

A New Life

Congratulations on making the best decision of your life! At this point you likely are still a little unsure about what just happened; don't worry. You are not alone, and we are here to help. When you complete this reading, the hope is that you have a better understanding of four important points: What just happened, what you do now, a general overview of the Bible, and a few simple facts to help you defend your faith. So, let's get started!

What just happened?

When you confessed your sins and invited Jesus to live inside of you something happened more than just words being said. That "something" is often referred to as SALVATION. Now, you probably have heard about salvation but, like most, do not really know what that means. Often, the reason for this is because over the years many have tried to define salvation in their own words. This has led to great confusion. So, for our definition we are going straight to the source, Jesus Christ.

In the gospel of John, Jesus defines "salvation" for us when a spiritual leader of that day comes to him at night because of the things he heard about Jesus:

John 3:1 *Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."*

³ *Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.^[a]"*

⁴ *"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"*

⁵ *Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You^[c] must be born again.*

Notice Jesus defined salvation as "being born again." What does this mean? Jesus likened it to the natural birth. Just as we are born of the flesh (naturally) we must also be born of the Spirit. When you invited Jesus to live in your heart you became born of the Spirit. As Jesus stated, this is the requirement for entering the kingdom of God (heaven). Theologically speaking, this is known as being justified. Because Jesus paid the price for sin and with him living inside of you God sees you as justified ("just as if" you never sinned) from sin.

Now What?

Now that you are “Justified” what do you do with the rest of your life? To understand this let’s take another look at the natural birth Jesus referred to. When we come into this world, we are consumed with one thing: meeting the needs of our body. If it tastes good eat it, if it feels good touch it, if it looks good look at it, if it makes you happy do it. This is a life focused on self. When you are born again simply put, you change your focus.

Paul talked about this in the eighth chapter of the book of Romans:

Romans 8:⁵ *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*⁶ *The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.*⁷ *The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.*⁸ *Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

⁹ *You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.*

Paul spells out the difference between those who are born again and those that are not. When you received Jesus, you received the Spirit of Christ and are now expected to live a life focused on pleasing God. This does not mean you will never make a mistake, but it does mean you will begin trying to please God with your decisions rather than just yourself. Theologically speaking this is called the sanctification process. The only way to do this is to start learning what God’s standards are. You do this by reading the Word of God (Bible).

General Overview of the Bible

The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by 40 authors over a span of more than 1500 years. While these authors technically wrote the books it is believed they did so under the inspiration of the same Spirit of God. We will offer more proof of this in the next section. For now, let’s talk about what is in the Bible.

The Bible starts out with the creation story in the Book of Genesis. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were made perfect. Because of this they could have an ongoing relationship with God. This continued until one day they both disobeyed God’s commandment and ate from a forbidden tree. At this point sin entered their hearts. Because God is perfect, he could no longer have that close relationship with Adam and Eve. God was faced with a decision. He could have just killed both Adam and Eve and started over, but thankfully he decides to put distance between himself and mankind while a plan for redemption could be worked out.

The Old Testament is the recording of the first attempt at redemption. It centers on a nation of people called the Jews. God chose these people to be set apart. He gives them commandments and laws to follow to rebuild that relationship. At first the Jews take on this task but begin to stray away from doing what God had commanded them to do. There are several accounts throughout the Old Testament of the Jews falling away, God punishing them, them repenting, and God restoring that relationship. The problem is that the Jews never seemed to learn their lesson. This was the flaw in the first attempt at redemption. It was dependent on man.

The New Testament tells the story of the second plan for redemption. This one is where the Spirit of God takes on human form in Jesus Christ and pays the price of sin for all of humanity. Paul talks about this in the fifth chapter of Romans:

Romans 5:17 *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*

¹⁸ *Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.* ¹⁹ *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

The life of Jesus is recorded in the first four books of The New Testament. These are not meant as accounts of four different lives, but rather four different perspectives of the same life. I recommend you start reading your Bible by beginning with the Gospel of John.

After the gospels, you have the books that tell us more about who Jesus was and is, and how we as his body should live our life. The last book in the Bible points to the future and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

As you read the Bible you will begin to see how the whole book is seamlessly designed. This speaks to its divine nature. It has been said that The Old Testament is The New Testament concealed and The New Testament is The Old Testament revealed. This statement rings true because as we understand more about God, we realize that the first attempt at redemption was not a mistake, but it was established so we could better understand the REAL redemption plan; Jesus Christ.

Defending Your Faith

1Peter 3:15 *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*

As Christians we are called to be able to defend our faith. This does not mean physically attacking those that do not believe like us. No, it means that we should be educated about not only what we believe, but also why we believe it. This is not so we can convince others to be Christians; God is the one that draws people to him. We are to be educated to build our faith and help explain why we have chosen to live for God. Always remember the last part of the above verse where it says to answer others with gentleness and respect.

Is the Bible Reliable?

Historical accuracy is measured in two major ways; the number of manuscripts and how close to the original time period are the manuscripts of information in those manuscripts. There are over 24,000 manuscripts of The New Testament dated from between 100-300 years after the originals along with fragments that are even closer to the originals. To get a better understanding of this look at these other examples that scholars consider reliable:

Caesar—10 copies—1000 year gap

Tacitus—20 copies—1000 year gap

Plato—7 copies—1200 year gap

Is the Bible the Inspired Word of God?

- Collection of 66 books
- Written by 40 authors (from all walks of life)
- Written over a span of more than 1500 years

Most religious manuscripts are written by one or two people during their life. This makes the possibility of fraud much more likely, however the Bible is different. Because of the way the Bible was written, the chances of a man coming up with this idea and pulling it off is non-existent.

Does God Exist?

Romans 1:20 *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*

The fact that creation exists demands a creator. When you see a painting, you know that it did not just appear, someone made that painting. The very idea that something can come from nothing goes against everything scientists know to be true. It is simple cause and effect.

Was Jesus God in the Flesh?

John1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing*

was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

- **Acts 1:3** After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

- Jesus was not bashful about the fact that he rose from the dead. After rising, he preached for 40 days.

-Flavius Josephus (37-97 AD), a Jew who defected and became court historian for Emperor Vespasian.

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as had a veneration for truth. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles: he was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had spoken of these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him: thus the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”