

# The Bible

## Teaching Objective:

To introduce the story of sin and build confidence in God's love

### OVERVIEW

One of the most common questions people have about God is, "If God is good, why is the world so evil?" There is a certain logic to this question. If God is all-loving, then he wouldn't want us to suffer. If God is all-powerful, then he would be able to keep us from suffering. So why does all of this evil still happen? In answering this question, we will look at three main things. Firstly, we'll look at the story of evil. This is helpful because it introduces us to those who are actually responsible – Satan, his angels, and us. Secondly, we'll look at the idea of freedom. True love requires freedom, but this always comes with risk. For many this is the big "light-bulb" idea that helps make sense of this question. Finally, we'll look at the cross which is where we see just how far Jesus is willing to go to rescue us from suffering. At the cross we see how much God loves us, we see that he understands what it means to suffer, and we see his beautiful heart in contrast to the heart of Satan.

### TIPS FOR BIBLE STUDY

**ANSWERING HARD QUESTIONS.** Whenever we study the Bible with someone there is a chance that they will ask us a question that we don't know the answer to. For some people, this is reason enough never do the Bible study in the first place! However, questions don't have to be scary. Here are some ways to reframe how you respond to hard questions. Firstly, remember that questions are a good thing. They show that the person you're studying with is engaging with the topic you're exploring. Secondly, remember that it's ok to say, "I don't know". In fact, this will usually build credibility and trust. Most people would rather study with someone who is on the journey of learning with them, rather than with someone who has all the answers. Thirdly, remember that some of the questions people have will be addressed in futures study guides. If this is the case, you can say, "That's a great question! In fact, we'll be looking at that in a couple of weeks." This will also encourage those you're studying with to continue studying into the future. Finally, remember to trust God. He is there to help you and he might just surprise you with the wisdom he gives.

**SOMETIMES YOU MIGHT COMPLETE A STUDY GUIDE OVER TWO WEEKS.** There is a lot involved in this study guide (and some of our future ones). If you find time getting away and you're only slowly getting through the verses, consider finishing it over two weeks.

### TEACHING POINTS

Genesis 1:1-4, 31

- These verses allow you to introduce the story of creation.



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- To save time, only the start and finish of the creation account will be read from the Bible. After reading verse 1-4 summarise the story of Creation (keep it brief). Highlight that at the end of each day it says that “God saw that it was good.” In verse 31 draw attention to the summary that “it was very good.” The purpose here is that God created our world and that he created it “good”.
- The question, “How does this compare to our world today?” is there to bring out the contrast between how our world was created (good, good, good, ... very good) and how our world is today (filled with so much evil and suffering).
- How did our world go from being such a place of good to being such a place of evil? That is what we’ll be looking at in this study guide.

#### Genesis 2:8-9, 16-17

- These verses introduce the two trees in the garden of Eden: the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- Draw their attention to the name of the second tree. Up to this point, they had this amazing experience with all that was good (remember – good, good, good, ... very good), but they knew nothing of evil. To eat of this fruit would be to make the decision that you want to experience evil in addition to good.
- You might ask, “Why do you think anyone would ever want to experience evil?” A helpful illustration is of a baby who is experiencing something for the first time. Unlike us, Adam and Eve had never experienced anything that was evil. They simply had to trust God.
- The question, “Why would a good God plant these trees?” is going to be answered with the next verse.

#### 1 John 4:8

- Before you read this verse, you might like to ask the person you’re studying with to try and summarise someone (spouse, friend, child, etc.) with a single word. This can be a lot of fun. Then point out that in this verse we’re going to find out what single word summarises God.
- This verse shows us that the most central thing we can know about God is that he is a God of love. Everything that he does springs forth from this.
- Point out that true love requires freedom to exist. A great illustration is of a robot. You might tell a silly story of creating a robot that can do all sorts of things for you (clean your house, do your homework, cook your food, etc.). However, deep down you feel unsatisfied by this, and you want more from your robot. In fact, you want your robot to love you. So, you make a recording that says, “(your name) I love you!” and you program your robot to say this every time you press a button. Then describe spending time with your robot and pressing the button often to enjoy feeling loved. Finish by asking the question, “In the story, did the robot really love me? Why or why not?” Most people will instinctively say, “No, because it didn’t have a choice.” This brings out the important lesson that true love requires freedom.
- Then take this one step further and point out that because love requires freedom it is always risky. The person you choose to love might choose not to love you in return. You



might use the illustration of someone proposing to someone they love and of the scary risk that the other person might respond with “No.”

- True love requires freedom, which always comes with risk.

#### Genesis 3:1-10

- This passage introduces the story of sin first entering our world.
- Focus on *how* the serpent convinces Eve to eat the fruit. One of the big things the serpent does is convinces Eve that God isn't a God of love. Here are some ways that it does this:
  - **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”** – God's posture towards Adam and Eve was one of freedom. He said they could eat from *any* tree and limited only one tree. But here the serpent presents God as a restrictive God who is keeping lots of good things from them.
  - **“You will not certainly die”** – Here the serpent indirectly says that God is a liar and can't be trusted.
  - **“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** – There is some truth to this statement, but the trick is that the serpent is presenting 'evil' as something desirable. Also, he's suggesting that God is against her because he is keeping something desirable from her, casting more doubt on God's love.
- Yes, their eyes were opened. But the new experiences were not good. They now experienced, for the first time, shame, fear, and a desire to hide from God. Notice that God doesn't change. He comes into the garden just like any other time. But sin has caused them to shrink away from God.
- Point out that sin is the enemy of relationships. And that the biggest problem with sin is that it separates us from God.
- You can let them know that we will leave the story of Adam and Eve here and that we will be looking at the rest of the story in the next guide.
- One of the real surprises in this story is the presence of this sneaky slimy snake! Where did that come from, and why would it be present in God's perfect world? That's what we'll look at next.

#### Revelation 12:7-9

- Before you read, let them know that our next verse is coming from the book of Revelation. One of the most important things to know about Revelation is that it is a book full of symbols. In this passage we read about a 'dragon.' This is not talking about a literal dragon but is using it as a symbol to refer to a person we will be learning more about.
- After you read, ask them what comes to their mind when they think of 'heaven?' (Most people will respond with images that are very positive). The surprising thing about this passage is that it describes a war taking place in heaven. Which is so different to what we usually imagine.



- Point out that this war is between the angels in heaven. On one side are a group of angels led by Michael (this refers to Jesus, point this out but don't stress it too much as this point is debated by some and it's not the focus of the study). On the other side is this dragon character and his angels.
- Ask what are some of the other names given to this mysterious dragon? Answers include: "that ancient serpent", "the devil", "Satan", and in some translations "the deceiver". Point out that the names "the devil" and "Satan" had well known meanings in the original language that Revelation was written in. When the first people read Revelation, they would have associated those things with this being. Here are some of the things we can learn from these names:
  - That ancient serpent – this identifies this being with the snake we just read about in the garden of Eden. (Remember, we're trying to figure out where the snake came from)
  - Satan – This word means "enemy" and shows that this being had in some way set himself up as the enemy of God.
  - The Devil – This word means "slanderer" (you might ask them what slander is) and shows one of the main ways that this being wages war against God – by slandering his reputation. Point out that this is exactly what we saw the serpent doing in the garden of Eden.
- Point out that when we think of war we usually think of guns and bombs. However, this might not have been the nature of this war. It was probably more of a war of words and ideas. A good illustration is of a political election which can sometimes feel like a war, with each side 'slinging mud' at each other. Ask them why a political candidate might want to slander the reputation of the opposition? The answer is to get you to distrust them with the end goal of securing your vote. This might be what the war in heaven was like. Satan selling lies to slander God's reputation, hoping that the other heavenly beings would choose to side with him.

Ezekiel 28:11-17

- Before you read this verse, let them know that this next passage is going to be a message from God directed to the "king of Tyre", but that as we will see, it is really a message directed to the power at work behind the king of Tyre – Satan. It's helpful to point out that when Satan does things in our world, he usually does so through something/ someone else. Examples include the snake (which we've read about), Judas when he betrayed Jesus (see John 13:27), and here the king of Tyre.
- There's a lot of difficult imagery in this passage. You might find it helpful to read it yourself, explaining it as you go. Here are some points to bring out.
  - **"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty"** – Ask them how they have usually seen Satan depicted in movies. Point out that the being here is very different! Emphasise that this being was perfect, wise, and beautiful.
  - **"You were in Eden, the garden of God"** – You might point out that the king of Tyre was never in the garden of Eden – but Satan was.



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- **“Every precious stone adorned you...”** – Depending on how familiar the person you’re studying with is with the Bible you can point out that the high priest wore a breastplate that was covered in precious stones like this. This might indicate that this being had a similar role in heaven, in the very presence of God.
- **“On the day you were created”** – Point out that this being was created by God. This shows that Satan isn’t an evil version of God. They are on very different levels. God is the creator; Satan is a created being.
- **“You were on the holy mount of God...”** – Again, these descriptions seem to point to this being having a very important role in heaven.
- **“You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you”** – Here point out that this being was created blameless. He was a beautiful and perfect creation of God. But something happened that caused him to become Satan, to become the enemy of God (remember, Satan means enemy).
- **“I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God”** – This reminds us of the description in Revelation of the dragon and his angels being thrown out of heaven.
- **“widespread trade”** – This might refer to Satan’s work of ‘selling’ lies and rebellion in heaven.
- **“guardian cherub”** – Point out that a cherub is another word for an angel.
- **“Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor”** – This is one of the most important lines in this passage as it gives insights into what happened in the heart of this perfect angel that caused him to fall. Point out that he saw how beautiful and wise he was and that this turned into pride, leading him to want a position in heaven that was never his to have.
- After reading it, give a summary of the story of Satan’s rebellion. It might go something like this: As we have seen, Satan didn’t begin as an enemy of God but began as an incredible, beautiful, wise, exalted angel in heaven, a wonderful creation of God. But at some point, this angel stopped looking to God and started looking to himself. Maybe he saw all the other angels worshiping God and started to wonder why he wasn’t receiving some of the worship as well. “I’m very beautiful” he might have thought, “I’m very wise. Surely, I deserve to be worshiped too.” Pride grew into jealousy and jealousy into rebellion. And eventually Satan had set himself up in direct opposition to God.

#### **Isaiah 14:12-15**

- Point out that this passage is very similar to the previous passage. This time it is a message for the king of Babylon, but again it reaches beyond him to the power at work behind – Satan.
- The big point to make in this passage is the incredible ambition of Satan. Even though he was created with such an exalted role in heaven, it wasn’t enough, he wanted to be lifted higher and higher. He even wanted to be like “the Most High”! However, as we have learnt, his ambition eventually led to his downfall.



## Philippians 2:5-9

- Use this passage to show the incredible contrast between Jesus and Satan.
- Satan wanted to lift himself up, up, and up! Jesus willingly went down, down, and down!
- Draw attention to each step down that Jesus made. He was equal with God yet stepped down to become a human, then he stepped down and lived like a servant, finally he stepped down to the point of death, even death on a cross!
- This is your opportunity to talk about the incredible love of Jesus.

## THE GIFT OF JESUS

Read this together as a way of summarising some of the big points of the study and make the connection back to our overarching theme of “the gift of Jesus”.

## LIVING IT OUT

Discuss: What big ideas have we looked at that help us make sense of the evil in our world?

- Use this question to bring the conversation back to our big question – If God is good, why is the world so evil.
- The two big ideas to reflect on are: 1) The role of freedom and how love requires it; and 2) The role of Satan.

Note: God has given us freedom, and this means that our choices matter. Each of these Bible guides will finish with a decision question. This is your opportunity to say yes to God and to align yourself to him.

- Use this as an opportunity to explain why each of the Bible study guides will finish with a decision question.

Decide: In the battle between good and evil, and between God and Satan, is it your desire to be on God's side?

- You might point out that the battle that began in heaven continues to take place in our world and in our own lives. Both Satan and God desire our loyalty but the choice remains with us. Which side will we choose?

