

Day 1: Mark 1-4  
Day 2: Mark 5-8  
Day 3: Mark 9-12  
Day 4: Mark 13-16  
Day 5: 1 John 1-3  
Day 6: 1 John 4-5  
Day 7: Genesis 1-3  
Day 8: Genesis 4-5  
Day 9: Genesis 6-8  
Day 10: Genesis 9-11  
Day 11: Romans 1-4  
Day 12: Romans 5-8  
Day 13: Romans 9-12  
Day 14: Romans 13-16

*The Basics*

## Reading schedule

*Dig Deeper*

**Week 3**

**Week 4**

**Week 5**

Day 29: Ephesians 4-6  
Day 30: Genesis 12-14  
Day 31: Genesis 15-17  
Day 32: Genesis 18-20  
Day 33: Genesis 21-23  
Day 34: Genesis 24-26  
Day 35: Genesis 27-29

Matthew 28

Day 49: John 19-21 and  
Day 48: John 16-18  
Day 47: John 13-15  
Day 46: John 10-12  
Day 45: John 7-9  
Day 44: John 4-6  
Day 43: John 1-3

**Week 7**

Day 42: Genesis 48-50  
Day 41: Genesis 45-47  
Day 40: Genesis 42-44  
Day 39: Genesis 39-41  
Day 38: Genesis 36-38  
Day 37: Genesis 33-35  
Day 36: Genesis 30-32

**Week 6**

*Dig Deeper (continued)*

By Shawn D. Handran, 2008, 2009, 2024.  
This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0  
**Dedication:** To Osman, who inspired me to make this study guide.  
**Acknowledgments:** I thank Daniel Tu for reviewing and suggesting the use of highlighted text; my wife Debra for reviewing and many helpful suggestions; and Dr. George Stulac for his theological review.  
Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.  
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

## About this guide

### Basics of the Bible PART 1 OF 2: THE BASICS

*A self-directed reading plan and study guide for people that are new to the Bible and want to learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus.*

## Introduction

**Welcome.** This course is designed for the person that wants to learn what it means to become or be a follower of Jesus. Many people that seek this knowledge realize that the Bible is where they must look, but have been hampered in their quest for one reason or another (e.g. intimidated by the size of the Bible, don’t know where to begin, tried to read the Bible but couldn’t make sense of it, got discouraged, etc.).

This is a **self-directed study** to assist you in your quest for answers. It is intended to take you rapidly through select books of the Bible to give you a “**big picture**” overview of what it means to be or become a follower of Jesus, and to become familiarized with the Bible—which is *the* definitive handbook for those who want to follow Jesus. For maximum benefit, plan on spending about **30 minutes** every day for the next few weeks.

The course consists of **two parts**: the first covers the basics and can be completed in two weeks. The second part “digs deeper” into the Bible and takes an additional five weeks of daily reading. This study lays the basic foundation for understanding the Bible and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

After completing this course, you will be **equipped, empowered** and **excited** to continue your study of the Bible!

Most of the books are divided into **chapters** (a few of the smallest books have a single un-numbered chapter), and each chapter in turn is divided into **verses**. A verse is typically one or two sentences. Even those that are unfamiliar with the Bible have probably heard someone quote or refer to **John 3:16**. This means the **book of John, chapter 3, verse 16**. When looking up books in the Bible, refer to the table of contents. In this example, the book of

## Chapters and Verses

## Navigating the Bible:

name and title together: Jesus (the) Christ.  
*Christos*, from which the title *Christ* is derived. Today, we put the or as translated in English, **Jesus**. The Greek word for Messiah is The Messiah is a descendant of Abraham named Yeshua (Joshua), ten in the Hebrew Scriptures about the coming **Messiah** (Savior). The Greek Scriptures show how the Creator God entered into history by becoming a human, fulfilling what was written in the Hebrew Scriptures over a period of approximately 40-90 AD. The Greek Scriptures contain **27 books**, also written by several different authors over a period of approximately 50 years, around 40-90 AD. The Greek Scriptures show how the Creator God entered into history by becoming a human, fulfilling what was written in the Hebrew Scriptures about the coming **Messiah** (Savior). The Messiah is a descendant of Abraham named Yeshua (Joshua), or as translated in English, **Jesus**. The Greek word for Messiah is *Christos*, from which the title *Christ* is derived. Today, we put the name and title together: Jesus (the) Christ.

the coming of a *Messiah* (which is the Hebrew word for savior or rescuer).  
The **Greek** Scriptures contain **27 books**, also written by several different authors over a period of approximately 50 years, around 40-90 AD. The Greek Scriptures show how the Creator God entered into history by becoming a human, fulfilling what was written in the Hebrew Scriptures about the coming **Messiah** (Savior). The Messiah is a descendant of Abraham named Yeshua (Joshua), or as translated in English, **Jesus**. The Greek word for Messiah is *Christos*, from which the title *Christ* is derived. Today, we put the name and title together: Jesus (the) Christ.

The Bible consists of the **Hebrew** and **Greek** Scriptures.  
The **Hebrew** Scriptures contain **39 books** written by many different authors over a one thousand year period, approximately between 1400-400 BC. Except for a few sections, it is written entirely in Hebrew. A more detailed description of the Hebrew Scriptures is included later in this study, but for the purposes of this introduction, it is sufficient to summarize that the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole tell of a special and unique task that the Creator God gave to the descendants of a man named Abraham—the **Israelites**. The purpose of this task was that the Israelites were “commissioned” to tell all the other people of the world about the **Creator God**. The Hebrew Scriptures contain many references of

## The Bible at a glance

It is important to **read every day**—missing a day or two will make it more difficult to remember where you left off and will also make it harder for you to develop a “big picture” view of the Bible.  
The Bible consists of the **Hebrew** and **Greek** Scriptures.  
The **Hebrew** Scriptures contain **39 books** written by many different authors over a one thousand year period, approximately between 1400-400 BC. Except for a few sections, it is written entirely in Hebrew. A more detailed description of the Hebrew Scriptures is included later in this study, but for the purposes of this introduction, it is sufficient to summarize that the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole tell of a special and unique task that the Creator God gave to the descendants of a man named Abraham—the **Israelites**. The purpose of this task was that the Israelites were “commissioned” to tell all the other people of the world about the **Creator God**. The Hebrew Scriptures contain many references of

Read the Bible selection **as quickly as you can** without skimming or speed reading (if you have a study Bible, do not stop to read the commentary notes, or do so only sparingly). If you notice a verse of interest, highlight it or underline it with a pencil, but **do not stop** to contemplate at this point in time yet (instructions will be given at the end of the course on how to read the Bible contemplatively and how to effectively use study Bibles and other commentaries).

Carve out time **each day** to complete the readings.  
This course requires about **20-40 minutes** of focused, **uninterrupted daily reading**. Every day before you begin reading, **pray to God** asking that the Holy Spirit would give you insight and understanding into what you are about to read.

## The importance of daily reading

John, or the *Gospel of John* as it is known by its longer title, is located toward the back of the Bible. Once you locate John, flip through a couple of pages until you reach chapter 3. In most Bibles, the front size of the chapter number is much larger than the rest of the text whereas the verse number is a small superscript number embedded within the text itself. **See examples below.**  
**Genesis 1:1**  
1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
**John 3:16**  
16For 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 Basics**  
*The Basics* covers **three books** from the Greek Scriptures (commonly referred to as the **New Testament**) and a portion of the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures (commonly referred to as the Old Testament):  
**Mark**  
1<sup>st</sup> letter of John\*  
**Genesis 1-11**  
**Romans**  
\*Not to be confused with the Gospel of John; 1st John is near the end of the Bible.

## The Basics: Big Picture Summary

**Mark:** a fast-paced and vivid account of the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ). Written by a disciple of Jesus named John Mark.  
**1<sup>st</sup> John:** the most succinct and eloquent writing in all of the Bible on the loving aspect of our Heavenly Father, the Creator God. Written by John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’ closest and most beloved disciples.  
**Genesis 1-11:** a big picture summary of creation and the aftermath of mankind’s rebellion against the Creator God. This portion of the Bible forms the foundation for understanding the entire Bible.  
**Romans:** a profound and stunningly clear description of the depravity of mankind and how to be reconciled with the Creator God through faith in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ). Written by Paul, the first missionary to Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and Greece.  
**The Basics reading schedule**  
See back cover.

## The non-sequential reading approach

Most people that are new to the Bible approach it like any other book that they read—they start at the beginning and read linearly through to the end.

However, this often leads to frustration because a linear reading approach does not readily facilitate an understanding of the Bible *as you are reading it*. This course takes a different approach by taking you through books of the Bible in a **non-sequential** order. As such, this facilitates a **greater understanding** of the big picture of the Bible as you are reading it—that is, as you progress through the daily reading schedule, you will understand more and more what the Bible is saying.

## Getting started

You will need a **Bible** and a **pencil** or **highlighter**.

It is not necessary to buy a study version of the Bible for this course, but you may find it beneficial in the long term to start this course using a study Bible. If English is your native language\*, choose a modern Bible translation—NIV, NRSV, NASB and NKJV are all excellent choices—but avoid paraphrase versions for this study. (Paraphrase versions are excellent for getting a different perspective on a word in the original Greek or Hebrew text, but this type of study should be saved for later in your journey.)

\*Generally, you’ll understand the Bible best in your first language, so feel free to use that translation if it is available in your native tongue. If you are bilingual, use the language with which you are most comfortable.



## Day 1: Mark 1-4

**Focus point:** Mark 2:1-12

I can tell someone that I forgive them of their sins—all of their sins, mind you, not just the ones they may have committed against me personally. It would be bold and presumptuous of me to make such a claim, but nevertheless, I could still say this to someone and no one could prove one way or the other if my announcement actually worked or not. That is because there isn’t any obvious or visible sign that proves whether or not I actually had the power and ability to remove their sins—they would look just the same as they did before I made my audacious announcement. Here, Jesus provides the physical evidence to His claim that He (and He alone) has the ability to forgive sins. First, He says to the paralytic that the man’s sins are forgiven, but then Jesus goes on to actually prove it—He connects His words of forgiveness with His words of healing. The paralytic is instantly cured—Jesus used His words to show His power over disease, the man was healed, therefore His words of healing must be true. Jesus used His words to state that He can forgive sins, likewise these words must also be true. Do you see the striking difference between my claim to have the power to forgive sins (in which I provide no proof), and Jesus’ claim to have the power to forgive sins (in which He provides spectacular proof)?

## Day 2: Mark 5-8

**Focus point:** Mark 8:31-38

This passage introduces a theme that you will see throughout all four gospel accounts—before Jesus’ death and resurrection, the disciples completely misunderstood the purpose and intent of Jesus’ plan. They thought that Jesus came as a conqueror-king that would deliver the oppressed Israelites out of the hands of the foreign rulers (Rome). This is why Peter “rebuked” Jesus here—Peter is essentially saying, “Jesus, that’s crazy talk—you’re here to deliver us, not sacrifice yourself—let me remind you of the game plan....” Jesus must correct Peter (and not for the last time!) and remind *him* of the true game plan—that Jesus came to usher in a new kingdom, the Kingdom of God—a kingdom which looks completely different from our worldly ideas of a

kingdom. Keep this thought in mind as you read through the gospel accounts and it will help you understand a great deal of the “confusing” things that Jesus said to His disciples—it sounds confusing to us because we have the same incorrect mindset that Peter had.

## Day 3: Mark 9-12

**Focus point:** Mark 12:28-34

The modern equivalent to a scribe would be a Bible scholar or Theology professor—one who studies the Scriptures in the original language and knows it inside and out. Isn’t it curious that a scribe is asking Jesus what commandment is the most important? The scribe is referring to the *Torah*, which are the first five books of the Bible—today we call this the “Law.” In Hebrew, *torah* simply means “instruction.” We will get to a study of the Law later, but for the purposes of understanding this passage, there are hundreds of laws and instructions described in the *Torah*, so the scribe is asking: which of these is most important? It is likely that the scribe was hoping to trip Jesus up and get Him to say something inconsistent, or to say something that could easily be proven wrong (after all, he had a Ph.D. in the Scriptures). Instead, Jesus condenses and summarizes all of the Law into two commandments: it’s all about your relationship with God as highest priority, and your relationship with fellow humans as second priority. Everything else—all the detailed rules that you read about in the Law—fall naturally into place if you have these two commandments in the right priority. You can see the transforming power of Jesus right here in this passage—the scribe had hoped to trick Jesus, but instead was completely convinced and changed by Jesus’ answer to his question.

## Day 4: Mark 13-16

**Focus point:** Mark 14:53-65

The religious leaders were looking for a way to lawfully have Jesus put to death and rid themselves of Jesus’ meddling in their territory, so to speak. In verse 58, an accusation is made that Jesus used magic or sorcery as His source of power, which was an act punishable by death according to the Law. But the accusation didn’t stick because of conflicting testimony. The chief

priest must then “ratchet” things up a notch, and hopes to trap Jesus in blasphemy—claiming to be God or equal to God—an act also punishable by death. Now, instead of the conflicting testimony of the false witnesses, Jesus Himself answers the chief priest’s question (much to the delight of the chief priest, for this is exactly the claim he was hoping Jesus would make)—Jesus confirms that He is the Messiah. This sealed Jesus’ fate, for now the council had the “legal” basis for imposing the death penalty. At that time, since Israel was under the control of Rome, criminals convicted of capital punishment had to first have the approval of the regional Roman leader before the sentence could be carried out. Stop and think about it for a moment: if Jesus were just an ordinary man (as the council thought), then good riddance—just another crazy person claiming to be a Messiah (people still claim this today); but the difference is that Jesus wasn’t just another crazy person, He rose from the dead, proving that He was indeed the Messiah. No false Messiah has ever done that, they are still in the grave.

## Day 5: 1 John 1-3

**Focus point:** 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:1-10

Many people find it unusual or strange that the Bible uses familial language so often. Many people have an idea that God is a distant, incomprehensible figure. When we reflect on the scope and size of creation, it is easy to get this feeling about the Being who brought forth the entire universe! Yet, John wants to make it clear, using language that we can easily understand and relate to, that God is like a wonderful father who pours His love out on us. s you read this section, try imagining that you are God’s “favorite” child (for the purpose of emphasizing the point John is making in verse 1) and see what a difference it makes in your understanding of God’s loving character! But also be mindful of the other point that John is making here—this lavish love is only for God’s children. And just who are God’s children? We find that out in the next chapter.

## Day 6: 1 John 4-5

**Focus point:** 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:7-16

This is perhaps one of the finest

explanations in the entire Bible about the nature of the relationship that we can have with our loving Heavenly Father—and the basis of that relationship is love. At first glance, it may sound similar to what many other philosophies and religions say, that one has to intentionally express love to God and to others and once you do that, you are a loving person and God is pleased with you. But re-read verse 10 and notice the striking difference between John’s explanation and that of the “world’s” explanation: it is not by us expressing love to God that brings us into a relationship with Him—it’s the other way around! God expresses His love to us, and that is how we become His children. Most people believe that the “work” has to be done on our side in order to make us pleasing and acceptable to God. Not so. Isn’t it wonderful that the “work” is done by God and not us—this is one of the reasons why the *gospel*, that is, the “Good News” (for that is what the Greek word *gospel* means in English) really is good news! Now look at verse 15. This verse answers the question raised yesterday—who are the children of God? Do you now see how to enter into a relationship with our loving Creator God? It is only by believing in Jesus Christ, our wonderful Savior!

## Day 7: Genesis 1-3

**Focus point:** Genesis 3:1-13

I can’t overemphasize the importance of this chapter in understanding the rest of the Bible. There are few chapters in the whole Bible that are as critical! Rather than comment very much on it, I recommend that you read and re-read this chapter frequently during *The Basics* and *Dig Deeper* studies—there are many other passages in Scripture that will shed more light and color on what we commonly refer to as “The Fall”—that is, the fall of mankind from a state of perfection and grace. We, as descendants of Adam and Eve, no longer have this perfect fellowship with the Creator God. The rest of the Bible is God’s wonderful plan to bring us back into that fellowship with Him. But as you will discover, the rest of the Bible also shows how mankind, sadly, repeatedly rejects God’s wonderful plan, even to this day.

## Day 8: Genesis 4-5

**Focus point:** Genesis 4:1-12

This passage tells the account of the first murder in the history of mankind. It is implied, but not explicitly stated, that the reason that Cain’s sacrifice was not pleasing to the Lord is because Cain didn’t give the very best of his harvest but held the best portions back for himself, whereas Abel gave the choicest portion of his offering. In other words, in Cain’s heart, he didn’t put God as the first and highest priority. Today it is no different—we too hold back the best for ourselves—it is in our very nature.

## Day 9: Genesis 6-8

**Focus point:** Genesis 6:5-8

The depravity of mankind only further deteriorated since the days of Cain and Abel, until it was to such a state that God was grieved to the heart—not that God has a heart like we do, but the author here (tradition states it was Moses) is using imagery that we can relate to in order to understand how God felt. Stop and think of that for a moment—God has feelings and emotion, such as grief and pain? That is an astonishing thought for most people, but it is true. This passage introduces the account of Noah, who found favor with God and through whom God would remake the world and re-establish the human race through a mighty flood.

## Day 10: Genesis 9-11

**Focus point:** Genesis 11:1-4

The important thing to take note in this passage is how quickly mankind is back to its self-centered, self-sufficient ways. In verse 3, notice how industrious and hard-working the people are here and that their goals are self-aggrandizement (“make a name for ourselves”). Sadly, there is little difference between the people today and those described here. Like them, we feel that we don’t need God, we can do it ourselves! It may sound strange or counter-intuitive, but it was actually an act of mercy that God dispersed the people and confused the languages—had the people been allowed to continue on in their quest for independence, no one would have been left who even remembered God. By dispersing the people, God was able to isolate a particular man from which He would build a whole nation of

people that would share His love with the rest of the world. We will return to this point in history in the *Dig Deeper* lesson, but first, we need to get additional background material to make better sense of this special people.

## Day 11: Romans 1-4

**Focus point:** Romans 1:18-20

Paul is saying here that it’s no use to plead ignorance—you can’t show up before the throne of God and say, “Oh, sorry, I didn’t know you existed... you should have made yourself more obvious.” God has left all of creation as a testimony of His existence! Re-read verse 18 to see what Paul says about people that attempt to feign ignorance—he says that someone who does this is a wicked person who suppresses the truth. Have you ever known someone that failed to see something about themselves but it was obvious to everyone else? Maybe it was a problem they had, some compulsion such as overspending, overeating, alcohol addiction or repeatedly making bad relationship decisions. Don’t you feel a little bit of pity for them—they can’t, or won’t see something that is plain to everyone else around them. Now amplify that ignorance—actually, it’s not true ignorance but a suppression of reality—on a much grander scale. Let say, the size of the universe—for that is how large of a witness there is to the Creator God—how foolish would it seem for a person to continue to deny the existence of God? Paul would say that it would be foolishness to the point of wickedness.

## Day 12: Romans 5-8

**Focus point:** Romans 8:1-4

This section of Romans contains one of the most lucid and sobering descriptions of mankind’s disposition towards evil. As we read through chapters 5-7, we are struck to the heart because we feel that Paul is not describing himself but instead has somehow gotten into our heads and discovered the deepest secrets about ourselves that we have kept hidden from everyone else! Try this exercise, re-read Romans 7:7-25. At the end of verse 25, stop and breathe a heavy sigh of relief—imagine that you’ve just finishing running a marathon and are so glad and relieved that it is

over. Then immediately read Romans 8:1-4. This passage is a breath of fresh air—imagine it, the heaviness of sin (like a grueling marathon), and then the lightness and freedom of being done with it—forever! That is how you should feel as you read through Romans 8, light as a feather through your new-found freedom in Jesus Christ!

## Day 13: Romans 9-12

**Focus point:** Romans 10:9-13

Re-read Romans 10:13 and let the words sink into your ears, your heart, your very being. Isn’t it wonderful to know that this is a promise from God that we can bank on and trust in? This is an excellent passage to memorize so that you can recall it anytime you need a burst of wonder at the amazing promises that our Creator God has given to us. But just who is the “Lord” that Paul is referring to in this passage? In today’s culture, it is very common to say or believe that there are many ways to “call on the name of the Lord” and that in essence, all the various religions are just different ways to the same God. But are they really? Is the Lord that Paul is describing here the same that our pluralistic society today defines? For the answer, we have to go back a couple sentences to verses 9-11. Here in these verses, who does Paul say is the “Lord” that is able to deliver on the promise given in verse 13? With that answer in mind, you may also want to memorize these verses as well!

## Day 14: Romans 13-16

**Focus point:** Romans 13:8-14

In Romans, you have heard Paul refer to the “Law” on many occasions. Just what is this Law that he keeps referring to? To answer that question will require more background reading in the Bible—in fact, we won’t get to a detailed study of the Law until after we finish the *Dig Deeper* section. But for purposes of getting a big picture overview of the Law, this section of Romans provides one of the best summaries in the entire Bible. Keep this overview of the Law in mind as you continue your study through the Bible, so that when you finally do read about the Law (which is quite comprehensive), you will not “get lost” or mired in the details of the Law. You can refer back here to Paul’s summary in order to keep you

grounded in understanding the true and underlying intention of God when He gave the Law to the Israelites. In Paul’s masterful way of expressing ideas, he introduces, or rather reminds us that the ultimate purpose of the Law is to lead us into love, which should sound very familiar to what you just recently read in the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of John!

## The Basics: Stop and Take a Look Back

Even though we’ve only read a little over three books of the Bible (out of a total of 66), you should already be getting the sense that the Bible “answers itself.” That is, the various books of the Bible, even though they are written by many different authors in many different places and time periods, are harmonious and complementary to one another. Or perhaps a better way to put it is that the Bible contains the answers to many of the perplexing questions we have about life—if we are willing to invest the time to search for the answers and be open to listening to what God is saying to us through the words of the Bible. This is one of the main goals of the first section of this course—recognizing that when questions “come up” as we read through the Bible, the answers are ultimately found in other passages of the Bible itself. This is why we said at the beginning of this course that we can understand the Bible better and better *as we are reading it*. As you continue your journey through the *Dig Deeper* study, keep this in mind—in fact, knowing that the answers to your questions might be “just around the corner” makes it very exciting to read through the Bible and you will find yourself not wanting to put it down!

## Dig Deeper

The *Dig Deeper* study continues building on the readings from *The Basics* study. Again, the emphasis is on selected books from the Greek Scriptures and you will also finish the book of Genesis from the Hebrew Scriptures: Luke Acts Ephesians Genesis 12-50 Gospel of John Matthew 28 The *Dig Deeper* and *Next Steps* study continue in the second part of *The Basics of the Bible* study guide.