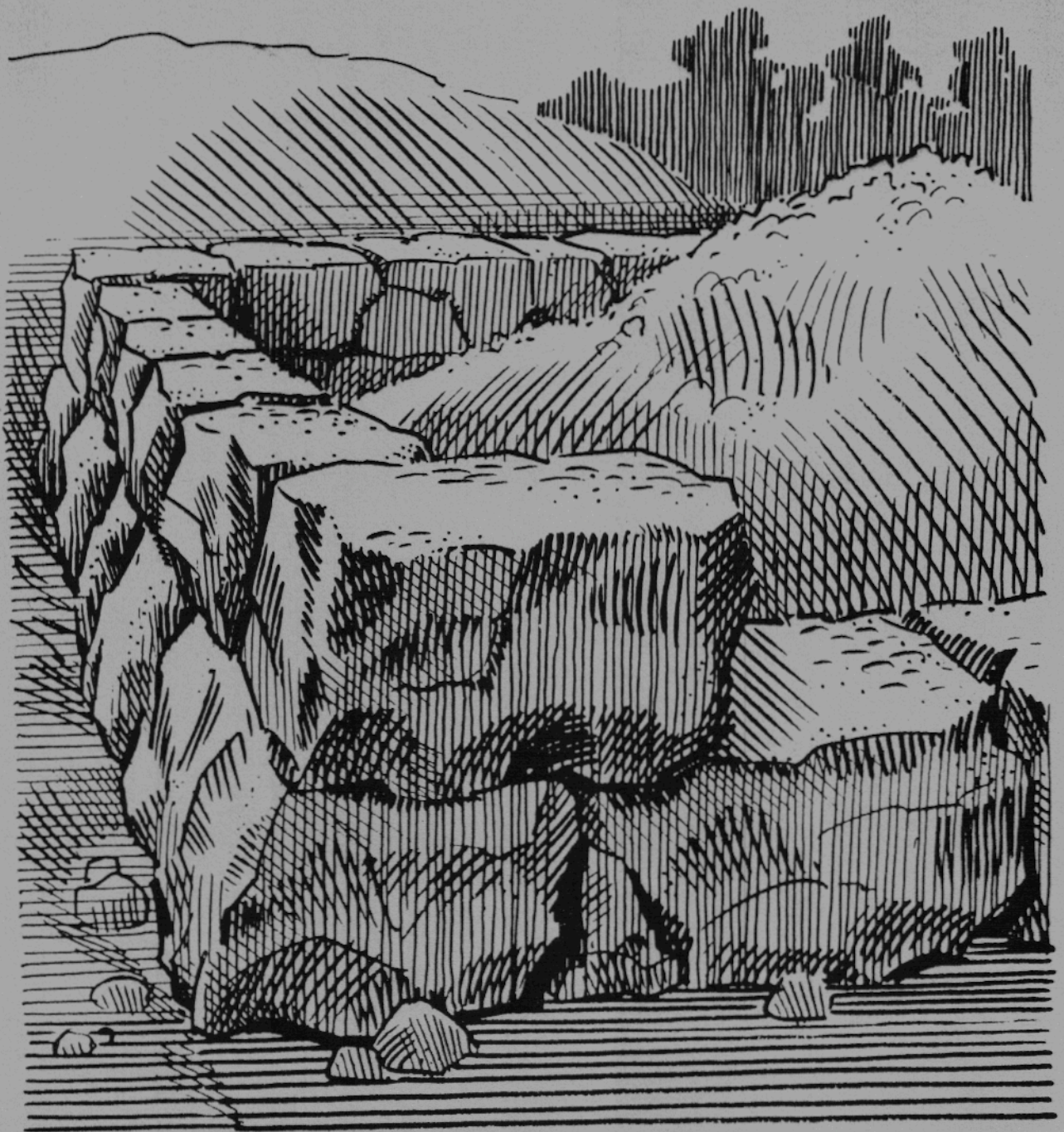


foundations for faith

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

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HOW TO USE "FOUNDATIONS FOR FAITH"

(This section is for the leader of these studies.)

The way from darkness to light and a living relationship with God is unique to every individual. Yet there are some things which are basic and necessary for all of us. These four studies are designed to give knowledge of those big basics in progressive steps.

Two reasons for the darkness of not knowing God are lack of knowledge about God and the stubbornness of our hearts toward Him. These studies seek to provide the needed knowledge and to encourage a turning toward Him with the will. There are suggestions each time to help people respond to God at the level of their understanding at that time, rather than proposing as a first response the gigantic step of total commitment at the end of the series. The responses suggested are related and appropriate to each lesson: the *first* time, simply to ask God to lead to the truth about Himself; the *second* time, to acknowledge to Him one's guilt and need for forgiveness; and the *third*, after seeing that Jesus is both Lord and God, to open one's heart toward Him and ask Him to reveal himself further. With this background, people can grasp the significance of the Cross (the *fourth* study), and that final commitment of genuine faith seems to follow more easily when there has been some previous response to the Lord.

TO BEGIN WITH

It seems to be most effective and comfortable for new people when —

- 1) The invitation is to a "four-time series" rather than to an unending Bible study or "to church."
- 2) The place is where they will feel at ease, such as the home of a friend or their own home.
- 3) The atmosphere is informal, not like a "meeting."

WITH A GROUP OR ONE-TO-ONE

These studies can be used either by a group or by a Christian doing it with one other person.

1. *When used with a group*

- a. A small group is most effective (4 to 8 at most). In a larger group the new people are hesitant to talk about their doubts and questions, or to say what they are thinking.
- b. It is helpful to find another believer with whom to pray and to share the leading, answering of questions from group members, and talking with individuals.
- c. Plan and invite so the majority present will be nonchristians. In this way those not believing yet will not feel intimidated or pressured.

- d. Sometimes people want to join the studies when they are already in progress. Because it is difficult to understand the later lessons without the background knowledge from the foregoing ones, it is wise to suggest that they wait until the series is done again.
 - e. If any of the group miss a lesson along the way, try to study it with them before the next time so they will be able to understand the following ones.
2. *When used one-to-one*
- a. Have it be a "study together" atmosphere, not a teacher/pupil one. It helps to take turns reading the Bible passages. Actually, the same thing can be said for study in a group.
 - b. For the most part let the other person answer the questions first, but add your findings sometimes, being careful to keep to simple basics.

HOW TO GET STARTED

1. Get acquainted with the four studies yourself. Read and think through them as if you were hearing it all for the first time.
2. If studying with a group, decide which of you will be the "Question Asker" for each study.
3. Be praying that you will be led to people whose hearts are prepared.
4. To find those "prepared" people —
 - * Be alert to remarks or attitudes which show they are thinking about spiritual matters, are having problems or sensing need, or simply that they are open.
 - * Possible approaches: "Have you ever read the Bible?" "Do you think God exists?" "What do you think He's like?" "Did you ever wish you could know Him?"
 - * To arouse interest or even curiosity, you can talk about this series using the lesson titles to describe the contents simply. And "It gets everything together — what the Bible says God is like and how we can know Him." "There is no pressure to believe anything. It's just a frank examination of what the Bible says."
5. Set the dates and time when those who are interested will be able to come four consecutive times. Once a week is a good pace, allowing time to read the Bible in the interval, and yet not time to forget what is learned in the studies. Doing one or two lessons daily (as at a conference) is possible, but people understand far better when a time interval allows Bible reading between studies.

THE STUDIES

WHY LOOSE LEAF

These study guides are in loose leaf form so you can give a copy each time to each person. Some people like to follow along in it as you study; others prefer just to hear the questions and look at the Bible. But giving them copies means they will not have to try to take notes as you study, and all of them can take the guide home to look through again if they want to.

Please note that it is best **not** to give copies of all four of the lessons from the start of the series, particularly so that they will not read the fourth study without having studied the foregoing ones. And you will have noticed that this section on "How to use..." the series is not meant to be given to the new people.

WHY QUESTIONS

These studies are in question form to make it possible for any Christian to study them with friends or with family, with one person or with a small group. It isn't necessary to be a "teacher."

Questions help us to look for and discover information for ourselves. We get involved actively in the study rather than just listening passively.

These questions are designed to help a person observe what the Bible actually says. It may be necessary to remind people to look for what the Bible is saying rather than just giving their own ideas. Also emphasize that these questions want simple, obvious answers, not deep, complicated ones. As much as possible let them have the stimulation and pleasure of finding things themselves.

READING THE BIBLE

If the new person doesn't have a Bible, arrange to loan one during the four time series: In many cases, response to the Lord is in direct proportion to the person's own reading of the Bible between studies. Suggestions of what to read (see the end of each lesson) and an interested query about what they are noticing can encourage them to read.

Comprehension is better if Bible passages are read by paragraphs or large thought units rather than by taking turns verse by verse.

Belief in the inspiration and authority of the Bible need not to be made a prerequisite for studying it. That often follows naturally as people study it for themselves. If insisted on before they have adequate information, it can arouse antipathy unnecessarily.

OTHER POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

Try to keep new listeners in mind and help them see the big, basic, simple points each time. Detailed explanations can be confusing to someone hearing for the first time.

Be unshockable, open to any opinion.

If anyone is argumentive, gently repeat that "We're studying *to see what the Bible says*, so let's honestly try to discover that, whether or not we agree with it right now."

During the study time try not to get sidetracked with arguments, such as about "science" in Genesis 1 or miracles. You can suggest that those interested talk about it after the lesson is finished.

Each study can be covered in about 1½ hours if you keep moving right along. Most people tire and can't concentrate well for longer than that. When less than 1½ hours is available,

the lessons can be divided in half. If time permits, however, there is a big advantage in getting the overall picture in four sessions.

RESPONDING TO GOD

At the end of each study there is a suggestion for an appropriate response to God as a result of what was seen in the Bible. This is an important moment, frightening to some, but eagerly used by others. It can be handled either with silent prayer or by praying aloud. In either case encourage them to speak to God simply and honestly about what they are thinking — doubts or questions as well as requests for confessions. Praying aloud makes us put things into definite words instead of just having vague feelings. However, in a group it is better to suggest praying silently lest anyone feel coerced into praying when not ready to do so. In a one-to-one situation you can encourage (but not insist on) praying aloud. At the end each time let your own or that of another believer be an example not of a lengthy, formal prayer, but of a short, sincere talk with a loving Father.

Unless a person spontaneously shares how he is responding to God during the times for silent prayer, it is usually best not to ask. But when chatting before or after the study times, a general question such as, "Are there any points which you can't understand or accept?" will help them to ask questions and bring up problems they have been thinking about. Avoid pushing or hurrying people toward a positive response to God, no matter how much you long for it. Let God move them. (Your prayers for them when they aren't listening can be as fervent as you feel!) However, by the close of the series there should be rapport with each person to find out how far he or she has come and to let him know your loving concern that he will come to know this living Lord.

At the close of the fourth study be sure to give an opportunity to believe, and afterwards to say they have done so. If they are not ready yet, assure them that they can settle things with the Lord by themselves as soon as they are ready, and encourage them to go on reading the Bible.

Don't panic if people go home after the fourth time without making a clear-cut decision. The Lord will continue to work in them, and they will continue to think. They know enough to turn to Him when they are ready, and a decision made when alone is more genuine and lasting than a half-hearted or pretended one made under pressure. You will probably find there are as many ways of coming to God as there are people who come.

WHAT NEXT?

Most people who study this series become so interested in the Bible that they request further study. When such an interest is expressed, it is possible to introduce the MARK study guide of the Neighborhood Bible Studies series. For further help in discussing Bible studies see the N.B.S. guide, *How to Start a Neighborhood Bible Study*, and the introductory pages of the Mark guide.

If your local bookstore does not carry the N.B.S. Guides (by Kunz and Schell), Japanese editions can be ordered from —

Seisho o Yomu Kai
PO Box 58
Machida Shi, Tokyo 194
Tel.:(0427) 26-0424

Both English and Japanese editions can be ordered from —

Christian Literature Crusade
English Department
OSCC Bldg., 2-1 Surugadai
Kanda, Chiyoda Ku, Tokyo 101
Tel.: (03) 294-0776

In the U.S. most Christian Bookstores carry (or will order) the N.B.S. Guides, which are published by Tyndale. Or both Japanese and English editions can be ordered from —

Neighborhood Bible Studies
Box 222
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522
Tel.: (914) 693-3273

Copies of **Foundations for Faith** in either *English* or *Japanese* can be ordered in Japan from the Seisho o Yomu Kai address listed above, or in the United States from either Neighborhood Bible Studies or from —

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WHAT IS GOD LIKE ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE?

What do you think of when you see or hear the word "God"? Share your ideas for a few minutes.

There are many ideas about God and many religions in the world. So which one is true? Or will any one of them do? Or after all, is there no real, living God anyway?

We can't see, hear or touch God. Unless He reveals Himself to us, we cannot know anything about Him with certainty. Has He ever done so? The purpose of this four-time study is to see what the Bible says about God and about His relationship with us. This is not to force you to believe, but to consider honestly what the Bible says. In this first study we will see what the Bible says God is like.

I. GENESIS 1:1 to 2:3 IN THE BEGINNING

As you read this first part of the Bible, think about what God is like as He appears here.

1. a. What impressions of God do you receive? How would you describe Him?
 - b. What are the verbs which express God's activities in verses 1 to 5?
 - c. What do these verbs indicate about God? What would He have to be like in order to do those things?
 - d. This also says God "blessed" (verses 22,28) and "gave" (verses 29,30). What do those words reveal about God?
 - e. Do you notice any other things about God in this chapter?
2. Man, too, can speak, make things, name things, etc., but in what ways is God much greater than man?
3. What does the Bible say was the method by which God created? (verses 3,6,9,14-15, etc.)
4. a. What did God think of each thing when it was finished? (verses 4,10,12,18, etc.)
 - b. How does this compare with most things we make? How often is what we make perfect?
5. What do we learn about God from the order in which He made things? What if He had made man first?
6. a. According to verse 1, when did God make the heavens and the earth?
 - b. What do the words "In the beginning" tell us about God and His existence?
7. How long did it take God to make everything?

The Hebrew word for "day" can mean either a 24 hour day or a period of time. If a period of time is meant here, the length of each day may have been different, some even long ages. In any case, the Bible is not trying to explain everything scientifically, but is saying that God brought everything into existence.

8. a. What do you think is the climax of God's creation?
b. How is the creation of man different from anything else in this record?
9. In view of what God is like, and because He said, "Let us make man in our image," what characteristics would you expect man to have? In what ways is man like God?

The Bible says "God is spirit" (John 4:24), so we differ from Him in having physical bodies though He does not. Being in His image means having personality, the basic characteristic of which is a free will.

10. Some people read this chapter and think, "God is like man." How is our understanding of God different if we think "God is like man" instead of "man is like God"?

If we think of God as being like man, we tend to think of Him having human limitations, and it is difficult to believe that He could create the universe. But if we remember that we are only extremely limited replicas of the God who made us, we can begin to understand how great He is, and also to understand the rest of the Bible.

11. Consider how the God revealed in the Bible is different from some of the "gods" we talked about at first:
 - a. Some people think of "Nature," the sun, the moon, etc. as being gods. How is the God of the Bible different from them?
 - b. Some people think of "eight million" gods ("Yaoyorozu no kami"). How is that different from the God of Genesis 1?
 - c. Another idea is that God is a "goriyaku no kami" (a dispenser of divine favors upon request), so that you use Him when you need help, forget about Him at other times. How does this compare with the God of the Bible?
 - d. Many people think God is a product of our minds: "If you believe He exists, He does; if you don't, He doesn't." Compare this idea with the God of the Bible.
 - e. Can you think of any other comparisons between what some people think and what the Bible says God is like?
12. Genesis 1 presents God as a living person who created the whole universe as well as the first human beings. How would you describe man's position before a God like that? What attitudes should we have toward Him?

The God we have seen in Genesis 1 is not a created being, but the Creator of all things. He is a living person and the source of all life. Let's see what the Bible says about whether this Creator has any relationship with us now.

II. PSALM 139 GOD AND ME

In most religions man is seeking God or seeking "something." According to the Bible, God is seeking man. That can be seen clearly in this psalm.

Psalm 139:1-6 As someone reads these verses, look for what God knows about "me."

1. a. According to these verses, what specific things does God know about us?

- b. How much of your life do these things include?
- 2. a. What contact is there between this person and the God who knows so much about Him? (verse 5)
- b. How do you feel when someone suddenly puts a hand on your shoulder?

Psalm 139:7-12 As someone reads this passage, look for the way this man reacted to God's knowing him completely and laying His hand on him.

- 3. a. What was the writer's reaction to God's knowing him that well?
- b. What possibilities of escape does he think of?
- c. In each case why would those places of escape from God fail?
- d. What further characteristic of God does this reveal?
- e. What are some of the ways we try to escape from God today?
- 4. a. What attitudes on God's part do you sense in verses 1 to 12?
- b. What does he want to do with His hand? (verses 5,10)
- c. Why would it be difficult for God to lead a person who was thinking and feeling as the psalmist did?

Psalm 139:23-24

- 5. a. What change do you find in the writer's attitude in verses 23-24?
- b. What is he now asking from God?
- c. How is this different from what he was seeking in verses 7 to 12?
- d. What do you think could have made this change in him?
- e. Since God already knows everything about him, why do you think the writer asks God to know him and search him even more?

We can have the same reactions as the psalmist—either try to run away or ask God to lead us. Would you like to ask God to lead you as the psalmist does in verses 23 and 24? If so, take a few moments now to tell Him whatever you are thinking.

Summary

According to the Bible, God is the Creator who is almighty, all-knowing, and present everywhere, and who cares about us and wants to lead us. But if He really does exist, why is the world in this condition? We will consider that question in the next study. It is suggested that before then you read Genesis 2 and 3 and Romans 1:18-32. If you want to read more about what God is like, Psalm 103 and Isaiah 40 are interesting.

IF GOD EXISTS, WHY IS THE WORLD IN THIS CONDITION?

Review briefly some of the things you learned about the God of the Bible from the first study.

Genesis 1:31 says that everything God created was "very good," but our world today doesn't fit that description. What happened to the "good" world? If God knows everything and cares, why doesn't He stop the evil rampant in the world, such as wars and crime? Has He become powerless to control what He made? Let's see how the Bible explains this problem.

I. GENESIS 2 THE GOOD WORLD

This chapter describes that "very good" world. As you read 2:4-25, notice the things which are good about it.

1. a. If you were painting a picture of verses 8-15, what would you put in it?
 - b. What makes Eden a good place in which to live?
2. a. What do you notice about the two humans and the way they spend their time? What did their responsibilities include? (See also 1:26,28)
 - b. Do you think life was boring for them? Why?
 - c. From what you see in verses 20-25, how would you describe the relationship the first couple had?
3. a. In today's world most people seem to have no relationship with this God who made man. Many do not even recognize His existence. In this passage what kind of relationship do you see between God and the people He had made?
 - b. How did man come to be in this beautiful spot? How did he find satisfying work? How did he find just exactly the right wife? (verses 15,19,20-22)
 - c. Although God put Adam in the garden and brought the animals to him, what did He expect him to do? (verse 19. Also, 1:26,28)

This shows that although God influenced and cared for His creation, it was not like "fate" (unmei). He made man similar to Himself with minds and wills, and He expected them to use them. They, not God, were to "rule" the living creatures and "subdue" the earth. When Adam names the animals, God was even interested to see what names he would choose (verse 19).

4. a. Notice that God's name changes in chapter 2. What is He called from 2:4 on?
 - b. Why do you think His name is changed at this point? Why would the last part of God's creation need to be reminded that He is Lord?
 - c. In what ways is God acting as Lord in verses 15-17?
5. a. What is the positive part of God's command in verses 16,17? the negative part?
 - b. What will be the result of disobedience?
 - c. When will death happen?

- d. Think back over the place and circumstances in which these two are living and the relationship they have with each other and the Lord. In light of that, do you think this command would be easy or difficult to obey? Why?

Sometimes we tend to react negatively to being commanded. However, in the ideal situation in Eden, with all their needs completely supplied, this command should not have been difficult to obey.

II. GENESIS 3 WHERE THE TROUBLE BEGAN

Genesis 3:1-6 Read this section remembering the command just seen in chapter 2.

1. a. What do you learn about the serpent who now appears on the scene?
b. Compare this with Revelation 12:9 to see who the serpent actually was.
2. Though Adam and Eve were in ideal circumstances and had no need of the forbidden fruit, they disobeyed God and ate it. Let's look for the reasons why they did, and for their weak place.
 - a. When Satan began his tempting, did he quote God accurately? Compare 3:1 with 2:16-17.
 - b. What impression of God would Satan's misquote give?
 - c. How does the woman's answer in verses 2-3 compare with what God had said?
 - d. How is the meaning of the words "you will surely die" (kanarazu shinu) different from "lest you die" (shinu to ikenai)?
3. a. At first Satan had twisted God's words. What does he next claim about what God had said?
 - b. According to him, what are God's motives for the command not to eat that fruit?
 - c. What does the woman's decision to eat the forbidden fruit reveal about how she actually regarded God and His word?
 - d. What does the man's eating it reveal about what he thought of God and His word?

This deliberate disobeying of the Lord God's command shows that they did not consider Him absolute Lord, which led to their believing Satan's words instead of God's. The result of those two things was their disobedience, the act of eating the forbidden fruit.

Genesis 3:7-24 As someone reads this passage, look for the results of the man and woman's disobedience.

4. a. What was the first thing that happened after Adam and Eve ate the fruit?
b. What do you think it means that their "eyes were opened"? Notice in 2:25 that they already knew they were naked. What has changed?
5. What happened to their relationship with God? (verses 8-10)
6. a. Who did Adam say was at fault for what had happened? Who beside Eve did he blame?
b. Who did Eve blame?
c. What happened to their ability to see themselves honestly? (verses 11-13)

7. How do you think Adam's words in verse 12 would affect his relationship with Eve?
8. a. Who and what did God judge in verses 14-19?
b. What judgments were decreed on each?
9. In verses 23-24, what was the final judgment?
10. a. Terrible things happened as a result of their disobedience, but God had said, "When you eat of it you shall surely die." Did they die as soon as they ate it?
b. What, then, do you think God meant?

In our experience, death causes a separation between us and whatever dies. The death of a person completely removes that one from our physical realm of life. However, "God is spirit" (John 4:24), so He does not have a physical body, and we human beings who were created like Him in many respects have a spiritual dimension also. When God told man that death would result if he disobeyed, it meant he would become completely separated from God, cut off from any relationship with God. That is exactly what happened. Man became dead toward God. Physical death, which came later (verse 19), is only a part of the total death which resulted from the disobedience.

11. a. After they disobeyed God, Adam said it was God's and Eve's fault. Eve said it was the serpent's fault. Whose fault do you think it actually was? Why?
b. What are some examples of the way we make the same sort of excuses about circumstances in our lives?

III. Romans 1:18-32 HOW THE TROUBLE SPREAD

Romans 1:29-32 Read this to see how the world had become by the first century A.D.

1. We of the 20th century usually think of ourselves as a highly advanced civilization. In this list of sins can you find any that we have stopped committing?

Romans 1:18-28 This passage explains why the world has come that awful state. As you read it, look for the reason God is angry with man.

2. a. According to verse 19, what has been made plain to every man?
b. Verse 20 tells more specifically what can be known about God. What is that?
c. Through what means are those things about God made known?
3. a. Even though confronted with this evidence, according to verse 21 how have people reacted?
b. How does this reaction compare with that of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3?
4. a. Verses 21-22 say that man's thinking became futile and his heart darkened and foolish. As a result, in what three foolish ways does he now act? See verses 23,25,28.
b. What practices in our world today are like what is spoken of in verse 23? in verse 25?

- c. How is the first part of verse 28, “they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God,” like what you see in our modern world?
5. a. Immediately following each explanation of what man has done toward God are the words “therefore” (verse 24), “because of this” (verse 26), and “since” (verse 28). Then in each instance the same verb is used to describe what God did because of man’s rejection of Him. What is the verb?
- b. To what does God “give them over”?
 - c. How would the meaning be different if the words were “caused them to...” instead of “gave them over to...”? Since it is “gave them over,” who is responsible for all the sins mentioned?

It was as if God “took his foot off the brake” and let man do as he wanted. All the things listed in verses 29-32 are a natural consequence of their “darkened hearts” (verse 21) and “depraved minds” (verse 28).

6. We often blame God for the state of the world by thinking such things as, “If God exists, why doesn’t He stop wars, famines, etc.?” But whose fault is it, after all, that our world has become like it is? Satan’s? God’s? Or ours?

Adam and Eve’s downfall started with not recognizing God as Lord, and as a result of that, not believing what He said. The Bible calls that sin. It is still man’s basic sin, the one that leads to all the others.

Summary

God made man “in His own image” (i.e., similar to Himself), one facet of which is having a free will, or the capacity and liberty to make choices, to decide what to do. But with free will comes responsibility, and therefore we must experience the results of our choices. (E.g., freedom to drink poison, but not to decide the result of it.) We can choose not to recognize or obey God, but we cannot escape the results which follow that choice. Cutting ourselves off from God, the source of life, results in death and all that leads up to it. Simply stated, the world is in this condition because man, who chose to rebel against God, is experiencing the results of his choices.

But let’s look again at Genesis 3. In spite of what Adam and Eve had done, God seemed to care about them very much. Three things especially reveal God’s love:

1) Verses 8-10

What did God do here that is similar to what we saw Him do in Psalm 139?

2) Verse 21

- a. Why do you think God would make them clothes of skins when they already had fig leaf garments?
- b. Where would God get the skins?
- c. What would happen to the animals?
- d. What had God said would be the result of sinning?

This was the first substitutionary sacrifice. The death of an innocent substitute “covered” the effects of their sin. Notice that it was God’s solution for the effects of sin, not man’s.

3) Verse 15

- a. This first prophecy about the savior whom God is going to provide to rescue man is saying that in the future there will be a confrontation between a descendant of the woman and Satan. According to this prophecy, which one will win?
- b. How do you think Adam and Eve felt as they heard these words spoken to the serpent?

To close now, spend a short time in silent prayer. If you would like to tell God you are sorry for those most basic sins — not making Him Lord in your life, Not believing Him or obeying Him —and that you need His forgiveness, remember that He is listening, and He is merciful

It is suggested that you read Luke’s Gospel before the next time, looking for the “offspring” of the woman, whom God promised to send.

WHAT DID GOD DO ABOUT THE PROBLEM?

We have seen in the Bible that God, the Creator, made human beings and wants to fellowship with them. But they deliberately chose to reject and disobey God, and by doing so were cut off from direct contact with God, the source of life. Man is therefore responsible for the death he brought on himself, but God promised a solution, saying it would be given through a descendant of the woman.

God must have been deeply hurt when the people he had made turned against Him and caused estrangement and death for the whole human race. And love for them would cause Him to search for ways to reestablish contact and communicate with them, and to rescue and restore them. In this lesson we will begin to see what God's solution to the problem is, and also how He communicated with us.

I. JESUS CHRIST, "THE WORD"

1. To begin with, think a moment about *words*. How would you define "word"? What is the purpose or function of words?

With that in mind, consider the following part of the Bible which talks about a certain "Word."

John 1:1-4, 10-11

2. What facts do verses 1-4 give about this special "Word"?
3. According to verses 10-11, what was the response of people to this person when he came into the world?

John 1:14-18

4. In what form did the Word come into the world, according to verse 14a?
5. a. After becoming a man, who did Jesus Christ, "the Word," make known?
b. What connection do you see between that and His being called the Word?

The Gospel of John uses this explanation about the Word as the introduction to writing about Jesus Christ. Calling Him the Word, this is saying the Jesus Christ is God, the Creator, and that He became a man and "made known" (communicated) God to us. Calling him Christ (which means Messiah) is a claim that He is the promised "seed of the woman" who is to conquer Satan and solve the enormous problem of sin and its disastrous effects.

These are astonishing claims to make. It is a matter of historical record that Jesus was born as a human being about 2000 years ago, that He lived about 33 years and was put to death on a Roman cross. But is there any evidence that He was more than an ordinary human being? In this lesson we will examine the Bible record of what He was like, what He said about Himself, and some of what He did to substantiate what He said. Let's see what brought John to the conclusion that Jesus was God, the Creator, become man to reveal God to us.

II. WHAT JESUS CLAIMED ABOUT HIMSELF

John 8:56-59 As you read this passage, remember that Abraham lived about 2000 B.C., which was that many years before Jesus said these things.

1. a. In verse 58, as Jesus compares Himself to Abraham, who does He say lived first?
b. What, then, is Jesus claiming about Himself?
2. How did the Jews react to that claim of Jesus?

In the Old Testament one of the names by which God identified Himself is "I AM." Jesus is using that name for Himself in this sentence (v. 58). The Jews were shocked and outraged at what seemed to them blasphemy, the Biblical penalty for which was death by stoning.

John 10:30-38

3. What do the Jews again understand Jesus to be claiming?
4. According to Jesus, what do his "works" (i.e., miracles) reveal about Himself? (verses 37-38)

John 14:6-11 In this section Jesus is talking with his disciples, who wanted to understand what He said, rather than the people who were opposing Him.

5. What did Jesus claim about Himself in verse 6?
6. What does Jesus say in these verses about the relationship between the Father (i.e., God) and Himself?

These words of Jesus mean He claims to be the God of Genesis 1. Who beside Jesus ever claimed that? Neither Mohammed nor Buddha nor any other person ever has. But Jesus Christ clearly did.

III. HOW JESUS SUBSTANTIATED HIS CLAIMS

1 Peter 2:22

1. Peter was one of Jesus' disciples and knew Him well from being with Him for over three years. What does Peter say about Jesus here?
2. How is this unusual?

Mark 1:30-34,40-42

3. Over what kinds of things did Jesus demonstrate power in these verses?

These are just an example from the many accounts in the four gospels where Jesus showed that He had power over diseases and demons.

Mark 4:35-41

4. a. When were the disciples most frightened? What were the surrounding conditions when they were "terrified"? (verse 41, NIV)
b. Why do you think they would suddenly fear Jesus so much?

5. a. What method did Jesus use to calm the storm?
- b. What method did God use when He created the universe? Compare Genesis 1:3,6,9, etc.

Since God created the universe by “speaking,” it is not surprising that Jesus- Who is claiming to be God - could influence and control nature by speaking. Many of Jesus’ miracles were done in this way.

John 11:17-27, 38-48, 53,

6. What did Jesus claim about Himself in verse 25?
7. How did he substantiate that claim in this incident?
8. a. By what method did He raise Lazarus from the dead?
- b. In his prayer what did Jesus say this miracle would reveal to the people who were watching?

The Jewish leaders admitted (verse 47) — indeed could not refute the fact — that Jesus was doing miracles, which is a clear indication that they really happened. The leaders, however, decided to murder Jesus rather than face up to the implications of those miracles. We need to consider if we are being like the Jewish leaders, determined not to believe regardless of the evidence, or like the disciples, who asked, “Who then is this?” and were looking and listening receptively.

Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34

9. What does Jesus predict will happen to Himself? How will He die? What does He say
 10. will happen afterward?
- What happens to the credibility of everything else Jesus has said if these predictions, especially the resurrection part, are not fulfilled?

IV. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

With so much hatred obviously building up against Him, it was not necessarily supernatural for Jesus to predict His murder. But resurrection? Preposterous if He was an ordinary man. If He could both predict and accomplish that, no one can lightly dismiss anything else He said, including His claim to deity. In fact, the credibility of Christianity itself hangs on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. Let’s examine some of the evidence for the resurrection.

Matthew 27:57-66 As someone reads these verses, notice what was done with Jesus’ body after His death.

1. What was done with Jesus’ body after He died? (verses 58-60)
2. What were the priests and Pharisees afraid would happen?
3. What was done to prevent the disciples from stealing the body?

The seal had the authority of the Roman Empire behind it. Breaking it could mean the death penalty. The guard were soldiers who could be given a death penalty if they failed their responsibility.

Matthew 28:1-15 As you read, find what each group of people said or thought happened to Jesus' body.

4. Which of all the persons seen in this passage acknowledged the fact that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb?
5. The angel, the women, the guards, and the Jewish leaders all recognized that the body was gone from the tomb, but how did their explanations of it differ?
6. Could you have believed the story the guards told? (How much can you see when you are sleeping?)

Mark 16:9-14 Read this noticing the reactions of the disciples to news of Jesus' resurrection.

7. a. Even though Jesus had told His disciples many times about His coming death and resurrection, they do not appear to have been expecting it. Before Jesus appeared to the disciples, who told them He had arisen?
b. How did those people know He was risen?
8. How did the disciples react to those reports?
9. Why do you think they didn't believe until Jesus Himself appeared to them?

It is obvious that the disciples were not eagerly awaiting the resurrection and ready to grasp at the slightest excuse for believing it. Nor did they show any indication that they might invent such a story. If people that were stubbornly skeptical later became convinced of Jesus' resurrection, they must have seen irrefutable proof.

John 20:1-10 As you read this incident, imagine the thoughts and feelings of Mary and the two disciples. John calls himself "the other disciple."

10. a. What do Peter and John find in the tomb?
b. What possible explanations can you think of for the burial cloths being there without the body?

John saw this and "believed" (verse 8). What do you think he believed? (Verse 9 is an explanation of why they had not believed earlier.)

John 20:19-20

12. Why would Jesus show the disciples His hands and side? What would they prove?

John 20:24-31

13. What did Thomas say were his conditions for believing?
14. When Jesus appeared He spoke immediately to Thomas and referred to those conditions. How could Jesus have gotten the information about them when he was not there? Remember Psalm 139:1-6.
15. What did Thomas believe? (verse 28)
16. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Why would John have a special reason to record this? See verse 8.
17. According to verses 30-31, why did John write this gospel?

SUMMARY

Many people say they can't believe Jesus' miracles really happened, especially His resurrection. But the central problem is not, "Are miracles possible?" but "**Who** is Jesus Christ?" If He is the God Who created everything, He would not only have power to do supernatural things, He would do so in order to make His claims believable.

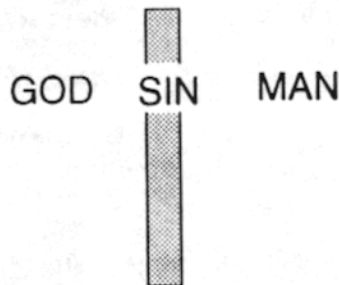
The Bible says this resurrected Jesus Christ is the living God, that He is the One Who created us, has put His hand on us and wants to lead us. Revelation 3:20 says this in another way. If you want to open yourself up toward Him, as it suggests, to invite Him into your life so He can teach you further the truth about Himself, tell Him that as you take a short time for prayer. You can also tell Him honestly about any doubts or questions you have.

Before the final study next time read at least one account of the crucifixion from the Gospels.

WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?

(Using a blackboard or large paper and felt pen to draw the diagram step by step through the lesson can make it easier to understand.)

As the following diagram reminds us, after God made man quite similar to Himself, so we could know and fellowship with Him, man chose to sin, and this resulted in his estrangement from God. However, God took the initiative to restore their relationship with Himself, promising an ultimate solution through a certain descendant of the woman. In the third study we saw that Jesus Christ claims to be that promised Messiah, simultaneously man and God, that He performed many miracles which validated His claims, and that as He repeatedly predicted, He physically arose from the dead after He was crucified.



It is not surprising that the one who is both God and man could overcome death. But why did He have to die? Why would He permit His own murder?

As a step toward understanding that, take a few minutes to memorize Romans 6:23 together. Notice the contrasts in the two parts of the verse: wages versus free gift, death versus life.

I. THE CRUCIFIXION — PROPHECIES AND THEIR FULFILLMENT

Beginning with Genesis 3:15 there are many prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah who would some day come to solve the problem caused by man's rejection of God. We will look at two of them and then compare them with what happened to Jesus.

A. Old Testament Prophecies

Daniel 7:13,14

1. Daniel, who lived about 600 B.C., was given a vision about the Messiah in which he saw "one like a son of man." What does the vision reveal about this "son of man"? What will be given to him? How long will his reign last?
2. a. Jesus often called Himself "the son of man." Notice, however, what he said in Mark 10:45 about His purpose in coming.
- b. What two striking differences are there between this and what Daniel wrote about the son of man?

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:3

3. a. This prophecy of Isaiah, written about 700 years before Jesus came, gives different impressions of the Messiah than Daniel's does. In 52:13 what is he called?
- b. According to 53:2,3 what will He be like, and how will He be treated?

These prophecies of Daniel and Isaiah seem to be inconsistent. However, they are revealing the Messiah's mission as both king and servant, and they describe His work at different points in history, including some things still in the future. But now let us consider how the Isaiah prophecy and what Jesus said about Himself in Mark 10:45 were fulfilled in history.

B. The Crucifixion: *What Actually Happened*

Mark 14:50 - 15:39 Read this section to find how Jesus was "despised and rejected" just as Isaiah said He would be. '

4. In what ways and by whom was Jesus despised? (See 14:55-65; 15:16-20,29-30,31-32)
5. In what ways and by whom was Jesus rejected? (See 14:50, 64, 72; 15:12-15, 33-34)

C. The Crucifixion: *Why It Happened*

Jesus had said His life was to be given as a ransom. In reporting how Jesus died, Mark tells only what happened, not why it happened. Isaiah's prophecy explains why and how it was to be a ransom.

Isaiah 53:4-12 Read the rest of the chapter now, looking for the reasons why the Messiah would have to suffer and die.

6. a. In verses 4-6 what reasons are given for the Messiah's suffering?
b. For whose transgressions and iniquities was He afflicted?
7. What did His punishment provide for us? (verse 5)
8. Whose idea was it to do this? (verses 6,10)

II. THE MEANING OF THE CRUCIFIXION

Repeat together Romans 6:23, thinking about what it means.

We have learned from the Bible that death was the direct result of man's sin against God. Now let's see the explanation of how life is a gift from God through Jesus Christ.

Refer again to the diagram at the beginning of this study.

GOD - the Creator, promised to solve the problem of sin.

MAN - created in God's likeness, sinned by rejecting God and His word and experienced death, both spiritual and physical.

SIN - cut man off from God. This is why we can't "feel" God and don't know Him.

Read Isaiah 59:1-2, which explains this condition.

A. THE DILEMMA

God has, of course, other characteristics than those we have seen thus far. Three of them particularly help us to understand the meaning of Jesus' death.

GOD IS HOLY - Isaiah 6:3

The Bible emphasizes God's perfect holiness. Think what would happen when a sinner stood before an utterly holy God. How would you feel when you were dressed all in white clothes if a very muddy child ran toward you? Such feelings are only a tiny measure of a holy God's

feelings toward sin. He cannot welcome or condone it. What, then, would His holiness require that He do with a sinner?

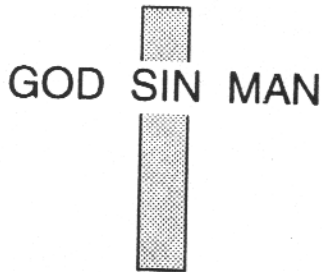
GOD IS JUST - Deuteronomy 32:4

Think what would happen when a person guilty of sin stood before a perfectly **just** God. What if a judge said to a murderer, "It doesn't matter. You're free to leave"? What is the judge obligated to do if he is just? What, then, must a just God do with a sinner?

GOD IS LOVE - I John 4:8

God's love is also perfect. What would happen when a sinner stood before a **loving** God? What would God's love prompt Him to do for the sinner?

HOLY
JUST
LOVE



To act in harmony with His own character, God's holiness must say, "Away with you." His justice must punish, but His love would want to forgive, to reconcile. At first glance His attributes seem to demand irreconcilable things. Let us see how the Bible says He solved this seeming dilemma.

B. THE SOLUTION

How can a person demonstrate how much he loves someone? One measure is how much he is willing to sacrifice for the person he loves. As we consider God's love, notice in the following verses how much He sacrificed for us.

Philippians 2:6-8

1. What did Jesus Christ give up for our sake?

As you have seen, Jesus gave up being "in the form of God" in order to become human. He gave up being served and became one who served. He gave up His life, not only by dying, but by dying a most painful, ignominious death. It is only natural to wonder why He would do this. The two following references make the reason clear.

I Peter 2:24

2. According to this verse, what was Christ "bearing" on the cross?
3. Who, then, was He representing? For whom was He a substitute?

HOLY
JUST
LOVE



Remember the pattern of a substitute sacrifice in Genesis 3:21 when an innocent animal was killed to cover the results of Adam and Eve's sin. The same thing is clearly portrayed in Isaiah 53, as we saw.

I John 2:2

4. According to this verse, to what extent does God consider the death of Jesus to be effective?

The word "expiation" (or "atoning sacrifice" - N.I.V.) means what all the requirements of God's attributes have been satisfied. So even if some people think it a stupid idea or refuse to

believe it, God Himself considers Jesus' death to be enough to atone for all the sins of the whole human race.

So we see that Jesus' death on the cross solved the big problem in this way:

- * The sins which separated us from God are atoned for and gone, so God's holiness is satisfied.
- * Sin was punished, so the demands of God's justice were satisfied.
- * God can now forgive and welcome us back, so His love is satisfied.

What God did at the cross met all the requirements of His character. And He did all this to make salvation possible for us, to open the way to Himself.

III. OUR RESPONSE

Repeat Romans 6:23 together, thinking about what it means.

1. According to this verse, **how** does eternal life rather than death become ours?

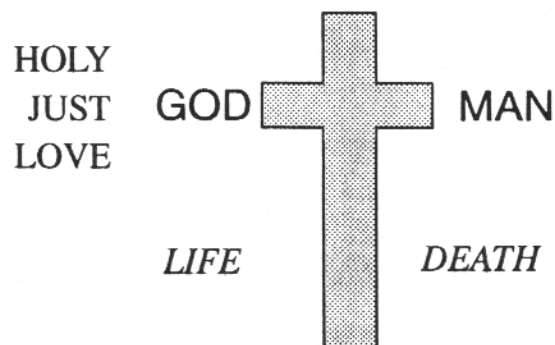
Did you see both factors? — that God *gives* it (it is a gift),
— and it is *through* Jesus Christ.

But notice the modifying words for Jesus: "our Lord." If He is your Lord, life is yours, too.

God made us with a free will, however, and He will not violate that will by forcing us to accept this salvation. He offers it as a gift, and He waits for our response.

2. a. If someone places a gift in front of you, what do you do to make it your own? What is the basic, minimum thing necessary in order for it to become really yours?
b. According to John 1:12, what must we do with the gift God is offering in order to make it our own?
3. Read also John 3:16, 3:36, and 5:24, noticing the words which express what we are to do, and the fact that they involve using our will.

As the diagram shows, by what He did at the cross Jesus has become the "way" to God, a bridge from Death over to Life. If we do accept Him as Savior and Lord, our sins are forgiven, we are reconciled to God and become His child, and we have eternal life. However, Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This means that if we reject Him and what He did for us, there is no other way to God. Apart from Jesus Christ there is only death, paying the penalty for our own sins.



If you want to receive Jesus Christ now, or later when you are alone, here is a simple prayer you could use. Any equivalent words will do.

- 1) I am a sinner, needing to be forgiven.
- 2) Believing that He died for me, too, I receive Jesus Christ now as my Savior and Lord.
- 3) Thank you for forgiving me, for making me your child.

Take a short time for prayer in case anyone wants to receive Jesus now.

In closing, read Romans 10:9-10 together, noticing what this says to do to be saved. If we have believed and told the Lord so, we can immediately thank Him for saving us. And you will find that if you tell someone else you have done so, it will strengthen your faith.