

## A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

(A Gospel Presentation)

**Explanatory Note:** How the Holy Spirit opens the door to present the Gospel usually varies with each circumstance. However, our responsibility is to recognize the opening and be ready to adapt the message of the Gospel to that need. Often that need will show up in the form of troublesome questions. When that is the case, something like the following might be said. The parts that are underlined refer to the diagram (see last page) and indicate when to add it to the diagram when making the presentation.

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Joe, those are really important questions. I'd like to talk them over with you; but before we get started, could I ask you a question? Are you aware of the main idea of the Bible? Could you summarize for me what the Bible is all about?

(In most cases persons will reply in the negative.) Well, Joe, why don't I take a few minutes and attempt to give you a summary of the Bible, and then we can talk over your questions. Let me try to diagram it for you like this. (Begin your diagram with just the straight, horizontal line.)

The very first words of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) are "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This can be called in a word Creation. According to the Bible, there actually was a beginning of time and space, so one can actually know the historical origin of things.

This most basic verse in the Bible states more, however, for it makes plain that at the time of the "beginning" God existed. He is in fact eternal. So at the outset the Bible takes into account the fact of what has been called the "supernatural reality." Everything there is, in other words, cannot be judged on a material or physical basis. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit existed before the beginning, and it was this Trinity Who decided to create. Which is also another way of saying, Joe, that we live in a personal universe. God is, and He is present.

The Bible therefore begins by asserting God's reality and thus explaining the origin of the material world. In so doing, it also answers a question troubling many persons, "Who am I?" Rather than just a "speck of protoplasm floating on a sea of meaninglessness," as one person described himself, man according to the Bible is a creature made by God. As such he bears His image. Man really is somebody!! He has value and worth! And furthermore, as God's creation he has been given purpose and responsibility. God designed man with something particular in view, and man despairs unless he fulfills it.

So God began by creating the first man, Adam, and the first woman, his wife Eve, and He put them in a beautiful place called the Garden of Eden. Here the first couple enjoyed their worth and purpose before God. It really was paradise!

Now God certainly showed that He loved man; but He also wanted man to show that he loved Him. God is personal after all. He's living. He can be known . . . communicated with . . . loved. So God arranged for man to have that opportunity. He presented him with the choice to love Him and serve Him as his Creator. God simply placed one tree in the Garden off limits. To eat of that tree was to choose to disobey, to go independent, and to incur an awesome penalty, death! Man's created purpose was to love and serve God. Would he choose to do it? Well, Joe, under the temptation of Satan, a rebellious and

## A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE, page 2

fallen angel, Adam and Eve willfully chose to eat of that tree. Instead of choosing to love God, they chose to rebel against God. And that, Joe, is the record of how “sin” historically came into the world. Man by his own choice had brought down on himself and his descendants all the consequences of his rebellion of which God had warned him . . . guilt, shame, misery, and ultimately death. And even the ground felt the effect of God’s curse for sin.

Now the whole story could have ended here. God could have just wiped everything out and started again. But His plan was to establish another arrangement or *covenant* by which He would restore a people for Himself in a restored Kingdom. In Genesis 3:15 God declared that He would bring this about through “the seed of the woman,” and that’s just what the rest of the Bible is all about . . . how God would do it. (Draw the overarch as you state these words “how God would do it,” drawing from left to right.)

This promise of “the seed” was first given in the presence of Adam and Eve. Later God renewed it to Noah, the man who built the ark at the time of the Great Flood. Still later God appeared to a herdsman named Abraham and said that through his “seed” - a person - all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham’s son Isaac was next to hear that promise, and his son Jacob (later changed to Israel) was chosen as the channel for this good news. Jacob had twelve sons, and the promise came upon Judah, the one from whose descendants the name “Jew” comes. So, through “the children of Israel” God made clear His Messiah, His anointed One, would come.

When you begin reading the second book of the Bible, Exodus, the children of Israel had become a nation down in Egypt. They had become virtual slaves in bondage, but God did not forget His promise. He raised up a man named Moses by whom He led them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, back to the land of Canaan, or what is now modern Palestine. En route they came to a craggy peak called Mount Sinai. There on Sinai, a place you can visit today, God summoned Moses to meet with Him, and on that historic occasion God gave Moses His Law, what is commonly called “the Ten Commandments.”

Now this Law came from God, Whom the Bible describes as holy, pure, good and everything right. And the Law showed His character. That’s why there really is a “right” and “wrong,” Joe. God . . . that’s the way He is. What is compatible with Him is right; what is not is wrong. But when man looks at this Law of God, he recognizes that he himself does not possess that character . . . he is un-God-like. This Law being perfect and righteous suddenly makes a man realize how different from God he has become when it comes to personal goodness. Loss of temper, depression, self-centeredness, discontent, hate, murder, war, . . . on and on we could go naming evidences of the stark truth that man is a law-breaker, a real sinner. While it is often difficult for a person to admit this, at least it gives a plausible answer to his question, “What am I like?” The answer is simply “a rebel against God and His Law, and so likewise I’m suffering the consequences.” Unlike what many people think, Joe, God gave Moses His Law in Exodus 20 so His people could know their real condition. It’s like what one reads in the New Testament in Romans 3:20 . . . “through the law comes the knowledge of sin.”

With this Law, however, came hope as well; for God also gave Moses careful instructions to show how such sinful person could worship and find acceptance with such a holy God. Since the first sin committed by Adam had brought death as its curse, so it would only be through death or “sacrifice” that God would accept man and his worship. That may sound strange, but that really is the way it is according to the Bible since God’s character includes justice. Sin must be punished by death. Therefore, God gave detailed directions for offering sacrifices, including a place of worship called a Tabernacle (or tent), and elaborate duties for specially appointed priests. Now the Bible explains that the ritual itself did not make

## A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE, page 3

the people holy or acceptable with God, but rather it all pointed to the coming Messiah, the seed of the woman as promised, Whose "sacrifice" or death would make man acceptable to God. The Old Testament, therefore, the first part of our Bible with its kings like David and Solomon, all look forward to this Coming One, this seed of the woman.

Well, Joe, as one begins to read the New Testament, he discovers something is indeed new! The Promised One is coming! Born of a young virgin called Mary, supernaturally conceived in her by the Holy Spirit, God's Son came into the world. Once again God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit had arranged that it would be the Son of God who would offer Himself to come as that "Seed," just as the prophets had foretold. He was named "Jesus" for He would "save His people from their sins." Thus, born in Bethlehem in poor conditions and reared in Nazareth in his stepfather Joseph's carpenter shop, Jesus Christ spent the first thirty years of His earthly life.

Now at this point the Bible tells us He began to carry out His specific purpose in coming into the world. A man called John, nicknamed "the Baptizer," introduced Him. One day he pointed Him out, "Look, The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This title sounds strange, unless of course one remembers what we have been saying about the necessity of sacrifice or death for acceptance with God. The significant thing about this statement is that God Himself sent Jesus into the world to be His sacrifice for sin! God in history was in the act of carrying out His promise or covenant through the "Seed of the woman," Jesus Christ. In short, God Himself was seeking out His people so that they could -- and would -- be saved.

Everywhere Jesus went, He went about doing good. Where Adam had refused to love God and obey Him, Jesus was perfectly responsive to doing God's will. He served God by choice. He kept the Law of God absolutely perfectly! He was in the sight of God really righteous. And God was pleased with Him. But beyond this, Jesus showed that He had come from God by healing the sick, curing the crippled, and even on occasion raising the dead! Everything about Jesus' character and life pointed men to God. He was, in fact, God come in the flesh. As such, He possessed the power to accomplish for us what Adam had forfeited.

But Jesus also preached. He told people about God, about themselves, about the world, and about why He had come. He showed by His love and concern that people--men, women and children--had worth and value; but yet He spoke plainly to them of their sin and of God's judgment on sin. He bluntly told people, "Repent!" He commanded them to turn from self-centeredness and pride back to God. He exposed their self-righteous religion as a farce, and told them to admit their sinfulness and seek God's forgiveness. When they heard Jesus, people heard truth. And lawbreakers usually do not like to hear that kind of criticism, Joe, even if it is true, and even if it is God Himself Who is saying it. So, the religious leaders stirred up the people against Jesus, drummed up false charges against Him, and pressured the Roman governor Pilate to sentence Him to death! Incredible? Yes, but that's the record. At a place called Calvary outside Jerusalem Jesus was nailed to a cross and left to die. And He willingly died. While His murderers thought they had rid themselves of this trouble-maker, their plot fell right into the plan of God. In fact, they had been the means by which God's sacrifice for sin, the Lamb of God, had been offered! Yet, three days later, Jesus miraculously came back to life. He rose from the dead, His work on earth completed. That's what Easter is all about, Joe.

And this is the heart of the Bible's message. In a few words it can be said like this (I Corinthians 15:3, 4): "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in

## A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE, page 4

accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” This focal point of history--the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus--points out the answer to man’s question “What do I need?” Of all the things man thinks he needs, the Bible says his basic need is to be brought back into a right relationship with his Creator, God. Without that, he is doomed. So, it really is of first importance to recognize in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus how God calls us into this right relationship with Him. And according to the Bible, it’s only in Jesus that God does it.

What then does God call upon man to do? Well, He certainly does not call upon people to save themselves. Rather, He calls men, women, and children--in fact, He commands them--to believe in Jesus as their sacrifice for their sin. God offers mercy and forgiveness to every sinner who looks to Jesus’ death on the cross as the completed sacrifice for his sin. Joe, it’s like accepting Jesus as your substitute. Instead of your having to die because of your sin, you accept your substitute. Instead of your having to die because of your sin, you accept God’s offer to have Jesus as your substitute. And when you accept and lean on Him as your substitute, you are turning from your sinful lifestyle back to the obedience of God. Jesus becomes your Lord, your King. His will becomes your concern. It is a bit mysterious, Joe, but that’s the way God works by His Spirit in bringing a sinner into a right relationship with Him. God causes him to see that Jesus Christ alone can meet his need, and he gladly turns to Him as his substitute.

Well, let me finish the story, Joe. A short time after Jesus rose from the dead, and after showing Himself alive to His friends, He returned to God the Father in heaven. And the Bible states He is there today, alive and ruling by His Holy Spirit Whom He sent into the world. As His disciples watched Him ascend up into the clouds, two angels appeared and told them, “This Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). So, the Bible says Jesus will, in time and space, come to earth again.

Unlike his first coming, Jesus’ second coming will be with power and splendor. And everyone will see Him. I don’t know how that will work, Joe, but that’s what the Bible says. And everyone will appear before Him for a Final Judgment. In John 5:28, 29 Jesus said it this way: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment or hell or another way of saying it is eternal death.”

So, when a person asks, “What is going to happen to me?”--a very important question to ask--the answer in the Bible is clear. He is going to meet Jesus Christ! And Christ, God’s appointed King, will pronounce judgment. Those persons who have put their trust in Christ as their sacrifice and submitted to His rule will enjoy everlasting life with God and His people in His new heavens and new earth, His new paradise (II Peter 3:13). In fact, Joe, according to Jesus’ word in John 5:24, persons believing in Jesus won’t even have to experience wondering what Jesus will say: “he . . . does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” So a believer receives eternal life at the point in time when he believes in Jesus! But on the other hand, those who neglect or refuse Christ’s sacrifice for sin, persisting in their own self-trust and rebellion against God and His Word . . . well, they are choosing terrifying consequences. They are consigning themselves to an eternal future of hell under God’s anger. Revelation 20:14 calls this a “second death” and a “lake of fire.”

Well, Joe, there you have in a few words an overall view of what the Bible is all about. With a clear explanation of the origin of things on the one hand, and with a clear setting forth of what we look



## A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE, page 5

forward to, the Bible puts man in the context of true history. We have the facts about how long it has been since Jesus died. The Bible does not tell us either how long we have to live or when time will end and Jesus will return. But it does tell us how we can have eternal life, and that's why the Bible has often been called "good news." Does this all make sense, Joe? Does it throw any light on the questions you were asking when we began this conversation?

(At this point, give Joe plenty of time to give his reactions and ask any questions. His original questions may have disappeared, and a new set of questions emerged. Evaluating the validity of his questions, answer them with the Scriptures themselves. Tell Joe what the Bible says about his questions. Stay with the Bible. Before you conclude, be sure to lay the call to faith and repentance upon Joe. You may say something like this.)

Joe, it is impressive to me that God cares about us . . . so much so that He has told us what we need to know and provided the way by which we can be restored to His fellowship and escape the judgment our sin deserves. Suppose, however, Jesus were to return tomorrow and you were called up to give an account. How would you fare?

A simple way to look at this would be to ask yourself if you have ever come to God by faith and asked Him to give you eternal life in Jesus Christ? Have you, in other words, accepted God's gift in Jesus as your sacrifice for sin? Another way to put it is like this: have you turned from your sinful lifestyle where you are running things and turned to Christ as the One you are choosing to serve? Joe, if you are still living like Adam chose to live--independent, doing your own thing--you have only one future ahead . . . eternal death. But if you respond in faith and obedience to God's call to you to believe in Jesus, you will receive His forgiveness, eternal life, and escape from hell. It's like John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Let me encourage you with one final word of Scripture. Romans 10:13 says, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." If you have never cashed in on this promise, Joe, is there any reason why you could not ask God right now to save you through Jesus?

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Steps to learning the above presentation:

1. If possible, watch/listen as an experienced person makes the presentation, using the diagram as he speaks.
2. Study the portions of Scripture used, checking the context of each reference, answering questions surrounding each portion.
3. Memorize the "flow" of the presentation, not trying to verbalize each word or sentence, but giving the sense of the historical content.
4. Practice giving the presentation alone at first, then with someone who will act like Joe. These practice sessions are vital to learning.
5. Pray for a readiness of heart to meet the need of those to whom God desires you to witness.

# GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

