

Foundations of Christianity

This three-part Bible study provides a good foundation of the basics of Christianity. Great for those new to the Christian faith, especially international students. This study was originally published in *Chi Alpha's International Student Friendship Ministry* handbook.

Study 1: Overview of Christianity

What is the Bible?

What kind of books do you enjoy reading?

What have you heard about the Bible?

The Bible is a unique book.

- Written by over 40 men: shepherds, doctors, priests, tentmakers, kings
- It was written over a time period of around 1600 years (~1500BC to ~AD100).
- Parts were written on three different continents (Asia, Europe, & Africa) and in Hebrew and Greek.
- Big Book with 66 smaller books.
- Its influence on our world and on many people's lives has been tremendous. It's the most translated book ever. Portions translated in over 2,000 languages (Shakespeare is 50).
- A living document with power to change the reader. The Author is alive and meets us as we read.
- The Bible's table of contents to see the Bible's two main divisions.
 - The Old Testament books were written hundreds of years *before* Christ. Show God's plan of redeeming the world, God's dealing with ancient Hebrews.
 - The New Testament books were written after Jesus' earthly life. They show Jesus's ministry and the founding of the Christian community.

What is Christianity?

- What were your impressions of Christianity before you came to America or Chi Alpha?
- Christianity is *not*:
 - Just a code of behavior. Going to church, doing good things, living a moral life. Some who do these things are not Christians. (Eph. 2:8–9)
 - Just a philosophy of life: Believing the right things; the right mental attitude. Some people have good philosophies of life, but are not Christians! (Matt. 7:21–23)
 - Just a way to get to heaven, a decision, or only a way to relieve our fear of death. Christianity affects a person's daily life now and their eternal future.

- Just an American religion or simply a part of American culture or family tradition. It began in the Middle East. There are more Christians in South America and Africa than the U.S. Many Christians come from families that are not Christian.
- Christianity *is* a *relationship* with God.
- A true Christian is a person who has *chosen* to believe in Jesus, *receive* Him, and let Him be *the Lord* of their life.

Who is God and what is He like?

Read Genesis 1:1.

- If God made the material universe, what does this tell us about God what He is like?

Read Genesis 1:26–30.

- Verse 26 says people were made in the image of God. In what ways do you think God and man are alike? In what ways are they different?
- How does God relate to and treat the first people? (See verses 28–30.)
- What gives God the right to tell people what to do?

Read Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24.

- The poet writes of how much God knows him and that God has placed His hand on him. How does the writer think and feel about God? How does it make YOU feel?

Questions for Reflection

- If God is as we have looked at here today, how does that make you feel about Him?
- Why do you think God wants a person to do more than just believe in his mind that there is a God?
- Was there anything in the talk on Christianity that was surprising to you? Any questions?

Study 2: After Creation, What Went Wrong? Broken Covenant

A *covenant* is a strong agreement between two people wanting to form a relationship. Talk about what your understanding of a covenant is. How would you define it? Talk about God, who created humans, as being the God who wants to form relationships with humankind. He's a personal God.

Read Genesis 2:16-17 and Genesis 3:1-7.

Talk about what you notice.

We see that God provided for humans all the food and provision they could ever want, and made just one rule about the fruit they could not eat. This was a rule in the covenant of their relationship. We see that Adam and Eve broke the covenant by disobeying that rule. This disobedience is sin.

Talk about sin.

- What is your understanding of sin?

It is missing God's standards, breaking our relationship with Him. Obeying God's rules is the standard. When we disobey God, we are in rebellion against Him. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, the covenant relationship was broken, which led to Adam and Eve feeling shame for the first time.

Read Genesis 3:8-10 and Genesis 3:21.

- Why does God ask Adam and Eve where they are?

God knows the relationship is broken, His closeness no longer available to His created. He knew that Adam and Eve cannot overcome the gap between themselves and Himself, and He knows we cannot overcome this gap, either.

- What is God's response?

Reconciliation.

- What does reconciliation mean?

Discuss the need for restoration in broken relationships. When He made man and woman, God could have forced relationship with Him. Why wouldn't He? Talk about God's character and how He wants to be in relationship with us, wanting us to choose relationship with Him. Instead of killing Adam and Eve for disobeying, God provided for them, showing His reconciliatory nature.

So, what's God's plan? God had a plan from the beginning to reconcile humankind. He promised to send someone who would pay the penalty for sin so that we can be brought back into relationship. Jesus, who was God and perfect, would come to earth as a man. When He died on the cross, He would bridge the gap between Man and God so we would have a way to enter relationship with God.

What about the rest of the Old Testament?

After creation, the people continued to multiply. God chose Abraham and his descendants to be God's people through whom Jesus would be born. This nation of Israel was to have a covenant relationship with God. The Old Testament tells the history of the people of Israel, the Jews. Creator God provided special laws for them to follow and gave them kings and prophets to direct them on how to live. He wanted them to have faith in God that would lead to obedience. Much of the time they failed. Creator God continued to tell them that a Promised one, a Messiah, would come and pay the full penalty for their sins. These Jews were then supposed to tell the rest of the world about the One True God and the opportunity to be reconciled and have an intimate relationship to God. That was God's plan.

Prophecy in the Old Testament

Jeremiah was a prophet that let the Israelites, God's people, know that a new covenant was coming. This covenant would be based on God's forgiveness through Jesus, and not obeying laws.

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

- What strikes you about this prophecy?
- What does it show us about the nature of God's new covenant with His people?

Talk about how this covenant is available to us. Talk about God using prophecy to guide His people so that when Jesus, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy came, His people would recognize His Son.

Study 3: The Life of Jesus in the New Testament

Start out by discussing who you think Jesus is, or what you have heard about Him from other people, leading into a discussion about what we learn about Jesus in the New Testament.

Who is Jesus?

He is the Son of God who fulfills the new covenant, restoring righteous relationship between man, woman, and God. He is the fulfiller of the covenant. Jesus' birth was a result of God's glorious plan, it was no accident.

Read Luke 1:26-38 about His miraculous conception, looking back to how this passage fulfilled the prophecy given in Micah 5:2.

Throughout the Gospels, or accounts of Jesus' life, we read about the ministry, teachings, and claims of Jesus. He healed people, taught them about God, and claimed to be their (and our) savior. His life and ministry reflect God's desire to have a relationship with us. Jesus is the humble servant who washed the feet of His disciples, He is holy and without sin, and a friend to the friendless such as tax collectors and prostitutes. He was also a teacher who taught about the authority of Scripture, revealing the truth about life.

Jesus shows us in His ministry that He is the provider for our needs. He is the one who blessed children and healed the sick with touch. He met big and small needs, and even powerfully raised a friend from the dead. Throughout His ministry, He also made claims about Himself. These claims revealed His nature to His followers, that He is the Savior of the world, the Son of God, the Bread of Life, and so much more.

The Death of Jesus

At Passover in the third year of Jesus' ministry, Jesus addressed His followers as they ate and drank together. He took a cup of wine and said, "This cup...is the new covenant in my blood."

Read this story in Luke 22.

This teaches us that Jesus' death was neither accidental nor man's idea, but God's. He later tells His accusers that He has come for this purpose, to lay down His life for those He loves. He laid down His life to restore the relationship between God and His people. Jesus is Redeemer, He is man and woman's final payment and atonement for sin. Jesus was crucified and buried in the tomb of a friend.

The Resurrection of Jesus

After Jesus died on a Roman cross, He was raised back to life three days later, just as He had prophesied He would. When a few women came to His tomb, He was no longer there! He appeared to them in resurrected form, showing that He conquered sin and death. The prophecies had been fulfilled! The resurrection of Jesus shows God's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice for man and woman. A while after His resurrection, Jesus ascended to be with God the Father, sending His Spirit to dwell with us. We can pray to Jesus and talk with Him anytime.

Covenant Relationship

God's reconciliation plan is much older than two thousand years. He's been calling to us like He called to Adam and Eve in the garden, "Where are you?" from the beginning. The way back to God came by Jesus' death and resurrection. To win us back to an intimate covenant relationship with God forever was God's original and ultimate plan. We come to relationship by faith in His grace, accepting the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for our behalf. For our part, we must choose repentance. We must choose to confess our sin and turn from it, accepting God's free gift of salvation. We must turn from our sin and follow Jesus. When we ask, God forgives us. For His part, He will fulfill our lives, transform us into who He created us to be, and allow us to be with Him forever.

End by reading John 3:16-17 and John 14:6.

- What do these verses tell us about Jesus?
- What new impressions do you have about God as our creator? What about Jesus.

End by talking about what it looks like to study the life of Jesus. Good resources to bring are PROAPT and Why We Read Scripture as a first step to a devotional life.