

## What is Christianity?

### **So what is Christianity all about anyway?**

Once in a while you may have read or heard about Christianity or perhaps you have never heard about it and are just a little curious about it. Maybe you have to do a research assignment about it for your class and don't know where to begin. Often, people have tried to learn about it but have been discouraged because it seemed to be complicated and confusing. Many just can't understand some of the ideas and concepts that seem to surround it. Maybe it is, like totally absurd or weird or something like that. The interesting thing about Christianity is that it just doesn't seem to go away. It has a nagging habit of popping up somewhere and once in a while it gets in the way. So what is it?

### **Basic Definition:**

For those who need a very basic definition for a school paper or for those who are just seeking to know, here it is: Christianity is the story of belief in an historical person who lived 2,000 years ago. The story is told in a book called the bible. The reason it is called Christianity is because it is named after this historical person who has two names, Jesus Christ. Those who believe or have faith in Jesus Christ are called Christians.

### **What is Christianity like?**

Christianity is like a large family with family members living in places all around the world. The family likes to meet at least once a week in a place called a church. Obviously every member cannot meet in the same place at the same time....too much travel time and not enough parking and things like that. So family members meet together in a church that is close to their homes. They usually meet in a building or in someone's home on the first day of the week...which is Sunday. Sometimes they meet together on other days of the week as well as on Sundays.

These meetings are called by different names. Many Christians call their meetings "worship services". Some just call them "church services". Services is a old term which just gives a name to the meetings. Sometimes they are called gatherings. They really are just meetings of people who join together to sing about their faith or belief in Jesus Christ and hear someone speak or talk about Jesus Christ. The reason they do this is because the bible tells them to do it and also because the very first believers in Jesus Christ began to meet this way on Sundays.

### **Why do Christians call themselves a family?**

Family members are related. They have a parent or parents, and have brothers and sisters. Larger families have many others like grand parents, cousins, aunts and uncles and so on. Christianity is like the smaller family with just one parent and brothers and sisters. This is where it gets really interesting. Christians learn from the bible that by believing in Jesus Christ, they have a father who is also the father of Jesus Christ. When people have faith in Jesus Christ, they become a member of a family with one father. All members have just one father who is also the father of Jesus Christ. Because Christians have just one father who the bible calls their heavenly father, all Christians are brothers and sisters. There are no aunts or uncles or grand parents in this family or cousins or nephews or nieces or grandchildren, just brothers and sisters. Anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ belongs to this family no matter where in the world they live.

### **Who is God?**

According to the teachings of Christianity and in particular the teachings of the bible, God is the one who has created the universe and the world and is the one who rules the world. God is not a physical being living on earth. God is a spiritual being who is present everywhere in the world and the universe. There is no place where God is not present. God has always existed. No one has made or created God. God is the one who has

created humans and all other things, visible or invisible in the universe. The bible also teaches that God is a holy and just being. This means that God is absolutely pure and without fault of any kind. God cannot be tempted by anything or anyone to do anything that is not absolutely pure and right.

God cannot be seen by anyone. Only Jesus Christ, alone of all those who have lived on the earth, has seen God. The bible states that God is invisible but this does not mean he does not exist. God is very much alive and in control of the entire world, not just those who are Christians or even to just those who believe that he exists. God also knows all about everything that is going on in the world and has known this long before the world was even made. God knows the future and not only does he know the future he controls what will happen in the future. Nothing can take God by surprise or cause God to have any worries about what will happen. God controls all governments and all leaders of the world. The bible states that it is God who has placed these leaders in their positions of responsibility.

There is so much that the bible teaches about God. The above description is only a mere beginning of the things the bible states about him. As this article cannot state or explain these things in any detail, it is important that the very most important thing about God be said here. It is this. God loves the world and the people of the world. God desires that all the people of the world become part of his family. This is one of the major reasons he created the world so that humans may live with God and enjoy his presence forever. God knew that humans would be sinful beings and would reject him. So God in love, sent his Son, Jesus Christ to provide the way for humans to come to God. God did not make this way for humans to come to him difficult. It is actually quite simple. God sent his Son to the world so that all who believe that God sent his Son and those who put their trust in this Son will by their faith receive eternal life and live and enjoy God forever. This is the most important thing to know about God.

### **Who is Jesus Christ?**

This is a much better question than who was Jesus Christ. Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ is alive right now and not dead. Christianity gets this teaching from the bible. The bible will be explained in a paragraph to follow. The bible explains that Jesus Christ has always existed and so has his father. The father is often called God but Jesus Christ is also God. The father who existed before the world came into being with his son sent his son into the world he had made to live as a human being. The son, Jesus Christ, was born as a real baby just over 2,000 years ago in the middle east country of Judea, now a part of Israel and Palestine.

Jesus Christ grew up and taught those around him things about his father and how those who believed in him (Jesus Christ) would live forever with his father and himself in heaven. This teaching is often called the gospel which simply means "good news". The good news is an explanation of what Christianity is all about. Jesus taught that everyone must have faith in him or believe in him because he would die to take the penalty on himself the father had set as the result of sin. The bible teaches that everyone who has been born commits sins. These are things that people do or say or think which are against God's commands or laws. Sins are acts of disobedience against God. God set the penalty of death as a result of the sins everyone commits. This penalty is not just physical death but is the death of being separated forever from God. This separation is not pleasant but really terrible. The bible teaches that everyone sins and keeps on sinning and deserves this penalty.

Jesus Christ taught that he would die and bare the sins of the entire world on himself. The bible states that he really did die and as a result he paid the penalty everyone else deserved. The amazing thing about this is that Jesus Christ never sinned, not even once and was the only person to ever live that didn't deserve the penalty of death. But the father had loved everyone in the world so much that he sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to die in the place of everyone else. The bible teaches that all people have to do is believe this and they will become Christians and therefore live with the father and the son in heaven forever.

But there is more to this story. Jesus did not stay dead! Three days after dying, Jesus came back to life on the earth and was seen by his immediate followers and over 500 others. There was just no doubt about this. The father raised his son from the grave. Why did he do this? The bible teaches that Jesus rose from the dead so that death, for all who believe in him would not be the end of people's existence but would be the beginning of living forever in heaven. Christians believe that when they die, they will go immediately to be with and live with Jesus Christ. The bible also teaches that Jesus Christ is alive right now and will be returning soon to the earth to bring judgement on all those who are against him and to reward all those who believe in him.

### **What is the bible?**

The bible is a very unique book. It was written by several different authors over a period of about 2,000 years. The last part of the bible was written just over 1,900 years ago. So it is a very old book. The bible states that the authors who wrote the words of the bible, also called the Scriptures, were inspired by God so that the words these authors wrote were the words God intended to be written. That is why the bible is often called God's Word or the Word of God.

The bible is not a history text book yet it contains lots of history. It is not a documentary about religion yet it is very religious in its content. So what is it? The bible can be understood as a story. It is a true story about God and how God created the world and how God relates to the world. The bible describes God's dealing with humans from the very beginning of the world to the time in the future when the world will come to an end and an eternal kingdom will be established. God will be the ruler of this eternal kingdom along with Jesus Christ, God's Son.

The bible has two main sections. The first section is larger or longer than the second. This first section is called the "Old Testament" The shorter second section is called the "New Testament". Each section contains different parts. These parts are called books. The reason they are called books is because they were written by many different authors over a very long time and were written and kept as separate documents. These separate documents were written on long lengths of material and rolled up in a scroll. These scrolls became known as books.

Many years before the birth of Jesus Christ, scholars gathered the various scrolls that they understood to have been inspired by God and put them into a single collection. This collection became known as the Old Testament. It contains 39 separate books. The reason this collection is called the Old Testament is because it describes God's relationship with humans and more specifically with the Jewish nation under a set of rules God gave to man. This set of rules can also be called the law or testament or covenant because it really was a set of laws which humans needed to obey. God gave these rules or laws to a man called Moses. These rules can be found in the first five books of the Old Testament. What is amazing is that, contained in one of the books of the Old Testament, is a promise that God would give humans a new covenant or set of laws in the future. God did just that and this new covenant or testament is found in the second part of the bible called the New Testament.

Many years after the birth of Jesus Christ, scholars gathered the various scrolls that they understood to have been inspired by God and put them in a single collection. This collection became known as the New Testament. It contains 27 separate books. Some of these books can also be called letters because they were written as a letter to a group of people in a particular city or town. The New Testament can also be called the new covenant because it contains the new set of rules God gave, not to one man like Moses, but to a newly established group of people called the church.

The New Testament is also the story of the birth, life, death, resurrection and present ruling of the world by Jesus Christ. It is also a covenant or a promise because in the New Testament God has given a set of rules which, if followed by anyone, will result in their being accepted into God's family and enjoying all the benefits that God intended for members of his family. Basically, the primary or most important aspect of this new covenant is one of belief. To become a member of God's family one must believe in what the New Testament states is the good news or the gospel. The gospel is the story of what Jesus Christ has done on behalf of everyone in the world which is explained above under the heading of "Who is Jesus Christ".

### **What is contained in the bible?**

The bible is a continuous story starting from the creation of the world and ending at the beginning of the eternal state or kingdom in which all those who belong to God's family will live with God forever. There is much more to this story. The first section, the Old Testament contains 39 books (see above explanation) which start with the story of the creation of the universe and the world by God. The story continues with God's choice of one nation through which he would bring a messiah or saviour to be born who would save the world's peoples from their sins. The beginnings of this nation which became to be known as Israel can be found in the very first book of the bible called Genesis which simply means "beginning". Through out the next 38 books of the Old Testament, the story of this nation is told. It is a story of struggle including good times and bad times and ends with this nation rejecting God as ruler over them.

However, the story of the Old Testament does not just contain the history of the nation of Israel. One of its most important features is the promise of a Messiah who would come in the future to be a saviour not only for Israel but for the whole world. Some of these promise are very detailed and include such things as the place and time of the Messiah's birth, the things he would do and accomplish, how he would die and even his eventual return to earth following his time in heaven which is called the second coming. The promises of the Old Testament about the Messiah in regard to his earthly birth, life, death and return to heaven have all been exactly fulfilled. Yet to come will be the fulfilment of the promises of his return to earth. The Messiah is also known by another name. This name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The New Testament contains 27 books and begins with the story of the life of Jesus Christ in what is known as the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The story of the newly established church begins in the fifth book which is called Acts or the Acts of the Apostles. The rest of the New Testament is a collection of letters written by some of these Apostles. The Apostles were the first followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ taught them personally and gave God's word to them. The major or most important Apostles, Peter, James, John, and Paul were also the leaders of the church. The word church is a collective term. It primarily means the people who are believers and followers of Jesus Christ who meet together to worship Jesus Christ. The New Testament calls these people Christians. All of the Christians together make up or can be understood as Christianity.

A summary of the bible is stated below. It is a very brief summary and is just an overview. There are a few books which will be made reference to at the end of this article which give a full survey of the books of the bible and about Christianity. If you want to learn more about what each of the books of the bible contain and how they relate to each other, it would be beneficial to consult these survey books.

### **The Old Testament - Overview**

The bible begins by telling the story of how the world was created. The bible simply states that the world was created by God. The bible never really tells us where God came from. God is someone who created the universe including the earth. God also made the first humans and all the animals, fish and birds and all other living things. God gave these humans some work to do and told them to populate the earth. Humans seem to have done this fairly well.

God wanted humans to obey and trust him. However, they didn't do this and God was angry with them and God told the humans that because they did not trust him or obey him, they would be judged and suffer harm. The greatest harm was that humans would be separated from God. It is important to understand something at this point. The bible tells us that it is God's world and he can do whatever he wants with it. Humans think they really are in control of the world and God has to respond to them or do what humans tell him to do. Even in ancient history, the bible tells the story that this control issue got humans into a lot of trouble and God even sent a world wide flood to destroy all the humans except for eight who survived in a big boat. This boat, after floating around for about a year, finally landed in the middle east and these eight people set out again to populate the earth. They did this fairly well but only after God forced them not to stay together in one place.

Not long after the flood was over, humans continued to have the same old control problems with God and they began to keep close together and even started to build a tower to reach up to God. The problem with this idea was that they were staying together and not going out to populate the earth and not obeying God by taking oversight of the earth in the way God wanted. So God gave them different languages and they could no longer understand each other the way they used to. With this, humans finally left the tower they were building and began to populate the earth.

After this, God chose a man to start a family that would be God's chosen people. The man's name was Abraham and he and his wife Sarah started a family which became the Jewish nation. God had even selected a land for these people to live which was known as the promised land. This land is now known as Israel. The Jewish people did not take possession of this land right away due to a severe famine. Abraham's grandson, Jacob and his family went to live in Egypt to avoid this famine, through the invitation of his brother Joseph who had spent many years in Egypt and had eventually risen to the rank of prime minister. Jacob's family grew in numbers and they did not return to the land promised to them. Before leaving for Egypt, Jacob had his name changed by God to Israel. So Jacob's family and descendants became known as the sons of Israel or simply Israelites. More about this story, up to this point, can be read in the very first book of the bible, called Genesis, which means, 'beginning'.

The Israelites stayed in Egypt for about four hundred years and during this long period eventually became slaves to the rulers of Egypt who were called Pharaohs. God finally decided to move the Israelites to the land he had promised them. God chose a man called Moses to lead the great numbers of the Israelites, now numbering about 2 million out of Egypt. Moses first met God in the desert of the Sinai peninsula but Moses had grown up in Egypt. In fact Moses grew up in the Pharaoh's palace and was like a grandson to Pharaoh. Moses, however was Jewish and when he grew up he sought to be the leader of the Jews. But Moses had to run for his life into the desert after killing an Egyptian who was attacking a Jewish slave. Moses was forty years old when he fled from Egypt. Moses lived in the desert for another forty years before meeting God. So he was eighty years old when God called upon him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

God gave Moses lots of help in persuading the Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt. Pharaoh did not want to let 2 million slaves leave his service. God used Moses and his brother Aaron to bring 10 different incidents called plagues against Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Some of these plagues included turning the water of the Nile River into blood, onslaughts of country wide infestations of things like flies, gnats, locusts and frogs, the darkening of Egypt for three days, a great hail storm and finally the death of the first born of both animals and humans. However, in the area of Goshen where the Israelite slaves lived none of these plagues were experienced.

Following the death of Pharaoh's first born as well as of the Egyptian's first born, Pharaoh said the people of Israel could leave Egypt. The angel of God who brought about the killing of the first born in Egypt, did not kill the Israelites' first born. This angel passed over the homes of the Israelites who has brushed lamb's blood on the door frames of their houses. This event, which God called the passover, is still celebrated in Israel and among Jews around the world to this day.

Moses knowing that Pharaoh could change his mind led the Israelites quickly out of Egypt. Pharaoh, when he was told that the Israelites were leaving, decided to have his army chase after Moses and the fleeing Israelites. The Israelites got as far as the Red Sea and were blocked. The armies of Egypt fast approaching by chariots were getting closer. God now worked another great miracle and caused the Red Sea to be divided so dry land appeared upon which the Israelites could flee to safety on the other side which was the Sinai peninsula. God also blocked the advance of the Egyptians by a great cloud so they could not attack the Israelites. As soon as the Israelites had crossed over to the Sinai peninsula, the great cloud was removed and the Egyptian army entered the dry ground of the Red Sea with the towering walls of water on either side of them. When the entire army was in the midst of the Sea, God brought the water down upon them and all the soldiers and their horses were drowned. This great miracle is also remembered by Jewish people today.

Moses next led the Israelites to a mountain called Mount Sinai where God gave him 10 great laws called the 10 commandments. God also gave Moses many other laws and regulations for the people for purposes of worship and daily living. The Israelites however, soon complained about life in the desert and rebelled against God. God punished the Israelites by making them stay in the great desert of Sinai for forty years. Of those who left Egypt only two, Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter into the promised land across the Jordan River. Even Moses who sadly had disobeyed God during this period died just before God led the younger Israelites, those who had been born in the desert, into the promised land. The story of Moses and the journeys of the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land can be found in the second, third, fourth and fifth books of the bible called: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Joshua became the leader of the Israelites during the time when they had to remove the people who were living in the land but were enemies of God. After settling in this land and over many years, the Israelites repeatedly disobeyed and rebelled against God. Through many generations even though God raised up several leaders who followed and were faithful to God, the Israelites chose to follow after false gods and worship idols. Many of Israel's leaders were like the people and turned their backs on God. God often called upon faithful followers called prophets to tell the people of Israel to repent and return to God but the people did not listen to them. All of the rest of the books in the Old Testament, which is the first section of the bible, tell the story of Israel's rebellion against God.

Israel rebelled against God in desiring to have a king rule over them instead of God. God allowed this to happen and even warned them that this would lead to many problems. Samuel, a priest of God first anointed Saul to be the first king over Israel. The nation of Israel was small in size and feared its more powerful and larger neighboring nations. Saul did not prove to be a faithful king and disobeyed God and therefore God selected someone else to be king. The second king to be anointed by Samuel was David. He was just a young man when he was chosen and Saul was still reigning. Saul was furious that God had rejected him as king and sought to kill David but God protected David. David was very faithful to God and God promised David that his descendants would always rule over Israel. David was also a poet and writer. Many of the Psalms that are in the Bible were written by David. Most of David's descendants however who became kings were not as faithful as David. These later kings rejected God and chose to worship idols or false gods. The prophets of Israel often rebuked these kings for their wicked and evil ways but these kings failed to listen to the prophets and had some of them killed. The final king to rule over Israel and the entire world in the future will be the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Bible states that Jesus Christ was born from a lineage or family that traced its ancestors back to king David. Therefore God's promise to king David about his descendants ruling over Israel will be realized through the future rule of Jesus Christ when he returns to the earth.

One of the most famous prophets was a man called Isaiah. Isaiah wrote an entire book about God's dealings with the Israelites in the past and how God would rescue the Israelites and the entire world in the future. Isaiah wrote several things about someone God had chosen to be the savior of the Israelites and the world. This person to come would be God's own Son whom the Israelites called the Messiah. The Messiah, Isaiah said, would suffer many things to bring about the rescue of people from the judgment of God. God would

not allow the rebellion and disobedience of all the world's people to go unpunished. This rebellion against and disobedience to God is called sin. People commit sins when they chose to not obey what God has required of them. For example, choosing to ignore God and claiming there is no God is a great sin. Choosing to disobey any of the 10 commandments is also a sin. God has told us many times in the bible that the penalty for these sins is to be separated from God for ever. God also said that everyone commits sins and there is no one who has lived a life without sin. Only one person, the Messiah to come, would live a life in perfect obedience to God

Following Isaiah, another of these famous prophets was Jeremiah. Jeremiah also wrote an entire book about God's relationship with the Israelites. The story Jeremiah wrote is a sad one. God, after hundreds of years of putting up with the sins of the Israelites allowed them to be captured by the armies of the king of Babylon ( a kingdom on the Euphrates River in modern day Iraq). The armies of Babylon destroyed the city of Jerusalem and tore down the great temple of God. Along with the treasures of the temple, a great number of Israelites were transported to Babylon. This is called the captivity or exile of the Israelites from Judah. The country of Israel had been split in two. The northern part was called Israel and the southern part was called Judah. The Israelite capital city, Jerusalem was in the smaller country called Judah. The people of Israel, the northern country had been taken captive earlier by the armies from Assyria. This is why the book of Jeremiah is a sad story and why he is called the weeping prophet for he shed many tears over the fate of his people, the Israelites. However, one of the joyful sections of the story Jeremiah told was about something new God was going to bring about in the future. God told Jeremiah that a new covenant between God and Israel was going to be made. This new covenant was a promise of how God would restore the relationship between himself and the people of Israel and Judah. God would once again be their God and he would forgive them of their sins. The second part of the bible, called the New Testament, is all about this new covenant.

Two more great prophets followed Jeremiah. Ezekiel tells the story of the far future and about a new temple which would be built. Ezekiel also spoke about a great battle that would be fought near Jerusalem. This battle has not yet been fought and is sometimes referred to as the battle of Armageddon. Daniel is the next great prophet. He tells the story of how he and three of his friends lived in the capital city of Babylon and how God rescued them from danger. Daniel's three friends refused to bow down to a statute of the king of Babylon and as punishment were thrown into a great furnace that was so hot that the soldiers who threw them into the furnace were themselves killed by the heat. The three friends however did not perish in the flames. When the king of Babylon looked into the fire, he saw not three men but four. An angel of God protected the three friends of Daniel. When the three friends came out of the furnace their clothes were not burnt, not even a hair of their heads were singed and they did not even have any smell from the fire upon them.

Daniel himself was also condemned by a later king. Because Daniel continued to worship the One true God and not the king he was thrown into a den of fierce lions. The lions, although they very powerful left Daniel alone and did not hurt him. The men along with their families who had accused Daniel were then thrown into the same den of lions and were quickly overpowered by the lions and immediately killed. Daniel tells many other stories including how God allowed him to interpret the dreams of the king of Babylon and about how God revealed the future to him. One of these future stories has to do with the very end of time when God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

At the end of the first section of the bible, the Old Testament, are stories from twelve prophets. Although many of the things these twelve prophets write about have to do with the sins of the Israelites, they do contain some interesting stories about the Messiah to come and the very end of time. For example one prophet called Micah revealed where the Messiah, Jesus Christ would be born. Another prophet called Zechariah, wrote about a future kingdom where the Messiah will reign in Jerusalem. The last prophet called Malachi tells the story about the last days of the earth when the a fire will consume the wicked but the righteous will be as free as calves released from their stalls, free to leap with joy.

## **The New Testament - Overview**

The second part of the bible is called the New Testament and it contains 27 books or letters written about the Messiah who the prophets of the Old Testament said would come. The first four books of the New Testament are often called the gospels for they tell the good news (the gospel means good news) about Jesus Christ. It is in these four books, called by the first names of the authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, that the story of the time spent by Jesus Christ on earth is told. Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Matthew wrote that another name for Jesus is Immanuel which means "God with us". This is a good description of Christianity. God's Son Jesus Christ, became a human and was born in Bethlehem as promised by the prophet Micah. Jesus, lived among the Jewish people of Judea and often visited the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. This temple had been rebuilt after the Israelites returned to Judah following the seventy year captivity or exile in Babylon.

Jesus lived for about 33 years before being killed by a tortuous and brutal Roman method of execution called crucifixion. The reason Jesus was put to death was because of the claim he made that he was God. For the Jews this was considered blasphemy. Jesus did not deny that he really was God. Along with this, Jesus claimed that he had come to earth to save the people from their sins. All that was required was that the people believe in him and that God had sent him. One of the most well known verses of the bible is found in the gospel of John, in chapter 3 verse 16 which John wrote, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The dual claim of being god and being the Messiah, the One who would bring salvation to Israel and the world was too much for the Jewish leaders to accept. The Jewish leaders convinced the Roman authorities to put Jesus to death. For this purpose the Romans used the cruel method of crucifixion.

Jesus had his hands and feet nailed to a cross which was then lifted up and made to stand upright. Those who were crucified were high above the ground on a cross and the weight of their bodies hung from these nails. Death was painful and slow and the victims of this type of torture died of suffocation. Before being crucified Jesus endured the lashings of cruel Roman soldiers who used whips with metal at the ends of the lashes which tore strips of flesh from his back. Bleeding from the whips and in a very weakened state Jesus was nailed to the cross. Immediately after his death and while he still hung on the cross, Jesus was pierced in the side by a spear from a Roman soldier. Blood and water flowed from this wound. Jesus' body was then removed from the cross and put into a tomb which had a large round stone securely set in place and sealed so no one could get in or get out. Roman soldiers were posted in front of the tomb as guards.

The gospel stories next tell of something amazing. Jesus was declared dead by the Romans who certainly knew death and knew that no one was ever removed from the torture of crucifixion without being dead. The tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers who would face death themselves if anyone removed the sealed and solid stone placed to block the only entrance to the tomb. Yet the gospel stories reveal that Jesus rose from the dead. Neither his disciples nor any other person took his body. The tomb was sealed and guarded. God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus appeared to the disciples and to over 500 people who were eye-witnesses of the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Why did Jesus have to endure such a cruel death since he had not committed even one sin? The answer to that question reveals the very heart of the bible and of Christianity. God being both holy and just could not allow sin to go unpunished. Everyone who has ever lived has committed sins and is a sinner, according to the bible, and must be punished. God's own holiness and justice demands a holy and just punishment. But God has done something remarkable. Even though God did not have to do this, He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ to be punished for the sins of the whole world. The punishment was death. Only someone who lived a perfect and sinless life could, according to God, become the one God could accept to bear the sins and pay the penalty of death for all the people of the world. There was no one found among the people of the world who was perfect and sinless so God, because he loved the entire world, sent his own Son to be born as a human being to pay this penalty.

The other books or letters of the New Testament tell the story of the lives of the disciples or as they are also known, apostles. Some of the stories have to do with Peter, Philip and Stephen who became the first Christian martyr following Jesus Christ. Most of the stories have to do with the life and journeys of a man who was not one of the original disciples of Jesus. His name was Paul and his long and hard journeys and sufferings are told through the letters he wrote and also through the historical book of Acts written by Luke who was a medical doctor. The book of Acts is the fifth book of the New Testament. These stories also are about the beginnings of the earliest churches that were started by the apostles. The first great church was started fifty days following the return of Jesus Christ to heaven. This event is told by Dr. Luke in the second chapter of the book of Acts.

The stories of the beginnings of the early churches are recorded in the books or letters following the book of Acts and ending with the letter or book of Revelation. They all tell a story which has not stopped even to this day. It is the story of the gospel of the good news of Jesus Christ. The story is simple. People become Christians by believing in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save people from eternal separation from God because of their sins. The book of Revelation records the story of the end of all things and how horrible it will be for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. So the gospel story is one which must be believed. It is not enough to learn about it or to know something about it or to think that it may be true. It requires faith in Jesus Christ. That is the story of the New Testament.

### **What has happened since?**

Since the early days of the start of the first church in Jerusalem fifty days after Jesus was taken up to heaven, the story of Jesus Christ has spread around the world. Those who have told the story have not found it easy nor has every ear been receptive to it. Many thousands, and perhaps millions have been persecuted and many have been killed because they stood up and have told this story. Some countries and cultures have tried to eradicate any telling of the story or any books which have been published about it including the bible. The story, however, even in spite of horrific opposition to it, continues to be spread and told to new generations and new peoples.

This is not to be understood as strange or foreign to the meaning of Christianity. For those who call themselves Christians have a command from Jesus Christ to keep on telling the story. Jesus said, as recorded by Matthew in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> verses of the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of the first book of the New Testament, ‘go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’ To be a Christian is to be a story teller. The story is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not about church buildings or religion but is a story of its founder Jesus Christ. It is made up of all those who follow and believe in Jesus Christ. Christianity can also be seen as the true church, not made of bricks, wood and stone but made up of all those who believe in the One who is Lord and Christ as the apostle Peter claimed in the book of Acts, chapter 2 verse 36. Now that humans have spread to all parts of the earth in obedience to God, the story of the good news of Christianity must also be told in all parts of the earth.

The following books are suggested to learn more about Christianity and the bible:

#### **About Christianity:**

*Basic Christianity*, by author John Stott, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

*Mere Christianity*, by author C. S. Lewis, Zondervan Publishers

*Knowing God*, by author J. I. Packer, Inter-Varsity Press

#### **About the Bible:**

*Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, Zondervan Publishers

*Nelson's Old Testament Survey*, by authors Charles Dyer and Eugene Merrill, Thomas Nelson Publishers

*Nelson's New Testament Survey*, by authors Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, Thomas Nelson Publishers

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