

# BIBLE BASICS

Finding Tools to Read and Interpret Scripture

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**BIBLE**  
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series

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# INTRODUCTION

## Swimming in the Bible

For some people, reading the Bible is like being around a swimming pool. They are very cautious. After all, too many people have drowned in those things. One time I saw a rowdy crowd by a backyard pool. One by one the people in the crowd were tossing people in. When they grabbed one lady, she started screaming, “No, no! I can’t swim!” Thankfully they let her go. She wanted nothing to do with that pool.

That’s how a lot of people feel about the Bible. They squirm whenever anyone pushes them close to a Bible. If they are invited to read it or study it, they get that look on their faces that says, “No, no! I can’t swim!”

Others shy away from the Bible because it seems irrelevant. All they have ever read in the Bible were stories from faraway places, which took place at a time that seems to have nothing to do with the here and now. Or they have read poems that didn’t make any sense to them or have come across lists of names that went on for chapters.

For others the Bible seems weird. Weird people have used the Bible to intimidate and bully them. They’ve had Bible “bullets” shot at them left and right by people trying to convert them to their way of thinking, without taking the time to gently teach them what they need to know. Seeing people on the corner of big city streets with grocery baskets and bull horns shouting out Bible verses at passersby hasn’t helped their perception of the Bible either.

Still others are frightened by the Bible because they have heard of people doing scary and mean things, claiming the Bible led them to do those things. They think of cult leaders like Jim Jones and David Koresh. The ancient crusades and abortion clinic bombings

have been justified by the Bible. If the Bible leads people to act in those ways, people reason, they want nothing to do with it.

The simple truth is that most people who shy away from the Bible have never really learned how to read it properly. The Bible is the most wonderful book on this planet. When you read it, you touch the heart of God. It answers all the big questions we have in life: such as, How did we get here? Why were we put here? Where are we going? How do we make the most out of our lives? And what happens after we die?

Although some find the Bible difficult to read, you can't escape the fact that the Bible is the all-time best seller as well as the most studied and revered book of all time. Government leaders have sometimes tried to eradicate the Bible from their nations because it garnered more loyalty than they ever could. The harder they tried to suppress it, the more it was printed and studied. That's because it is God's book. And God wants to give it to the world. It reveals God to us, and God will stop at nothing to have himself revealed. He made us, and he wants us to be in his family. That's why he gave us the Bible.

Have you wanted to take a "swim" in the Bible but held back because you were not sure where the shallow end was? The Bible has many books with difficult-to-pronounce names and different writing styles. Where is a person supposed to start?

The way to start is with a proper introduction. That's where this book comes in. It will properly introduce you to the Bible. And I am excited to be your greeter, because no book even comes close to the Bible's message, its power, and its ability to renew the human heart. We will start at the shallow end, with the basics, and then move out into deeper waters. Take your time, and work on understanding what you are reading.

If you read this book carefully, by the end you should be able to read the Bible at any time, starting in any place, and enjoy what it has to offer.

If you don't have your own copy of the Bible, I urge you to go out and get one. You will want to use it while you are reading this book. If I were teaching you how to swim, we would be at a pool. If you are to learn how to get around in the Bible, you have to be near a

Bible. I recommend that you get a New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. It is easy to read, and it fairly accurately translates the meaning of the original Bible. All Bible quotes in *Bible Basics* come from the NIV. Using the same version will make it easier for you.

## Bible References

Throughout this book you will see Bible references, for example, Genesis 1:1. The word *Genesis* refers to the book of the Bible where the passage is found. The number before the colon is the chapter in which you find the verse. The number after the colon is the verse within that chapter.

## Definitions

Here are a few definitions of terms you will find as you read this book and when you jump into your Bible.

*Apostle*—A man who was sent by Jesus to tell the world that Jesus had come as our Savior. There are 13 apostles in the New Testament. Twelve of those men lived with Jesus and saw all the events of his ministry. The 13th was a man named Paul, whom Jesus called to be an apostle after Jesus had ascended into heaven. God called the apostles to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection, and he inspired them to write and teach his Word.

*Christ*—The New Testament translation of the Old Testament word *messiah*. It means the "Anointed One." Some people think that Christ was Jesus' last name. His last name was Bar-Joseph. But since he was the long-promised "Anointed One," he bears the title "Christ" after his name. To *anoint* someone is to set that person apart for a special task. Jesus was set apart by God to win our salvation.

*Disciple*—A follower of Jesus. Christians today are sometimes called disciples too. Jesus had many disciples. He chose 12 of them to receive special training and attention. He set them aside to be the 12 apostles.

*Holy Land*—In the Bible it is also called the Promised Land. This is a term used for the land that God promised to give to Abraham

and his descendants, who were called the people of Israel. It is also where Jesus lived and worked. Today this land is considered holy by three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

*Israel*—This is the name that the Bible uses for God’s chosen people. It comes from the name of one of their forefathers. At first the name of this man was Jacob, but very early in the Bible (Genesis 32:28) he was renamed Israel.

*Jews*—By New Testament times, the Israelites were most often called Jews. This name is derived from *Judah*, one of the 12 tribes into which the Israelites were divided and the only tribe still in existence when Jesus was born.

*Prophet*—Someone that God sent to tell his people what was on his mind about their past, present, or future. Seventeen books of the Bible were written by prophets. Most prophets appear in the Old Testament, but there are also a few in the New Testament.

*Messiah*—This is an Old Testament word that means the “Anointed One.” The New Testament word for Messiah is *Christ*.



## A SIMPLE INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

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# 1

One day my son's high school classmate challenged him with these questions: "Isn't the Bible just like the Koran of Islam and the books that the Buddhists follow? They're all old books that teach old religions, aren't they?" My son's friend is not alone in his view of the Bible. The books he mentioned were all written long before we were born. They're all believed to be the authoritative word of God. And they all talk about God and people. But that is pretty much the extent of their similarities.

There are important differences between the Bible and other holy books. First of all, the Bible is a much older book than either the Koran or the teachings of Buddha. Consider this: The entire Bible was finished in A.D. 95. That's about five hundred years before the Koran was written. The teachings of Buddha were not actually written down until around 100 B.C. More than two-thirds of the Bible was completed by that time, and the very first books of the Bible were written 1,300 years before any Buddhist scriptures even existed. So, the Bible has been around much longer than either the Koran or the writings of Buddha.

Another difference is the amazing continuity in the Bible. It was written by more than 50 people whose lives spanned more than 1,500 years. Most of its authors never met one another and yet their writings have a consistent message that develops slowly and carefully throughout their collective work. In other words, the Bible is a collection of writings from God, sent through more than 50 different men, that tells a single story that unfolds over a 1,500-year period. No other collection of books in this world has such diverse origins and yet such continuity and singular purpose! Compare that to the Koran and the teachings of Buddha. One man wrote the Koran over a very short period of time. The teachings of Buddha are largely the work of one man as well and were committed to memory by monks for three hundred years before they ever started writing them down.

However, the greatest difference between the Bible and other religious holy books is not who wrote them or how long it took. The greatest difference is their message. The Bible tells how God reached down to save all people for eternal life. No other book teaches that! The Koran, the teachings of Buddha, and all other religious holy books tell how people must save themselves by working their way up to God. The only holy book that tells us about a God who came down to us and saved us is the Bible. That's a huge difference!

### A Brief Overview of the Bible

The Bible is a single book. But it is also a collection of many different writings. To keep it simple, we call those writings books, but actually only some of them read like a book with a story line that goes from beginning to end. Others are collections of poetry and ancient prophecy. Some are even letters from one person to another or to a group of people. The best way to get to know which books are prose and which are not is by reading the Bible slowly and carefully with study helps. For the moment, keep in mind that there are 66 books in the Bible and that some of the books are telling stories while others are poetry and letters.

### Old Testament Overview

The Bible is divided into two main collections. The first collection of 39 books is called the Old Testament. This section of the Bible was originally written in Hebrew. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament around 1500 B.C. The last book of the Old Testament was written by a prophet named Malachi around 430 B.C. One can easily divide the Old Testament into three main sections: history, poetry, and prophecy.

The first section of the Old Testament is a collection of 17 *historical books*. They run from Genesis to Esther. Each of these books is a historical narrative. As a whole, they tell the story of how God created the universe, the earth, and everything in it. They tell how God made human beings the crown of his creation and how the first