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What is the Bible?

Before I get into the central characters of the Bible and its message, I want to first of all give you a brief overview to help you understand and to familiarize yourself with Scripture. To first-time readers and students of the Bible, I would like to give an outline of the Bible, its divisions, characters and a brief summary.

The Divisions

The Bible is divided into two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. In short, the Old Testament is the story of a Nation, and the New Testament is the story of a Man. The Nation was God's way of bringing the Man into the world.

The Old Testament describes the founding and preservation of the nation of Israel, God promised to use Israel to bless the whole world (Gen.12:2-3). Once Israel was established as a nation, God raised up a family within that nation through whom the blessings would come: the family of David (Psalm 89:3-4). Then, from the family of David was promised one Man who would bring the promised blessing (Isaiah 11:1-10).

The New Testament details the coming of that promised Man. His name was Jesus, and He fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament as He lived a perfect sinless life, died to become the Savior, and rose from the dead.

The Central Character

Jesus is the central character in the Bible. The whole book is really about Him. The Old Testament predicts His coming and sets the stage for His entrance into the world. The New Testament describes His coming and His work to bring salvation to our sinful

world.

Jesus is more than a historical figure: in fact, He is more than a mere man. He is God in the flesh, and His coming was the most important event in the history of the world. God Himself became a man in order to give us a clear, understandable picture of who He is. What is God like? He is like Jesus: Jesus is God in human form (John 1:14; 14:9) and creator of all things (John 1:3).

A Brief Summary

God created man and placed him in a perfect environment; however deceived by Satan, man rebelled against God and fell from what God intended him to be. God placed the world under a curse because of disobedience (sin) but immediately set in motion a plan to rescue man and all creation to its original glory.

As part of His plan of redemption, God called Abraham out of Babylonia into Canaan (about 2,000 B.C.). God promised Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob (also called Israel) that He would bless the world through a Descendent of theirs. Israel's family emigrated from Canaan to Egypt, where they grew to be a nation.

Around 1,400 B.C., God led Israel's descendants out of Egypt under the direction of Moses and gave them the Promised Land, Canaan, as their own. Through Moses, God gave the people of Israel the Law and made a covenant with them: if they would remain faithful to God and not follow the idolatry of the surrounding nations, then they would prosper. If they forsook God and followed idols, then God would destroy their nation.

Around 400 years later, during the reigns of David and his son Solomon, Israel was solidified into a great and powerful kingdom. God promised David and Solomon that a Descendant of theirs would rule as an everlasting King.

After Solomon's reign, the nation of Israel was divided. The ten

tribes to the north were called "Israel," and they lasted about 200 years before God judged them for their idolatry; Assyria took Israel captive around 721 B.C. The two tribes in the south were called "Judah," and they lasted a little longer, but eventually they, too, turned from God. Babylon took them captive around 600 B.C.

Around 70 years later, God graciously brought a remnant of the captives back to their own land. Jerusalem, the capital, was rebuilt around 444 B.C., and Israel once again established a national identity. Thus, the Old Testament closes.

The New Testament opens about 400 years later with the birth of Jesus Christ in Judea. Jesus was the Descendant promised to Abraham and David, the One to fulfill God's plan to redeem mankind and restore creation. Jesus faithfully completed His work: He died for all of the sins of the world and rose from the dead. The death of Christ is the basis for a New Covenant with the world: all who have faith in Jesus will be saved and live eternally with Him.

After His resurrection, Jesus sent His disciples to spread the news everywhere of His life and His power to save. Jesus' disciples went in every direction spreading the good news of Jesus and salvation. They traveled through Asia Minor, Greece, and the Roman Empire. The New Testament closes with a prediction of Jesus' return to judge the unbelieving world and to free creation from the curse of Adam's fall.