

1. Introduction to the "Big Picture of the Bible"

In this Bible study series we will be considering the "big picture of the Bible", or "what the Bible is all about". As we explore this, let us begin by considering some important truths about the Bible.

Over what period of time was the Bible written? What is significant about this?

The Bible was written over a 1550 year period (from about 1450BC commencing with Moses and concluding about 95AD with the apostle John). What is significant about this time period is that no human being could have overseen the Bible's production – for no one could live for such a length of time.

By what human authors was the Bible written by?

The 66 books in the Bible were written by about 40 authors – prophets of God, song writers (psalmists), apostles of Jesus Christ, historians, etc. Some of the authors were common people; others were royalty.

Although the Bible was written by about 40 human authors and over a 1550 year period of time, we declare that it reads as "one book". Why is that? (cf. 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21)

God inspired its 40 authors to write the books in the Bible; as a result, it reads as one big story – His story. Through inspiration, dictation, visions, and just plain observation, God has had His hand on all the Bible's human authors. As a result, we call the Bible the "Word of God" (cf. 1 Thess 2:13).

How can we be sure that the Bible is inspired of God, and is the "Word of God"?

- Revelation is given to various authors that could only come from outside human knowledge; ie, from God (cf. what God says to Job in Job 38:31 concerning galaxies that we can only observe in our time).
- The Bible has many prophecies that are all fulfilled by its unfolding story; eg, prophecies on Israel, prophecies on the Lord Jesus, prophecies on Jesus' return and the kingdom to come.

How can we tell that the Bible is one book – God's book?

There are many things that help us come to this conclusion. For example, what we begin with in Genesis 1&2 is what we return to in Revelation 21&22; ie, we start with a perfect creation, and will return to a perfect new creation. However, as we shall see, there is a mega story that ties the whole Bible together.

What other things help us know that the Bible is trustworthy and reliable?

- Archaeology verifies the various places and people that the Bible speaks about.
- Historical books give proof that what the Bible says did happen (eg, Jesus in the writings of Josephus).

The Bible's 66 books are broken into two halves – the Old Testament and the New Testament.

What do you think the Old Testament is primarily about? (cf. Psalm 145:1-13; Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39)

At first glance, we may think it's about Israel, as this nation is mentioned many times. However, this is not what the Old Testament is primarily about. Firstly, it's about God. Through His dealings, especially with Israel, we get to see the character and work of God. Secondly, the Old Testament shows us that no human leader is able to deliver people from their sin, and rule them in righteousness, but God points us to One who would come and do this; the Jews call Him the Messiah, we call Him the Christ (Christ Jesus).

What's the New Testament primarily about? (Matt 1:1,1:18-23, 2:1-2; Rev 22:12-21)

At first glance, we may think it's about the church. However, it's primarily about God's Son Jesus. According to prophecy, He is the promised One of the line of Abraham and David, our only saviour from sin, God with us (Emmanuel), the king God has appointed over us, and the One returning one day to bring in the kingdom of God and everlasting righteousness; the One we were to expect, believe in, and follow.

In the light of the emphases in the Old and New Testaments, what is the "big picture of the Bible", or "what is the Bible all about"? Is it about the following? [Discuss]

Salvation: In the Bible God is the awesome God who can save and rescue. In Christ we see His greatest saving act; saving us from sin, judgment, and hell. But "salvation" is pointing us to something greater.

Kingdoms: In the Bible we have the kingdom of Israel, and the kingdom of God. One day God's kingdom will come in full. But the "kingdoms" in the Bible are more a vehicle pointing us to something greater.

The OT points us to Christ; the NT proclaims Him. Is the Bible about Jesus then? [Discuss]

The Bible is about Jesus; as well as the Father who sent Him and raised Him up (John 3:16; Acts 2:24).

But before we conclude that the Bible is about Jesus, consider the thrust of Jesus' mission and His words to us. In the light of this, what is the "big picture of the Bible"? (cf. John 17:3,25-26; 1 John 5:20)

Jesus came to reveal His Father and to reconcile us to the Father, so that we might be in relationship with God. The big picture of the Bible, then, is all about "knowing God" through Jesus Christ (John 14:6, 23).

Summary: **The Bible is all about knowing God personally; knowing God through Jesus Christ.**

2. Made to Know God

Review: *From the previous lesson, what is the Bible all about? What is the big picture of the Bible?*

The Bible is all about knowing God. Through the Bible God reveals His glory and the way to know Him.

How does the Lord Jesus fit into the Bible’s main theme of “knowing God”? (cf. John 14:5-10)

Only through the Lord Jesus can we know God; He reveals the Father to us perfectly (cf. also Heb 1:1-3), and He reconciles us to Him through His death and resurrection so that we can know God personally.

Discuss: *In this study we will consider the first two chapters of the Bible. Some believe these chapters are not to be taken literally; ie, they were written poetically, or in parable form, or philosophically. How should we take these first two chapters? Why? [We should take these chapters literally, believing in a supernaturally working God, a real Adam & Eve as our first parents, etc. God has given us key foundational truths in these chapters. Paul and even the Lord Jesus endorse them; Matt 19:4-5; 1 Cor 15:45; 1 Tim 2:13]*

Study: *Read Gen 1:1-25. What are the key truths that we glean from these opening verses of the Bible?*

- There was a beginning. Nothing or no one existed before the beginning, except God.
- God created everything by speaking it into existence; it did not come about by time and chance.
- God created with diversity, and everything was distinct (of its kind); eg, plants, stars, birds, animals.
- God created all things over six “evenings and mornings” (ie, over 6 days – cf. also Gen 2:1-3).
- All that God created was good (vv.4,10,12,18,21,25). God created a beautiful and perfect world.

In Gen 1:26-27, we read of the creation of mankind (the final creating act of God). What is strikingly different about the creation of mankind, compared to all the other things that God created?

Mankind is made in the image (or likeness) of God. This made him distinct from the animals, and gave him a position higher than all other creatures. He was made as the crown of God’s creation.

What does it mean that mankind was made in the image (or likeness) of God?

God made mankind like Himself; to have a mind so that he could think and reason; to have emotions so that he could feel and respond; to have a will so that he could choose and decide; to have the ability to communicate and articulate his thoughts and feelings with others.

What do you think is the primary reason why God created mankind in His image?

The primary reason is so that mankind would be able to know God. He was given a mind to understand God; he was given emotions to respond to God; he was given a will to choose God; he was given the ability to communicate with God. We were made to know God and be in relationship with Him.

Mankind was given the charge to rule the earth in Gen 1:28. How were we to do this?

Being made in God’s image, we were to rule the earth on God’s behalf, as His representatives. As we ruled this earth, we were to reflect God’s glory and image, and do all things for His glory.

Read Gen 1:28-31. After commanding all creatures to be herbivores, what does God say in v.31?

God didn’t just make everything good – but very good. This is a reference to what He created on the sixth day. In particular, the creation of mankind in His image – in God’s eyes, this was very good.

In Gen 2 we have a more detailed description of the creation of man and woman. What do we learn about the creation of man (Adam) in Gen 2:4-9?

- Adam was made from the dust of the earth; yet from this, God brought forth a glorious creation.
- God breathed into Adam the breath of life to make him a living being with a spirit (we’re not just flesh).
- God planted a beautiful garden called Eden for Adam to live in and cultivate.

What do we learn about the creation of woman (Eve) in Gen 2:18-25?

- Eve was created because Adam was alone (without a corresponding helper).
- God made Eve by taking some flesh from Adam’s side (or rib).
- God made Eve to be one with Adam.

Besides the creation of Adam and Eve, what else do we see in Gen 2:15-17?

God communicated with Adam, and Adam could hear and respond; in other words, Adam knew God and had a real and personal relationship with Him, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The fact that Adam could know God sets the scene for the rest of the Bible. In what way?

The rest of the Bible is about God revealing Himself to us so that we might know Him, and reconciling us to Himself through His Son, after we broke our relationship with God through sin. It’s all about knowing God.

Summary: God made mankind in His image so that we can know Him and relate to Him.

3. Sin Damages us Knowing God

Review: *One of the most important themes in the first chapter of the Bible is Gen 1:26-27. What is it? Mankind was made different from all other creatures – he was made in the image and likeness of God.*

What's one of the key implications of mankind being made in God's image? (cf. Gen 2:15-17)

Mankind could know God and relate to Him. Being made in God's image, he had a mind to understand God, emotions to respond to God, a will to choose God, and the ability to listen and speak with God.

Discuss: *In Gen 3 we are introduced to the serpent. Is this a mythical being personifying evil, or did snakes back then speak and stand on their tail? How should we read this? (cf. Rev 12:7-9) [The serpent in Gen 3 was no "talking snake". He may have appeared in this form, but this was the devil, or Satan]*

Study: *What did God mean when He said in Gen 2:17 that Adam and Eve would die if they sinned?*

They would die both physically and spiritually. Physically their bodies would begin to die (ie, they would be struck with ageing). Spiritually, their relationship with God would die (cf. Isa 59:2).

Before we consider the "fall", what did Adam and Eve appear to have with God in Gen 3:8a?

They appeared to have a daily time with God, who would come and walk and talk with them in the late afternoon. We need to realise this in order to understand the effects of sin on our relationship with God.

Read Gen 3:1-5. What do we learn about Satan? What does the New Testament affirm about him?

Satan was cunning and deceiving. He disguised himself as a serpent or snake, he threw doubt on God's Word and spoke lies, and he tempted Eve to disobey God by what she might gain. Satan is still the same: he deceives us by disguising himself (2 Cor 11:14), lying to us (John 8:44), and tempting us (Matt 4:1).

What caused Eve to yield to Satan's temptation? (Genesis 3:6)

After Satan tempted her, Eve desired the forbidden fruit because it looked delightful, and because of the possibility of it making her wise. This wrong desire led to sin, and sin led to death (cf. Jam 1:15).

What happened immediately after Adam and Eve sinned against God? (Genesis 3:7)

Their innocence was lost and they felt naked. They then, for the first time, chose to live independently of God by not looking to God to meet their needs. Instead, they clothed themselves with fig leaves.

What else happened to Adam and Eve as a result of sin? (Genesis 3:8-10)

They were no longer in fellowship with God. This is clearly seen when God came into the Garden of Eden. Instead of coming to Him and enjoying their fellowship with God, they were afraid, and ran and hid.

What else do we observe Adam and Eve doing in their state of sin? (Gen 3:11-13)

They blamed others for their sin. Adam blamed Eve (and God for giving him Eve), and Eve blamed the Satan. Adam now not only had a broken relationship with God, but a strained relationship with his wife.

What was God's response to Adam and Eve's sin, and the devil's temptation? (Gen 3:14-19)

God cursed the devil and the earth. The devil was damned, and the world was damned to decay (Rom 8:20-22). Adam and Eve, on the other hand, were not cursed, but punished. Eve would suffer the consequences of her sin, and Adam and the human race would be inflicted with suffering and death.

Despite God's just judgment, and mankind's relationship being damaged with God through sin, what do we make of God's actions and announcements in Gen 3:9 & 15?

Even though Adam and Eve had sinned, and God knew this, He sought them out (v.9). Also, in the midst of passing judgment, God promised to deliver the human race from Satan (Gen 3:15) – this is the first prophecy about God using His Son Jesus Christ to deliver us from Satan (cf. Col 1:13-14).

What else did God do for Adam and Eve in His grace? (Gen 3:20-21)

God replaced their fig leave clothes with animal skins. In order to cover them, God had to kill an animal or two. The first death and shedding of blood was by God to cover Adam and Eve after their sin.

What is this act of God covering Adam and Eve with animal skins a beautiful picture of?

It's of Christ covering us with His righteousness through His death so that we might be right with God.

In the next few chapters, we mainly see mankind living independently and in rebellion to God, but they weren't completely cut-off from God. What do you notice in Gen 4:1-8, Gen 5:21-22, Gen 6:5-8?

God, in mercy, came to Cain and warned him of his sin. This showed God hadn't abandoned us. Also, by faith, Enoch walked with God and Noah pleased God and knew God. Yet, knowing God as Adam did had been lost through sin, until the coming of Christ; who would come and reconcile us back to God.

Summary: Sin damages our relationship with God so that we cannot know Him. But in His grace, God permitted man to reach out to Him through faith, until things were restored through Christ.

4. God Making Himself Known in the OT– part 1

Review: *Adam & Eve walked with God and knew God, but what occurred after they sinned? (Gen 3:7-10)*
Their relationship with God was damaged. They no longer walked with God and knew God as previously.

Adam & Eve were punished for their sin. Besides their relationship with God being damaged, they also began to die physically (through ageing). Yet, what hope do we see in Gen 3? (cf. vv. 9, 15, 21)
God came looking for them after their sin; He promised a rescuer (3:15); He clothed them with animal skins, which is a great picture of how Christ would clothe us in His righteousness through His death.

Discuss: *After the fall in Gen 3, there is a very long length of time before Jesus came to fulfil the promise in Gen 3:15. Why is there such a long length of time? Why didn't Jesus come immediately? [Discuss]*
Jesus came when the time was right (Gal 4:4). Also, during this long length of time (the Old Testament period) God was revealing His nature and getting things ready for the coming of His Son.

Study: *After the flood and the tower of Babel, what was the next big thing God did? (Gen 12:1-3)*
God called Abram (Abraham) and He established Abraham's descendants as His people.

Although Jesus hadn't come yet to fully restore our relationship with God, what do we notice between Abraham and God? (Gen 17:1-8, 18:17-23)

God and Abraham had a relationship. God would appear to Abraham and talk with him, letting Abraham know of His plans and purposes. Abraham knew God, and was even called the friend of God (Jam 2:23).

In His dealings with Abraham and his relatives, God's character is revealed. What do we learn from such passages as Gen 19:15-16; 19:24-25; 21:1-2; 22:9-14; 22:15-18?

God is compassionate and merciful, rescuing Lot and his family; God is just and righteous, punishing Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness; God is faithful and true, fulfilling His promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah; God is the provider of our needs, providing a sacrifice in place of Isaac; God has plans and purposes, which primarily are about His Son (Gen 22:18; Gal 3:16).

Another major story in Genesis is that of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. What do we learn about Jacob and God's dealings with him? (Gen 25:29-33; 27:30-35; 28:10-17; 32:9-10)

Jacob was a scheming and deceitful man, but in His grace, God chose to make Himself known to Jacob, and to choose him as the one through whom the Abrahamic promise would be fulfilled. What grace!

The next main character in Genesis is Joseph. What do we learn from God's dealings with Joseph from Gen 37:25-28; 39:19-21; 41:37-41; 50:15-21? Can you see parallels between Joseph and Jesus?

God is able to preserve us and lift us from the lowest place to accomplish His purposes. God is truly all powerful and sovereign. In many ways, Joseph reminds us of Jesus. Jesus was humbled and broken, but God raised Him up to save us from something worse than a famine – spiritual death.

The people of Israel were in Egypt for a long time and after Joseph's generation died out, they began to be oppressed and afflicted by the Egyptians. What do we learn about God from Exod 2:23-25?

God cares. He heard the cry and saw the suffering of His people, and was moved to take action. Also, God is faithful. He had not forgotten His promises in the covenant He had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God struck Egypt with devastating plagues, but spared His own people from the majority of them. In the final plague what did God command? (Exod 12:21-29) What did this foreshadow?

God commanded His people to sacrifice a lamb and to apply its blood to the door of their houses so that the firstborn may not be struck down by God's judgment. This is a powerful picture of Christ, the Lamb of God (1 Cor 5:7; John 1:29). When we apply His blood to our lives, we are spared God's judgment.

What do we learn from Exod 14:13-27 about Israel's deliverance? What is this a picture of?

We see God's awesome power to deliver His people. It's also a picture of the awesome power God would use to bring us out of Satan's dominion and into the kingdom of His Son (Col 1:13-14).

What did Moses, God's deliverer, have with God? (Exod 3:1-6; 24:9-13; 33:7-11)

Moses had a special relationship with God. God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend. Wow!

What was the purpose of the Tabernacle? What did this loudly declare? (Exod 40:34-35)

The tabernacle showed how much God longed to be with His people. It also showed how their sin stopped them from directly coming to God (they could be near, but not close). Only the high priest could come near, once a year, but the people had to be distant. Only in Jesus would the way be fully opened to all.

Summary: **Sin damaged us knowing God, but God still wanted to be with us, to make Himself known, and to bring us back. The Tabernacle proclaims this, but it would only be fully realised in Jesus!**

5. God Making Himself Known in the OT– part 2

Review: *In the first two books of the Bible what do we learn about God after the "Fall" in Gen 3?*

God still reached out to fallen humans (like Abraham, Joseph, Moses), and they could walk with Him and know Him (Exod 33:7-11; Jam 2:23). He also revealed His character in the way He dealt with humans.

The construction of the Tabernacle was very significant. In what way?

It signified God's desire to be with His people, but it also showed how our sin inhibits us from coming directly into God's presence.

Discuss: *We have briefly looked at Genesis and Exodus – they are foundational books of our Bible. But have you ever considered the way the OT is composed. What are the five main sections of the OT?*

[Genesis to Deuteronomy – the Law books; Joshua to Esther – the history books; Job to Song of Solomon – the wisdom books, Isaiah to Malachi – the prophecy books]

Study: *What do the Law books (especially Lev to Deut) reveal? (Lev 11:44-45; Num 15:38-41; Deut 23:14)*

They reveal that God is holy, and that God's people who bear His name, must be holy as well. The Law teaches us what it means to be holy and to live holy.

In the Law books, God tells His people what would happen if they sinned and turned away from Him. How would you summarise what happens in the history books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles? (cf. Josh 24:19-24; Judg 2:6-19; Judg 21:25; 1 Sam 15:10-11; 1 Kings 11:1-8; 2 Chron 36:11-21)

God's people initially followed the Lord, but then they turned away to follow other gods. No matter how many judges God raised up to help them, they would turn away. Even most of their kings led the people astray. Then, after a long time, God's people were finally sent into exile for their rebellion as He had said.

In Ezra and Nehemiah (after exile), how did God's people live? (Ezra 9:1-4; Neh 5:6-10; 13:6-11)

The people continued to go astray, despite good leadership from Ezra and Nehemiah. For example, they married foreign pagan women, the rich took advantage of the poor, and the house of God was neglected.

Through the history books of the OT (Joshua to Esther) we are not just to see Israel's rebellion.

What are we to predominantly see?

We are to see God – we are meant to understand and know Him through His dealings with His people.

From your knowledge of the Old Testament what are the key things that are revealed about God?

He is great, good and kind, just and righteous, gracious and merciful, faithful and true. This is our God!

The wisdom books of the OT, especially the Psalms, highlight the character of God from God's dealings with Israel. As a summary of this, read Psalm 78:17-25, 34-39, 54-72 and discuss.

God is perfect and righteous in all His ways.

In the wisdom book of Job, we see a godly man affected by suffering and taunted by bad friends. He begins to question God and to have a lower view of Him. But what happens? (Job 38:1-7; 40:6-9; 42:5-6) God, in His grace and power, helps to lift Job's sagging eyes up so that he might see and know who God truly is. Job is left speechless (Job 40:3-5) and humble; he ends up knowing God better.

The prophecy books also contain much on God's glorious character. As a sample, read Isa 40:9-17; Jer 31:2-4; Lam 3:19-23; Dan 6:25-27. Why has God revealed His character throughout the OT?

He has revealed His character so that we might know Him and honour Him for who He is.

Read Jer 9:23-24 and Jer 29:10-13. What should we be doing?

We should be glorying in knowing God, and we should be seeking Him so that we might know Him.

Although God had made Himself known through the OT, as the Tabernacle/Temple signified, people could not come near to God due to sin. But what did God promise to do? (Isa 53:1-6)

God promised to send someone to bear the punishment of our sins so that we could be forgiven.

What was the main reason for why God promised to send Jesus to bear our sins? (cf. what the Tabernacle/Temple signified and what happened when Jesus died in Matt 27:50-51)

It was so that we might know God. Through the OT we get to know God, but through Jesus we would come to know God personally; no longer kept distant because of the consequences of sin. Praise God!

What then are the two foremost themes of the Old Testament?

The OT reveals God so that we might know Him, and it reveals Jesus who would bring us to God.

Time permitting, consider these verses on Jesus: Isa 7:14, 9:6-7, 42:1-3, 49:6; Jer 23:5-6; Dan 7:13-14.

Summary: The OT primarily reveals God's character so that we might know about Him, and it reveals the One who would come so that we might know God personally; it's about knowing God.

6. Christ's Coming: Making God Known – part 1

Review: *What are the two main reasons for the Old Testament? (ie, what does the OT reveal?)*

The OT reveals the true character and nature of God so that we might know about Him, and it reveals the Messiah, the One God promises to send, so that we might be reconciled to God (know God personally).

Read Jer 9:23-24 and Jer 29:10-13. What should we be doing?

We should be glorying in knowing God, and we should be seeking Him so that we might know Him.

Discuss: *As we come to the NT, we are introduced to the Lord Jesus Christ. Many have misunderstood who He is and why He came. In our society, what are some of the common misconceptions concerning who Jesus is? What are some of the common misconceptions in regard to why He came? [Discuss]*

Study: *In the opening chapter of the NT, in particular Matt 1:18-25, we are immediately confronted with who Jesus is and why He came. Based on Matt 1, who is Jesus and why did He come?*

Jesus is unlike any other. Born miraculously, He is God with us, and He came to rescue us from our sins.

Note: Both His identity and His mission were also clearly prophesied in the OT (cf. Isa 9:6; 53:6).

The true identity of Jesus is critical. Jesus even stressed this. What do we learn in Matt 16:13-17?

Many misunderstood who Jesus truly is; just like people today. However, Peter understood correctly.

Jesus is the Christ; ie, God's anointed king for us. Jesus is also divine; ie, the Son of God. Interestingly, this was revealed to Peter through the work of God in him (cf. 2 Cor 4:6).

Why should we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? What evidence can we give?

We should believe because Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies of the OT concerning Himself. He also had power over demons, over disease, over death, and the power to forgive sin (who can forgive sin, but God alone). He also rose from the dead, showing that He indeed is truly the Son of God (Rom 1:4).

The Gospel of John particularly highlights the divinity of Christ. What do we learn in John 1:1-3?

Jesus is the Word of God, and He was with God the Father in the beginning (before Creation), and not only has He always been with God the Father, but He is God (divine) as well. He is also our Creator; creating the whole universe, together with the Father (Rev 4:11) and the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2).

What do we learn from the following verses about Jesus? (John 5:17-18; 8:58; 10:30; 20:27-28)

Jesus is truly God. Thomas's response to the resurrection truly seals the testimony. Jesus is Lord and God.

Why do you think it's extremely important in getting Jesus's identity right? [Discuss]

If we don't get Jesus' identity right, then we will dismiss Him as just another religious leader or prophet. When we understand His true identity, we can then appreciate why we should listen to Him (Matt 17:5), and why His death was so significant and how it accomplished so much (cf. John 1:29).

One of the main reasons why Jesus came was to save us from our sins (Matt 1:21). However, while He walked and talked among us for three years, what else was Jesus accomplishing? (cf. John 1:18)

Jesus also came into the world to reveal God the Father. He was able, because He had come from God.

How would you compare the OT revelation of God to that which Jesus brought? (cf. Heb 1:1-2)

The revelation of God in the OT was not complete; it was completed by Jesus. In Jesus we see God in the flesh. Everything we need to know about God was revealed through Christ's presence and teaching. Jesus is like the sun (the light of the world) and the prophets of the OT are like twinkling stars (small lights).

How is Christ qualified to reveal God the Father according to Col 1:15-19 & Heb 1:3?

Christ is the only One who can reveal the Father fully to us, for He is the image of God, the One whom God dwelt in fully (see also Col 2:9), and He is exactly the same as the Father in every way.

A very important passage in the NT is John 14:6-11. We learn about how Jesus is the only One who can bring us to God. What else do we learn from Jesus' conversation with Philip?

When we see Jesus, we see the Father. Jesus spoke the Father's words, did the Father's deeds, and shone the Father's glorious character. In every way, Jesus revealed the true God. He introduced Him to us.

Jesus' main mission was to reconcile us to God through His death and resurrection. Why do you think it was also important for Him to be involved in the mission of revealing God to us?

Jesus wanted us to know what God is like. The true God had been completely misunderstood by the world and even by God's people Israel. He wanted us to know who He was reconciling us to.

Summary: **Jesus primarily came to bring us back to God, but He also came to reveal God (John 1:18; 14:9). Through His life and His teaching, we have a completed and glorious revelation of God.**

7. Christ's Coming: Making God Known – part 2

Review: *Why is it important to get Jesus' identity right?*

If we don't get Jesus' identity right, then we will dismiss Him. Only His true identity helps us to listen to Him (Matt 17:5), to appreciate why He came, and to see His death as extremely significant (John 1:29).

Besides coming to save us from our sins, why else did Jesus come? (John 1:18, 14:9; Heb 1:3)

Jesus came to reveal the Father to us – in Jesus we see the Father clearly. He came to make God known.

Discuss: *What is the core of the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor 1:17, 23)? [the core of the Gospel is Christ's death]*

What are we commanded to remember? (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-26)? [We are to remember Christ's death]

Why is Christ's death emphasised so much in the Scriptures compared to other events? [Discuss]

Study: *We saw in our last lesson from Matt 1:21 that Jesus came to save us from our sins. What are we meant to understand by this? (Matt 25:31-33, 41-46; Rev 20:11-15)*

Jesus came to save us from the consequences of our sins; to save us from judgment, from God's wrath, and from eternal punishment in hell (the lake of fire); where there will be ongoing torment forever.

How did Jesus save us from the consequences of our sins? (Isa 53:5-6; Rom 3:23-26; Col 2:13-14)

Jesus was punished for our sins so that we could be forgiven. God dealt with our sins justly by punishing Jesus for them, and was then able to extend grace and mercy to us (if we trust in Jesus).

But Jesus didn't just die on the cross to save us from hell. What else did Jesus die for? (John 3:16)

Jesus died to give us eternal life. He came so that we might live forever with God in His glorious presence.

In John 17:3, what definition does Jesus give us for eternal life? What does this definition indicate?

In this verse Jesus doesn't describe eternal life as a long, long time, or a place that is free from suffering and pain. He describes it as "knowing God" – knowing God the Father and Jesus the Son. This shows us that Jesus' atoning death was more than just saving us from hell; He died to reconcile us to God.

The primary purpose of the cross was to enable us to know God. This purpose was made clear the moment Jesus died. What happened (Matt 27:50-51)? What's so significant about this? (cf. Heb 10:19-22)

At the moment Jesus died the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This curtain was thick and huge – so this "renting" was an act of God. This curtain also acted as a powerful sign that no one could approach God due to sin. But the moment Jesus died, God tore the curtain to show what Christ's death had accomplished. Through Jesus' death, our sins have been dealt with and anyone (through faith in Christ) can now approach God and know God.

The reality of what Christ's death had accomplished for us is also emphasised after Christ's resurrection. What do we learn from Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene in John 20:17?

Jesus' death and resurrection opened the way for us to know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as our God and our Father. Jesus had made it possible for us to know God and to be His child.

There are many verses in the NT that describe how our relationship with God was restored through Jesus' death and the shedding of His blood for us. What do you learn from the following verses?

Rom 3:21-24 We have righteousness; ie, a right standing with God. We're no longer condemned (Rom 8:1).

Rom 5:1-2 We have peace with God, though once we were enemies and objects of wrath (Rom 5:8-10).

Eph 1:5-7 We have redemption; once we were slaves (Eph 2:1-3), but now we are God's children.

Col 1:19-22 We have reconciliation; we have been brought near to God through Christ's shed blood.

A great passage on our reconciliation to God is 2 Cor 5:18-21. What do we learn in this passage?

God was actually in Christ reconciling us to Himself. In order to reconcile us, Christ became "sin on our behalf" (v.21) so that we could have our sins "not counted against us" (V.19). NB: As reconciled people, we are also to be involved in God's work of helping others to be reconciled to God through Christ.

One of the striking realities of being a Christian is that we are part of God's family now; children of God. What do you learn from the following verses?

John 1:12-13 We have been declared to be the children of God and have been born of God (John 3:3-5).

Rom 8:14-17 We have God's Spirit, who testifies that we are God's children and that God is our Father.

1 John 3:1-2 We are God's dearly beloved children, and one day we will be like the Son of God Himself.

Summary: Jesus came to reveal the Father to us, and He came to reconcile us to the Father. His death took away our sin so that we could approach God and know Him as a beloved child.

8. Growing in Knowing God

Review: *Jesus came to save us from the consequences of our sins. This includes saving us from judgment and condemnation. But what else did Jesus' death accomplish for us? (Matt 27:50-51; Col 1:19-20)*

Jesus died to reconcile us to God the Father so that we can approach Him and know Him.

How does the NT describe our new relationship with God through Christ? (Rom 5:1; 8:15)

We are at peace with God; and are a beloved child of God. We have been reconciled through Christ.

Discuss: *Many Christians don't seem to grow in their Christian life. They end up being more like a stunted sapling, than a grand tree. In what ways are we meant to grow? [Discuss]*

Study: *At the end of his second letter, Peter gives a very important command. What is it? (2 Pet 3:18)*

We are to **grow** in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. We are not to remain the same; we are to grow.

What does it mean to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?

It means to appreciate more and more His gracious work in saving us through His death and resurrection, and it means to grow in knowing and understanding who Jesus Christ is.

Paul wasn't just content that he had made his "decision" to make Jesus his Lord and Saviour.

What was Paul's great ambition and goal in life? (Phil 3:7-11)

Paul wanted to know Christ more and more. He wanted to know Christ intimately; even to share in His sufferings and power in this life, and then one day attain to the resurrection of the dead to be with Him.

Paul was true to his ambition to know Christ more. Near the end of his life, what could he say to his young apprentice Timothy in 2 Tim 1:12? Why?

He could declare that "I know whom I have believed". He didn't just believe in Jesus – he knew Jesus. This is because he maintained a daily walk with the Lord. He didn't just do "ministry". He walked with Christ and knew Him more and more each day. This is meant to be the normal Christian life.

This growing in "knowing Christ" is so critical. It's one of the main sources for assuring us that we truly belong to Christ and are saved. What do we learn from Matt 7:22-23 and John 10:14?

Jesus will turn many people away from Him because, although they did many "Christian acts", they did not know Him ("I never knew you"). Christ's true sheep know Him, and Christ knows them. Growing in knowing Christ therefore shows that we indeed know Him and are saved.

So far we have considered knowing Christ. When we know Him, what does this result in according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus in John 8:19 and John 14:6-7?

It results in us knowing God. To know the Son is to know the Father. As we saw in our last lesson, Jesus came so that we might know the Father (cf. 1 John 5:20).

How are we to know God the Father and our Lord Jesus more? Cf. Paul's prayer in Eph 1:15-17.

We grow in our knowing of God our Father and the Lord Jesus by growing in our knowledge of God. We ought to pray for ourselves and each other that we might be given wisdom and revelation in knowing God. God is able to do this (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). But we need to ask Him.

How often do you pray that you might know God more? If you don't pray this often, or at all, why?

Often we mistakenly think that we know all that there is to know about God. We have forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, and know that God is great, good, and gracious. But there is so much more to know about God and depths to plumb that will take eternity to explore (cf. Psa 145:3; Rom 11:33-36).

In this life the Bible is the key to knowing God. But how do we read it, and how should we read it?

We often read the Bible to get comfort, or to find out what we should be doing. However, it's primarily the revelation of God, so that we might know the way to Him (Christ), and so that we might know Him. Therefore, every time we read the Bible, we should be primarily seeking to know Him more – do you?

What must we ensure to help us to continue to grow in knowing God? (Gal 4:8-11; Jam 4:4)

We must cling to Christ and not be swayed from Him. We also must keep ourselves from the ways of this fallen world. We cannot walk with God and know Him if we are worldly (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

We were made to know God, saved to know God, and the Christian life is meant to be all about knowing God more. What's the benefit of growing in knowing God? (Col 1:9-10)

It goes hand in hand with a life that is lived worthily for God's glory and fruitfully for Christ's kingdom. It also brings us greatest joy. To know our Father and the Lord Jesus is everything.

Summary: We have been made and saved to know God – may we grow in knowing Him more.

9. Knowing God in Eternity

Review: *Christians are meant to be "growing". What are we meant to be growing in? (2 Peter 3:18)*

We are meant to be growing in the grace and in the knowledge (personal knowing) of Jesus. Are you?

How did the apostle Paul live the Christian life according to Phil 3:10-11 and 2 Tim 1:12?

Paul had a heart to know Christ (and God the Father). He could say near the end of his life that he "knew whom he believed"; this is because Paul walked with Christ and sought to know Him more and more.

Discuss: *Most of us don't think too much of eternity. Why is that?*

Often we just focus on the here and now, letting this life consume us. We live by sight, rather than by faith.

Why is it important to dwell on eternity and what is to come? (cf. Heb 12:2; 1 John 3:2-3)

When we think of eternity it helps us persevere and it leads to us living lives for God's glory.

When you do think of eternity, what fills your mind? Will we be sitting on clouds playing harps?

Study: *Just before His arrest and crucifixion, in John 14:1-3 Jesus instructs His disciples on things regarding the future. How does Jesus describe heaven? What is He preparing for us in heaven?*

He describes us being in "My Father's house" – not "My Father's country". And in this "house", Jesus is preparing a "dwelling place" or a "permanent lodging place" for us. In other words, the picture Jesus gives us is that we will be right with God our Father and with the Lord Jesus – in the "same house".

Some older English translations use the word "mansion" to convey what Christ is preparing for us. In what way can this term be misleading? What emphasis should we draw from Jesus' words?

We might think from the term "mansion" that we will be given a grand separate house to dwell in, in heaven – a house that is just "for me". But that's not the emphasis of Jesus' words in John 14:2. Jesus is wanting us to see that we will be permanently dwelling with our Father – in the "same house".

In Revelation 7:15-17 we have another passage about how eternity will be. What do we learn?

We will be before the throne of God, serving Him in His temple, with God spreading His house (or tabernacle) over us; thus, we will be forever in God's glorious presence. In this same place the Lord Jesus will also be, who will shepherd us forever, protecting and providing for us.

What do you make of the statement "God will wipe every tear from their eyes" in Rev 7:17?

No longer will we have sorrow and tears, and God Himself will perform this very intimate act in wiping away our tears. No one wipes away our tears except a very dear loved one. That's how God will be to us!

To be reassured that these verses in Rev 7:15-17 do speak about our eternal destiny, read Rev 7:9-14. What do we learn here about those who will one day be before God's throne?

Those who will be before God's throne are a great number who come from the nations. They have persevered through this time of great tribulation (which has been since the birth of the church). Most importantly, they have washed themselves clean of their sins by trusting in Christ's shed blood for them.

Read Rev 21:1-3 concerning the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. What is remarkable?

In the new Jerusalem, God's holy city, on the new earth that God will make, God Himself will dwell with His people in the city. No longer will God be in heaven, and we will be on earth. Heaven will be on earth.

Read Rev 21:4-7. What are some of the "new things" we will enjoy in glory?

We will no longer experience sadness and pain (v.4). We will never be in need (v.6). But above all, we will enjoy the most perfect and complete relationship with God. We will be His children and He will be our God (v.7). We will know and enjoy God forever.

In Rev 21:10-21 the apostle John is privileged to see the "new Jerusalem" where we will dwell with God. This is "My Father's house", as Jesus put it. What is affirmed in Rev 21:22-23 about this city?

There will be no temple in the city. This is because the Father and the Lord Jesus will be present – they will be the temple. Their presence will make the city equivalent to the "holy of holies" in the Old Testament temple. We will be in the "holy of holies"; no longer outside. There will also be no sun, for the glory of the Father and the Son will illuminate the whole city. Wow!

What else do we learn from Rev 22:1-5 concerning our future state?

Besides enjoying perfect health and eternal life, and having every need met through the "water of life", we will see God face to face, and will even wear the great name of our God on our forehead. What glory!

When we think of what we have considered in this study, what is the main emphasis?

We will know and dwell with the Father and Son forever. For this we were made; for this we were saved.

Summary: The Bible's emphasis is knowing God through the Son; one day we will know Him fully.