**Lesson 1 – The Bible: What is it?**

Deep in all of our hearts, we sense that our life has a purpose – a meaning that extends beyond this physical world. Perhaps you have been lying awake at night wondering about this, but eventually, you get discouraged or distracted and try to ignore the biggest questions of life: Where did I come from? Why am I here? What will happen after I die?

I’m glad that you came tonight as we begin studying the Bible. If you come with an open heart, I believe that you will find this book has answers to all of these questions (and much more). It is a big book - a person can spend a lifetime studying this book. Our lessons will only present an overview of some basic things that the Bible teaches. We will study the Bible chronologically and we will only study selected key events. Once you understand the basics of the Bible, the rest of the Bible is easier to understand.

**How is the Bible Unique?**

The Bible is the best-selling book in the history of the world. It was the first book printed on the Gutenberg commercial printing press (1450) and has been translated into over 1400 languages. It has been attacked physically and factually, yet has been proven true in every account. Over 25,000 archeology sites have been discovered that prove the accuracy of the historical accounts recorded in the Bible.

The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years (1500BC to 100AD) by 40 separate writers. Most of the writers were Jewish, and included kings, fishermen, scholars, shepherds, prophets, a doctor, the rich and poor. Even though it was written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over such a long period of time by a diverse group of men, it has a single, unified message.

Over 24,000 partial or complete manuscript copies of the Bible are still in existence today, far more than any ancient book. It is the only book which gives accurate, detailed prophesies of future events, many which have already been clearly documented. The Bible is not a book of legends – it contains true stories of real people reported by eye-witnesses and first-person interviewers, corroborated by other documents written during the same periods of time.

Unlike many religious books, the Bible does not simply provide a list of rules to obey. It contains true stories of history, showing how God created people, how they broke away from Him, and what He has done to bring them back to Himself. The detailed accounts of the Bible are characteristic of actual historical reporting (not mere fiction). And other than Jesus, the heroes of the Bible are realistically portrayed, including their mistakes and failures.

***Romans 15:4*** *- For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (NT287)*

**What does the Bible say about itself?**

The Bible makes some huge claims about itself. If the claims are true, the Bible is worthy of study, attention, and devotion. If the claims are false, it should be discarded as useless and dishonest. Those claims include:

The Bible came from God. God spoke to men called "prophets" the exact messages He wanted written down. Sometimes He spoke audibly. Sometimes He spoke to them in a vision. Sometimes He put the message directly in their minds. The Bible is *not* men's ideas, but **God's own Words.**

***II Peter 1:21* -***For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (NT417)*

***II Timothy 3:16 -*** *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, (NT376)*

***2 Corinthians 12:12*** *- The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. (NT327) {credibility of writers}*

The Bible contains a table of contents, **the** **Old Testament with 39 books**, **the** **New Testament with 27 books**, chapters and verse numbers and footnotes and various helps. While the words of the Bible came from God, men have added the various chapters and verse numbers to make it easier to find and remember certain passages.

The Bible is eternally relevant. Even though cultures change, the words of the Bible do not change. Even though it was written long ago, it is important today.

***Isaiah 40:8*** *–The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. (OT1171)*

***Matthew 24:35*** *–“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (NT48)*

***Psalm 119:89*** *- Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. (OT1005)*

The Bible is God's personal message to each of us. The Bible does not just give general truth for the world, but it tells us exactly what God thinks of us and what He sees as our greatest need. It is a living document, reaching into our hearts and speaking to us individually.

***Hebrews 4:12*** *–For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (NT387)*

***Psalm 119:105*** – *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (OT1005)*

***Psalm 1:1-3*** *- Blessed is the man whose … delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (OT881)*

The Bible reveals the truth about God. God is the source of all life, cannot be contained, and greater than we can ever imagine:

***Acts 17:24,25*** *–* “*The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” (NT242)*

HE is so great that our simple, unaided brains could never know and understand Him:

***Romans 11:33, 34 -*** *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” (NT283)*

***Isaiah 55:8,9*** *– “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (OT1200)*

The only way that we could ever know God is if He chose to reveal Himself to us. And that is what the Bible claims to do, because He wants us to come to know Him:

***Psalm 83:18*** *-* *That they may know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth. (OT965)*

The Bible reveals the purpose of man. God does not waste His power, creating things without a purpose. But if we simply try to discover our purpose on our own, we will end up living for things that are not important. The Bible helps us to understand the meaning of life and live as God designed:

***Jeremiah 9:23, 24*** *- Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.” (OT1241)*

***Isaiah 43:7*** *– “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (OT1178)*

Here is some good news from the Bible – even though we have broken God’s law and are separated from God, He has a great love for us, the people He created:

***Psalm 103:11*** *– For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him. (OT982)*

As you study the Bible, come with an open heart, searching to know the God who made you, loves you, and is seeking you.