



What is the  
message  
of the  
Bible?

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# **What is The Message of the Bible?**

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# I. WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

## **The Bible: Its Basic Composition**

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word meaning "book."

The Holy Bible consists of 66 books. The Bible is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament consists of 39 books. It covers the period of history beginning with the creation of the world until 400 years before Jesus Christ was born. The New Testament consists of 27 books. The New Testament covers Jesus' 3-year ministry on earth as well as the early history of the church. These books were written over a long period of time. The Bible was written over 40 generations and by more than 40 different authors. Yet these writings are remarkably united!

Although the Holy Bible came to us from forty different human authors, the primary author is God. The human writers did not write their own opinions but their words were inspired by God. The Bible says that "all Scripture (that is the Holy Bible) is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim.3:16). The word "inspired" means "God-breathed." Just as breath comes out of our mouths when we speak, so also the Bible is God speaking to us. God breathed out the Bible by using human authors.

The Bible says that "no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet.1:20-21). Here the Bible tells us that the Bible did not originate in man but in God. The human authors were completely controlled and guided by the Spirit of God even in their choice of words. God chose and used men, not as robots, but with their own talents, style, abilities and personalities. Yet He guided them in such a way that the Bible is accurate, reliable and without error.

The 66 books of the Bible are recognized as the Word of God for faith and practice by the church throughout the years. It was written in the Hebrew language (the Old Testament) and in the Greek language (the New Testament). Today the Bible is translated into 2000 languages around the world.

### **The Bible: God's Unfolding Story**

Recently a gentleman asked me this question: "Why did God reveal Himself step-by-step? Why not all at once?"

This is because the Bible is God's unfolding story from the beginning of history. The Bible is a book of salvation history. In the Old Testament, God tells us about His creation of the world and our first parent's rebellion against Him. But God, in His love, came to our first parents with a promise of the Saviour to come. God chose to work out His plan of rescuing man from his sinfulness through a particular people – the people of Israel. God made His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their sons after them. He used this line to bring the promised Messiah into the world – Jesus Christ! The Old Testament tells the story of the line from the first man in history, Adam, to Christ. The New Testament tells the story of the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Messiah and how God expands the church to include people of all tribes, nations and languages.

The purpose of the written history in the Bible is not just to tell us how man is saved; it is meant to reveal God to us. God makes Himself known to man step-by-step.

As God reveals more of Himself, more of the truth becomes visible, just as the mountain climber can see more and more of the land around him as he climbs higher and higher.

Or to put it in a different way, I like to use the example of the seed, bud and flower. The whole plant is already in the

seed in perfect form. You can observe the development of that seed over time – first you see the sprout, the plant, the bud and finally, the flower. In the same way, in the Old Testament God's revelation of Himself is there in perfect form but only as a seed. This seed is slowly revealed as the Bible progresses and it finally unfolds into a beautiful, complete flower in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who became man.

The story of the Bible tells about our need for Jesus Christ to rescue us from our sinfulness and to bring us into fellowship with God. The Bible begins with the story of our first parents' fellowship with God in the garden (paradise) and it concludes with God again having fellowship with man in the new garden (the new earth to come). And between the two, the Bible speaks of man's need for Jesus. Man is barred from entering into the garden because of his sinfulness against God. God opens the way to paradise through Jesus. In brief, this is the whole story of the Bible.

## **II. WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE?**

### **A. God Establishes a Relationship with Man**

The Story of the Bible is God's story to mankind. It is a true story.

The Bible begins with the story of God's creation, His huge kingdom. God freely exercised His power by creating. The first ten words of the Bible say: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1). The rest of the creation story explains how God created all things in six days. On the seventh day He rested.

How did He create the heavens and earth? How did He create everything we see around us?

## **God Spoke ... And There Was**

When we make something, we need materials or ingredients. For example, we need peas, potatoes, flour and spices to make samosas.

But God did not need to use anything to create His kingdom. He simply said, "Let there be," and there was.

On the first day, He created the light. And He divided the light from the darkness. He also exercised his power by naming everything He created. He called the light "day" and He called the darkness "night."

On the second day, God created the sky to separate the water. The waters above the sky are called clouds.

On the third day, God created land, plants, trees and seas. He made His kingdom beautiful. He caused the earth to bring forth grass, herbs and trees *according* to their kinds. Consider this. Scientists are able to do their work of classifying today because God created animals and plants according to their kinds!

On the fourth day, God filled the heavens. He created the sun, moon and stars.

On the fifth day, God filled the skies and seas. He created the beautiful sea creatures and all the birds *according to their kinds*.

On the sixth day, God created the animals on the ground *according to their kinds* and He created our first parents. Adam and Eve. God created man and woman different from

the animals. God created them in His own image, in His own likeness. When God breathed in the nostrils man became a living soul, so man is different that the animals. Man is like God in that God made him a ruler. Man is called to serve God by ruling over and caring for God's creation, by having children and by using and developing the resources of God's creation to His glory.

Why did God create?

He created everything, including man, so that He might receive the honor, the glory, the praise, and the thanksgiving.

### **God's Evaluation**

What did God think about what He created? Did He say, "I see mistakes, I'd better do it over again"?

No, after each creation day, God said, "And it was good" (Gen.1:10,12,18,25). And after He created everything, including man, the crown of His creation, He said, "And indeed it was very good" (Gen.1:31).

What He created was good. He made all creation good. There was no evil. There was no sin, no misery, no sickness, no crying, and no death. There was peace in God's creation. God found joy and pleasure in what He made. And Adam and Eve, our first parents, shared in God's joy and happily served Him.

How do we know God found joy and pleasure in what He made?

He rested. The Bible says He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. This does not mean that God went to sleep. Today He still provides for and cares for His creation. "He rested" simply means that God was finished His work of creating (Gen.2:2). He rested and found pleasure, joy and delight in what He had created.

We have already noted that God created man for a purpose. What is this purpose? God created man to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

How do we do that? How do we enjoy Him?

We do so by reflecting God's character in our lives and in this world. That's what it means that God created man and woman in His image. And according to Genesis 2, man's calling is to enjoy God by reflecting Him in three ways: 1) in resting; 2) in working; 3) in relating.

### **In Resting**

God worked six days and He rested the seventh day. In this way, God established a pattern for man. Man is called to serve God six days of the week, but he is also called to rest from His work on the seventh day of the week in order to worship the Lord and find joy in Him. He rested, therefore, we rest. Today we call this day of rest Sunday.

### **In Working**

One side of the equation is resting one day out of seven. The other side of the equation is finding enjoyment in God by reflecting Him in working. He worked six days, and therefore, we also work six days of the week.

According to Greek mythology, in the beginning the earth produced its fruits of itself and man didn't have to do any labour. Man lived like the gods – free of human cares, labour and distress.

But not according to the Bible!

In light of our purpose, work shouldn't be seen as a necessary evil but as an opportunity to reflect God, the Divine Worker, in this world.

God placed man in the garden which He planted in the eastern part of Eden (in a region known as Iraq today).

God tells us that it was a good working environment. There were trees, the four rivers – the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates – and gold, aromatic resin, and onyx. This description of the workplace showed that there was a loving relationship between God and our first parents, Adam and Eve. There was love for God and love for neighbour in the work place. There was no dishonesty and no bribery. There were no labour disputes or arguments. There was peace.

Man's task was simple. Man had to use his hands and head for the glory of God. God called Adam to use his hands by telling him "to tend and to keep" the garden (Gen.2:15). Here we see Adam, the farmer. But he was also called to use his mind in naming the animals that the Lord God brought to him. Here we see Adam, the scientist.

Man's task today is to develop culture, namely agriculture, industry, the sciences and the arts. His job is to develop a culture that glorifies God and that reflects His character in this world.

Now we focus on the third way in which man is to reflect the character of God.

### **In Relating**

Man was also called to enjoy God by reflecting Him in relating. This is seen specifically in marriage between husband and wife. Marriage (family) is the basis of all other relationships in our society.

When there is respect for authority in the family there will also be respect for God's ordained order for society. Although the prime minister, teacher or father may not always be respectable, God has given him a position of authority. We do not honour and respect him because he is right or because he is

strong or talented. We respect him in his position because it pleases God to rule us through them.

God tells us in the Bible about the first marriage and family in history – the marriage and family of Adam and Eve.

God said that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen.2:18). Here we see the purpose of marriage: man needed a helper, a friend. Marriage was to represent the special covenant relationship that God had between Himself and man.

Before God brought the woman to Adam, God gave Adam a lesson in loneliness. God gave him the task of naming the animals and twice the Bible says that there was not a helper found suitable for Adam. Animals, such as dogs and cats, cannot make up for man's loneliness.

Animals cannot make up for man's loneliness because they are not created in God's image and therefore cannot relate as humans can.

So God, because He loved and cared for Adam, made the woman from one of Adam's ribs and He brought the woman to the man. The Bible also records the first wedding song in history: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man" (Gen.2:23). Then God says: "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen.2:24).

God tells us in the Bible that Adam and Eve "were both naked and they felt no shame" (Gen.2:25). This says something of the marriage that existed in the Garden. There was openness, honesty and true love. There was no shame, fear or guilt. The marriage relationship beautifully reflected the right relationship that existed between God and Adam and Eve.

Man and woman were created *equal*, but they each had a different function in the marriage relationship. Adam loved Eve and sacrificed himself for her and Eve joyfully submitted to the leadership of her husband, Adam. This was God's plan for an orderly, just society.

Today, however, there is emotional, verbal and physical abuse in the marriage relationship. There is adultery, separation, and divorce. There is jealousy, deception, and hatred between husbands and wives and within families.

This guilt, shame, pain and brokenness is because man broke his covenant relationship with God.

## **B. Man Breaks His Relationship with God**

Among the many trees in the garden, two trees were very important. There was the “tree of life” and there was the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen.2:17).

The tree of life in the garden of Eden was a sign of Adam and Eve's fellowship with God. God promised life forever if our first parents would continue to obey Him. They would never die! But there was also the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said that they were free to eat of every tree in the garden, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they were not allowed to eat. God said, "for when you eat of it, you shall surely die."

### **Believing the Lie**

Satan, an angel who had previously served God but now is an enemy of God, talked to Eve in the garden. He talked to her in a sly way – through a snake.

He said, "Did God really say...?" He planted doubt in Eve's mind about what God said to them about this one tree. Then

Satan told Eve that God was lying and that man would not die but would instead become like God (Gen.3:1).

Rather than obeying the Word of God and saying "No, God has spoken!" Eve set herself up as ultimate judge. She began to look at the tree and at its attractive fruit. She then took some of the fruit and ate it. She also gave some of the fruit to Adam and he ate.

Both Adam and Eve believed Satan. They became friends of Satan and changed human history.

Immediately, Adam and Eve realized that they were naked and made clothes for themselves out of fig leaves. And then they heard the sound of God walking in the garden. Adam and Eve both hid themselves from the Lord in the trees of the garden because they were afraid. There was *guilt* and *shame!*

The fellowship between God and man was broken. God told Adam and Eve that from then on, there would also be brokenness in *human relationships* and in the *workplace*. And the very ground from which God created man would take him back through *death*.

Our first parents sadly chose death – physical, spiritual and eternal death – and broke the relationship between God and man. The relationship between God and man was now broken! Indeed, this was the saddest day in the history of mankind.

### **In Adam's Fall, We Sinned All**

Since that time, all mankind has been sinful and corrupted, not just Adam and Eve.

Adam, our family head, represents the whole human race. He acted in *our* place. His rebellion is *our* rebellion. Adam's guilt is transferred to us.

Perhaps, an example will help us understand. A baseball player is injured during a game. He can't play for the next three games. Even though he doesn't play, he can still say, "we won" or "we lost". He shares in the team's victories and defeats because of his relationship to the team.

Likewise, we are all members of the human race through Adam. The Bible says: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom.5:12). Death is God's righteous judgment upon the whole human race. Death is not natural. God created man to live with Him forever but death is the punishment all mankind must bear of Adam's sinfulness.

Not only does everybody physically die, but everyone is also born dead spiritually. The Bible tells us that all men are born with hearts against God. The brokenness, misery, and death in our world prove it.

### **Expulsion from the Garden**

Adam and Eve experienced fellowship with God in the garden. When they disobeyed, God sent them out of the garden of Eden and placed an angel with a flaming sword at the entrance to the garden to keep them out.

Now sin, misery, brokenness and death rule outside of the garden. Is restoration and healing possible?

### **C. God Restores His Relationship with Man Through Blood**

A lot of people try to hide or cover or make up for their guilt by doing good things. They don't realize that according to God's justice, they deserve to *die* for their sins.

## **Fig-leaves Or Blood?**

Humankind has not changed at all since Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen.2:9).

When God called Adam in the garden, Adam covered himself with fig leaves and hid. He was afraid of God because he knew he was guilty and was ashamed of his nakedness. The open, loving relationship with the Lord God was destroyed.

To this very day, men and women still try to hide or cover their own guilt with "fig leaves" (Gen.3:7). They try to pay for their own sin with their own good deeds. They fail to realize the seriousness of their deadly sinfulness and that they cannot pay for their own guilt.

There is, however, a remedy. Man is not doomed to certain death. God, in *His tender love and grace*, provided a covering for the ashamed Adam and Eve. The Bible says that "the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Gen.3:21). God provided an animal for Adam and Eve to use to cover themselves. The animal had to die to cover their sin and guilt and shame. The blood of this animal was shed for Adam's sake. This animal died *instead of* Adam. The sacrifice of the animal was a symbol of the Saviour who was to come.

## **Believing in God's Promise**

God promised Adam and Eve that He would send His own Son, Jesus Christ, to defeat Satan and pay for their sins once and for all. This would happen 4000 years later.

Adam and Eve believed God's promise. They gave up their "fig-leaf approach" and came to God on His terms which is why God clothed them in animal skins. It was a picture of

what God would do for them in Jesus. They trusted in the promise of Jesus, who would be God's ultimate sacrifice for human sinfulness.

When Jesus would come to give His life, the symbol of the animal sacrifice would no longer be needed because the ultimate sacrifice had come!

The "fig-leaf approach" and the "blood approach" to God remain in conflict with each other to this day.

The conflict is clearly shown in the story of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's two children.

### **The World's First Murder**

Cain, the older son, was a "tiller of the ground" (a farmer), and Abel, the younger son, was a "keeper of the sheep" (a shepherd) (Gen.4:2).

As Cain and Abel grew older, they each brought an offering to the Lord. Cain gave some of his harvest to the Lord, and Abel brought the firstborn of his flock, a lamb.

The Bible tells us that Cain became jealous of his younger brother because the Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but did not look with favour on Cain and his offering.

Cain's jealousy grew into anger. God asked Cain, "Why are you angry? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen.4:6).

Cain chose to ignore God's advice, and one day, while Cain and Abel were together in the field, Cain struck and killed his brother Abel.

## **The Battle Between Two Seeds**

Why did God accept Abel and his offering but not Cain and his offering?

Man needs a covering. He needs to somehow cover or pay for his own sins.

Cain came to God, trying to cover his sins with his good works (i.e. the fig-leaf approach). His offering did not include the shedding of blood and therefore God rejected it.

Abel, on the other hand, believed in God's promise that Jesus would come, and showed his faith by slaughtering the first born of his flock. He saw his own sinfulness and the need for a blood-covering. The slaughter of the first born of his flock was a temporary covering, but by this act of faith, Abel looked forward to the coming of God's promised Saviour, Jesus Christ, the ultimate sacrifice.

Abel was from the "seed of the woman" or the seed of believers in the promised Saviour. Cain was from the "seed of Satan" or the seed of unbelievers. In the lives of Cain and Abel we have the first clear evidence in history of the conflict between these two seeds.

## **God's Promise Wins**

Was God's promise in danger now that Cain had killed Abel? After all, there was only one seed left – Cain, who was a friend of Satan.

But God did not lose to Satan. God would keep His wonderful promise through the children of Adam and Eve. From their children and their children's children, the Saviour would still come!

God is faithful to His Word. Soon God gave Adam and Eve another son. Adam and Eve named him Seth, meaning "appointed." When Seth was born, Eve said, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed" (Gen.4:25).

God gave Seth to Adam and Eve in order to keep His wonderful promise. Through Seth's descendants, God would bring Jesus, the Saviour, into the world. The Bible tells us Seth's family tree from the very beginning to Jesus' birth, which took place about 3500 years later.

Throughout these 3500 years, God was keeping His promise. Beginning with Adam, and continuing through Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his descendants, the people of Isreal, God worked out His plan. Throughout these 3500 years, the conflict, which began with Cain and Abel, continued. The "seed of the serpent" (Satan and all those who did not believe in God's promise) tried to destroy the "seed of the woman" (all those who believed in God's promise). Because God is more powerful, Satan could not stop Jesus, the Saviour, from coming into this world to accomplish God's plan of rescuing man from his deadly sinfulness.

Because of His promise, God also preserved His people by telling them the way that they would approach Him – through the sacrifice (death) of an animal, usually a lamb. In this way, they showed their trust in God's promise that the Saviour was coming. Regularly each believer had to offer a young, spotless lamb. He would place his hand upon the head of the lamb. The sin that was transferred to him from Adam was now transferred to the lamb. The lamb was then killed in his place. While the cruel death of the lamb did not remove or cover the man's sin, his faith in the coming Lamb, which was shown through the sacrifice, would set him free from his sins and he would be forgiven.

In order for a sacrifice to be acceptable to a holy and just God, and in order for a sacrifice to be a covering for sin – two things are necessary: 1) blood must be shed. The sacrifice must be living and it must be killed, 2) it must be spotless and perfect.

The Old Testament sacrifices of perfect, spotless lambs pointed forward to the New Testament sacrifice of the one final and perfect Lamb – Jesus Christ.

### **Jesus – The Lamb of God**

Though sacrificing animals provided a temporary covering for sins; we need a permanent, final sacrifice to cover our sins. If there was no final solution, we would have to spend eternity in hell. If there had been nothing for the people of the Old Testament to look forward to – all of their animal sacrifices would have been useless. Only the blood of *the* perfect, spotless Lamb is enough to save us from our sins.

3500 years later, God fulfilled His promise that He had made to Adam and Eve. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was born of the virgin Mary by the power of God. Jesus took to Himself a body like ours. He became a man like us, except without sin. Like us, He became hungry and thirsty. He cried. He was tempted and He also suffered. But He came for one purpose and that was to offer Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. About him, one of His disciples said, "Look! See the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

During His whole life on earth and especially at the end, Jesus suffered greatly. The religious leaders put Him on trial because He claimed to be God. He was whipped. The people spit on Him and He was then nailed to the shameful cross. He bled for Adam's helpless race. On the cross, Jesus cried out in His agony, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt.27:46). He was rejected by God so that through faith in

Him we are accepted by God. He, the perfect, spotless Lamb of God, died the death we deserve. He offered His life in perfect obedience to God in our place. He is *the* acceptable offering to God! He is *the* covering for our sin!

The bad news is that the sin of Adam, our representative, was transferred to the entire human race and therefore, all die. Though we all deserve to die for our sins, Jesus, through His death and sacrifice, is the representative for all those who trust in Him as the way to God. Jesus' death takes the place of our death. (This doesn't mean that we won't die, but that we won't have to be punished in hell forever).

The good news is that through faith in Jesus, our sins are transferred to Him and, in exchange, God declares us righteous. One is either punished in Christ or in hell forever.

#### **D. The Blessing of this New Relationship with God**

The story of the Bible does not end with the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, on the cross. Otherwise there would be no hope.

The Bible says that three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. The resurrection is our only hope! His resurrection from the dead proves that He is God's answer to the problem of sin and death forever. Jesus won over sin, death and hell.

His miracles during His three years' ministry on earth, prior to His death and resurrection, prove that He came to bring the life and communion that Adam and Eve once enjoyed in the garden. He raised Lazarus from the dead. He gave new eyes to blind Bartimaeus, and healed a man who was paralyzed and forgave his sins. Who else but Jesus, the eternal Son of God, could do all these things?

Forty days after Jesus was raised from the dead, He went up into heaven. Today, by His power, He continues to give this life and communion with God which He earned for us on the cross.

## New Life

For example, the Bible tells us the story of Saul. A few years after Jesus went up into heaven, Saul was persecuting those who believed in Him. Saul hated them so much that he looked for them, bound them, and brought them to Jerusalem to be killed. One day as he was travelling to Damascus, a light suddenly came from heaven. A voice said to him, "Saul, Saul, why are persecuting Me?" Saul said, "who are you, Lord?" Then the Lord said; "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 22:7,8). Saul, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 2:9,10). Jesus changed Saul and he became a preacher of Jesus Christ. He also wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

God gave Saul, also called Paul, a new heart and new eyes (Acts 13:9). God changed Paul to see things the way they really were concerning the truth about God, man and the world. Paul saw that, like Adam and Eve, he was created to glorify God. Through faith in Christ, Paul became a changed person so that He could reflect God's character in resting, in working and in relating.

This change in his life is one example of the continuing power of Jesus Christ. If He could change Paul, He can change you!

This new life God gives through faith in Christ results in a changed life. He gives us His power. Because of His power at work in us, we want to fight against our self-centredness, sinful motives, bad thoughts and actions. Because of His power at work in us, God replaces these bad things with good things: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. It's God's powerful work, none of our own.

Through faith in Jesus, the only Saviour, God gives these gifts to us in exchange for a life of sin and eternal death!

### **The New Heaven & Earth (The New Garden)**

Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God also promises a new heaven and a new earth after our death – a place without weeping, sorrow, misery and sin. This will be a place like the garden in which Adam and Eve lived.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus Christ returns at the end of this world, everyone will be raised from the dead. Everyone who believed in Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice, will receive a new body that will never die. God will receive him into His garden. Everyone who refused to come to God on His terms – through the blood of Jesus Christ – is condemned to hell.

The Bible begins with the story of God's fellowship with our first parents in the garden and it ends with the promise of fellowship with God in the new earth. Between the two gardens, the Bible tells of the cross, the cross of Christ. Through the sacrifice of Christ, the door to the new garden (paradise) is open to all who believe!

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