soldiers divide His clothes among themselves and draw lots for His robe.

As Jesus hangs on the cross, the sins of all the world are placed on him. As the only man who lived a sinless life, he chose to pay the punishment for the sins of every human ever born; past, present, and future. This is the reason he came into the world.

When Jesus was on the cross and said, "Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?" Many people believe that at that moment Jesus was made sinful, and his holy father, God, could not even look at him. Others think that Jesus was quoting the beginning of Psalm 22, which contains prophecy about the Messiah's death. Those standing there would know the psalm, and would be reminded that his death was predicted a thousand years before.

It might seem at first to be a failure, but Jesus' death on the cross was the great victory over Satan from Genesis: the child of Eve (Jesus) would crush the head of the serpent (Satan). Satan lures people into sin and then holds them captive to sin, separated from God. On the cross, Jesus was paying the debt of sin, so that those who believe in him could have their sins forgiven and have eternal life and fellowship with God. Jesus himself was the "Passover lamb" slain for humankind.

Satan no doubt realized his defeat. Even at the last hour, Jesus could have saved Himself instead of dying for man's sins. He heard their shouts: "If you really are the Son of God come down from the cross and we will believe." Whether this temptation was being prompted by Satan or not we don't know, but love for mankind and obedience to the Father held Jesus on the cross.

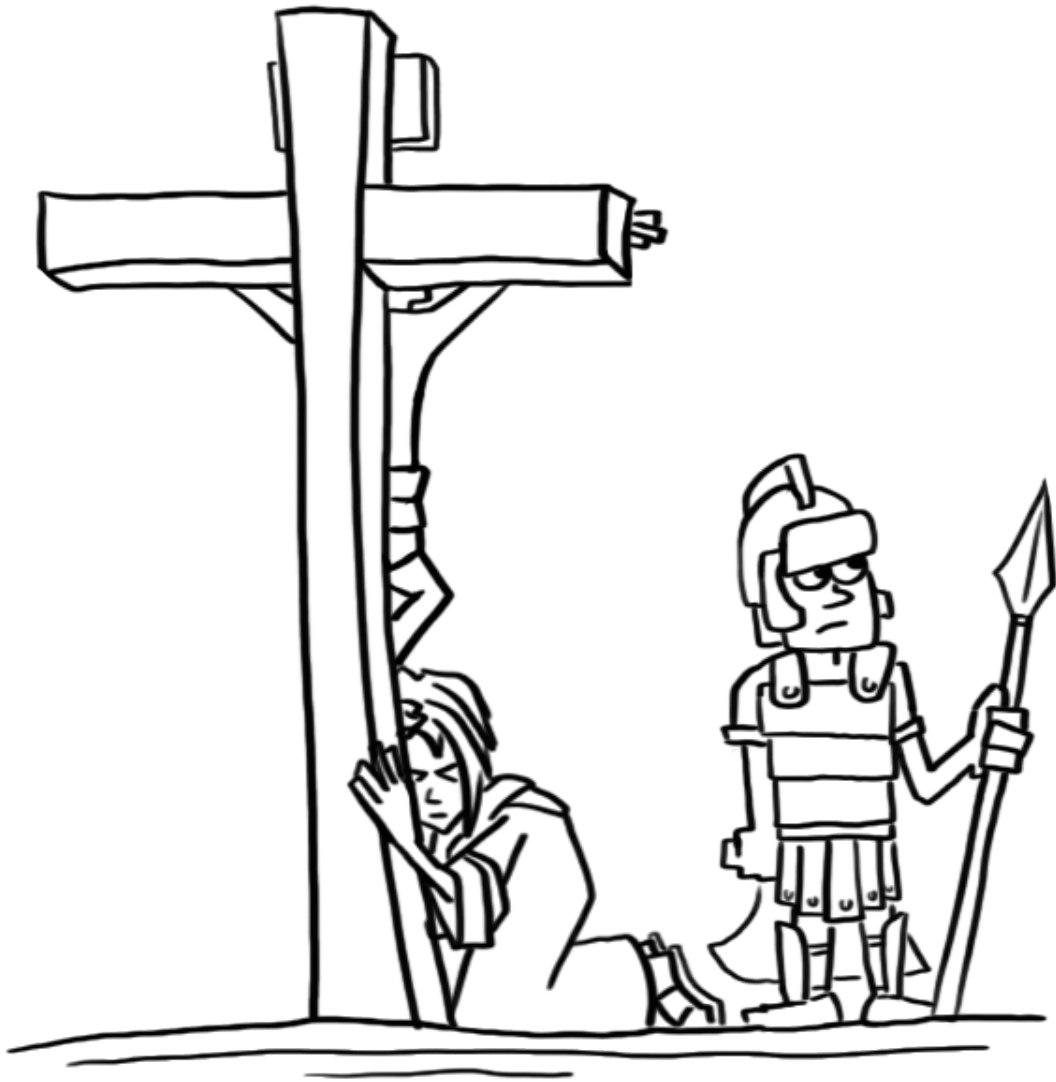
Words of King David, written long before crosses were used for execution.

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

16 For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—

17 I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me;

18 they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.



Jesus on the Cross

One of the criminals on the cross beside Jesus joins in with the crowd, throwing insults at Jesus, but the other criminal rebukes him: “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then the second criminal turns to Jesus and says, “Remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” Jesus answers, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Finally, Jesus exclaims, “It is finished!” and dismissing his own spirit, he dies.

At that moment, along with the darkness there is a great earthquake. In the temple, the great curtain in front of the Most Holy Place tears in two from top to bottom, symbolizing the now-open door between man and God. Outside of the city, tombs split open and many holy people who had died are brought back to life and enter into Jerusalem.

The Jewish leaders do not want the bodies hanging on the crosses for the holiday Sabbath, so they ask Pilate to have the legs of the criminals broken so they die more quickly. The Roman soldiers are surprised to find Jesus already dead. A person normally suffered on the cross for up to 20 hours. Just to make

“Most Holy Place” where the high priest would go once a year to offer a special sacrifice to God.

sure He is truly dead, they stick a spear into his side, and out from the wound pour blood and water, indicating that Jesus was truly dead.

One of the Jewish leaders, Joseph of Arimathea (a secret follower of Jesus) asks Pilate if he could bury Jesus' body. He and Nicodemus, another Jewish leader, take Jesus' body down from the cross, prepare it for burial, and lay it in a brand-new tomb, which was like a burial cave. Some women, who are also followers of Jesus, follow behind and watch. A huge stone is pushed in front of the opening, and then Jesus' friends go home to observe a sad Sabbath day of rest.

The Jewish leaders go back to Pilate, because Jesus had predicted that after three days he would rise from the dead. They said Pilate should "order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." So, guards are posted in front of the tomb, and the tomb is sealed.

Chapter 15: Christ is Risen!

Early Sunday morning, the women head back to the tomb with more spices to anoint Jesus' body. They start wondering who could roll the huge stone away from the entrance. But when they get there, they see no guards and the stone has been rolled aside. They look inside the tomb but Jesus' body is not there. Suddenly two angels were standing beside them, saying, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!" The women are so excited that they take off running to tell the disciples.

So what had happened to the soldiers? Well, when Jesus rose from the dead, the earth shook and the guards fell down "as dead men." After they revived, they ran to tell the Jewish leaders what had happened. The leaders gave them a large sum of money to be quiet about what had happened and if anyone asked, they were to say that Jesus' disciples stole his body.

When the women get back to the disciples, they tell them that Jesus is not dead; he has risen and is alive! The men don't believe them at first, but Peter and John run to the tomb to check for themselves, and find it empty. A little later, Mary Magdalene – who had stayed behind in the garden near the tomb – was crying when Jesus suddenly appears to her. He sends her back to the other disciples, and she tells them she has seen the Lord. That same evening the disciples and other followers of Jesus were huddling together in a room of a house, when suddenly Jesus appears among them and says, "Peace be with you!" He shows them the nail holes in his hands and wound in his side, and tells them he is sending them out with the good news of forgiveness of sins.



Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene

One of the disciples, Thomas, was not with them. Later, when he hears that Jesus is alive, he doesn't believe it. He says, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Suddenly Jesus again appears, and invites Thomas to touch his wounds. He is not a ghost. Thomas immediately believes, saying, "My Lord and my God."

Over the next 40 days, Jesus appears to many people. One time two of his followers were walking along the road to a town called Emmaus. A man joins them and asks why they are so disturbed. Surprised that he doesn't know what has happened, they tell him how Jesus had been crucified, but that some of his followers were saying that he is alive. The man then starts to explain from Scripture (the Old Testament), how Jesus had to die for sins but that he would be raised. At their destination, they invite the stranger for supper, and when He thanks God for the food, they suddenly realize that it is Jesus! At that very moment, Jesus disappears.

Another time His disciples had gone back to their boats and spent the night fishing, but caught nothing. In the morning, a man on shore tells them to cast the net on the other side of the boat. The disciples pull in another miraculous catch of fish, then John says to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Immediately Peter jumps into the water and swims to the shore, where Jesus is waiting for them and breakfast is being prepared on the fire.

Another time, Jesus appeared to a group of 500 people together, who saw him at the same time.

At the end of the 40 days, Jesus meets his followers on the Mount of Olives, outside of Jerusalem. He tells them that they must wait in Jerusalem because soon God the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) is going to be sent to help them. Jesus then gives them their mission: they are to go and tell others what they had seen and heard, and help others to follow Jesus. Their mission would begin in Jerusalem and spread out to the surrounding regions and to the "ends of the earth," and Jesus promised to always be with them.

Then, Jesus ascends into heaven before their eyes. As they stare up into the sky, two angels appear and ask, "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."

Chapter 16: The Church - Jesus' Body on Earth

This might seem like a good place to end a biography about Jesus, with Him going off into the sky. But remember, we are not talking about an ordinary man; we are talking about Jesus Christ who is God the Son, so the story goes on. The followers of Jesus go back to Jerusalem to wait together for the promised Holy Spirit, as Jesus had directed. The group was quite large—around 120 people, including 11 of his disciples and the women (including his mother, Mary) who had followed Jesus. (The twelfth disciple, Judas, had been full of remorse for betraying Jesus and had hung himself).

Fifty days after the Passover, the Jews hold another festival, Pentecost, which celebrates Moses receiving the Law on Mount Sinai. Once again, Jerusalem swelled with Jews from all over the empire. As Jesus' followers meet together early one morning during Pentecost, there suddenly arises the sound of a rushing wind and then "tongues of fire" appear over their heads as the promised Holy Spirit descends and fills them all with power and joy! They begin telling everyone about Jesus and what he had done. Miraculously, Jesus' followers find themselves speaking about Jesus in languages they had not learned. In this way, the foreigners visiting Jerusalem hear the message in their own native languages. They are amazed. Some scoff and accuse Jesus' followers of being drunk. But Peter objects, "No one is drunk! It is only 9 in the morning!"



Receiving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost

Then Peter stands up and preaches to the crowd about Jesus: how he had died, been resurrected, and then sent the Holy Spirit down to them. People ask what they need to do to be saved, and Peter answers that they need “to repent (turn from their sins) and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” About 3000 people believed the message and became followers of Jesus Christ that day. This Pentecost event was the birth of the Church – Christ’s ‘body’ on earth.

Shortly after Pentecost. Peter and John were going to the temple to pray when, passing the temple gate, they come upon a man who has been lame since birth, begging for money. When he turns to Peter and John, they tell him that they don’t have any money but will give him what they have. Then they command; “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” The man stands up and begins jumping around! This, of course draws a crowd, and Peter says, “Why are you looking at us as if we have done this great thing? It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has healed this man.” About 2000 more people believed that day.

When the Sanhedrin hears what has happened, Peter and John are brought before them. They insist that they stop talking about Jesus. But Peter and John reply that they can’t stop talking about what they have seen and heard. The leaders threaten them with serious consequences if they kept on talking about Jesus and then let them go.

It isn’t long before the religious leaders hold true to their threats and begin persecuting the brand new Church. The disciples, who are now called, “apostles” (meaning “the sent ones”) are beaten, arrested and one of them, James, is even beheaded for following Jesus. Peter is arrested and would have been executed, but during the night, God sends an angel, who rescues him from prison.

The early persecution of the church drives believers out of Jerusalem into other cities, actually helping the church to spread out and grow. One Jewish leader named Saul is so passionate to stop this new faith, that he not only persecutes the Church in Jerusalem, but also travels to other cities to hunt down believers and put them in jail. He is a righteous man and feels it is his duty to put down this “false teaching” about Jesus.

Through persecution, Satan attacks the church from the outside, but he is also at work within, trying to destroy the church through sin. Two early hypocrites in the Church are a husband and wife, Ananias and Saphira, who lie to the apostles about how much money they were giving to the church. As a penalty for their deceit, God takes their lives.

As we saw earlier, Satan was defeated at the cross, but not destroyed. The Bible says he continues to prowl around like a roaring lion, seeking people to destroy. He has lost the war, but until Jesus returns, Satan seeks to take as many people as possible down with him into destruction. One way he destroys people is by trapping them in sin. Another way is to keep them from hearing or understanding the good news about Jesus.

Chapter 17: The Church of Christ for All

In spite of persecution and attacks outside and within, the church continued to grow. But at the beginning, the new believers are nearly all Jews who accept Jesus as their Messiah. Philip, one of the church leaders, finds himself telling some Samaritans about Jesus. Samaritans were a mixed race of Jews and non-Jews. They were not accepted by the Jews. As Philip is preaching about Jesus, the Holy Spirit falls on the Samaritans as he had on the Jewish believers at Pentecost. Because of this, Philip and the other apostles agree that God not only accepts Jews descended from Abraham but Samaritans as well.

But a bigger surprise was yet to come. There was a Roman centurion named Cornelius, who loved God. One day as Cornelius is praying, an angel comes to him and tells him to send for a man named Peter, staying in the town of Joppa, who will have a very special message for him. So, Cornelius sends some servants to invite Peter to come and deliver God's message.

Meanwhile, Peter is up on the roof of his house in Joppa, also praying, when God gives him a vision. Peter is hungry and he sees a large sheet dropping down from heaven. Inside the sheet are many animals that the Jews would not eat. God tells Peter to go, kill an animal and eat it. Peter says, "Surely not, Lord, I've never eaten anything impure or unclean." The sheet goes up but comes down two more times, with God telling Peter to eat, and Peter refusing. God finally says, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Then God tells Peter that some servants are coming to the house to invite him to speak to Cornelius, and he should not be afraid, but go with them.

So, Peter goes to Cornelius's home, where Cornelius has gathered a large group of people to listen to Peter. Peter says, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." He then begins telling them about Jesus, but before he finishes, the Holy Spirit falls on the crowd of Roman listeners in the room! Peter reports back to the Church that all people could follow Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit: Jews, Samaritans, and even those with no Jewish background at all.



Peter sees the sheet filled with unclean animals

Meanwhile, the Pharisee Saul continues to persecute the Church, putting many Christians (Christ-followers) in prison. He hears that there are Christians also in Damascus (Syria). So he approaches the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, who provide official letters giving Saul permission to go to Damascus and arrest believers. As he walks along the road to Damascus, a bright light suddenly overtakes Saul and he falls to the ground. A voice sounds, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" Saul replies, "Who are you, lord?" The voice answers "I am Jesus, who you are persecuting." When Saul gets up, he is blind. The men with him see the light, but they can't hear the voice. They have to lead Saul by the hand into Damascus.

In Damascus, a Christian named Ananias is praying in his home, when God speaks and tells him to go to the house where Saul is staying. God tells Ananias to go and pray for him, so that he would recover his sight. Ananias replies, "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and now he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But God assures Ananias, saying, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

So, Ananias goes and prays for Saul, and Saul receives his sight. Right away, Saul starts telling everyone that Jesus is the Christ. The Jewish leaders decide that Saul must be killed, but in the night the believers in Damascus help Saul escape by lowering him over the city wall in a basket. Saul goes on teaching about Jesus, but the apostles in Jerusalem are afraid to receive him, suspecting that it was a trick. One church leader, Barnabas, bravely brings Saul back to Jerusalem, where the leaders realize that he really has become a true follower of Jesus.

Saul ends up in Antioch and works with Barnabas and the other church leaders there. One day the Holy Spirit tells the Church that Saul (whose name had now been changed to Paul) and Barnabas are to go out as missionaries to cities that have not yet heard about Jesus or the good news of his death and resurrection. So they start preaching about Jesus throughout what is now Turkey, and many Jews and non-Jews believe.

After they finished their trip, Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem where they report to the apostles what God had done on their trip and how many Jews and non-Jews had believed the message of Jesus. The leaders there are very glad to hear that people were being saved from their sins, but some are concerned that these people are not keeping all the Jewish customs. So, in Jerusalem the very first church council meets to discuss what demands should be placed on these new believers from non-Jewish backgrounds.

This discussion went on for many years and is sometimes still a problem today. Moses received the Law, and Jesus raised the standards of the Law in his Sermon on the Mount. So, what is the role of the Old Testament rules (such as the Ten Commandments) in the life of a believer? The Bible makes it very plain that we are saved by Christ's death on the cross and not by our good deeds. Jesus said, "I did not come to abolish (erase) the Law, but to fulfill the Law." No one is made righteous in God's eyes by keeping the Law, but only through Christ's fulfillment of Father God's requirement of a sinless sacrifice.

But although it cannot bring salvation, the Law still plays a role for Christians. God gave us the Law to teach us what sin is. Without it, we would not understand clearly what sin

is and what it isn't. Secondly, the Law was given to show us the right way to live. If we are truly followers of Christ, we try to follow God's law. And when we don't, we ask forgiveness. We may still suffer consequences because of our sin, but we won't die eternally for our sin, because Jesus already died in our place. This is grace: getting something good from God that we don't deserve.

So, Christians are not under the Law, but try to live by the Law. Does that mean we need to sacrifice animals and not eat certain food, like pork? No, it doesn't mean that. It's important to understand that the Old Testament Law was made up of three parts: the moral Law, the sacrificial Law and the ceremonial Law.

The moral Laws - such as don't worship idols, don't steal, honor your parents – still show us the way God wants us to live. This part of the Law is what Christians try to live by.

The sacrificial Laws- about sacrificing animals for our sins- were completed when Jesus died for our sins. The animal sacrifices were a picture, pointing ahead to when Christ would die. We no longer need the sacrificial Law because Jesus has become the Final Sacrifice, for all who believe.

The ceremonial (sometimes called civil) Laws - about things like food, holidays and dress was intended to mark Israel as different, uniquely led by God, and to keep them from becoming like other nations. The ceremonial law was not meant to apply to all nations and to all ages. Paul addresses this question of Law in his letter to the Galatians.

The Jerusalem council decided that Paul should go back to the new groups of believers and tell them that they were not bound by all the ceremonial laws. They only asked them not to eat meat that had been resold after being sacrificed to idols, to stay sexually pure, and to avoid eating the blood of an animal.

Paul made a second and even a third trip back to the cities where he had been and even preached in a few cities in Europe. The other apostles also went out in all directions sharing about Christ. Several of the letters that Peter, Paul and John wrote to these early churches are included in the Bible. The Church, Christ's Body on earth, has continued to grow for 2000 years and now exists in every country on the earth.

Chapter 18: What is Jesus Doing Now?

It is not completely clear what Jesus is doing right now. Before he left, Jesus gave his followers some idea. He said after he left that he would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit, who came at Pentecost. He said that he would sit down at the right hand of the Father as a member of the Trinity returning home. The right hand symbolizes a place of power and honor. Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for his followers, where they would live with God. The Bible also says that Jesus is praying for us.

As mentioned, Jesus fills the role of the 'head' of his Body, the Church. He guides the church like the head guides the body; the church is designed to fulfill the wishes of its head, Christ. Jesus is also pictured as a bridegroom preparing for his wedding to his bride, the Church. He wants his bride (his people) to be pure, faithful, and beautiful. He is looking forward to the time when he and his Church can be together for all time.

In Jewish culture and in many other cultures today, it is still tradition that the fiancé gifts his bride-to-be with expensive jewelry and clothing, and even purchases her wedding dress. It is a beautiful picture of the groom making his bride feel as beautiful and loved as possible for her wedding day.

Chapter 19: Jesus Will Return - Are You Ready?

The story of Jesus written in the Bible continues today. There are several events written about that have not yet come to pass. Since these deal with events in the future and since the writers were trying to describe dream-like visions, it is not clear exactly what will happen. It is hard to know what is symbolic and what is literal, and in what order these events will happen. However, here are some of the clearer promises about the future that the Bible repeats many times.

Jesus' Return (his second coming): The most written about future event is that Jesus will return to earth, just as was promised when he left. Some of the things written about this return are that he will come very unexpectedly, like a "thief in the night"; that every eye will see him return; that he will come this time not as a savior but as a judge; that he will come through the clouds and not as a little baby.

Another coming event is the resurrection of the dead. When Jesus returns, all the dead will receive a resurrection body similar to the body that Christ received when he was resurrected: a physical body which can feel, eat, talk, etc... Those who are alive at the time of His return will instantly be changed into their resurrected bodies.

There will also be a judgment. Each person will be judged for the wrong done in his life on earth. However, those believing and accepting Jesus' death as punishment for their sins will not be punished; their penalty has already been paid. Jesus came to save people from their sins and to reign as Lord in their lives. Those who do not trust Him with their lives will suffer in eternity.

Another event is that heaven and earth will perish with fire and that a new heaven and earth will be created, where God will reign. Things will be like they were before the first sin of Adam and Eve, with no sin, no sickness, and peace between people and between animals. Those whose sins are forgiven in Christ will dwell in this perfect place with God for all of eternity.



Jesus will come again as King and Lord!

Epilogue: Jesus and Us

How is Jesus' story connected to our stories? How can a person receive forgiveness of sins and enter the kingdom of God? Many people, after realizing that they are sinners and how much Jesus has done for them, begin with a sincere prayer of thanksgiving to God aloud or silently, alone or with another person. They confess their sins to God, acknowledging that they are sinners and have lived according to their own will. They express their willingness to accept Jesus' death for the forgiveness of their sins and to go on living according to God's will. This does not mean they will never sin again, but that they intend to live with Christ, trusting that Jesus forgives their sins past, present and future. Knowing that they have received the wonderful gift of forgiveness, they can turn to Him at any time and confess when they sin.

There are also more public ways that people begin their relationship with Christ. Some declare their faith in Christ in front of other people. They may tell family and friends about their new faith. They may accept baptism in their church. Baptism is like a marriage ceremony between you and Christ, where you commit to love, serve and obey Christ for your whole life as he gives you strength. In return, God gives a person the Holy Spirit, His constant presence in the life of the believer.

What else happens when we enter the kingdom of God by accepting Jesus as our Savior and King? Here are some of the things mentioned in the Bible:

- We become children of God, adopted by him. (Ephesians 1:5)
- We become a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- The angels rejoice in heaven. (Luke 15:10)
- Our sins are forgiven and we are saved from God's wrath. (Romans 5:9).
- We can turn to God without fear. (Hebrews 4:16; Ephesians 3:12)
- We have an inheritance in heaven. (1 Peter 1:4)
- We become a disciple of Jesus and try to obey Him (John 8:31-32 and 14:21)
- The Holy Spirit begins to produce fruit in our lives: mercy, patience, love, etc. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Having accepted Jesus Christ, how can we strengthen our relationship with God? Jesus said that we can truly know Him when we keep His commandments:

"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." (John 14:21)

Just as with a human relationship, one important element in your relationship with God is good communication, both talking and listening. One of the most common ways Jesus speaks to us is through his Word, the Bible. As we read his Word, we also try to do what it says. This is also a part of a good relationship. If we have a family member or friend and we know there is something they don't like, but we keep on doing it day after day, that relationship is not going to become very healthy or strong. We do the things the other person likes and wants us to do, and it is the same way with Jesus. If you are not sure about how to start listening to God in your Bible-reading, see the appendix in this book, "Making the Bible a Part of Your Life".

In a good relationship we don't just listen, but also talk. We share our thoughts, dreams, delights, fears, problems, and failures with the other person. The same is true with Christ. We can talk to him anytime, out loud, and even in our mind. Some people like to use Bible verses in their prayers. Some read prayers written by others that say the same thing they would like to say. Some people write out their prayers into a prayer journal. Some like to pray while out in nature, while others prefer being inside, and of course you can pray in church.

Another important way to develop a relationship with Jesus is to be a part of his Body on earth, the Church. The Bible is full of verses about how we support each other in our life with Christ. We are to love one another, pray for one another, help carry the burden of each other, forgive one another, and confess our sins to one another, to name just a few. Just as the parts of the body need each other, a member of Christ's body also needs the other members. The best way to connect to the Body of Christ is to find a church or group of believers that meets regularly to worship and grow together.

Another way of developing our relationship with Jesus is to tell others about him. Jesus does not want this good news to be kept a secret. He wants everyone to know that any person who desires it can have their sins forgiven and connect with the God of all the universe, who loves them deeply! For many people, faith is personal and private, so we have to be sensitive not to be obnoxious in the way we share Christ. But we should be ready and willing to talk about Jesus when the opportunity arises.

Well, that's the story of Jesus and why he needed to come and die. In closing, the whole story can be nicely summed up in one verse from the Gospel of John chapter 3 verse 16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Appendices

Making the Bible a Part of Your Life

The Bible is an incredible book, written over the span of about 1300 years by 35 - 40 authors. It has been translated into around 700 languages and remains a best-seller today. One benefit of reading the Bible is growing in your understanding of who God is. God is the main character of the Bible, and the Bible records God's activity and messages to humanity throughout history. The Bible also reveals who we are, and how we can know God through Jesus Christ. This has been the major theme of this book. The Bible also contains instructions on how to live life abundantly. That doesn't mean a life that's problem-free, but rather a life that is fruitful in loving God and loving people. The Bible can also encourage us to avoid sin, to have hope in the middle of difficult times and to live a life with few regrets.

Here are a few hints about how to get the most out of your Bible reading:

Get a Bible You Understand

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (the Old Testament) and Greek (the New Testament). The most-read Russian Bible is the Synodalni translation (1876). Its meaning is very close to the original, but because of its age, many words are no longer commonly used. If you have a very large vocabulary, go for it. However, you might consider reading a more modern translation. The Russian Bible Society published the Contemporary Bible in 2011, accepted by both Orthodox and Protestant leaders. You can find a Bible in a Christian bookstore (in person or online). Many times, churches give out free Bibles. There are also Bible apps for your phone.

Understand the Structure of the Bible

Now that you have a Bible, where do you start reading? Usually when you have a book you start at the beginning; however, the Bible is not really one book; it is a library of 66 books. That's right, 66! So where do you start?

This "library" called the Bible has two "halls" – the Old Testament (covenant) that God made with the Jewish nation of Israel before Christ; and the New Testament (covenant) that God made with everyone, including you. But why is the Old Testament even included in the Bible if it deals with Israel? Because God chose to use His special relationship with Israel to reach the whole world. Reading the Old Testament reveals much about God's character, about how he related personally to his people, and how his purposes for man have unfolded up to now.

The Old Testament has 39 books and is divided into four sections:

The Old Testament

Section and Books	Content
Pentateuch or the Law Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	Includes interesting stories of creation and the early believers called Patriarchs Records moral, sacrificial and ceremonial laws for Israel.
Historical books Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther	Record of Israel's history and leaders Shows us what happens when leaders and nations follow God and when they don't.
Poetical books Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon	Poetry, songs and wise sayings; even a love story.
Prophecy Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	God's warnings to his people and other nations about sin and judgement, but also promises of his mercy and care. Predictions about the future. Many of these predictions have come to pass, but some are still ahead.

The New Testament has 27 books and also includes different sections.

The New Testament

Section and Books	Content
The "Gospels" which means "Good News". Matthew, Mark, Luke and John	Four accounts of Christ's life on earth, each written by a different author with a unique perspective.
Early Church History Acts of the Apostles	An account of the beginning of the Church, Christ's Body on earth.
"Epistles" or letters written to the Church Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1,2&3 John, Jude	Letters to believers in different places, written by the apostles Peter, James, John, Paul and others.
Prophecy about the Future Revelation	A final message given to the apostle John about future events, including the end of time. There is quite a bit of symbolism in this book and nobody knows for sure what it all means, but the main message is clear: Jesus will come again as King and Lord!

Find a Good Place to Start Reading

You can start reading at the beginning, but by the middle of the second book, Exodus, you may find yourself overwhelmed by a lot of ancient practices and strange laws. Instead...

- **You might want to turn to the Appendix, “Chapter by Chapter with references” and read the stories from this book** straight out of the Bible. Reading “The Story of Jesus” has been like watching a movie trailer, but the Bible itself will include all the details.
- **You could pick one of the Gospels about Jesus’ life and read it from beginning to end.** You’ll see even more of his life and teachings. The Gospel of Luke was especially written for non-Jews and might be a good starting place.
- **You could start with books that are easiest to understand,** such as the Gospel of John, Acts, or the letter of James.
- **In the Old Testament, Genesis, I Samuel, Proverbs, Psalms are good starting places.** The book of Ruth is also very interesting. Jonah and the first 6 chapters of Daniel include some great stories.

Don’t let the size of the Bible scare you off, just find a good starting point and get started!

Develop Bible Reading as a Habit

Once you have a plan, start reading some of the Bible every day. It’s more likely that you will create a habit if you:

- **Have a regular time.** Some people read the Bible first thing in the morning while their minds are fresh; others at night just before bed. Some read their Bible on transportation to school or college. Experiment with different options to find out the best time for you. If you think you will just read your Bible when you get around to it, that probably won’t happen.
- **Find a regular place to read the Bible where you won’t be interrupted.** This can be a problem if you are reading the Bible on your phone. I suggest you consider either reading a printed Bible with your phone off or in another room, or turn off notifications for the time of day when you are reading your Bible. God wants to speak to you through your reading, but it can be hard to hear when others are vying for your attention.
- **Start with a realistic goal.** Your goal should not be to read as much as you can each day; instead, it is much more important to read a chapter or even a few verses and listen for what God might be saying to you. A runner doesn’t begin by running a marathon; he starts with shorter distances he can handle. If you want to read more, you will get an overview of what’s in the Bible. But there should be no pressure to do that.

Most importantly, don’t give up! If your time or place didn’t work out, or if you missed it yesterday, you can always start again. You will be glad you did.

Get Others Involved in Your Bible Reading

Just like in learning a sport or any other new skill, it's great to have a coach – someone who knows more than you do, who can help with your questions or make suggestions. It should be someone who knows the Bible well and cares about you; maybe a leader from camp, your youth group or club, or maybe the person who gave you this book?

You also might want to ask a friend to read the Bible, too. You could get together and discuss what you are reading.

Or you might be able to find a group Bible study that you could join. Sometimes these groups read the same verses from the Bible during the week and then get together to discuss what they have learned.

Finally, try sharing what God is teaching you with people who maybe don't even read the Bible.

Apply What You Have Learned

The Bible says the Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible and helps us see how God wants to change our thinking or actions. It's good to begin Bible reading with a prayer asking God to open your mind to what he wants to say to you.

As you read, you might want to highlight any verses that are especially meaningful. You can do this by using a highlighter or circling the number of the verses. Bible apps usually also have a highlighting function.

Another helpful tool in studying the Bible is to keep a notebook where you write down special verses and your insights. Here is one idea:

1. Write the date into your notebook along with the book, chapter and verse number of one meaningful verse from that day's reading.
2. Try writing the meaning of that verse in your own words into the journal.
3. Finally, try to condense your thoughts into 2 or 3 words. (It's easier to remember a few words than the whole verse or passage you have read that day).

Another great way to get God's word into your life is to memorize verses and then review them each day. You could write out a verse on a card and then go over it as you travel about.

One good verse to start with is John 3:16 from the end of this book. Other good verses are found in the appendix "Verses about Jesus to Memorize". It's good to not only memorize a verse, but also the reference where it is found and a topic related to the verse.

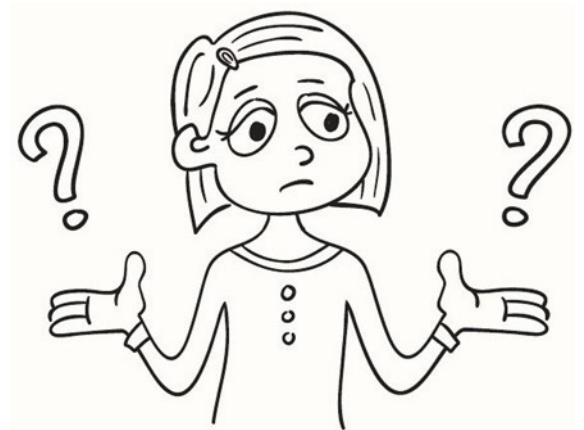
The Bible is a book that will change your life in so many ways, if you will let it.

Verses About Jesus to Memorize

<p>Jesus' Deity <i>Colossians 2:9 ESV</i></p> <p>For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Colossians 2:9 ESV</p>	<p>Jesus' Sacrifice <i>1 Peter 1:18-19 ESV</i></p> <p>Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Peter 1:18-19 ESV</p>
<p>Jesus' Humanity <i>John 1:1, 14 ESV</i></p> <p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 1:1, 14 ESV</p>	<p>Jesus Died for Sinners <i>Romans 5:8 ESV</i></p> <p>But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romans 5:8 ESV</p>
<p>Jesus' Resurrection <i>1 Corinthians 15:20 ESV</i></p> <p>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Corinthians 15:20 ESV</p>	<p>Christ's Second Coming <i>Hebrews 9:28 ESV</i></p> <p>So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Hebrews 9:28 ESV</p>
<p>Believe in Jesus <i>John 3:16 ESV</i></p> <p>For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 3:16 ESV</p>	<p>Obedience to Christ <i>John 14:21 ESV</i></p> <p>Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 14:21 ESV</p>

What If I Have Doubts About the Bible?

The Bible contains things that are difficult for us to understand. Part of it is that God Himself is not fully understandable. Part of it is that the Bible records his activity in cultures and times that are very foreign to us. Part of it is that the Bible can't record every detail of every story or event, so we wonder about what is not written. Finally, while we believe God spoke through the Biblical authors, they are human beings with varying perspectives. For many people this creates some distress.



It's interesting to study the life of Jesus. There were some instances in his life when his followers openly confessed doubts about him. In each case, Jesus did not get angry, but told them to look at the evidence. One person who doubted was John the Baptist; he had baptized Jesus and told others, "See, here is the Lamb of God come to take away the sins of the world." Later on, John was unjustly arrested and while sitting in jail he started to have doubts. He sent messengers to Jesus to ask, "Are you the Messiah or should we look for someone else?" Jesus told them to go back to John and tell him what they saw: people were being healed and raised from the dead, and the good news was being preached to the poor. He said in effect, "Look at the evidence." (Matthew 11:2-6) After the messengers left, Jesus praised the faith of John! We do not need to fear our doubts. The Bible says that faith the size of a mustard seed is enough!

Another incident that shows us Jesus is not offended by our doubt happened just after Jesus' resurrection. Thomas refused to believe that Jesus was alive unless he could see the nail prints in Jesus' hands and the wound in his side. Jesus appeared and allowed Thomas to see the scars in his hands and side. But then Jesus added, "Blessed are those who have not seen but have believed." (John 20:29)

For some people believing is not difficult. They have a simple faith. "If the Bible says it, then it must be so. If I don't understand something, I am content with what I do understand." But many others have a more complex faith with lots of questions.

For some questions, no answers will be found in this temporary life. But there are many plausible answers for many of the Bible's difficult questions. Looking for answers to some of the difficult questions from the Bible is a field of study called apologetics. Bible scholars continue to search for answers.

One such scholar was an atheist lawyer named, Josh MacDowell. He decided he was going to use his legal skills to gather all the evidence he could to prove that the resurrection of Jesus was a hoax that never really happened. After gathering his research together, he looked at it and decided there was no way the resurrection could be a hoax – that truly, the most logical conclusion was that the resurrection of Jesus really happened. His material is published in a book entitled Evidence That Demands a Verdict. A smaller book by Josh MacDowell that is

easier to read and addresses hard questions about Jesus is More Than a Carpenter.

There are many other scholars who have written about these questions. One good place to find articles and discussions about the Bible in Russian is the Center for Apologetic Study (Центр Апологетических Исследований: ЦАИ) <https://apologetika.ru/>

It's hard to know why God doesn't make faith easy and just show Himself to all, in his full glory. For some reason, it is important to him that people seek him. He has left many clues for those who are looking, so don't give up! Keep reading the Bible and searching for him, even if you have questions. You and he have all the time in the world and eternity to figure it out.

Chapter by Chapter with Bible References

Now that you've read this overview about Jesus Christ, you can read the original text from your Bible. Here are the Bible references for many of the stories mentioned in this book.

Bible references usually have three parts. First is the book of the Bible. If you are not sure where to find that book, you can look in the table of contents or list of books on your phone. Second is the chapter number and after the colon the verse number. If there is no colon then the whole chapter is connected to the information.

Introduction: Before Creation

The Trinity – Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 4:4-6; Romans 15:30

Satan leads one third of angels in revolt – Isaiah 14:12-14; Revelation 12:7-9; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6

Chapter 1: The Creation and Flood

The Creation – Genesis chapters 1 and 2

Adam and Eve fall into sin – Genesis chapter 3

Noah and the flood – Genesis chapters 6 to 8

Chapter 2: Abraham Believed God

God calls Abram to a new land – Genesis 12:1-9

Three visitors promise Abraham a son – Genesis 18:1-15

Abraham asked to sacrifice Isaac – Genesis 22:1-19

Joseph sold to Egypt where he saves the world from famine – Genesis chapters 37 and 39 to 47

Chapter 3: Which Way Back to the Promised Land?

Moses and the exodus ('exit') of the Israelite slaves out of Egypt – Exodus chapters 1 to 12

Moses receives the Law from God – Exodus chapters 19 and 20

The bronze serpent lifted on a pole for healing – Numbers 21:4-9

Joshua worships the commander of God's army – Joshua 5:13-15

Chapter 4: A King Who Will Reign Forever?

God promises David that his descendant will be king forever – 2 Samuel chapter 7

Rehoboam almost loses the Kingdom – 1 Kings 12:1-24

Queen Athaliah tries to end the royal line – 2 Kings chapter 11

Chapter 5: The Messiah is Coming?

Prophecy about Messiah as Suffering Servant – Isaiah 53

Prophecy about Messiah born of a virgin – Isaiah 7:14

Prophecy about Messiah born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2

Prophecy about John the Baptist (A messenger will come to prepare the way for the Messiah) – Isaiah 40:3-4; Malachi 3:1

Chapter 6: Israel into Exile

Three Hebrews in the fiery furnace – Daniel chapter 3

Queen Esther pleads for the Jewish nation – The entire book of Esther

Chapter 7: God the Son Comes into Our World

The Birth of Jesus – Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20; Matthew 1:18-25

Jesus at age 12 in the Temple – Luke 2:41-52

Chapter 8: The Baptism of Jesus and Temptation by Satan

The baptism of Jesus by John – Matthew chapter 3; John 1:19-34

Satan tempts Jesus – Matthew 4:1-11

Chapter 9: The Rabbi Chooses His Disciples

Jesus calls disciples to follow him – Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector – Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus appoints the 12 disciples – Luke 6:12-16

Jesus sends out 72 disciples – Luke 10:1-23

Other disciples – Mary Magdalene, women who supported him – Luke 8:1-3

Chapter 10: Wow! He Does Miracles!

Water turned to wine – John 2:1-11

Ten lepers healed – Luke 17:11-19

Healing of crippled man lowered through the roof – Mark 2:1-12

Woman who touched Jesus' clothes healed – Mark 5:25-34

Servant of Roman soldier healed – Luke 7:1-10

Prophecy that Messiah will do miracles – Isaiah 35:5 and Matthew 11:5

Jesus casts out the legion of demons – Luke 8:26-37

Jesus resurrects the widow's son – Luke 7:11-17

Jesus resurrects the daughter of Jairus – Luke 8:40-56

Jesus resurrects Lazarus – John 11:1-44

The feeding of the 5000 – Matthew 14:13-21

The feeding of the 4000 – Matthew 15:32-39

Jesus walks on water – Matthew 14:22-36

Jesus calms the storm – Mark 4:35-41

The first miraculous catch of fish – Luke 5:1-11

Chapter 11: "He Who Has Ears, Let Him Hear!"

Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is - Matthew 16:13-20

The parable of the pearl – Matthew 13:45-46

The parable of the servants and the master's return – Luke 12:36-48; Mark 13:33-37

The parable of the prodigal son – Luke 15:11-32

Jesus talks about his death and rebukes Peter – Matthew 16:21-23

Jesus compares his death to tearing down the temple and rebuilding it – John 2:18-22

Chapter 12: Why Wasn't Jesus Accepted by Everyone?

Satan fills Judas to betray Jesus – Luke 22:1-6

Leaders are jealous – Matthew 27:18

Pharisees find loopholes in the Law – Matthew 15:3-9

Jesus breaks Sabbath rules when He heals a bent over woman (Luke 13:10-17) and crippled man (John 5:1-15)

Jesus eats with “sinners” – Mark 2:13-17

Jesus' words seen as blasphemy:

“I came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it” – Matthew 5:17

“I and the Father are one” – John 10:30

“To see me is to see the Father” – John 14:9-12

“Your sins are forgiven” – Mark 2:1-12

Attempt on Jesus' life in Nazareth – Luke 4:14-30

Jesus cannot move about freely – John 11:53-54

Leaders want to kill Jesus and Lazarus after Lazarus is raised – John 11:45-57

Chapter 13: The Last Week of Christ's Life

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey – John 12:12-19

Jesus drives merchants out of the temple – Matthew 21:12-13

Jesus washes the disciples' feet – John 13:1-17

The Passover meal/ Jesus' last supper – Mark 14:12-26

Jesus prays and is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane – Mark 14:32-50

Jesus says he is the Son of God – Matthew 26:57-67

Chapter 14: Mission Accomplished - The Cross and Jesus' Death

Roman soldiers beat and mock Jesus – Mark 15:16-20

Jesus crucified – Mark 15:21-32

Jesus, the Lamb slain for sinners – 1 Peter 1:18-19; John 1:29; Revelation 5:9

Jesus and the two criminals – Luke 23:39-43

Jesus' death – Matthew 27:45-56; John 19:28-37

Jesus' burial – Matthew 27:57-66; John 19: 38-42

Chapter 15: Christ is Risen!

The resurrection of Christ – Matthew 28:1-15; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18

Christ appears to his disciples and Thomas – John 20: 19-31

Christ appears to the men on the road to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-35

Christ appears to his disciples who are fishing – John 21:1-14

Christ appears to 500 people at the same time – 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Christ sends out his disciples to tell others about him – Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8

Christ ascends to heaven – Acts 1:1-11

Chapter 16: The Church - Jesus' Body on Earth

Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2:1-13

Peter and John heal a man crippled since birth – Acts 3:1-10

Peter and John before the Jewish rulers – Acts 4:1-22
Peter released from prison by an angel – Acts 12:1-19
Ananias and Sapphira try to deceive the Church – Acts 5:1-11

Chapter 17: The Church of Jesus Christ for All

Philip tells Samaritans about Christ – Acts 8:4-25
Roman officer Cornelius believes and receives the Spirit - Acts chapter 10
Jesus appears to Saul on the road to Damascus – Acts 9:1-31
Paul and Barnabas sent out by the Holy Spirit as missionaries – Acts 13:1-3
A person is not saved by works – Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5
Christ came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it – Matthew 5:17
Believers freed from Jewish requirements – Romans 6:14; Galatians chapters 2 and 3
The Jerusalem Council – Acts 15:1-31

Chapter 18: What is Jesus Doing Now?

Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father – Acts 7:55-56; Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 3:1
Jesus is preparing a place for his followers – John 14:1-3
Jesus is praying for his followers – Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25
Jesus is the Head of the Church – Ephesians 4:15-16 and 5:23; Colossians 1:18, 24
The Church is Jesus' bride – Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-9

Chapter 19: Jesus Will Return - Are You Ready?

Jesus' return (his second coming) – John 14:3; Acts 1:9-11
The resurrection of all people – John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15
Final judgement and punishment for sins – Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10
New heaven and earth – Revelation 21:1-5

Epilogue: Jesus and Us

Repent and believe – Acts 17:30 and 20:20-21
Be baptized – Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 2:12
Importance of the Bible – 2 Timothy 3:16-17
Praying: Talking to God - Philippians 4:6-7
Time with other believers – Hebrews 10:24-25
Telling others about Jesus – 1 Peter 2:9

Genealogy of Christ



Family Line of Jesus according to Matthew 1:1-17
(Names in bold are mentioned in this book)



Abraham	Jotham
Isaac	Ahaz
Jacob	Hezekiah
Judah and Tamar	Manasseh
Perez	Amon
Hezron	Josiah
Ram	Jeconiah
Amminadab	Shealtiel
Nahshon	Zerubbabel
Salmon and Rahab	Abiud
Boaz and Ruth	Eliakim
Obed	Azor
Jesse	Zadok
David and Bathsheba	Achim
Solomon	Eliud
Rehoboam	Eleazar
Abijah	Matthan
Asa	Jacob
Jehoshaphat	Joseph and Mary
Jehoram	Jesus
Uzziah	

A Map of Israel in Jesus' Time

