

FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAITH  
FOR FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

**CHRISTIAN**  
— B A S I C S —  
**BIBLE**

NEW LIVING  
TRANSLATION



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New Living  
Translation®

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
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# Read This First!

The book you hold in your hands is the most exciting and life-changing book in the world! For some of you, this may be the first time you have ever picked up a Bible. Perhaps you became a Christian recently and have no Christian background whatsoever, so the thought of starting to read the Bible may seem a bit overwhelming. For others of you, you may have been part of a church for years but somehow just never got into the Bible, or whenever you did, it seemed remote and hard to grasp. Well, whichever category you fall into, this Bible is for you!

First of all, the Bible text itself is the easy-to-read New Living Translation. This means that, while it's a full Bible with nothing left out, it's translated into the language of today.

Moreover, the Bible text is accompanied by a whole range of helpful notes and features—all of them written especially for readers who know little or nothing of the Bible's story, background, or message. These supplemental materials are designed to help you engage with the Bible from scratch, to help you get hold of the basics—hence the title, the *Christian Basics Bible*.

The first additional feature that will help you is the **book introductions** at the beginning of each Bible book. Each introduction contains four sections that provide a helpful way into the book:

- *Introduction*—a short summary of the book's content
- *Overview*—an outline of the book
- *What's it all about?*—a summary of the book's content in more detail
- *What does it mean for us?*—a guide to the book's relevance for today

Second, throughout the Bible text, there are **notes** on various historical, cultural, social, biographical, practical, and theological issues—all written from the perspective of a reader who is new to all of this, and all geared toward showing the relevance of the Bible for today. Some of these notes include maps to give you an idea of where key events happened or charts that help summarize information on a wide range of topics. At the end of many notes and also throughout the Bible text you will find cross-references to related notes.

Third, at the front and back of the Bible you will find **other material** that we think you will find helpful in laying a strong foundation for your Christian faith. These include:

- three articles: “Becoming a Christian,” “Now that You Are a Christian,” and “What Is the Bible?”
- a timeline of the Bible to show you what happened when
- two Bible reading plans
- a section called “Basic Truths of the Christian Faith” that can be used as a starting point in finding and engaging with the answers that God's word provides on many basic questions about life and faith

## READ THIS FIRST!

- a glossary and a feature index
- “A Visual Overview of the Bible,” which provides a helpful visual means of accessing the Bible’s story. These maps and infographics give a survey of the biblical narrative through visually engaging historical, geographical, and thematic background material.

Our prayer is that all of this will help the Bible come alive for you! If you don’t already have a relationship with God through Jesus, we pray that reading this Bible will help you come to know Jesus personally and find the difference that he makes in life. And if you are already a Christian—whether new or long-standing—our prayer is that you may find help in developing your faith, acquiring a strong foundation, and becoming a strong, mature, and fruitful Christian. The Bible has helped millions of people over countless generations to know God better and to find their place in his plans; we pray that the same may be true for you. And if, after a few years, you move on from this edition of the Bible to a different study Bible that helps you dig even deeper into its teachings, then there will be no one happier than us.

*Mike Beaumont  
Martin Manser*

# Becoming a Christian

Becoming a Christian is not about deciding to live better, trying to be more holy, going to church, or following certain religious practices or behaviors. It is about beginning a personal relationship with God. Religious rules and duties will always end up tying us up, as Jesus often reminded the highly religious Pharisees of his day. Jesus came not to tie us up but to set us free (see, e.g., John 8:31-32; Galatians 5:1). He came with good news (the meaning of the word “gospel”); and this good news is that ordinary people—even people who feel unworthy or have failed or have done bad things—can know God personally and live in harmony with him.

But before that can happen, something has to go—our old way of life, the life that always puts self first, just like Adam and Eve did (see Genesis 3). In fact, following their disobedience, something entered the human race that separates each one of us from God (see Romans 5:12). Somehow that barrier needs to be removed—though none of us, the Bible says, can do anything about it.

But what we could not do, God himself did: Such is his love for us. The way he did this was by coming into this world himself to rescue us, in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. As the One who was God-become-man, he was uniquely capable of doing two things: As a man, he had *the right* to replace us, to be our substitute; as God, he had *the power* to deal with the sin that separated us from him. The way he did this was through his execution on the cross—a death he did not deserve, for he had lived a perfect, sinless life that deserved no condemnation, as even his judge agreed (Luke 23:4). As our substitute, he took upon himself the sins of every human being who had ever lived, and would ever live, and bore the punishment for us (see 1 Peter 2:24). He is “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29; see also 1 Peter 1:19)—the sacrifice provided by God himself. And what proved that his sacrifice had been effective was his resurrection, God’s confirmation that Christ had indeed conquered sin and death for us and that the way to God was now open.

All God asks of us now is that we believe this! But this belief is not just about accepting certain facts about Jesus; it is about committing yourself to live a whole new life in light of those facts. We can do this by taking the following steps:

- First, we need to *acknowledge* that God’s perspective on us is true, that “everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23)—including me—and we need to repent of all wrongdoing.
- Second, we need to *believe* that Jesus is God’s Son and that he died on the cross to pay the price for all our sin (Romans 10:9-10).
- Third, we need to *commit* our lives to him and promise that, from this time on, we will be his true disciples, learning from him and putting into practice all he says to us.

## BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

You could pray a prayer like this: “Dear God, I am sorry I have left you out of my life. I acknowledge that I have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. I believe that you sent your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the price for my sins. So now please forgive all my sin. I commit my life totally into your hands, to love and serve you. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may now begin to live for you alone. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

If you pray this with all your heart, then from that moment on you are “born again” (John 3:3), a child of God (1 John 3:1), and part of his growing redeemed family (see Ephesians 2:19). Don’t worry if you don’t feel an immediate change (some people do; some don’t). What matters is that you trust that Jesus has done what he promised to do (see, e.g., Revelation 3:20). His Holy Spirit *is* now at work in your life, and from this moment onward your life will begin to change, and you will never be the same again. You are now a child of the living God!

# Now that You Are a Christian

Just as a baby doesn't understand what has happened to it when it is born, so we really don't understand fully what has happened to us when we are "born again" into God's family through faith in Jesus. All we know is that *something new has started* (2 Corinthians 5:17)! You are now living a new life, made possible through God's Holy Spirit bringing your human spirit to life. This new life brings several new things to you:

## A NEW RELATIONSHIP

Through Jesus you have been brought into relationship with the living God. He is now your heavenly Father—a Father who is perfect and is everything you would want a father to be. He will always be there for you and promises to never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). He will provide for all your needs as you seek to put him first (Matthew 6:25-34).

### *Developing the relationship*

Like any new relationship, your relationship with God now needs to be developed. That requires spending time together, talking and listening. The talking is done through *prayer*. Prayer (see *The Lord's Prayer*, page 1077) is simply conversation with God. Unlike in other religions, Christian prayer needs no special words, rituals, places, or times. Simply talk to God as you would to your best friend—and be honest with him (see *Does God mind if we are honest with him?*, page 848). Share everything with him—your gratitude, concerns, needs, and mistakes—and don't give up if your prayer isn't answered immediately! (See *Perseverance in prayer*, page 1184.) The listening is best achieved by *reading the Bible*, God's word to us (though you will often hear God in your heart, too, as you listen while praying). If you get into the habit of reading a portion of the Bible daily in a systematic way, you will be amazed at how just the right passage comes up at just the moment you need it.

► See also *Studying God's word*, page 1387.

### *Not being ashamed*

It is important not to be ashamed of this new relationship. Be ready to tell others about it. This can be done in two ways. First, it can be done through *words*, telling others what Jesus has done for you (what Christians call a "testimony"). Be wise how you do this, but don't be embarrassed or try to hide your faith. Second, it can be done through *action*, particularly through the action of baptism (see *Baptism*, page 1238). Baptism is your badge of allegiance to Jesus, making public to everyone that you now belong to him.

## A NEW FAMILY

When we come to God as our Father, we join with many others who are also his children—our new brothers and sisters in Christ. Together we form God's big family, the church. It is therefore important to express that by *joining a local church*. Churches come in many different kinds; simply find one where you feel at home. Don't just look for people like you, however—from your neighborhood, people group, or profession. The wonderful thing about the church is that it comprises people "from every nation and tribe and people and

## NOW THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN

language” (Revelation 7:9), and we have the joy of experiencing and demonstrating that right now. Meet with your new spiritual family as often as you can—attending worship on Sunday and being part of its midweek or small-group structures. This is part of God’s provision to help you grow strong as a Christian.

► See also *Belonging to a church*, page 1406.

### A NEW ENEMY

Becoming a Christian isn’t always easy. Not everyone will appreciate your decision; some may think you have betrayed your family or former faith and may at best mock you or at worst oppose or persecute you. Behind all this lies your new enemy, the devil, who, as Peter said, “prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). These words are not meant to frighten us but to cause us to be alert. And that is why Paul tells us to “put on all of God’s armor” (Ephesians 6:11) and lists some of the weapons God has given us to help us stand in the fight (Ephesians 6:11-17).

► See also *Spiritual warfare*, page 1353.

### A NEW FRIEND

Thankfully, that isn’t the last word! For we are not left alone. Jesus sends us his Holy Spirit, just as he promised (see John 14:15-18). The Spirit helps us both to develop our relationship with the Father and to resist the devil. That is why Paul tells us to “be filled with the Holy Spirit”—literally, to “go on being filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). The Spirit is the One who brings God’s presence and power, who guides and restrains us, who urges us on when we are timid, who helps us to witness to Jesus, and who gives us his gifts to be used in God’s service. With him, our new life in Christ is an exciting adventure!

► See also *The Christian’s relationship with the Holy Spirit*, page 1350.

# What Is the Bible?

## THE BIBLE'S LIBRARY

The word “Bible” comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means “books”—yes, books, plural. That’s because the Bible isn’t just one book but rather a collection of sixty-six books, written by some forty authors over a period of around fifteen hundred years. That makes it a kind of “library of books.” And just as in any library, those books are not gathered chronologically (in order of the time that they describe or were written in), but by category.

First, we have what we call *The Old Testament*, with its main sections of *Law* (recording the beginnings of creation, humanity, and God’s people), *history* (telling us the story of that people), the *poetry and wisdom* of that people, and the words of their *prophets*—all of which prepare for the coming of Jesus.

Then we come to *The New Testament* with its four *Gospels* (recording the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus), *Acts* (the story of the early church and how it took the message of Jesus out to the world), *letters* written to the first churches, and a book called *Revelation*, which shows how God is ultimately in control, no matter what happens in human history, and how everything works out in the end.

Through all of these books, with all their individual stories, the Bible tells us one big, overarching story. It is the story of God’s love for people and his determination to rescue them from the mess they have made of both their lives and the world and to restore them to friendship with him, putting things back to the way they were at the beginning. The Bible is therefore an amazing love story.

## THE BIBLE'S WRITERS

Each part of the Bible has two writers: the person who wrote the words and God, who was actively inspiring them in what they wrote. As the apostle Paul explained, “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The term “inspired” doesn’t mean that the human authors were some kind of robot, mechanically churning out words that they had no control over. Nor were they mere mail carriers, dropping off letters someone else had written. Rather, the Greek word translated “inspired” means “God-breathed.” In other words, God so breathed by his Spirit upon the writers that he stirred their hearts and thoughts to write exactly what he wanted written. The apostle Peter said a similar thing, but using a different picture. He wrote that the writers of Scripture were “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The word “moved” in the original Greek was the word used of a ship being moved as it hoisted its sails to catch the wind. In other words, it is as if the writers of the Bible hoisted an inner sail to God’s Spirit, who then moved them along in their writing.

But because these writers were human and not robots, their different styles come out in that writing. For example, Isaiah was well educated, so his prophecies are written in beautifully poetic Hebrew; but Peter, whose story probably lay behind Mark’s Gospel, was a working-class man, so Mark’s Gospel is written in simple, fast-moving Greek. When God comes into our lives, he doesn’t override our personalities; nor did he do so with the writers of the Bible.

### THE BIBLE'S LANGUAGES

The original texts of the Bible were written in three ancient languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Old Testament was written entirely in Hebrew, apart from some small sections of it—Daniel 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; and Jeremiah 10:11. These passages were all written in Aramaic, an international language of Bible times, because they concerned nations other than Israel, and God wanted them to hear his message. The entire New Testament was written in Greek, the language used throughout the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries AD. Excellent scholarship has ensured that these languages are translated accurately for us today.

Some people worry about whether our Bible today is an accurate representation of the original manuscripts. After all, messages often get changed when passed on, even among people with the best intentions; so how can we be sure that didn't happen to the Bible? Two key things reassure us. First, we know that copyists of the ancient texts took great care in hand-copying their work (long before the invention of printing). They copied word for word, then counted how many words and letters were on each page and checked it against the original copy. So mistakes were rare—especially since they believed they were dealing with God's word. But the truth is, mistakes sometimes did happen. And that is where our second reassurance comes in—the science of the study of ancient texts. This has become a very refined skill which, through years of research and experience, has led to the development of guidelines that help us to ascertain the original text with remarkable accuracy. And if there is ever uncertainty about how a word or phrase should be translated, a footnote is made to that effect, as in this Bible.

### THE BIBLE'S LAYOUT

To help us find our way around the Bible, each book is divided up into chapters and verses. The chapter and verse numbers aren't part of the original Bible text, however; they were simply added later in church history as a tool to assist us. In a reference to a specific place in the Bible (e.g., John 3:16), the **name of the book** comes first; then the first number is the **chapter**, and the second number is the **verse**. In the biblical text of this edition, chapter numbers appear in blue in a larger font, while verse numbers appear in black in a smaller font. The Table of Contents at the front will help you find each book quickly.

### THE BIBLE'S MESSAGE

At the heart of the Bible's sixty-six books lies one central message: God's love for people and his determination to save them. **The Old Testament** opens with the story of creation, then tells of how things started to go wrong with the human race and of God's resolve to put this right. His plan would involve a family—a family through whom he would eventually build a nation (Israel), from which he would eventually bring a Messiah to save not just Israel but the whole world. The story unfolds slowly, and at times it even looks like it is going backward rather than forward; but God was steadily working out his plan. And then, “when the right time came, God sent his Son” (Galatians 4:4). This is where **The New Testament** comes in, telling us about the coming of God's own Son, Jesus, who was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. It was through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension that salvation could be given, not just to Israel, but to everyone who believed in him. Through him, God's Kingdom started to break into this world—a small seed at first, but one that would grow into a worldwide harvest of people who loved God and one another. The church, God's redeemed people, has been given the responsibility and the privilege of taking this message of God's love through Jesus to others—a task that will only be completed when Jesus returns at the end of the age, destroys all evil, and makes everything new. The Bible both tells us this story and gives us insights into how to live a fulfilled life with God, serving him and others.

### THE BIBLE'S IMPORTANCE

Reading the Bible is important. Why? First and foremost because it reveals God to us, showing us what he is really like. The Bible shows us that God is good and loving, always right and faithful (Exodus 34:6-7); he is the perfect Father. His character is reflected in everything he does: creating a beautiful world (Genesis 1:1-31), having a plan for when people messed up that world, steadily unfolding that plan through the story of Israel, and bringing it to a climax through sending his own Son, Jesus, to deal with sin through his death on the cross (Romans 3:23-26). How would we know all this if it were not for the Bible?

Secondly, the Bible shows us the way to have a relationship with this God. We receive this gift of relationship with him through Jesus Christ by truly turning away (the Bible's word for this is "repenting") from our own independent, anti-God (sinful) way of living and turning to God in belief (see John 1:12; Acts 20:21). Such believing includes personally accepting that Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for our sin. As we trust Jesus, he saves us and puts us in a right relationship with God in a way no one else can (see Luke 18:9-14; John 3:16; Romans 3:21-28).

Thirdly, the Bible shows us the way to live out that relationship in daily life. Reading the Bible nurtures our faith by bringing the very life of God to us through his Spirit so we can live in relationship with God as he wants us to. Through the Bible, God helps us to grow stronger, to come to know him better, and to become more like Jesus. It answers many of the questions we face in life—questions such as, How should we behave at work, at home, with our families, and in society? (See Colossians 3:1-4:6.) Why and how should we pray? (See Luke 11:1-13.) What do we do when the going gets tough? (See Ephesians 6:10-20.) But it will also challenge our worldview, for sin has caused us to get out of step with God. So it will sometimes cut across our cultural norms or our former way of living. But as we not only read the Bible but also seek to put it into practice, we will find that it increasingly shapes us into the people God wants us to be.

### READING THE BIBLE

Because some parts of the Bible are hard to understand, we sometimes need help in grasping what it means and how it applies to life today. The notes throughout this edition will help you with that. Bible devotionals and commentaries can also be very helpful (ask your pastor or a Christian friend for more information about these resources).

But here is a simple approach we can adopt when reading the Bible. First, ask yourself, what would this passage have meant *then* (to the people who first experienced or heard this)? Put yourself into the story and imagine what it must have been like and how people must have reacted or what they must have thought. Second, ask yourself, how does this apply to us *today*? What does this story reveal about what God is like? And what abiding principles does the story give us about how God wants his people to live? Always start with "then"—then move to "today." This will help you to avoid the danger of reading things back into the story that were never there.

### THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is made up of four main sections in our Christian Bibles—Law, History, Poetry and Wisdom, and Prophets—though the Jewish Bible divides it up differently and has three main sections called Law, Prophets, and Writings.

#### *The Law*

This is the name given to the first five books of the Bible. This section is also sometimes called "the Pentateuch" (from a Greek expression meaning "five books"). According to the oldest Jewish and Christian traditions, these five books were written by Moses, though they were probably shaped as we now have them by a later editor. They are partly historical, partly legal

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

in character. *Genesis*, meaning “beginning,” tells us of the beginnings of everything—creation, humanity, the breakdown of relationship with God, and the origins of the family God would use to start his rescue program (Abraham and his descendants, the Jews). *Exodus* narrates God’s rescue of this people from the slavery in Egypt that they ended up in. He called a man named Moses, who, backed up by miracles from God, dramatically led Israel to freedom. At Mount Sinai, God made a “covenant” or “binding agreement” with the Israelites, taking them as his own people and giving them his laws, including the Ten Commandments. *Leviticus* reveals what the people of Israel had to do when they disobeyed those laws and the relationship with God was broken: offer sacrifices to deal with their sin. *Numbers* continues the story as the Israelites left Mount Sinai and made their way toward Canaan, the land God had promised to give them. But repeated disobedience led to their spending forty years in the wilderness as that whole generation died out. In *Deuteronomy*, Moses looked back over Israel’s history and reminded them of their laws, calling them to be faithful to God as they were about to enter the Promised Land. They would enter it without Moses, however. He died within sight of the Promised Land, but he never made it there himself.

### *The Historical Books*

This section contains twelve books covering the history of the Israelites from their entry into the Promised Land to their exile from it and eventual return. *Joshua* contains exciting stories of God giving them military victories—at times surprising or miraculous victories—over the Canaanites under the leadership of Moses’ successor, Joshua. *Judges* records some sad stories as the newly established nation of Israel was repeatedly disobedient and unfaithful to God. But God stayed faithful to them. He appointed leaders or “judges” to rescue them from their various enemies; but every time, despite their initial gratitude, they soon fell back into disobedient and idolatrous ways. But the story of *Ruth*, set in the time of the judges, shows us a glimmer of hope. It contains the story of someone who was faithful to God even in dark days and whom God used to further his rescue plan—for Ruth would be the great-grandmother of the famous King David. *1 and 2 Samuel* record Israel’s history from the end of the period of the judges to Israel’s first kings, Saul and David. The early chapters are dominated by the prophet Samuel, after whom the books are named, who helped Israel transition from a theocracy (a nation ruled directly by God) to a monarchy, which is what the people asked for. Saul started his reign well but finished badly and was rejected by God. David was God’s chosen replacement through whom he promised to build a kingdom that would never end—something Christians see fulfilled through his descendant Jesus. *1 and 2 Kings* record the reign of David’s son Solomon and the division of the kingdom into a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah) after his death because of the foolishness of his son. Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC, and Judah by Babylon in 586 BC—both because of ongoing and willful disobedience to God. Israel was scattered and dispersed; Judah was taken into exile and preserved. *1 and 2 Chronicles* tell the same history again, but this time from the perspective of those who returned to Judah after the seventy-year exile and who were asking the question, Is God still with us?—to which the author’s answer was: Yes! *Ezra* records the story of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem by the returning exiles; while *Nehemiah* tells us of Nehemiah’s bold leadership in rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls and defenses, and in rebuilding Israel itself as a people who were to hold God’s word as foundational. But not everyone came back from exile; *Esther* was a young Jewish woman who was born in exile and remained there. She rose to become queen of Persia and was able to save the Jews from a plot to exterminate them.

### *The Books of Poetry and Wisdom*

This section of the Bible contains stories, proverbs, and poems that deal with many of “the big questions” of life: things like suffering, meaning, God, and love. *Job* is the story of a really good man who experienced incredible suffering—none of which was helped by the input of his friends. Job ultimately found peace, not by finding answers, but by finding God in a new way. *Psalms* is the hymn and prayer book of the Old Testament and contains prayers that cover the whole range of human experiences and emotions. *Proverbs* is a collection

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

of short sayings that seek to bring God’s wisdom to a wide range of everyday situations. They highlight what happens when people don’t walk in God’s ways, and the blessing that follows when they do. *Ecclesiastes* takes us on a journey through life from birth to death. It considers the age-old question, What is life all about?—and shows how empty it all is if lived without God. The *Song of Songs* (or *Song of Solomon*) is a collection of love songs, celebrating the joy of human love and the relationship between a man and a woman.

### *The Books of the Prophets*

This section contains the writings of four so-called Major Prophets (“major” because of the length of their works rather than the importance of their writings) and twelve Minor Prophets. The four Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. *Isaiah* repeatedly warned Judah of God’s coming judgment through conquest and exile, but his great vision of God and his holiness also brought hope that when the judgment was past, God would once again restore his people. He also looked ahead to the coming of the Messiah, the one who would come to ultimately deliver God’s people. *Jeremiah* prophesied judgment upon Judah because of their unfaithfulness, and his prophecies led to much personal suffering for him. Judgment would come in the form of exile to Babylon. Jeremiah also wrote *Lamentations*, a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. *Ezekiel* was a priest taken into exile in Babylon. With his priestly work now over, God called him to be a prophet, though his language remained that of a priest. He saw both the reason for Judah’s exile—their uncleanness before God—and God’s restoration of them in the future. *Daniel*, taken into captivity in Babylon, served a number of pagan kings there, but he used his position to bring God’s word to them by interpreting their dreams. His own dreams gave him a glimpse of God’s plan for the future and his establishing of a kingdom that, unlike human empires, would never end.

The first of the twelve Minor Prophets is *Hosea*, who prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel in its closing years, assuring them of God’s faithfulness despite their own unfaithfulness. *Joel* described a devastating plague of locusts, which he interpreted as a sign of the coming “day of the LORD,” and he called people back to God in light of it. *Amos* was passionate about social justice and called upon the rich and materialistic in Israel to change. *Obadiah*, whose work is the shortest book in the Old Testament, prophesied against Judah’s neighbor Edom, calling them to account for their behavior. *Jonah* is the story of a reluctant prophet whom God called to preach in Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Jonah really didn’t want to, being unwilling to accept that God loved other nations, too, and not just Israel. *Micah* spoke against the injustices in society and promised judgment on both Israel and Judah for their sins; yet he also promised hope, forgiveness, and restoration. *Nahum* prophesied that God would comfort his people through the coming destruction of Nineveh. *Habakkuk* questioned God about his justice, wanting to know why he would use wicked Babylon to punish his holy people. *Zephaniah* condemned the spiritual state of Judah and prophesied that the coming “day of the LORD” would bring judgment not just against others but also against God’s own people. *Haggai* urged the returning exiles to renew their commitment to God and to prioritize rebuilding the Temple. *Zechariah* also encouraged God’s people to throw off their discouragement and rebuild the Temple, assuring them that great things still lay ahead. *Malachi* challenged God’s people to be wholehearted in their serving of God and to get ready for the coming of his messenger, who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

► See also *A timeline of the Bible*, pages A22–A24.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

### *The Gospels*

The word *gospel* means “good news,” and the news about Jesus is so good that we get not just one account of it but four—each one written from a slightly different perspective and highlighting slightly different things in order to fill out the picture we get of Jesus. These four accounts make up nearly half of the New Testament.

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**Matthew** wrote his Gospel primarily for Jews who had become Christians. He uses many quotations from the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and his collection of Jesus' teaching into five main blocks is a way of saying, "Here is the new Moses (the writer of the first five books of the Bible), who leads his people into freedom." **Mark**, although second in order, was probably the first Gospel to be written. His account, written for Gentiles (non-Jews), is succinct and fast-moving. He has little time for details, so he launches straight into the start of Jesus' ministry, showing us through Jesus' teaching and miracles that he is both Messiah and Son of God. **Luke**, the only non-Jewish Gospel writer, emphasizes that Jesus is for everybody, especially those society has rejected. His account stretches from Jesus' conception to his return to heaven (the Ascension), and it includes many details that the other Gospels do not have, such as information about Jesus' childhood. **John** is quite different from the other three Gospels, approaching the story of Jesus in a distinctive way. Although John knew many stories, he carefully chose just some—seven signs (miracles) and seven sayings (known as the "I am" sayings)—stating that his purpose was "that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name" (John 20:31).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the "synoptic" Gospels, from a Greek word meaning "seen from the same viewpoint."

► For charts showing where the parables and miracles of Jesus are recorded in the Gospels, see **Jesus' parables**, page 1089, and **Jesus' miracles**, page 1128.

### Acts

**Acts of the Apostles** is the second part of Luke's two-volume work (compare Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1). In it he continues the story of Jesus that he began in his Gospel, starting with Jesus' return to heaven (the Ascension) and his sending the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Now the story of Jesus could continue—not through Jesus in person, but through his empowered followers, the church. Acts shows how the church kept at its very core the mission to spread the Good News "in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Luke follows that geographic pattern in his account, highlighting the work not just of key apostles like Peter and Paul but also of ordinary church members. The book ends in an open-ended way as Paul, even though under house arrest in Rome, just kept preaching the gospel to everyone who came to him.

### The Letters

The newly established church needed a lot of help, and that help was provided by the visits and letters of the apostles. These letters dealt with a wide range of matters: from right beliefs about God and Jesus to right living for those who followed Jesus. This section begins with thirteen letters written by the apostle Paul, some to churches and some to individuals.

**Romans**, written to prepare the way for Paul to visit a church he did not know and had not founded, outlined his gospel so that they would know they believed the same thing. In this letter, he shows that the gospel of Jesus is God's plan of salvation and righteousness for everyone who believes, Jew and Gentile alike; and he shows how the gospel, lived in the power of God's Spirit, should transform our lives. In **1 and 2 Corinthians** Paul deals with many of the problems the church in Corinth faced as a result of selfishness, immorality, worldliness, and super-spirituality. **Galatians** is one of his most strongly worded letters, challenging those who were saying that, to be a real Christian, you had to become a Jew as well (by being circumcised and keeping the Law). He makes it very clear that salvation is through faith in Jesus alone. In **Ephesians** Paul explains that God's great and mysterious plan is being worked out through the church, which lies at the very center of this letter. **Philippians** is a letter full of joy as Paul thanks his Christian friends in Philippi for their support of his ministry and as he encourages them to keep pressing on. **Colossians** tackles some cultural and religious ideas that had trickled into the church from the surrounding culture and which urgently needed to be addressed because they were undermining the deity and supremacy of Christ. **1 and 2 Thessalonians**, among Paul's earliest letters,

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

deal with people's wrong understandings about Christ's second coming. **1 and 2 Timothy** and **Titus** are letters to church leaders, containing practical advice on church leadership. **Philemon** is a personal letter, appealing to a man named Philemon on behalf of a runaway slave, Onesimus, who had now become a Christian.

What follows is a collection of letters by other leaders in the early church, the first of which—**Hebrews**—is completely anonymous. It was almost certainly written to Jews who had become Christians but who were being pressured to give up their Christian faith and return to Judaism. The author shows them that this would be a big mistake since everything about Jesus is better and since he fulfilled everything that the Old Testament pointed to. **James**, one of the earliest New Testament writings, is a letter to Jewish Christians experiencing various troubles that had spilled over into church life. It is therefore full of practical teaching on how to live out the Christian life together. **1 Peter**, written by the apostle Peter, encouraged Christians who were being persecuted for their faith, while **2 Peter** contains warnings against false teachers and urges believers to stand firm. **1, 2, and 3 John** were all written by the apostle John to help Christians be sure of their faith and to show them how to work that out in their everyday lives—lives that should be full of love. **Jude** encouraged believers to stand firm against false teachers and the havoc they were causing.

When reading these letters, we should always remember that they are exactly that—letters. As such, they were written to specific people at specific times for specific reasons, so it is important to understand as much as we can about the background or context to help us interpret them correctly. Nevertheless, while they are letters from people to people, they are also letters from God. His inspiration lies behind them all, as the early church leaders themselves began to see. Peter, for example, put Paul's letters on a par with "other parts of Scripture" (2 Peter 3:15-16). Therefore, even though they address issues at a certain point in history, they also contain God's eternal principles for us today.

### **Revelation**

In many ways, the final book of the Bible, **Revelation**, could be included in the previous section, since the book itself tells us it is a letter (Revelation 1:4), and its opening follows the standard form of a letter in those days. Yet it is more than a letter. It also describes itself as a "revelation" (Revelation 1:1) and a prophecy (Revelation 1:3; 22:18). Using spectacular and mysterious images—often puzzling to us but well-understood by the original recipients—Revelation assured believers who were being persecuted for their faith that, despite everything that was happening, Jesus was still Lord, was still seated on his throne, and would triumph at the End. And his triumph over all evil would be followed by a new heaven and a new earth, and God's redeemed people would be safe with him forever. The Paradise lost in Genesis 3 through human sin is here regained through God's own intervention!

# A Timeline of the Bible

Dates in this chart are those that have been traditionally accepted. In the early period (before Israel’s monarchy) all dates are approximate. A question mark (?) indicates scholarly uncertainty about the dating. Dates of kings, queens, and prophets are the dates of their reign or ministry. Where dates of kings overlap, it is where there was a “co-regency” (the next king being crowned before the death of the previous one to ensure a peaceful succession).

EARLY BIBLICAL HISTORY			
Period	Key Events	Key Figures	Key Bible Passages
<b>Beginnings</b>	Creation The Fall The Flood Babel	Adam Noah	Genesis 1–11
<b>The Patriarchs</b>	God’s promise to Abraham	Abraham 2166–1991 BC Isaac 2066–1886 BC Jacob 2006–1859 BC Joseph 1915–1805 BC	Genesis 12–50
<b>Israel in Egypt, the Exodus, and Sinai</b>	Slavery in Egypt The Exodus 1446 BC Sinai and wilderness wanderings 1446–1406 BC	Moses 1526–1406 BC	Exodus
<b>Conquest of Canaan</b>	Crossing the Jordan 1406 BC Conquest of Canaan 1406–1375 BC The judges 1375–1050 BC	Joshua 1486–1376 BC	Exodus—Deuteronomy Joshua Judges
<b>The United Monarchy</b>		Saul 1050–1010 BC	1 Samuel
		David 1010–970 BC	2 Samuel; 1 Chronicles
		Solomon 970–930 BC	1 Kings; 2 Chronicles
<i>The kingdom splits in two 930 BC</i>			

## THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

Prophets of Judah	Kings of Judah (the southern kingdom)	Kings of Israel (the northern kingdom)	Prophets of Israel
Joel 835–825 BC (?)	Rehoboam 930–913 BC	Jeroboam I 930–909 BC	Elijah 875–848 BC
	Abijah 913–910 BC Asa 910–869 BC	Nadab 909–908 BC Baasha 908–886 BC	
	Jehoshaphat 872–848 BC	Elah 886–885 BC Zimri 885 BC Tibni 885–880 BC Omri 885–874 BC	
		Ahab 874–853 BC Ahaziah 853–852 BC Joram 852–841 BC	
	Jehoram 848–841 BC Ahaziah 841 BC Athaliah 841–835 BC Joash 835–796 BC	Jehu 841–814 BC	Elisha 848–797 BC
	Amaziah 796–767 BC Uzziah (Azariah) 792–740 BC	Jehoahaz 814–798 BC	Amos 760–750 BC Jonah c. 755 BC
Jehoash 798–782 BC Jeroboam II 793–753 BC			
Zechariah 753 BC Shallum 752 BC Menahem 752–742 BC Pekahiah 742–740 BC Pekah 752–732 BC			
Isaiah 740–685 BC Micah 735–686 BC	Jotham 750–735 BC Ahaz 735–715 BC	Hoshea 732–722 BC	Hosea 760–722 BC
Habakkuk 640–605 BC Zephaniah 635–622 BC Jeremiah 626–580 BC	Hezekiah 715–686 BC	<i>Fall of Samaria and exile of the ten northern tribes 722 BC</i>	
	Manasseh 697–642 BC		
	Amon 642–640 BC Josiah 640–609 BC	<i>Assyria conquered by Babylon 605 BC First Jews exiled to Babylon 605 BC</i>	
	Jehoahaz 609 BC Jehoiakim 609–598 BC		
Obadiah c. 586 BC (?) Joel (?)	Jehoiachin 598–597 BC Zedekiah 597–586 BC		
	<i>Fall of Jerusalem 586 BC</i>		

## EXILE AND RETURN

Prophets	Events in Judah	Events in Babylon & Persia	Key Bible Passages
Daniel <i>605–535 BC</i> Ezekiel <i>593–571 BC</i>	Temple destroyed and Judah exiled to Babylon <i>586 BC</i>		2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36
Joel (?) Haggai <i>520 BC</i> Zechariah <i>520–480 BC</i>	Judea becomes part of Persia <i>539 BC</i> The Jewish exiles return to Jerusalem <i>538 BC</i> Temple rebuilt <i>536–515 BC</i>	Persia conquers Babylon <i>539 BC</i> Daniel continues to serve the Persian kings	Ezra, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah
Malachi <i>440–430 BC</i> Joel (?)	Ezra returns to teach God's word <i>458 BC</i> Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem's walls <i>445–443 BC</i>	Esther <i>484–464 BC</i> Haman's attempt to exterminate the Jews	Esther Ezra Nehemiah
	Alexander the Great conquers Judea <i>333 BC</i> Growing Greek influence in Judea Maccabean revolt <i>167 BC</i> Rome conquers Judea <i>63 BC</i> Herod the Great <i>37–4 BC</i>		

## THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD

Events in Judea and Galilee	Events elsewhere in the Roman Empire	Writing of New Testament Books
Jesus born <i>c. 5–4 BC</i>		
Jesus begins his ministry <i>c. AD 26</i> Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension <i>c. AD 30</i> Pentecost <i>c. AD 30</i> Council of Jerusalem <i>AD 49</i>	Paul's conversion <i>c. AD 33–34</i> Paul's first missionary journey <i>AD 46–48</i>	Galatians <i>c. AD 48 (or AD 53)</i> James <i>c. AD 48</i> 1 & 2 Thessalonians <i>c. AD 50–51</i>
Jerusalem destroyed by Rome <i>AD 70</i>	Paul's second missionary journey <i>AD 50–52</i> Paul's third missionary journey <i>AD 53–57</i> Emperor Nero <i>AD 54–68</i> Paul imprisoned in Rome <i>AD 59–62</i> Peter dies <i>c. AD 65–67</i> Paul dies <i>c. AD 67</i>	1 & 2 Corinthians <i>c. AD 54–55</i> Romans <i>AD 57</i> Mark <i>late AD 50s/early 60s</i> Matthew <i>early AD 60s</i> Luke <i>early AD 60s</i> Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon <i>AD 62</i> Acts <i>c. AD 62–63</i> 1 Peter <i>c. AD 62–63</i> 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus <i>AD 63–67</i> 2 Peter <i>c. AD 64–67</i> Jude <i>c. AD 65</i> Hebrews <i>c. AD 66–70</i>
		John's Gospel, his letters, and Revelation <i>c. AD 85–95</i>

# Old Testament

# Genesis *In the beginning*

The word “Genesis” means “origins.” This book shows us about the origins of the world, especially the human race, and the origins of God’s people, Israel.

Genesis tells us of God’s creation of all things. Human beings were the high point of his creation, but their disobedience led to their expulsion not only from the Garden of Eden but also from intimate friendship with God. This sin of disobedience spread rapidly as the human race developed, but from the beginning we see that God had a plan to put things right again.

## What’s it all about?

Chapters 1 to 11 describe the earliest history of the world and its beginnings. They show us that the world as originally made by God was good, that the human race has a special place in that world (with both male and female being made in God’s image to be like him and to be called into a relationship with him), and that humanity has a responsibility to look after God’s world.

But because the first human beings disobeyed God, refusing to trust and obey him, the world in which we live is now “fallen.” Brokenness in relationships, illness, suffering, trouble, and even death itself are the results of human sin. God responds to sin with judgment, but he also brings salvation, as we see in the story of the flood.

The remainder of Genesis shows us how God began his plan to mend a broken world. Even though human beings don’t deserve it, God in his kindness loves the world, and so he made a covenant—a binding agreement involving a special relationship—with a man named Abraham. In this covenant he promised to bless not just Abraham and his descendants but ultimately the whole world. In return, God called for faithful obedience. So chapters 12

to 50 tell the stories of the ancestors of the people of Israel: Abraham, his son Isaac, Isaac’s son Jacob, and Jacob’s sons, who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Through their descendants, God would work out his plan of salvation.

## What does it mean for us?

Genesis gives us answers to the big questions of life: Who brought everything into being? What is God like? Why do things go wrong in the world? What is the

### OVERVIEW

#### THE BEGINNING OF THE HUMAN RACE

The creation of the world  
1:1–2:25

The first human beings disobey God  
3:1–24

Adam’s descendants and the spread of sin · 4:1–5:32

The story of Noah and the flood  
6:1–10:32

The tower of Babel  
11:1–32

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF GOD’S PEOPLE, ISRAEL

The story of Abraham  
12:1–25:34

The story of Isaac and Jacob  
26:1–36:43

The story of Joseph  
37:1–50:26

purpose of life? Genesis shows us about God—that he is eternal, powerful, perfect; the creator and the giver of life. He is also personal and has made human beings in his image, to have a close relationship with him. He made men and women as equals, to be different, but to complement each other.

God gave the first human beings the principles of work and rest (2:2-3) and the basic social unit of marriage: the union of one man and one woman in a lifelong relationship (2:24). The rebellion of Adam and Eve led to God’s judgment, which included death and suffering. Yet even in the midst of judgment, we see God’s kindness and his patience with people.

Through God’s special relationship with Abraham and his descendants, we see the beginning of God’s plan to bring hope and salvation to the whole world, despite the reality of human sin.

### *The Account of Creation*

**1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.\* <sup>2</sup>The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

<sup>3</sup>Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

<sup>6</sup>Then God said, “Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.” <sup>7</sup>And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens.

<sup>8</sup>God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

<sup>9</sup>Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened.

<sup>12</sup>The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>13</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

<sup>14</sup>Then God said, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years. <sup>15</sup>Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth.” And that is what happened. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>19</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>Then God said, “Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” <sup>21</sup>So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

<sup>23</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>Then God said, “Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” And that is what happened.

<sup>25</sup>God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make human beings\* in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth,\* and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings\* in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>29</sup>Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup>And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

<sup>31</sup>Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

**2** So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. <sup>2</sup>On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested\* from all his work. <sup>3</sup>And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

<sup>4</sup>This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

### *The Man and Woman in Eden*

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. <sup>6</sup>Instead, springs\* came up from the ground and watered all the land. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. <sup>9</sup>The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup>A river flowed from the land of Eden, watering the garden and then dividing into four branches. <sup>11</sup>The first branch, called the Pishon, flowed around the entire land of Havilah, where gold is found. <sup>12</sup>The gold of that land is exceptionally pure; aromatic resin and onyx stone are also found there. <sup>13</sup>The second branch, called the Gihon, flowed around the entire land of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The third branch, called the Tigris, flowed east of the land of Asshur. The fourth branch is called the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. <sup>16</sup>But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—<sup>17</sup>except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

1:1 Or *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . .* Or *When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .* **1:26a** Or *man*; Hebrew reads *adam*. **1:26b** As in Syriac version; Hebrew reads *all the earth*. **1:27** Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*. **2:2** Or *ceased*; also in 2:3. **2:6** Or *mist*.

## Was the world really made in six days?

Some Christians believe that the world was made in six literal twenty-four-hour periods. Others consider that the periods described as days refer to extended periods of time.

The real issue is not so much the length of the periods of time that God took to create everything but the fact that he did create everything: There is a God who made everything in an orderly manner. It isn’t chance or luck that controls human life; it is God. A living, personal God, not blind, impersonal fate, has guided all life from the beginning.

<sup>18</sup>Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” <sup>19</sup>So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man\* to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. <sup>20</sup>He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

<sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man’s ribs\* and closed up the opening. <sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

<sup>23</sup>“At last!” the man exclaimed.

“This one is bone from my bone,  
and flesh from my flesh!  
She will be called ‘woman,’  
because she was taken from ‘man.’”

<sup>24</sup>This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

<sup>25</sup>Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

### *The Man and Woman Sin*

**3** The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

<sup>2</sup>“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. <sup>3</sup>“It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”

<sup>4</sup>“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. <sup>5</sup>“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

<sup>6</sup>The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. <sup>7</sup>At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

<sup>8</sup>When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man\* and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. <sup>9</sup>Then the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

<sup>10</sup>He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”

<sup>11</sup>“Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

<sup>12</sup>The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

► **2:24** See *Does marriage still matter to God?*, page 976; **3:6** See *Sin*, page 387.

## Adam and Eve

Chapter 2 zooms in on the climax of creation portrayed in chapter 1—the creation of human beings. The Hebrew word *adam* is used in this chapter of both humanity in general and “the man” (i.e., Adam). It’s as if it is telling us that the story of Adam is not just the story of an individual but also of the whole human race.

Adam alone couldn’t fully reflect what God was like; for that, he needed “a helper” (Genesis 2:18). Together “Man” and “Woman”—only later called Eve (3:20)—were created to reflect God, know God, and care for his world. Sadly, disobedience would rob both them and all humanity of experiencing all this in its fullness, until Christ—“the last Adam”—came to restore it (Romans 5:12-21; see also 1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

► See also *The fall of humanity*, page 7.

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God asked the woman, “What have you done?”

“The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild.

You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live.

<sup>15</sup> And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike\* your head, and you will strike his heel.”

<sup>16</sup>Then he said to the woman,

“I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.\*”

<sup>17</sup>And to the man he said,

“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you.

All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it.

<sup>18</sup> It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”

### *Paradise Lost: God’s Judgment*

<sup>20</sup>Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live.\* <sup>21</sup>And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

<sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God said, “Look, the human beings\* have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!” <sup>23</sup>So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made.

<sup>24</sup>After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

2:19 Or Adam, and so throughout the chapter. 2:21 Or took a part of the man’s side. 3:8 Or Adam, and so throughout the chapter. 3:15 Or bruise; also in 3:15b. 3:16 Or And though you will have desire for your husband, / he will rule over you. 3:20 Eve sounds like a Hebrew term that means “to give life.” 3:22 Or the man; Hebrew reads ha-adam.

## The fall of humanity

Adam and Eve’s disobedience and their subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden is known as “the Fall”—so called because they fell from their place of security and intimate friendship with God. They fell into a life of uncertainty, hard labor, disharmony, and threat in the world into which they were sent. But this didn’t just affect them; it affected every human descended from them (Romans 5:12). Even by Genesis 4 we see what a mixed bag humanity has now become—on the one hand, still wonderfully creative (4:21-22), yet on the other hand capable of great wickedness (4:1-16). This condition has been passed on through the human race (Romans 1:18-32), affecting even creation itself (Romans 8:20-21).

But God has not abandoned us. He even provided a note of hope to Adam and Eve by promising that one day a descendant of theirs would come and crush the head of the serpent (the devil), even at cost to himself (Genesis 3:15). This has often been seen as the first proclamation of what Jesus would do one day (see Revelation 12:9).

► See also *Adam and Eve*, page 6.

*Cain and Abel*

**4** Now Adam\* had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the LORD’s help, I have produced\* a man!” <sup>2</sup>Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. <sup>3</sup>When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. <sup>4</sup>Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, <sup>5</sup>but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

“Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

<sup>8</sup>One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out into the fields.”\* And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

<sup>9</sup>Afterward the LORD asked Cain, “Where is your brother? Where is Abel?”

“I don’t know,” Cain responded. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

<sup>10</sup>But the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! <sup>11</sup>Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood. <sup>12</sup>No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

<sup>13</sup>Cain replied to the LORD, “My punishment\* is too great for me to bear! <sup>14</sup>You

have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!”

<sup>15</sup>The LORD replied, “No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him. <sup>16</sup>So Cain left the LORD’s presence and settled in the land of Nod,\* east of Eden.

*The Descendants of Cain*

<sup>17</sup>Cain had sexual relations with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain founded a city, which he named Enoch, after his son. <sup>18</sup>Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad became the father of\* Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech.

<sup>19</sup>Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah. <sup>20</sup>Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the first of those who raise livestock and live in tents. <sup>21</sup>His brother’s name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute. <sup>22</sup>Lamech’s other wife, Zillah, gave birth to a son named Tubal-cain. He became an expert in forging tools of bronze and iron. Tubal-cain had a sister named Naamah. <sup>23</sup>One day Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
listen to me, you wives of  
Lamech.

I have killed a man who attacked me,  
a young man who wounded me.

<sup>24</sup> If someone who kills Cain is punished  
seven times,  
then the one who kills me will be  
punished seventy-seven times!”

**Cain and Abel**

Chapter 4 reveals how quickly sin spread, affecting even close family relationships. Cain, a farmer and Eve’s firstborn, allowed his anger and bitterness with his brother, Abel, a shepherd, to boil over, and Cain killed Abel when God accepted Abel’s offering but not Cain’s. This may have been because of what was offered—Abel offered his best (“the best portions of the firstborn lambs”), while Cain simply offered ordinary farm produce (Genesis 4:3-4)—or it may have been because of Cain’s heart attitude and unawareness of sin (4:7). But not only did Cain kill Abel, he coldheartedly denied any knowledge of it (4:9), leading to him being cursed and banished, driven even further away from God’s presence.

### The Birth of Seth

<sup>25</sup>Adam had sexual relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth,\* for she said, “God has granted me another son in place of Abel, whom Cain killed.” <sup>26</sup>When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. At that time people first began to worship the LORD by name.

### The Descendants of Adam

**5** This is the written account of the descendants of Adam. When God created human beings,\* he made them to be like himself. <sup>2</sup>He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called them “human.”

<sup>3</sup>When Adam was 130 years old, he became the father of a son who was just like him—in his very image. He named his son Seth. <sup>4</sup>After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup>Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.

<sup>6</sup>When Seth was 105 years old, he became the father of\* Enosh. <sup>7</sup>After the birth of\* Enosh, Seth lived another 807 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup>Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.

<sup>9</sup>When Enosh was 90 years old, he became the father of Kenan. <sup>10</sup>After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived another 815 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup>Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.

<sup>12</sup>When Kenan was 70 years old, he became the father of Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup>After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup>Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.

<sup>15</sup>When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he became the father of Jared. <sup>16</sup>After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived another 830 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>17</sup>Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died.

<sup>18</sup>When Jared was 162 years old, he became the father of Enoch. <sup>19</sup>After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters.

<sup>20</sup>Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.

<sup>21</sup>When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. <sup>22</sup>After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another

300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup>Enoch lived 365 years, <sup>24</sup>walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.

<sup>25</sup>When Methuselah was 187 years old, he became the father of Lamech. <sup>26</sup>After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived another 782 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup>Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died.

<sup>28</sup>When Lamech was 182 years old, he became the father of a son. <sup>29</sup>Lamech named his son Noah, for he said, “May he bring us relief\* from our work and the painful labor of farming this ground that the LORD has cursed.” <sup>30</sup>After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived another 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup>Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.

<sup>32</sup>After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

### A World Gone Wrong

**6** Then the people began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were born to them. <sup>2</sup>The sons of God saw the beautiful women\* and took any they wanted as their wives. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not put up with\* humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years.”

<sup>4</sup>In those days, and for some time after, giant Nephilites lived on the earth, for whenever the sons of God had intercourse with women, they gave birth to children who became the heroes and famous warriors of ancient times.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. <sup>6</sup>So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. <sup>7</sup>And the LORD said, “I will wipe this human race

4:1a Or the man; also in 4:25. 4:1b Or I have acquired. Cain sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean “produce” or “acquire.” 4:8 As in Samaritan Pentateuch, Greek and Syriac versions, and Latin Vulgate; Masoretic Text lacks “Let’s go out into the fields.” 4:13 Or My sin. 4:16 Nod means “wandering.” 4:18 Or the ancestor of, and so throughout the verse. 4:25 Seth probably means “granted”; the name may also mean “appointed.” 5:1 Or man; Hebrew reads adam; similarly in 5:2. 5:6 Or the ancestor of; also in 5:9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 25. 5:7 Or the birth of this ancestor of; also in 5:10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26. 5:29 Noah sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean “relief” or “comfort.” 6:2 Hebrew daughters of men; also in 6:4. 6:3 Greek version reads will not remain in.

I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.”<sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor with the LORD.

### *The Story of Noah*

<sup>9</sup>This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God.<sup>10</sup> Noah was the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup>Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence.<sup>12</sup> God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt.<sup>13</sup> So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!

<sup>14</sup>“Build a large boat\* from cypress wood\* and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior.<sup>15</sup> Make the boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high.\*<sup>16</sup> Leave an 18-inch opening\* below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper.

<sup>17</sup>“Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die.<sup>18</sup> But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives.<sup>19</sup> Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood.<sup>20</sup> Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive.<sup>21</sup> And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals.”

<sup>22</sup>So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

### *The Flood Covers the Earth*

**7** When everything was ready, the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous.<sup>2</sup> Take with you seven pairs—male and

female—of each animal I have approved for eating and for sacrifice,\* and take one pair of each of the others.<sup>3</sup> Also take seven pairs of every kind of bird. There must be a male and a female in each pair to ensure that all life will survive on the earth after the flood.<sup>4</sup> Seven days from now I will make the rains pour down on the earth. And it will rain for forty days and forty nights, until I have wiped from the earth all the living things I have created.”

<sup>5</sup>So Noah did everything as the LORD commanded him.

<sup>6</sup>Noah was 600 years old when the flood covered the earth.<sup>7</sup> He went on board the boat to escape the flood—he and his wife and his sons and their wives.<sup>8</sup> With them were all the various kinds of animals—those approved for eating and for sacrifice and those that were not—along with all the birds and the small animals that scurry along the ground.<sup>9</sup> They entered the boat in pairs, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah.<sup>10</sup> After seven days, the waters of the flood came and covered the earth.

<sup>11</sup>When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, all the underground waters erupted from the earth, and the rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky.<sup>12</sup> The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights.

<sup>13</sup>That very day Noah had gone into the boat with his wife and his sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives.<sup>14</sup> With them in the boat were pairs of every kind of animal—domestic and wild, large and small—along with birds of every kind.<sup>15</sup> Two by two they came into the boat, representing every living thing that breathes.<sup>16</sup> A male and female of each kind entered, just as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD closed the door behind them.

<sup>17</sup>For forty days the floodwaters grew deeper, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth.<sup>18</sup> As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth,<sup>20</sup> rising more than twenty-two feet\* above the highest peaks.<sup>21</sup> All the living things on earth died—birds, domestic animals, wild animals, small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the people.<sup>22</sup> Everything that breathed and lived on dry land died.<sup>23</sup> God wiped

out every living thing on the earth—people, livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and the birds of the sky. All were destroyed. The only people who survived were Noah and those with him in the boat. <sup>24</sup>And the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days.

### The Flood Recedes

**8** But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and livestock with him in the boat. He sent a wind to blow across the earth, and the floodwaters began to recede. <sup>2</sup>The underground waters stopped flowing, and the torrential rains from the sky were stopped. <sup>3</sup>So the floodwaters gradually receded from the earth. After 150 days, <sup>4</sup>exactly five months from the time the flood began,\* the boat came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. <sup>5</sup>Two and a half months later,\* as the waters continued to go down, other mountain peaks became visible.

<sup>6</sup>After another forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the boat <sup>7</sup>and released a raven. The bird flew back and forth until the floodwaters on the earth had dried up. <sup>8</sup>He also released a dove to see if the water had receded and it could find dry ground. <sup>9</sup>But the dove could find no place to land because the water still covered the ground. So

it returned to the boat, and Noah held out his hand and drew the dove back inside. <sup>10</sup>After waiting another seven days, Noah released the dove again. <sup>11</sup>This time the dove returned to him in the evening with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Then Noah knew that the floodwaters were almost gone. <sup>12</sup>He waited another seven days and then released the dove again. This time it did not come back.

<sup>13</sup>Noah was now 601 years old. On the first day of the new year, ten and a half months after the flood began,\* the floodwaters had almost dried up from the earth. Noah lifted back the covering of the boat and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. <sup>14</sup>Two more months went by,\* and at last the earth was dry!

<sup>15</sup>Then God said to Noah, <sup>16</sup>“Leave the boat, all of you—you and your wife, and your sons and their wives. <sup>17</sup>Release all the animals—the birds, the livestock, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—so they can be fruitful and multiply throughout the earth.”

**6:14a** Traditionally rendered *an ark*. **6:14b** Or *gopher wood*. **6:15** Hebrew *300 cubits* [138 meters] *long, 50 cubits* [23 meters] *wide, and 30 cubits* [13.8 meters] *high*. **6:16** Hebrew *an opening of 1 cubit* [46 centimeters]. **7:2** Hebrew *of each clean animal*; similarly in 7:8. **7:20** Hebrew *15 cubits* [6.9 meters]. **8:4** Hebrew *on the seventeenth day of the seventh month*; see 7:11. **8:5** Hebrew *On the first day of the tenth month*; see 7:11 and note on 8:4. **8:13** Hebrew *On the first day of the first month*; see 7:11. **8:14** Hebrew *The twenty-seventh day of the second month arrived*; see note on 8:13.

## The flood and the ark

Human sin became so deep and widespread that God decided to start all over again, sending a flood to destroy everyone and everything (Genesis 6:1-7). He told Noah to build an “ark”—not so much a boat as a huge, three-decked floating box—and to gather his family and pairs of animals there (6:11-22). For forty days, torrential rains fell and underground waters erupted, flooding the earth (perhaps the result of an ice age ending). Noah and his family stayed in the ark for over a year before the waters dried up completely. With wickedness removed, it was time for a new beginning, marked by a covenant between God and Noah, the sign of which was the rainbow—God’s promise that he would never flood the earth again (9:1-17).

Some people struggle with this story because a flooding of the whole earth seems impossible. But the Genesis story does not require belief in a global flood; in fact, Genesis 11:9 says that it was only after the tower of Babel that God scattered people across the whole earth. Therefore, it is perhaps more likely that this was a vast regional flood that destroyed the emerging human population—though from the perspective of Middle Eastern writers, that would have been “the whole earth,” as they understood the term at that time.

► See also *Noah*, page 12.

<sup>18</sup>So Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives left the boat. <sup>19</sup>And all of the large and small animals and birds came out of the boat, pair by pair.

<sup>20</sup>Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose.\* <sup>21</sup>And the LORD was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. <sup>22</sup>As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.”

### God Confirms His Covenant

**9** Then God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. I have placed them in your power. <sup>3</sup>I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables. <sup>4</sup>But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it.

<sup>5</sup>“And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. <sup>6</sup>If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings\* in his own image. <sup>7</sup>Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth.”

<sup>8</sup>Then God told Noah and his sons, <sup>9</sup>“I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, <sup>10</sup>and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup>Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup>Then God said, “I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. <sup>13</sup>I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. <sup>16</sup>When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth.” <sup>17</sup>Then God said to Noah, “Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth.”

### Noah’s Sons

<sup>18</sup>The sons of Noah who came out of the boat with their father were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham is the father of Canaan.) <sup>19</sup>From these three sons of Noah came all the people who now populate the earth.

<sup>20</sup>After the flood, Noah began to cultivate the ground, and he planted a vineyard. <sup>21</sup>One day he drank some wine he had made, and he became drunk and lay naked inside his tent. <sup>22</sup>Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked and went outside and

## Noah

In contrast to the sin depicted in these early chapters, Noah was “righteous” and “blameless” (Genesis 6:9). His faith—no doubt mocked by others as he built his enormous boat—was rewarded when God, heartbroken (6:6), resolved to destroy sinful humanity and start again. Noah obeyed God, gathering his family and the animals into the ark he had made and staying there until it was safe to come out—around a year after the rains had begun. Noah’s first response on leaving the ark was to build an altar to God (8:20), and God responded by making a covenant, not just with Noah, but with all humanity, marked by the sign of the rainbow (9:1-17). Noah’s faith became noteworthy for generations to come (see Hebrews 11:7).

► See also *The flood and the ark*, page 11.

# Bible Reading Plans

## Plan 1: An introduction to the Bible

*Time needed: Four weeks*

If you're new to the Bible, then this is a great place to begin! This four-week reading plan will take you through some basics of the Christian message, showing you who God is, what he has done for you, and how he wants you to respond.

### THE OLD TESTAMENT (7 Days)

*The Old Testament shows us how God carefully prepared for the coming of Jesus.*

- Genesis 1–2** Creation: how God created everything perfectly
- Genesis 3** Sin: human disobedience and its consequences
- Genesis 12:1–9; 15:1–6** Faith: God puts people back into relationship with him through our faith
- Exodus 20:1–20** The Ten Commandments: instructions for godly living
- Exodus 32:1–34:8** Knowing God: Moses discovers what God is really like
- Psalms 23** The God who cares: King David's experience of God's provision and protection
- Isaiah 7:14; 9:1–7** Salvation: More than seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, God promises to send a Savior

### THE GOSPELS (7 Days)

*The four Gospels tell us about the coming, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God's promised Savior.*

- Luke 2** The Savior's arrival: Jesus' birth and early years
- Matthew 3:1–4:11** Baptism and beginnings: Jesus obeys his Father and overcomes the devil
- John 1:35–51** Disciples: Jesus calls his first followers
- Matthew 5–7** A new way of living: the Sermon on the Mount, the heart of Jesus' teaching
- Matthew 8:1–17; 11:1–6** Miracles: a sign that God's Kingdom is breaking into this world through Jesus
- Mark 14:1–52** The time has come: preparations for Jesus' death
- Mark 14:53–16:20** Defeat and victory: Jesus is tried and crucified, but rises again

### THE FIRST CHRISTIANS (7 Days)

*The book of Acts shows us how the church was born and how the first Christians lived and witnessed.*

- Acts 1:1–11; 2:1–21** A new season: Jesus leaves, but the Holy Spirit comes
- Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37; 5:12–16** A new way of living: life in the early church
- Acts 5:17–42; 7:54–8:3** Opposition: Not everyone is happy with the message of the gospel
- Acts 9:1–31** New beginnings: the conversion of Saul (who becomes the apostle Paul)

- Acts 10** A gospel for everyone: Peter sees that Christianity is for all peoples and nations
- Acts 15:1-35** A gospel of grace: The church agrees that we are saved by Jesus' grace alone and not by what we do
- Acts 27-28** The unstoppable gospel: No matter what happens, the gospel's power cannot be stopped

## NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS (7 Days)

*The letters, written by apostles or those closely associated with them, show Christians what they should believe and how they should live.*

- Romans 3:21-4:8** The foundation of faith: Faith, not works, is what makes us right with God and keeps us in relationship with him
- Romans 8:1-39** Conquered and conquering: the blessing of living life in the power of the Holy Spirit
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 1 John 3:11-20** The power of love: Christ's love changes the way we relate to others
- Galatians 5:1-26** Free and fruitful: Christ has freed us to bear good fruit for him
- Ephesians 1:15-23; 4:1-16** The body of Christ: the importance of the church
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11** He's coming again! Living in light of Christ's promised return
- Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5** Hope for the future: the assurance that we will be with God forever

## Plan 2: An overview of the Bible's story

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*Time needed: Six months*

This Bible reading plan provides readings for 180 days. If you follow it in order, it will take you through the whole Bible, helping you to understand the flow of its overall story and to see its key themes. If you want more variety in your reading, however, you can alternate between sections of the Old Testament and sections of the New Testament.

### THE OLD TESTAMENT (90 Days)

#### *Creation and the Fall*

- Genesis 1-2** The creation of the world and humanity
- Genesis 3** The origins of sin
- Genesis 6:9-7:24; 9:1-17** God punishes human sin through a great flood

#### *God begins to build a family through whom his plan will be worked out*

- Genesis 12:1-9; 15:1-20; 17:1-27** God calls Abraham and promises to give him descendants and the land of Canaan
- Genesis 21:1-7; 22:1-19** God gives Abraham a son but then tests his faith
- Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-28:5** Abraham's son Isaac has two sons, Jacob and Esau, who quarrel
- Genesis 29:1-30:24; 35:16-18** Jacob flees Canaan but finds a wife and has twelve sons
- Genesis 32:1-33:20** Jacob returns home and is reconciled to his brother
- Genesis 37** How Jacob's son Joseph ended up in Egypt
- Genesis 41:1-57; 46:1-7; 50:15-21** Joseph gains prominence in Egypt and brings his family there to avoid famine in Canaan

# Basic Truths

## OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Christians look to the Bible to provide answers to the basic questions they have about life and faith, but often it seems difficult to find the key places where God's word speaks about a particular question or topic. This section will provide a good starting point to help you find those key places and engage with God's word on many of those basic questions and ideas.

### Abandonment

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Many of us have times when our circumstances are so overwhelming that we feel utterly alone and think that no one else knows, understands, or cares about our situation. But the Bible reminds us that, no matter what the situation or circumstance might be, God is always with us and will never abandon us.

*“Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.” – Deuteronomy 31:8, page 234*

#### God promises to never abandon his people

Deuteronomy 4:30-31, page 206 • Joshua 1:1-9, page 242 • Isaiah 49:14-16, page 802 • Hebrews 13:5-6, page 1409

**God himself knows what it feels like to be abandoned** Deuteronomy 32:15-18, page 236 • Judges 10:6-14, page 283 • Isaiah 65:1-5, page 818 • Jeremiah 2:4-13, page 823

**Circumstances can make us feel—wrongly—abandoned by God** Judges 6:1-14, page 276 • 1 Kings 19:1-18, page 404 • Psalm 44:1-26, page 628

**Prayers that God would never abandon us** 1 Kings 8:54-61, page 387 • Psalm 27:7-10, page 617 • Psalm 71:1-24, page 645

#### We can trust God even when everything has gone wrong

Job 1:6-22, page 565 • Habakkuk 3:17-18, page 1027 • 2 Corinthians 4:7-18, page 1327

**The Bible assures us that God will be with us in the dark times** Psalm 18:1-24, page 610 • Psalm 23:1-6, page 615 • Psalm 46:1-11, page 630 • Isaiah 41:10-14, page 792

**Honest prayers of some who felt abandoned** Psalm 22:1-31, page 614 • Psalm 38:1-22, page 625 • Lamentations 5:1-22, page 897

**Jesus felt abandoned on the cross** Matthew 27:45-46, page 1115

**Jesus promised he would never abandon us** Matthew 28:18-20, page 1116 • John 14:18, page 1223

### Abortion

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The Bible teaches that life does not begin at birth but at the moment of conception. Abortion therefore violates the sanctity of God-given life and the potential which that life contains. Confessed to God, however, abortion can be forgiven, just like any other sin.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. – Psalm 139:13-16, page 689*

## BASIC TRUTHS • page 1478

**Every human being is made in God's image** Genesis 1:26-27, page 5 • Genesis 5:1-2, page 9

**God forbids the taking of life** Genesis 9:5-7, page 12 • Exodus 20:13, page 90 • Matthew 19:16-19, page 1099

**God cares for those not yet born** Exodus 21:22-25, page 91 • Job 10:8-12, page 573 • Psalm 139:13-18, page 689

**We should protect all those who are helpless** Psalm 82:3-4, page 655 • Proverbs 31:8-9, page 729 • Isaiah 58:6-10, page 811

**Children are a gift from God** Psalm 127:3-5, page 684

**God plans the future of every child** Psalm 139:13-16, page 689 • Isaiah 49:1-3, page 801 • Jeremiah 1:4-8, page 822

**Abortion, like every other sin, can be forgiven if confessed** 1 John 1:8-9, page 1433

▶ See **Abortion**, page 823.

## Abuse

The Bible forbids people from abusing others—using our position or power to harm them, control them, or exploit them in order to gain advantage for ourselves. It warns of God's judgment on those who do and says that God is always on the side of those who are abused.

*"The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them." – Exodus 3:9, page 68*

**Abuse of others can arise from our uncontrolled anger** Genesis 4:1-15, page 8 • 1 Kings 21:1-14, page 407 • Matthew 2:16-18, page 1070 • Mark 6:14-29, page 1129

**Every act of abuse is seen by God** Genesis 31:38-42, page 39

**The abuse of power brings God's judgment and curse** Exodus 7:14–12:30, page 73 • Jeremiah 23:1-2, 9-24, page 851 • Acts 12:1-23, page 1254

**God forbids abuse of minorities or the underprivileged** Exodus 22:21-24, page 93 • Leviticus 25:35-46, page 148 • Deuteronomy 24:10-15, 17-18, page 226

**God promises to protect those who are helpless** Deuteronomy 10:17-23, page 213 • Psalm 12:1-8, page 608

**God wants his people to care for the needy, not abuse them** Deuteronomy 15:1-11, page 218 • Proverbs 14:31, page 711 • James 1:27, page 1413

**Examples of abuse and exploitation** Job 24:2-17, page 584 • Isaiah 3:13-15, page 752 • Isaiah 58:1-10, page 810 • Amos 4:1-3, page 996

**Jesus experienced abuse** Matthew 26:67-68, page 1112 • Matthew 27:26-44, page 1113 • Luke 4:14-30, page 1158 • John 8:48, page 1213

**Family relationships should be marked by love and respect, not abuse** Ephesians 5:21–6:4, page 1351

▶ See **Oppression**, page 710.

## Access to God *see Coming into God's presence*

## Accountability *see also Responsibility*

Accountability is about recognizing that we are not free to live just for ourselves; rather, we need to be answerable to others for what we think and do. As Christians, we are first and foremost accountable to God, to whom we will one day have to give an account of our lives. But we are also called to be accountable to one another in a local church, just as the first Christians were.

*One day Jesus called together his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out all demons and to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. . . . When the apostles returned, they told Jesus everything they had done.*  
– Luke 9:1-2, 10, page 1168

**All we do should be done in light of the fact that God will judge our work one day**

2 Chronicles 19:5-10, page 500 • 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, page 1327

**God will hold us accountable for our actions**

Ezekiel 18:30-32, page 917 • Luke 12:42-48, page 1176 • Romans 2:16, page 1284 • Revelation 20:11-15, page 1465

**Church leaders are accountable to God and fellow leaders**

Ezekiel 34:1-10, page 935 • Galatians 2:11-14, page 1338

**We are accountable for every word that we speak**

Matthew 12:33-37, page 1087

**We should be held accountable in our Christian ministry**

Luke 10:1-20, page 1171

**We should hold each other accountable**

Luke 17:3-4, page 1182 • Galatians 6:1-5, page 1343

**The importance of being accountable to a local church**

Acts 14:27-28, page 1259

**God holds us accountable for our attitudes**

Romans 14:10-12, page 1298

**We should be willing to be accountable to one another**

James 5:13-16, page 1417

► See *Accountability*, page 1258.

## Accusations

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God tells us not to falsely accuse others, for it undermines justice and harmony. The Bible records many examples of people who were falsely accused—with Jesus himself as the greatest example—and shows the unjust outcomes of false accusations.

*“Be sure never to charge anyone falsely with evil.” – Exodus 23:7, page 93*

**Examples of false accusations** Genesis 39:6-18, page 49 • Nehemiah 6:1-9, page 541 • Acts 6:8-15, page 1244 • Acts 16:16-40, page 1262

**God forbids false accusations** Exodus 20:16, page 90 • Exodus 23:1, 7, page 93 • Luke 3:12-14, page 1157

**Satan accuses God’s people** Job 1:6-22, page 565 • Zechariah 3:1-10, page 1040

**No one can accuse us regarding our standing before God** Isaiah 50:8-9, page 803 • Romans

8:31-39, page 1292 • Colossians 1:22, page 1363

**Jesus was falsely accused** Matthew 10:24-25, page 1083 • Matthew 26:59-60, page 1112 • Mark 3:20-30, page 1124 • Luke 23:1-5, page 1192

**Accusations against church leaders must come from more than one person** 1 Timothy 5:19, page 1383

**Satan, the Accuser, is already overthrown** Revelation 12:10-11, page 1457

## Addiction *see also Desires; Greed*

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Any addiction—whether it be to drugs, alcohol, money, sex, or food—creates a dependence that pulls us away from God and other people. These addictions continually demand more, but they are never satisfied. Ultimately, only Jesus can set us free from addictions and help us to control every aspect of our lives through the help of the Holy Spirit.

*For you are a slave to whatever controls you. – 2 Peter 2:19, page 1429*

**Warnings against addiction to food and drink** Proverbs 23:1-8, 19-21, 29-35, page 719 • 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, page 1309 • Philippians 3:17-21, page 1359

**Warnings against addiction to money** Ecclesiastes 5:10-15, page 734 • Mark 10:17-27, page 1136 • Luke 12:13-21, page 1175

**Warnings against addiction to sexual sin** Jeremiah 3:1-5, page 825 • 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, page 1309

**Addictions can keep people from loving Jesus fully** Mark 10:17-31, page 1136 • 1 Timothy 6:6-10, page 1383

**Jesus wants to help set us free from addictions** Romans 6:1-23, page 1289 • Titus 2:11-15

**We are addicted to anything that controls us** Romans 6:16, page 1289 • 2 Peter 2:19, page 1429

**We should not become slaves to anything** 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, page 1309 •

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Galatians 4:4-7, page 1341 • Galatians 5:1, page 1343 • 2 Peter 2:17-22, page 1429

**Self-control is part of the Holy Spirit's provision to deal with addiction** Galatians 5:13-26, page 1343

**Any addiction is opposed to the true transformation Jesus wants to perform in our lives** Philippians 3:1-21, page 1358

## Adolescence *see Youth*

## Adoption, Spiritual

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The Bible tells us that when we turn to Jesus and trust him, we are adopted into God's family. From that point on we can know God as our Father and be sure that he loves us and that all his resources are now at our disposal.

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. – Romans 8:14-17, page 1291*

**God's children should obey him** Exodus 19:3-8, page 88 • Deuteronomy 26:16-19, page 228 • 1 John 2:3-6, page 1434 • 1 John 5:1-5, page 1437

**God lovingly disciplines his children for their good** Deuteronomy 8:1-5, page 211 • Psalm 119:75-76, page 680 • Hebrews 12:5-11, page 1408

**We should not reject God's fatherly discipline** Job 5:17, page 569 • Proverbs 3:11-12, page 699 • Hebrews 12:5-13, page 1408 • Revelation 3:15-19, page 1450

**God is our heavenly Father** Malachi 2:10, page 1051 • Matthew 6:9-18, page 1077 • Romans 8:15-16, page 1291 • 1 John 3:1, page 1435

**God our Father will provide for all our needs** Matthew 6:28-33, page 1078 • 2 Corinthians 9:6-10, page 1331 • Philippians 4:19, page 1360

**Christians are God's children** John 1:12-13, page 1199 • Galatians 3:26-29, page 1341 • 1 John 3:1-2, page 1435

**God's children are his heirs** Romans 8:15-17, page 1291 • Galatians 4:6-7, page 1341

**God chose us to be adopted as his children** Romans 8:22-23, page 1292 • Ephesians 1:3-5, page 1346

**God's children should have nothing to do with worldly living** 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, page 1329 • Ephesians 5:1-20, page 1351

**All of God's children are equal in God's eyes** Galatians 3:26-28, page 1341 • Colossians 3:10-11, page 1365

**Jesus is our spiritual brother** Hebrews 2:11-15, page 1398

**We should love our Christian brothers and sisters** 1 John 3:14-19, page 1436 • 1 John 4:20-21, page 1437

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► *See **Now that you are a Christian**, page A13; **Abba**, page 1144; **Life in the Spirit**, page 1291; **Living by the Spirit**, page 1342; **The Christian's relationship with the Holy Spirit**, page 1350.*

## Adultery *see also Marriage*

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Adultery—the violation of the marriage bond through a sexual relationship with someone who is not one's spouse—is seen by God as something detestable, for it breaks the principle of covenant faithfulness. The Bible both forbids adultery and shows the consequences when it happens. Like any other sin, however, adultery can be forgiven.

*But the man who commits adultery is an utter fool, for he destroys himself. He will be wounded and disgraced. His shame will never be erased. – Proverbs 6:32-33, page 703*

**We should run from situations that might lead to adultery** Genesis 39:1-21, page 49 • 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, page 1309

**God forbids adultery in the Ten Commandments** Exodus 20:14, page 90

**David's adultery had terrible consequences** 2 Samuel 11:1–12:25, page 352

**David realized that he needed to repent of his adultery** 2 Samuel 12:13, page 354 • Psalm 51:1-19, page 633

**Enjoyment of our own marriage is the best safeguard against adultery** Proverbs 5:15-23, page 701 • 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 page 1310

**Adultery is foolish** Proverbs 6:32-34, page 703 • Proverbs 7:7-27, page 703

**Jesus said that lust is as sinful as adultery** Matthew 5:27-28, page 1076

**Jesus said that remarriage, in some circumstances, is adultery** Matthew 5:31-32, page 1076 • Mark 10:1-12, page 1135

**God can forgive the adulterer** John 8:1-11, page 1211

► See **Adultery**, page 353; **Does marriage still matter to God?**, page 976.

## Advice

The Bible encourages us to be ready to seek advice from others. An unwillingness to seek advice is seen as arrogant, obstinate, and even stupid; but a willingness to seek and follow advice is seen as wise. We should also be ready to offer prayerful advice to others—though ultimately everyone is responsible before God for their own decisions.

*Those who take advice are wise. – Proverbs 13:10, page 709*

**Wise leaders will consider the advice of others** Exodus 18:13-26, page 87 • Proverbs 24:3-6, page 721

**Advice should always be evaluated** Numbers 13:25-30, page 169 • 2 Samuel 16:15–17:14, page 360

**Older people often give wise advice** 1 Kings 12:1-11, page 392 • Acts 15:1-35, page 1259

**Rejecting wise advice invariably leads to disaster** 1 Kings 12:1-19, page 392 • Acts 27:3-26, page 1277

**Following God's advice always leads to success** Psalm 32:8-11, page 621 • Psalm 73:24, page 647

**Wise people will always seek advice** Proverbs 1:2-9, page 697 • Proverbs 12:15, page 709

**We are foolish if we reject advice** Proverbs 1:24-33, page 697

**Good advice helps ensure success** Proverbs 11:14, page 708 • Proverbs 15:22, page 712 • Proverbs 20:18, page 717

**Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would give us advice and counsel** John 14:15-26, page 1223 • John 16:12-15, page 1225

► See **Wisdom**, page 701.

## Alcohol

The drinking of alcohol is often a matter of considerable debate among Christians. The Bible itself does not prohibit God's people from drinking—apart from Old Testament priests who were about to go on duty (Leviticus 10:8-9, page 127). However, it consistently warns against the dangers of overdrinking and forbids drunkenness, showing the consequences that can follow.

*Wine produces mockers; alcohol leads to brawls. Those led astray by drink cannot be wise. – Proverbs 20:1, page 716*

**Drinking alcohol excessively can lead us to do foolish things** Genesis 9:20-25, page 12 • Genesis 19:30-38, page 23

**Used properly, wine is seen as a gift from God** Deuteronomy 7:12-13, page 210 • Psalm 104:13-15, page 667 • Isaiah 25:6-8, page 773 • 1 Timothy 5:23, page 1383

# Glossary

The concise explanations in this glossary are intended to supplement the outlines given in “Basic Truths of the Christian Faith” (page 1477) and the notes throughout the Bible, which expand on many of these topics. You can use this glossary to find concise definitions and then follow the cross-references for further discussion of the relevant topics.

**Abba** An Aramaic word meaning “daddy,” used by Jesus of God (Mark 14:36) as a mark of his intimate relationship with him and subsequently adopted by the early church (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6).

*See also Abba, page 1144; Living by the Spirit, page 1342; The Christian’s relationship with the Holy Spirit, page 1350.*

**Accountability** Being responsible to others for our thoughts and actions. As Christians we are primarily accountable to God, to whom we will one day have to give an account of our lives. But it is also good to be accountable to one another in a local church, just as the first Christians were (Acts 14:27-28; James 5:13-16).

*See also Accountability, page 1258; Basic Truths: Accountability, page 1478.*

**Adoption, spiritual** The privilege of becoming the children of God. When we turn to Jesus and put our faith in him, we are adopted into God’s family and can know God as our Father, assured that he loves us and that all his resources are now at our disposal (John 1:10-13; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26; 4:4-7; Hebrews 12:5-11).

*See also Now that you are a Christian, page A13; Basic Truths: Adoption, spiritual, page 1478.*

**Advent** *see Festivals, Major Christian*

**Agape** *see Love*

**Alpha and Omega** The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, used as a title of both God (Revelation 1:8; 21:6) and Jesus (Revelation 22:13) to signify their everlasting nature.

**Altar** A place where sacrifices were offered. Both Israel’s Tabernacle and Temple had a large bronze altar in their courtyard for burnt offerings and a golden altar within the sanctuary itself for offering incense (Exodus 27:1-8; 30:1-10; 2 Chronicles 4:1, 19).

**Amen** A Hebrew word meaning “surely,” used to affirm the truth of what has been said, especially in worship or prayer (1 Chronicles 16:36; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

**Angels** Spiritual beings, created to serve God as messengers (Psalm 103:20-21; Luke 1:26-38) and to bring his

help or intervention (Genesis 22:9-12; Daniel 6:22). Despite their high status they are not to be worshiped, being significantly less glorious than Jesus (Hebrews 1:3-14).

*See also Angels, page 1397; Basic Truths: Angels, page 1482.*

**Annunciation** The angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah (Luke 1:26-38).

**Anointing** The act of pouring oil over somebody or something to indicate being set apart for God’s service, symbolizing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Genesis 35:14-15; Exodus 28:40-41; 1 Samuel 10:1; Luke 4:16-19; James 5:14).

*See also Anointing, page 315.*

**Antichrist** A term used in the Bible, only by John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7), not just of a single end-time opponent of Christ but of all who do not acknowledge him as God incarnate and Messiah. The Greek word “anti” means “instead of,” so antichrist is anyone who seeks to take the place of Christ.

*See also The man of lawlessness, page 1375; The Antichrist, page 1434.*

**Apocalyptic** A type of literature that uses symbolic numbers and vivid, often fantastic or frightening images to communicate its message. Apocalyptic (meaning “revealed”) reveals God’s perspective on history, unfolding what is going on “behind the scenes” or at the end of the world.

*See also Revelation (book introduction), page 1444.*

**Apocrypha** Jewish writings from the period between the Old and New Testaments that were not part of the original Hebrew Scriptures but were added later to its Greek translation (called the Septuagint). Some churches accept them as Scripture, but others do not, seeing them simply as providing helpful insights into Jewish beliefs at that time.

*See also Between the two Testaments, page 1054.*

**Apologetics** A reasoned defense of the good news of Jesus, such as Paul’s speech before the city council in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). All Christians should be ready to explain their faith (1 Peter 3:15).

See also *Being a witness*, page 1456; *Basic Truths: Witnessing*, page 1606.

**Apostle** From a Greek word meaning “sent one,” the term is used both of Jesus’ twelve disciples, whom he sent out to preach the gospel (Mark 3:13-19), and of other key church leaders (Acts 14:1-4; Galatians 1:17-19; Ephesians 2:20) whose work included preaching the gospel and starting, equipping, and strengthening churches (Acts 14:1-3, 21-23; Ephesians 4:11-13).

See also *Apostles of Jesus*, page 1122.

**Ark, Noah’s** The vessel Noah was commanded to build to save his family and the different kinds of animals in the great flood that God sent to wipe out human wickedness (Genesis 6:5-22).

See also *The Flood and the ark*, page 11.

**Ark of the Covenant** A gold-covered wooden box, measuring about 4 x 2 x 2 feet (1.2 x 0.7 x 0.7 meters) and containing the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron’s staff that sprouted leaves (Hebrews 9:4). Symbolizing God’s presence among his people, it was kept in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

See also *The Ark of the Covenant*, page 311.

**Armageddon** The focal point of the gathering of God’s enemies at the end of time, mentioned only in Revelation 16:16. Some interpret this battle literally and others symbolically.

See also *Armageddon*, page 1461.

**Ascension, the** The return of Jesus to his rightful place in heaven forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:9-11).

See also *Jesus’ ascension*, page 1196.

**Assurance** A firm conviction that we are accepted by God, not because of anything we have done but because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross on our behalf (Romans 3:21-26; 5:1-2; 8:1). Through faith in him we have an unchanging status as children of God (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-7).

See also *Confidence*, page 1399; *Basic Truths:*

*Assurance*, page 1484.

**Atonement** The restoration of relationship with God through the “covering” (the root meaning of the Hebrew word) of sin through sacrifice. The New Testament sees Old Testament sacrifices as simply a foreshadowing of Jesus’ sacrifice, which alone can remove sin (Hebrews 9:11–10:4). His death pays sin’s price, brings forgiveness, and secures eternal relationship with God (Romans 3:23-26).

See also *The Day of Atonement*, page 135; *The death of Jesus*, page 1114; *Justification*, page 1288; *Basic Truths: Jesus Christ: his death*, page 1546.

**Babel, tower of** A temple-tower or *ziggurat* built as an expression of human pride whose construction led

to God’s judgment coming upon its builders (Genesis 11:1-9).

See also *The tower of Babel*, page 14.

**Backsliding** Turning or drifting away from God. If we see we are starting to backslide, we should take action quickly and renew our commitment to Jesus while there is still time (Jeremiah 3:22; Hebrews 3:12-15; Revelation 3:14-22).

See also *Backsliding*, page 841; *Basic Truths: Backsliding*, page 1486.

**Baptism** Originally a Jewish ritual that involved immersion in water as a sign of repentance (Matthew 3:1-10). It was adopted by the early church at Jesus’ command (Matthew 28:18-20) as an expression of a person’s commitment to Jesus in faith and repentance (Acts 2:38-41; 16:30-34).

See also *Baptism*, page 1238; *Basic Truths: Baptism*, page 1488.

**Beatitudes** The list of blessings (Matthew 5:1-12) at the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. They express the values of God’s Kingdom and are the opposite of what most people seek in life.

**Bible** The sacred text of Christianity, comprising the books of the Old and New Testaments. The word *Bible* comes from a Greek word meaning “the books.” Though written by human authors, the Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

See also *What is the Bible?*, page A15; *Meditation*, page 603; *Basic Truths: Bible*, page 1489.

**Birth, new** see *New birth*

**Blasphemy** Speech or actions that misuse or dishonor God’s name, forbidden in the third commandment (Exodus 20:7). Jesus’ claim to be equal with God was seen as blasphemy by the religious leaders (Matthew 26:62-65). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable, for it involves determined, persistent rejection of the one who leads us to God (Matthew 12:24-32; Mark 3:20-30).

See also *Basic Truths: Blasphemy*, page 1491.

**Blessing** A prayer, declaration, or gift that reflects the kindness of the one who gives it. God loves to bless people (Genesis 1:28; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 1:3) so that we can enjoy life to the full, and he calls his people to bless others also (Numbers 6:23-27; Luke 6:27-36).

See also *The power of blessing*, page 160; *Basic Truths: Blessing*, page 1491.

**Blood** In the Bible, a symbol of life (Leviticus 17:11); so shedding blood in a sacrifice signified life offered up in death as the price of sin. The expression “the blood of Christ” is used in the New Testament to speak of Christ’s life offered on the cross to pay the price of our sin and inaugurate the new covenant (e.g., Romans 5:9; Hebrews 9:14; see also Romans 3:25; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 9:22).

See also *Old Testament sacrifices and offerings*, page 118; *Basic Truths: Blood*, page 1492.

**Body of Christ** A term used both of Christ's physical body, offered on the cross for our salvation (1 Corinthians 11:23-29), and as an image of the church—the expression of Christ now on earth. Christ is the head of that body (Colossians 1:18), and Christians are its “members,” called to serve one another (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

See also *The church*, page 1348; *Basic Truths: Body of Christ*, page 1492.

**Born again** see *New birth*

**Bride of Christ** A New Testament image of the church, reflecting the intimate union between Christ and his people (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-32). This image challenges the church to prepare for Christ's return so that, like any bride, it will be ready to welcome her groom (Revelation 19:7-9).

See also *The church*, page 1348.

**Calvary** see *Golgotha*

**Cherubim** A high rank of heavenly beings that serve God. Unlike angels, cherubim (singular, cherub) have wings (Ezekiel 10:3-5), and gold representations of them were located above the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:17-22).

See also *The Ark of the Covenant*, page 311; *Angels*, page 1397.

**Chief/leading priests** Senior priests in charge of the Temple in Jerusalem, seen as leading representatives of the Jews (Matthew 2:4). They rejected Jesus, whose teaching they saw as undermining their traditions, and conspired in his arrest and crucifixion (Matthew 26:3-5; John 11:45-53). They tried to prevent the apostles from preaching the gospel (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-41).

**Christ** Not a name but a title—the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah,” meaning “Anointed One”—the King-Deliverer promised by the prophets and expected by Israel. See also *Messiah*.

**Christian** Found only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), the term was first used as a nickname by outsiders but quickly became the most common term for “a follower of Christ.”

See also *Christian*, page 1254.

**Christmas** see *Festivals, Major Christian*

**Church** In New Testament terms, not a building or an institution, but Christians themselves—the gathered community of believers in Jesus, whatever their background. The New Testament emphasizes their unity through imagery such as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 1:23), God's holy temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17), and God's family and house (Ephesians 2:19-22). The church exists not to serve itself but to be God's people in the world (1 Peter 2:9).

See also *The church*, page 1348; *Belonging to a church*, page 1406; *Basic Truths: Church*, page 1495.

**Circumcision** The removal of the male foreskin when one week old, the Old Testament sign of being part of God's covenant people (Genesis 17:1-13). The New Testament, however, sees only the inward circumcision of the heart (a metaphor for obedience to Jesus) as having any value (Romans 2:25-29), and circumcision is unnecessary for Gentile converts to Jesus (Acts 15:1-21; Galatians 5:1-6).

**Commitment** Dedication to God, his work, and his Kingdom, whatever the cost and without drawing back. Jesus summed up commitment when he prayed, “I want your will to be done, not mine” (Matthew 26:39). Those who lack commitment are constantly challenged in the Bible (e.g., Joshua 24:14-28; Revelation 3:15-20).

See also *Consecration*, page 267; *Discipleship and the cross*, page 1095; *Counting the cost*, page 1180; *Basic Truths: Commitment*, page 1497.

**Communion** see *Lord's Supper*

**Confession** Acknowledgment of our sin before God. God promises to forgive all who confess their sin, but he expects our words to be matched by our actions and that we will change how we live (Luke 3:1-18; John 8:10-11).

See also *Is there anything God won't forgive?*, page 633; *Basic Truths: Confession*, page 1499.

**Conversion** The experience by which someone turns to Jesus in repentance and faith (Acts 20:21) and is born again by God's Spirit, leading to a complete change of direction in their life.

See also *The new birth*, page 1203; *Conversion*, page 1371.

**Covenant** A binding contract, the Bible's main word for describing the relationship between God and his people. Out of love and grace God binds himself to his people, calling upon them in return to live grateful and godly lives. Although there were several covenants in the Old Testament, the prophets looked forward to “a new covenant” (Jeremiah 31:31-34; see also Ezekiel 36:25-27), which was fulfilled in Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:25).

See also *Covenant*, page 19; *The new covenant*, page 861; *Basic Truths: Covenant*, page 1501.

**Creation** God's act of bringing the universe into being out of nothing (Genesis 1-2; Hebrews 11:3), something that is assumed throughout the Bible and is seen as fundamental to God's nature. The Bible is not concerned with the specifics of how creation came into being, but rather constantly calls us to worship the One who created it in all its beauty.

See also *Was the world really made in six days?*, page 5; *Basic Truths: Creation*, page 1502.

**Cross, crucifixion** A brutal means of execution by torture that involved nailing criminals to a wooden stake.

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## A NOTE TO READERS

The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, was first published in 1996. It quickly became one of the most popular Bible translations in the English-speaking world. While the NLT's influence was rapidly growing, the Bible Translation Committee determined that an additional investment in scholarly review and text refinement could make it even better. So shortly after its initial publication, the committee began an eight-year process with the purpose of increasing the level of the NLT's precision without sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004, with minor changes subsequently introduced in 2007, 2013, and 2015.

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