

# DISCOVERY

## BIBLE STUDY COURSE

### ***Lesson One: The Bible as a Book***

*The Bible is a remarkable book, actually composed of sixty-six separate books divided into two great sections—the Old Testament and the New Testament.*

The Old Testament is composed of thirty-nine books. Some are named after the author (e.g., Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel). Others are named for the material they contain (e.g., Genesis, Judges, Kings, Chronicles). Some are named after principal characters discussed within their pages (e.g., Samuel, Ruth). Still others are named for their literary form (e.g., Psalms, Proverbs). By the first century, the Old Testament, as we know it, was grouped into three general categories: the Law (first five books), the Prophets (last seventeen books), and the Writings (middle seventeen books). According to Josephus, these were written between the time of Moses (c. 1500 B.C.) and the reign of Artaxerxes, King of Persia (465–423 B.C.).

The New Testament is composed of twenty-seven books. Its writings were completed during the first century after Jesus' birth. Some of the New Testament books are named for the author (e.g., Matthew, Peter, Jude). Some are named after

*This study series is designed to introduce students to the major themes of the Bible, focusing on God's redemptive plan for us. By reading each lesson and completing the questions, students will grow to have a deeper understanding and appreciation for God and His expectations of us as His creation.*



those who received the writing (e.g., Romans, Galatians, Timothy). And others are named descriptively for their contents (e.g., Acts, Revelation). Receiving congregations copied the inspired writings and then shared them with surrounding congregations, just as Paul specifically instructed the Colossians (4:16). In this way, congregations came to possess copies of several inspired writings.

Therefore, the Bible is not a single book penned by a single author. It is composed of sixty-six separate books, written by at least forty different men over a period of over 1600 years. How could such men from different

times and backgrounds produce a collection of writings as uniform as the Bible? The answer to this mystery, as we will see in Lessons Two and Three, lies in the fact that all these authors were guided by a single mind, God. In this sense, the Bible may be described as a single book with only one author. The Bible is a library of books containing a record of God's revelation of Himself and His redemptive plan for lost humanity.

**The word "Bible" comes from the town of Byblos (on the Lebanese coast north of Beirut, now called Jebail). The word "byblos" comes from the Greek word for papyrus, the material used for writing in the first century. Much of the available papyrus material was produced in Byblos, hence the name of the city. The cognate form *biblion* came to mean "book," the Greek plural *biblia* meaning "books."**

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## ➤ The Story of the Bible

Though a few short paragraphs can never do justice to the wonderful message of God's Word, it is important that we begin with a glimpse of the "big picture." So with broad brush and bold strokes, let us consider the story that is the Bible.

God created the heavens and the earth in six days (Genesis 1) and placed humanity, the height of His creation, in a garden paradise. At that time, He gave humans certain responsibilities and the freedom to choose between right and wrong. God warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree; but they, influenced by Satan, chose not to heed God's instruction (Genesis 3). The Bible calls this disobedience "sin." Adam and Eve's disobedience severed their good relationship with God. Ever since, humans

have proved their lack of personal righteousness by their disobedience to God. The remaining 1186 chapters of the Bible tell the story of God's plan to redeem imperfect humans, restoring the good relationship shared in the beginning.

God promised Eve that one born of a woman would deal a mortal blow to Satan. No doubt, Eve hoped that one of her own children would fulfill this promise, but this blessing was reserved for a later generation (Genesis 3). Adam and Eve had children and began to populate the earth. Over time, many chose paths of sin and rebellion against God, leading the Creator to act as a Destroyer—He decided to purge the earth of sin by a flood, saving only Noah, his family, and a remnant of animal life on an ark (Genesis 6–9).

After the flood and the repopulating of the earth, God selected a man named Abraham to receive certain promises (Genesis 12, 15, 17). Of special note, God promised that the nations of the earth would be blessed by one of Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:3). Abraham had a son named Isaac in accordance with the Lord's promise. Isaac had a son named Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel. And Israel had twelve sons, whose descendants became known as the twelve tribes (family lines) of Israel—the Israelites.

After relocating to Egypt during an extended famine, the Israelites began to multiply so much that the Egyptian Pharaoh grew concerned. In an effort to protect his land, he enslaved them. About 250 years later, God appointed an Israelite named Moses to lead His people from Egypt back to Canaan, the land God had promised to give to Abraham's descendants. Through a series of miraculous signs, God convinced the Pharaoh to release the Israelites. They traveled across the Red Sea on dry ground and arrived at Mount Sinai where God gave the Israelites a written law—the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments (Exodus 1–20).

Despite some setbacks because of their lack of faith, the Israelites finally reached Canaan, and God gave them victory over the former inhabitants of that land. After settling in the land, the people appointed kings for themselves; the first three were Saul, David, and Solomon. After Solomon's death, the Israelites divided into two kingdoms: Judah (Southern Kingdom) and Israel (Northern Kingdom). The Israelites, or Northern Kingdom, idolatrous from beginning to end, existed for about 200 years before being taken captive by the Assyrians. The Judeans in the Southern Kingdom remained more loyal to God's law

but became idolatrous toward the end. They existed for 350 years before being taken captive by the Babylonians. While in captivity, the Judeans (Jews) repented of their sins and were allowed to return home after seventy years.

Throughout the Old Testament history of the Israelites (recorded in twelve books from Joshua to Esther) and in the books of prophesy (the last seventeen books of the Old Testament), God prophesied of a coming Messiah who would establish a new, spiritual kingdom. While God provided physical care, nourishment, and salvation for the Israelites in the Old Testament, His ultimate plan was to provide spiritual care, nourishment, and salvation for all who would serve Him.

When God had accomplished all of the needed preparations (Galatians 4:4), He sent His Son Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus came to earth to save people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)—His mission was spiritual. At age thirty, Jesus began to preach publicly concerning His kingdom that soon would be established. He traveled from place to place for three years teaching the people and working miracles designed to convince them that His teaching was true. After three years of service, the Jewish leaders, jealous of Jesus' popularity and angry at His message of salvation, convinced the Romans that Jesus should be crucified. While Jesus' crucifixion must have appeared to be a victory for the Jewish leaders, it was really a part of God's plan. Three days later, by the power and design of God, Jesus arose, victorious over sin and the grave, prepared to offer salvation to humanity.

Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, during the Jewish Pentecost festival, Jesus' chosen apostles received the promised guidance from the Holy Spirit and began to preach the message of salvation to all who would hear. On the very first day the gospel was preached, more than three thousand people received the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:41)! Thus, the age of Christianity began and the Lord's church was established in accordance with His promise (Matthew 16:16–18).

From Jerusalem, the good news of salvation spread throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:5–24), and eventually to Gentile communities throughout the world (Acts 13–18), all in accordance with God's plan (Acts 1:8). One evangelist especially effective

DATE	KEY EVENTS IN BIBLICAL HISTORY
2400 B.C.	Flood; only Noah and his family are saved
2100 B.C.	Abraham moves to Canaan; God's covenant with Abraham
1875 B.C.	Jacob (Israel) and his family move to Egypt
1750 B.C.	Israelites are made slaves in Egypt
1450 B.C.	Moses leads Israelites out of Egypt
1400 B.C.	Israel begins conquering Canaan under Joshua's leadership
1350–1050 B.C.	Period of the Judges
1050–1010 B.C.	Saul as King of Israel
1010–970 B.C.	David as King of Israel
970–930 B.C.	Solomon as King of Israel
930 B.C.	Division: the Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom of Judah
722 B.C.	Kingdom of Israel destroyed by the Assyrians
586 B.C.	Kingdom of Judah destroyed by the Babylonians
536–432 B.C.	Judeans (Jews) return and rebuild Jerusalem
430–5 B.C.	Between the Testaments
4 B.C.	Birth of Jesus
4 B.C.	Death of Herod the Great
A.D. 26	Jesus begins His ministry
A.D. 30	Death, burial and resurrection of Jesus
A.D. 30	New Testament church under the new covenant begins
A.D. 35	Conversion of Saul (Paul)
A.D. 46	Paul begins his missionary ministry
A.D. 67–68	Paul and Peter are killed by Nero in Rome
A.D. 70	Destruction of Jerusalem
A.D. 95	Final New Testament book (Revelation) is written

in establishing churches in Gentile (non-Jewish) communities was Paul. The New Testament contains thirteen letters he wrote directing newly established congregations concerning belief, worship, and daily behavior. The New Testament closes with the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which contains a prophetic glimpse of the persecutions the church would soon have to endure, persecutions that are well-documented in historical writings outside the New Testament. It also describes the final triumph of Christ and His church and the heavenly home prepared for faithful Christians.

➤ **The Old Testament: Its Organization and Content**

The Bible was not merely thrown together or arranged haphazardly; nor are the books necessarily chronological in their arrangement, as one might presume. Consider the following chart illustrating the organization of the Old Testament in our modern Bible:

LAW	HISTORY	POETRY	MAJOR PROPHETS	MINOR PROPHETS
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Hosea
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Joel
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Amos
Numbers	1 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	Obadiah
Deuteronomy	2 Samuel	Song of Solomon	Daniel	Jonah
	1 Kings			Micah
	2 Kings			Nahum
	1 Chronicles			Habakkuk
	2 Chronicles			Zephaniah
	Ezra			Haggai
	Nehemiah			Zechariah
	Esther			Malachi

***The Books of Law.*** The first five books of the Old Testament are called the books of law because a significant portion of their pages contain the Law of Moses. They are sometimes called the Pentateuch (“the five books”) or the Torah (“the law”). Jesus refers to these books when He speaks of “the law” (Matthew 5:17; 7:12, et al.). They were written around 1500 B.C. by Moses (John 7:19–23). These books contain the earliest record of human history and are arranged in chronological order. Following is a brief synopsis of each book:

BOOK	SYNOPSIS OF CONTENTS
<b>Genesis</b>	Genesis means “beginnings.” It contains a record of the creation and tells of the beginning of our relationship with God. Major themes include the creation; the fall; the flood; the account of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
<b>Exodus</b>	Exodus means “departure.” It tells how the descendants of Jacob (renamed Israel) became slaves in Egypt and how God delivered them from Egyptian bondage under Moses. It records how Moses received a written law for the Israelites from Mount Sinai.
<b>Leviticus</b>	Leviticus is named after the Israelite tribe of Levi. It contains the specifics of God’s law as it applied especially to the priests and Levites.
<b>Numbers</b>	Numbers is so named because it contains an account of the numbering of the Israelites. It tells how the Israelites were forced to wander in the wilderness for forty years after failing to trust in God.
<b>Deuteronomy</b>	Deuteronomy means “the second law.” Before entering Canaan, Moses repeated God’s law to the Israelites, warning them to keep its instructions.

**The Books of History.** There are twelve books of history in the Old Testament, collectively tracing the history of the Israelites from the time of their entrance into Canaan until their captivity under hostile nations. They cover a period of roughly one thousand years (1400–400 B.C.), and they are arranged in chronological order. The chart on the following page gives a brief synopsis of each book:

BOOK	SYNOPSIS OF CONTENTS
<b>Joshua</b>	The book of Joshua is named after Moses' successor. It is the historical record of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites.
<b>Judges</b>	Judges records a period after Joshua's death during which there was no central ruler. God provided local leaders to "judge" the sins of the people and help them defeat neighboring enemies.
<b>Ruth</b>	The book of Ruth, named for a Moabite woman, takes place during the period of the judges. It tells about Ruth's love for her Israelite mother-in-law. Ruth was David's great grandmother.
<b>1 and 2 Samuel</b>	1 Samuel is named after the leading prophet of the period and records the reign of King Saul, Israel's first king. 2 Samuel records the reign of King David, Israel's second king.
<b>1 and 2 Kings</b>	1 and 2 Kings records the reign of King Solomon, the division of the Israelite nation after his death, and an account of the reign of the succeeding kings, giving emphasis to the kings who ruled in the Israelite Kingdom.
<b>1 and 2 Chronicles</b>	1 and 2 Chronicles records the reign of Kings David and Solomon, the division of the Israelite nation after Solomon's death, and an account of the reign of the succeeding kings, giving emphasis to the kings who ruled in the Judean Kingdom.
<b>Ezra</b>	The book of Ezra is named after a priest who provided spiritual leadership for the Jews who returned to Judea after being held captive in Babylon for seventy years. It focuses on the people's efforts to rebuild the Jerusalem temple and the religious reforms enacted by Ezra.
<b>Nehemiah</b>	The book of Nehemiah is named after an Israelite leader who led a group of Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem. It focuses on the rebuilding of the Jerusalem walls under Nehemiah's leadership.
<b>Esther</b>	Esther was a Jewess living in Persia after the Babylonian captivity. It records how a Jewess became Queen of Persia and saved the Jews from possible destruction.



***The Poetic Books.*** There are five books written in Hebrew poetic verse: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. These books are sometimes called books of wisdom. They are arranged in the chronological order of their origination, though Job was written long before the other four. Job, probably written during the period of the judges, tells of a man who endured various trials at Satan’s hand and yet remained faithful to God. The Psalms were written to be sung, and most were composed by David. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes contain a collection of the wise observations of Solomon, David’s son. And the Song of Solomon contains a poetic romance that many believe is a figure of God’s love for His people.

***The Major Prophets.*** The Major Prophets, comprising five books, include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Containing the prophecies given by those whose names are attached to the book, they are arranged in chronological order—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations (written by Jeremiah) were written during the period just preceding Babylonian captivity, while Ezekiel and Daniel were written from Babylon during the captivity. These five books are called “Major Prophets” because of their long length. Isaiah is known as the Messianic prophet because of his many prophecies concerning the Messiah and His spiritual kingdom.

***The Minor Prophets.*** The Minor Prophets, Hosea through Malachi, comprise twelve books and contain the prophecies given by those whose names are attached to the books. They are arranged, more or less, in chronological order. They record the work and prophecies of twelve prophets from various historical periods and contexts. These books are called “minor” because of their relatively short length. In the Jewish Bible, they are combined in one book called “The Twelve.”

An understanding of the general content and organization of the Old Testament books will aid students in their navigation and study of these wonderful writings. Concerning the Old Testament, Paul writes: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

## ➤ The New Testament: Its Organization and Content

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament books are arranged in a specific order to facilitate Bible study. Consider the following chart illustrating the organization of the New Testament in our modern Bible:

GOSPEL	HISTORY	PAUL TO CHURCHES	PAUL TO PEOPLE	GENERAL LETTERS	PROPHECY
Matthew	Acts	Romans	1 Timothy	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark		1 Corinthians	2 Timothy	James	
Luke		2 Corinthians	Titus	1 Peter	
John		Galatians	Philemon	2 Peter	
		Ephesians		1 John	
		Philippians		2 John	
		Colossians		3 John	
		1 Thessalonians		Jude	
		2 Thessalonians			

**The Gospels.** These four books, named after their authors, tell about the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They are called “Gospels,” meaning “Good News.” They are not intended to present a biography of Jesus’ life, but to provide evidence that He was the promised Messiah. Since each book was written to a different audience, each takes on a different flavor—Matthew was written to Jews, Mark was written to Romans, Luke was written to Greeks, and John was written to Jews and Greeks living in Asia Minor. The first three (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are called “synoptics” (meaning “to see together”) because they record many of the same events in Jesus’ life. John, written about thirty years after the synoptics, contains many narratives not recorded in the other Gospels.

**History.** Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke as a companion to his Gospel, presents a history of the spread of the gospel from A.D. 30–62. The first half of the book focuses on the preaching of Peter and John in Palestine. The second half focuses on Paul’s preaching in various Gentile communities. Acts provides a valuable record of how people of the first century became Christians.

**Paul’s Letters to Churches.** These nine books (Romans through 2 Thessalonians) comprise letters written by Paul to various churches, most of which he established in his evangelistic work. They teach us many things concerning what churches are to believe, teach, and practice. They are named after the recipients of the letters and are arranged in order from longest to shortest. They are not arranged chronologically.

**Paul’s Letters to People.** These four books (1 Timothy through Philemon) comprise letters written by Paul to individuals. Timothy and Titus were evangelists who helped Paul—these three letters are sometimes called the “pastoral epistles.” In these three letters, we learn about the responsibilities evangelists have toward God and the church. The letter to Philemon is a personal letter Paul wrote to his friend, a member of the church in Colosse. These four books are named after the recipients of the letters and are arranged in order from longest to shortest.

**General Letters.** These eight books (Hebrews through Jude) are called “general letters” because they are not addressed to a specific church or individual—they are written to the church “in general.” Hebrews, named after the recipients of the letter, was written to Jewish Christians who were considering a rejection of Christianity in favor of a return to Judaism. The other books are named after the respective authors (James, Peter, John, Jude) and contain general admonition to the churches. The general letters are arranged in order from longest to shortest.

**Prophecy.** The Revelation of Jesus Christ is the only book of prophecy in the New Testament. Written by John, it contains a prophetic picture of the church, victorious and saved in heaven, despite hardships and persecutions.

## ➤ Suggestions for Bible Reading

As students embark on this series of Bible studies, they are encouraged to begin a habit of regular Bible reading. Too many people know about the Bible only from what they have heard other say or teach. The Bible is not a mysterious book requiring superior intelligence or a pile of degrees to understand. It is God's communication with His creation, intended to be read and understood by all those who desire to serve Him. The people in Berea were commended because after they heard the truth taught, they then studied for themselves to verify the accuracy of what they heard (Acts 17:10–11).

**Read the Bible Regularly.** While long hours of study are sometimes necessary and rewarding, there is no substitute for regular, daily Bible reading. I recommend students begin by reading fifteen minutes each day from the New Testament. At this rate, most people will finish the entire New Testament in about four months. Following is a chart that will guide interested students through a reading of the New Testament.

WEEK NO.	READING PASSAGE
1	Matthew (chapters 1–14)
2	Matthew (chapters 15–28)
3	Mark
4	Luke (chapters 1–13)
5	Luke (chapters 14–24)
6	John (chapters 1–12)
7	John (chapters 13–21)
8	Acts (chapters 1–14)
9	Acts (chapters 15–28)
10	Romans
11	First Corinthians
12	Second Corinthians
13	Galatians, Ephesians
14	Philippians, Colossians, First Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians
15	First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon
16	Hebrews
17	James, First Peter, Second Peter
18	First John, Second John, Third John, Jude, Revelation (chapters 1–5)
19	Revelation (chapters 6–22)

***Read the Bible Prayerfully.*** In reading the Bible, we allow God to communicate with us; in prayer, we communicate with God. This two-way communication is vital to good spiritual health. As students read, they are encouraged to pray for wisdom and guidance (James 1:5).

***Read the Bible with the Goal of Learning.*** Some who read the Bible read merely out of curiosity. Others read out of skepticism or with the intent of proving (or disproving) the teachings of a particular denomination. Such motivations are flawed from the outset and are doubtful to yield good results. As much as possible, students are encouraged to set aside any ulterior motives for studying the Bible other than to learn spiritual truths. A disciple, by definition, is a student or learner. We cannot serve God acceptably until we first take the time to examine His will honestly.

***Read the Bible with the Goal of Serving God.*** Some read the Bible with the goal of learning God's will but never allow their newfound knowledge to affect their attitudes, motivations, or behavior. The Bible contains God's will for us as His special creation. His will is not that we would merely "know" but that we would "be." What good is it to know the proper prescription for treating a deadly disease and yet not follow the prescription? Knowledge, in and of itself, is not sufficient. At some point, knowledge and theory must be put into appropriate practice. Jesus said,

But why do you call Me "Lord, Lord," and do not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:46-49).

 **Conclusion**

In this first lesson, we have examined a few features of the Bible as a book. The goal of this lesson has been to equip students with a general understanding of the organization and content of God's Word. The Bible is a library of books. Like any library, the Bible will be much more useful if we understand how things are arranged. Unlike a library, all the books in the Bible were conceived by a single mind (God) and their contents tell a single story of God's plan to redeem humanity.

This lesson has presented the "big picture" of the Bible. Such an overview is helpful, for we cannot understand or appreciate properly the specific teachings of the Bible until we first have a grasp of the "big picture." In future lessons, we will consider some of the Bible's specific themes and teachings, focusing on the revelation of God's plan to redeem humanity.

## Question and Answers

1. How many books are in the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_
2. About how many authors were involved in writing the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Identify the two major divisions of the Bible. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. The first major division of the Bible can be subdivided into five sections. Name them:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. The second major division of the Bible can be subdivided into six sections. Name them. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. The Greek word from which we get the word "Bible" means \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Some of the books of the Bible are named after the book's author (e.g., Daniel, Matthew). Describe how some of the other books of Bible received their names and give an example of each.  
\_\_\_\_\_ example \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ example \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ example \_\_\_\_\_
8. What special promise did God give Adam and Eve after their sin? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What special promise did God give Abraham? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Why did Jesus come to the earth? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Thought Questions**

1. In what way is the Bible a single book? In what way is it not a single book?
2. Read Matthew 7:24–27 and James 1:22–25. As Bible students, what two goals should we have in studying God’s Word?

### **Additional Study Goals**

1. Memorize the five major divisions of the Old Testament.
2. Memorize the six major divisions of the New Testament.
3. Memorize the books of the New Testament in order according to their divisions.
4. Reread the section entitled “The Story of the Bible.”
5. Commit yourself to daily Bible reading, reading the New Testament over the next four months.

### **Your Questions**

In the space below, write down any personal notes or questions that you had while reading through this lesson.

### CHARTING THE COURSE

*Have you ever wondered if the Bible really is God’s Word? How can we know?*

*These are questions that have real, rational answers. In our next lesson, we will consider some of the evidence proving the authenticity of God’s Word.*